

This Was Not Cinema: Judgment, Action, and Barbara Hammer

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Often when writing about films (and other artworks) in a politicized vein, we tend to ascribe modes of agency to a film, to describe it as “doing” this or that, resisting some things, subverting others, or else creating new ways of being. I wonder how serious we are being—how literal or how metaphorical—when we ascribe actions to works of art. Can we really think about making a film as a means of acting in the world? Clearly, a film, like any work of art, is brought into being through some sequence of human activity, and making, fabrication, is something humans *do*. But not everything we do amounts to what would count in the sphere of politics as action. This essay thinks about what it might mean to regard film as a mode of acting. I will primarily be working with three thinkers, Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt, and Linda Zerilli, and in reference to the work of one filmmaker, Barbara Hammer.

To indicate some of what is to follow, I should say that I draw on Kant, Arendt, and Zerilli to argue that acting has much in common with the practice of judgment. What unites acting and judging is that both activities refuse to traffic in concepts: as modes of comportment they offer the experience of something new because not already conceptualized. In exploring this complex of problems in relation to filmmaking, I have been drawn to Hammer’s work because of the way

in which both acting and judging (or judging-as-acting) significantly ground her film practice and her account of that practice. I hope that by bringing these thinkers and this filmmaker together, my essay can gesture towards a generative understanding of filmmaking and film spectatorship as human activities predicated on the contingent freedom of action and judgment.

The essay is divided into two sections. In the first I explain how Kant's theorization of the aesthetic and Arendt's notion of action share a ground of groundlessness: both resist—indeed, are antithetical to—the overdetermination of the concept. Despite the fact that Arendt strongly counterposes her understanding of action to the “reification” we associate with artworks (especially in her account of the “work” [*The Human Condition* 136-74]), her insistence on an action's conceptlessness rhymes and resonates strongly with Kant's proposal of the artwork's ontological conceptlessness (e.g., 106). In order to pursue this line of thought, I draw on Zerilli's reading of Arendt and Kant in which she argues for the significance of judgment—a non-conceptual practice—as central to both aesthetics and politics.¹ I close this first section by suggesting how film theory's understanding of identification is profoundly beholden to a kind of concept-bound determinism that makes it, as a mode of explaining some of our most important responses to film, antithetical to thinking of film as action. All of this serves as the framework for the second section, in which I turn to Hammer's filmmaking and her accounts of her film practice. Hammer's work offers a valuable and surprising means through which to claim that a film might be understood as a mode, vehicle, or object of action.

Judging, Acting, and (Not) Identifying

Kant calls an aesthetic judgment a “judgment of taste.” Such judgment, for Kant, specifically and strictly precludes the use of a concept or any application to an “end” or objective that would be predicated on a concept. Likewise, any question of interest cannot constitute “the determining ground of the judgment about the object [the artwork, for instance] of the pleasure” (106). Similarly, the good, which is beholden to preconceived notions of right and wrong, of what is morally desirable and undesirable, also has no place in the scene of aesthetic judgment. In Kant's theorization an aesthetic judgment is strictly separated from “a cognitive judgment” (106), and “thus does

not concern any *concept* of the constitution and internal or external possibility of the object, through this or that cause, but concerns only the relation of the powers of representation to each other" (106). In other words, when judging artworks, we do not refer to concepts as the basis on which to ascertain and attest to their beauty; rather, we are only interested to know that they have come into being, and thus are set before our judgment.

So if I judge a painting to be beautiful (or powerful or important—terms we might be more likely to deploy today) because it reminds me of my childhood, then I am not making an aesthetic judgment, strictly speaking, because my judgment is interested—is beholden to a private and already cognized set of expectations, thoughts, and desires. If I judge a painting to be beautiful because it uses the color green, then again I am not making an aesthetic judgment because I have allowed interest (my preference for the color green) to determine my judgment. Instead, a judgment of taste—an aesthetic judgment—is not grounded in “any private conditions” (97). Rather, in making an aesthetic judgment (examples: “That painting is beautiful” or “Jane Austen is a great writer”) “one ascribes the satisfaction in an object *to everyone*, yet without grounding it on a concept” (99). If I can provide a reason for my judgment—which is to say, if I can identify my judgment with a concept—then I have not in fact made an aesthetic judgment, at least in Kant’s terms.

Later in *Critique of the Power of Judgment* when Kant discusses how beautiful art is produced, he continues to ban or strictly limit the operation of the concept in governing art’s production. Kant’s definition of the process by which the beautiful work of art is produced runs thus: the work must “agree *punctiliously* but not *painstakingly* with rules in accordance with which alone the product can become what it ought to be, that is, without the academic form showing through, i.e., without showing any sign that rule has hovered before the eyes and fettered his mental powers” (186). Kant develops the concept of genius to name how it is an artwork comes into being, arguing that genius itself “is a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given” (186). Genius “cannot itself describe or indicate scientifically how it brings its product into being” (187). Making art is a means of coaxing something new into the world by way of unpredictability, such that the artist cannot exactly account for the process by which the artwork came to be what it is.

For Kant, despite the fact that the artwork intends nothing other than its own appearance in a mode of intentional intentionlessness, the artwork does become the occasion for—indeed it *occasions*—the sociability of the faculties that feel themselves in pleasant conversation with another before the artwork (102-103). This occasioning illustrates *in nuce* the other thing *occasioned by* the work of art: the scene of judgment, a scene that is public, plural, and therefore, perhaps, even tinged with the political. In making aesthetic judgments we believe—without really thinking about it, of course—that everyone must agree with us. Thus, the making of the judgment itself summons a virtual public for whom, and in whose presence, the judgment is made. Kant was, of course, aware of the fact that, actually, not everyone does agree on judgments of taste. In an interesting elaboration of the scene of judgment, Kant describes the judging subject's impatience should he be contradicted: "He rebukes them if they judge otherwise, and denies that they have taste, though he nevertheless requires that they ought to have it" (98). The scene of judgment opens up this space of disputation. It does so assuming that everyone should agree, but only because there is no (private) interest at stake. But even in making this assumption—by making the scene of judgment implicitly collective, social, public—aesthetic judgment puts subjects into conversation, relation, and even confrontation with one another. In these terms, aesthetic judgment seems to share important affinities with the space of the political.

W. H. Auden clearly articulates a Kantian sort of thinking in his poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" (1939), when he famously proposes that "poetry makes nothing happen" (242). Auden goes on to modify this formulation a bit later when he defines poetry as "a way of happening" (242). The idea that we may not be doing much of anything, or that we most distinctly *ought not* to be doing anything has long guaranteed and safeguarded the artwork's purchase on what has been called its autonomy, its freedom from instrumentality, its avoidance of succumbing to the status of "propaganda," its aspiration towards "seriousness" or "authenticity." Autonomy names the discourse and practice of how not to make bad art, according to theorists like Adorno and others working in a loosely construed Kantian tradition of aesthetic thinking. For Adorno, artworks do not participate in concepts.² And if and when they do, they are less than artworks, or certainly less than interesting or authentic artworks. And yet, as my brief and too

obvious allusion to Auden makes clear, the idea that the artwork might transcend its status as mere *res*—or might actually not just be good but be good *for something*, might even *do* something, might act in some way, might possess or promise some mode of agency—haunts the artwork's theorization in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment aesthetics. Even for Adorno and Horkheimer, the serious artwork still “keeps faith” with the “lower classes”—who nonetheless probably have little time for it, which Adorno and Horkheimer are quick to acknowledge and which confirms their point (135).

Action receives one of its fullest philosophical elaborations in Arendt's *The Human Condition*, in which she elaborates a tripartite distinction among three major terms: labor, work, and action. Although the terms are densely inter-related, the order in which Arendt addresses herself to them encodes a hierarchy of value, with labor the least-prized category of experience and action the most. For Arendt, laboring, in its purest form, may be considered an “effort that... [leaves] no trace” (81), and is thus a private, “worldless” (118-119) activity. It intends only the reproduction of the life process itself. Work, which Arendt identifies with “fabrication” and “reification”—the making of works—enacts a step towards the “plurality” (cf. e.g., 7) that is, for Arendt, the ontology of the human. Work provides a world of things that we can share in common, a world of objectivity. Humans can use and dispute the value of the objects produced by reification; these objects are, in a strong sense, *media*. As a category of activity and experience, however, work is limited insofar as the production of a work always demands “the guidance of a model” (140). In that sense it is bound by interest, or by use-value. Work, we might say, is a mode of instrumentality in which the concept determines the thing to be produced.

Because of its reliance on a concept, work differs radically from the realm of freedom that Arendt calls action. “The human condition,” as Arendt imagines it, is most powerfully experienced in the realm of action. Action is “never possible in isolation” (188). It arises out of the “web of relationships” (181), and it gives humans the opportunity to express our non-sovereign plurality. Action thus constitutes for Arendt the true nature of the human, and of the human's expression of itself in the political sphere. Action's ontology is its “burden of irreversibility and unpredictability” (233). That which action brings could not have been predicted. Without it the world as it is would be merely reproduced indefinitely.

Actions then, could be said to resist identification, if by identification we mean an attempt to fix something (the action performed), hold it in place, make it knowable. Action is a form of (in Arendt's terms) "natality" (8-9). It creates a radical break, a beginning, and thus it is nameless, conceptless, insofar as what is genuinely new cannot have been determined by a concept that would have preceded it. Arendt writes that "[w]ith word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance" (176-177). Action enacts and produces a kind of "boundlessness"; in its boundlessness, action "always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries" (190). Moreover, action cannot be undertaken in isolation. Its "basic condition" is "human plurality" (175): the presence of other humans without whose presence no action would have any meaning. This plurality guarantees action's "non-sovereignty," which is the real guarantor of our freedom. Arendt argues that non-sovereignty—and not, as we might think, sovereignty—insures human freedom. To be human is to exist in the plurality of other humans, and by being plural and thus exposed to others' speech and actions, we are necessarily unable to exert mastery over the world (234-36). Action, therefore, endows us with a non-identity: it resists identification, resists fixity, and thus throws us into an experience of non-sovereignty that is both thrilling and terrifying.

In *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, Linda Zerilli draws extensively on the thinking of both Kant and Arendt in order to propose a feminist politics that embraces ontological groundlessness as its very purchase on both feminism and the political. Zerilli appeals to Kant's account of aesthetic judgment in order to imagine judgment as initiating the creation of "the *space* in which the objects of political judgment, the actors and actions themselves, can appear" (160). In this account, then, the scene of the aesthetic—if not the aesthetic artifact itself—makes a lot happen. It makes happening possible.

Zerilli writes as a political theorist, but much of her attention is attracted by artworks (Monique Wittig's novel *Les guérillères* [1969], for example) or by scenes of judgment in which artworks are at stake. In a brilliant chapter on the Milan Woman's Bookstore Collective, Zerilli discusses the Collective's text *Sexual Difference*, in which they describe their troubling encounter with the desire to

construct a canon of women writers whom they hoped would direct their inquiries into sexual difference. In debating which writers should belong in such a canon, they discovered the uncomfortable terrain of, in Zerilli's words, "differences that were dangerous to the identity of the group" (108). What the Collective found was that disagreements—including an apparently revelatory one over the work of Jane Austen (!)—constituted the basis for understanding the real and radical nature of their work together. The Collective faced up to the fact that not all of their members—and not all women—were necessarily equal in every capacity or every advantage. The achievement and maintenance of this insight, however, led them to discern that "[w]ithout a space for strong conflicts or disagreements, there was no space for strong desires and no possibility of genuine politics" (109). The fact that these disagreements were disputes about works of art was absolutely crucial to the political possibilities discovered in what were fundamentally scenes of aesthetic judgment.

Zerilli brings Kant's theory of the judgment of taste to bear on this episode from the Collective's history. As I have explained above, Kant's sense of judgment's fundamental publicity constitutes a key dimension of what it is that makes aesthetic judgments potentially political. The other, perhaps more important, dimension of judgment's political force is its fundamental groundlessness—the fact that it is not based on concepts or on interest. Zerilli writes that the "following [of] rules" would be "of no use in aesthetic judgments, where we are faced with the particular qua particular" (110). That is to say, the object of an aesthetic judgment is a singular thing, and thus, by definition, we would fail in our response to it if our response were guided by a rule, by generality. The groundlessness of aesthetic judgment (insofar as it is not grounded on a concept or on any private interest) offers a powerful model to political life precisely because politics is too often conducted on the basis of doing what we already know (how to do). However, when we act politically on the basis of prior knowledge, then we fundamentally condemn ourselves to insuring that nothing new will ever come into existence. Moreover, as we know from Arendt, the space of the political, like the space of judgment, is ontologically plural. Judgment's non-conceptual basis and its definitional plurality allow for the emergence of the new.

The resistance to knowledge or foreknowledge that we see in the spheres of action and judgment, and which is a kind of non-

sovereignty, would seem to sit at odds with the major contours of at least some of the ways in which identification has been thought about in psychoanalysis and in psychoanalytic film theory. In Freud's basic account of identification, in his eponymous essay on the subject, he explains that identification oscillates between what one would like to be and what one would like to have. "The distinction, that is, depends upon whether the tie attaches to the subject or to the object of ego" (135). Freud's examples, of course, extend from family life: does the little boy want to be like the father, or does he want to have the father? Does a symptom that imitates the symptom of another subject (father or mother) bespeak an aggressive desire to replace that subject in another subject's affection? ("If I cough like my mother, does that mean my father will want to sleep with me?") Or does it signify a desire for that subject? ("When I cough like my father, it is a sign of how much I want to sleep with him.") (135-137). Many things are at stake in Freud's understanding of identification, but I want to stress a few key features of this theory: 1) identification articulates an array (or system) of subjective and objective positions; 2) identification is mimetic; and 3) identification is a state of knowing, in advance of getting it, what one wants.

In psychoanalytic film theory, identification is a mode—however fraught and doomed to various forms of failure—in which the spectator lays claim to the film, attempts to possess it in some way. Christian Metz's elegant formulation of the spectator's experience of identification runs thus: "At every moment I am in the film by my look's caress" (54). It was left to feminist film theorists, however, to dispute the universalism of this account. According to Mary Ann Doane, because "the woman" does not have the same access to the image, and thus to a sense of sovereign identity, for her, "identification... cannot be... a mechanism by means of which mastery is assured" (16). Woman is left the possibility (at least or especially in the "woman's film" that Doane is discussing in this context) of an identification with the position of masochistic spectator, identified ("narcissistically") with the female character onscreen, or (via a kind of transvestism) with the "active male hero" (19). For Doane, this "oscillation" among identificatory positions is further complicated by the fact that the woman's film so directly addresses itself to the (female) spectator, thus limiting the availability of the "transvestite" identification. But because the woman's film also tends to desexualize woman, and because woman's

sexuality in patriarchal culture is the ontology of woman's existence, the second position is also seriously etiolated at best. What results, in Doane's analysis of the woman's film, is a kind of immobility (19). Put another way, because of *what* the female spectator *is* (a woman) she cannot *do* anything—she cannot act. Identification names a process of naming, in a sense, and of reconfirming a kind of already-understood subject position, which is exactly that: a position—an immobile point on the map of social reality.

The problem that we encounter here is that what a film can do and what one can do with a film seem to be limited by a set of already-cognized values. Because of an identification that has already taken place (the female spectator is a woman), identification itself—which names our fundamental mode of relating to the film—can only, apparently, be something already-identified as well: an experience in which nothing happens. For much of film theory, identification would seem to determine a relationship or set of relationships—to the apparatus, to the film's textuality, to the film's objects of representation, to the world towards or away from which the apparatus and/or the film has oriented the spectator. Identification seems to proceed according to rules, and its effects seem to be known in advance.

In a spirit of productive provocation, I propose to think about when and how it could be useful to move away from identification as a primary mode of conceptualizing our address to film (and film's address to us) in order to think about a relation that will be based on judgment and that—insofar as it is predicated on judgment—might also permit us to see spectatorship as a mode of doing, rather than of being. In what follows I turn to the work and example of Barbara Hammer, someone who is often identified as a “lesbian” “experimental” filmmaker. Hammer clearly intended her work to be formative to the very activity of constructing lesbian life worlds—of identifying them and holding them up for identification. The project of identification that seems so central to her work would seem to make her films an odd subject through which to explore a conception of film spectatorship and filmmaking that lies beyond identification. However, I am interested in precisely the ways in which her films—and her accounts of their making—actually reveal the limits of identification and indicate the significant role that a kind of groundless judgment plays in making and responding to films.

Barbara Hammer and Groundless Making

Barbara Hammer is perhaps the crucial pioneering figure in the history of lesbian experimental cinema. The three-way conjugation of lesbian-experimental-cinema suggests the remove from which her work stands in relation to those three categories. Her work is not as obviously “representational” as some forms of lesbian aesthetic production (we might think, for instance, of the coming to consciousness of a novel like Rita Mae Brown’s *Ruby Fruit Jungle* [1973]); but its obvious interest—however abstracted—in the representation of lesbians (of lesbians, of lesbian communities, of lesbian sex) occasionally pushes her work outside some of the familiar boundaries of “experimental” aesthetic practice (and its privileging of form or abstraction above the claims of representation).³ Cinema, finally, names a medium that, in both its industrial and experimental-artisanal contexts, had, until Hammer’s work, been the least hospitable to lesbian representation.⁴

Hammer’s decision to become a lesbian seems to have precipitated, or to have been difficult to distinguish from, her decision to become a filmmaker. She describes her movement into both practices thus:

When I made love with a woman for the first time my entire worldview shifted. I was touching a body much like my own which heightened all my senses. In addition to the sensual pleasure, my social network completely changed; I was swept up with the energies and dreams of a feminist revolution... After returning from a motorcycle trip through Africa with my first woman lover, I enrolled in film school and gathered a group of women to go to the country for a weekend of filming. Cris Saxton and I shot an hour’s length of film as I directed women to walk through fallen leaves, comb one another’s hair, trace circles with their fingers on each others’ bodies, and embrace. (*Hammer!* 26)

The entry into a community and that community’s documentation (however rehearsed or performed) that Hammer describes articulates any number of tropes—or, less flatteringly, clichés—associated with second wave feminism or with lesbian art and politics. It was Hammer’s activity as a maker, however, that released her from what Arendt calls “the guidance of a model” that obtains in fabrication.

Hammer explains what happened when she sat down to edit the footage she had shot:

In the editing room I looked at the footage of the nature rituals and yawned. This was not cinema. This was an exercise in relaxation. I got brutal and cut the lackadaisical footage to shreds, only keeping the core of each image that showed touching. The hour became two minutes. (26-27)

The film that resulted, *Dyketactics*, has been called by Hammer “the first lesbian-lovemaking film to be made by a lesbian” (27).

Dyketactics defies straightforward interpretation, despite the fact that it seems like we ought to know what we are looking at. In the first part of the film, there are, indeed, shots of women (and young girls) in nature, naked, congregating in circles with their arms and bodies intertwined, or washing each other’s hair. The second half of the film studies Hammer and a friend engaged in making love; the footage is shot (by Hammer’s collaborator, Cris Saxton) in close up, with the camera moving around and between the women’s bodies as if it were a third partner in this lovemaking. In this initial verbal description that I have given here, the film might sound exactly like what Hammer has half-jokingly called it: a “lesbian commercial” (27).

But elements of the film’s iconography as well as its formal organisation—especially its insistent use of superimpositions in the first half—prevent us from reaching a conclusion about the status of these images. For instance, even in the film’s very first images, which act as a kind of title sequence, there obtains a real sense of ambiguity. Extending from offscreen space at the right edge of the frame, an arm wielding a paintbrush is putting the finishing touches on a piece of graffiti: the single word, DYKETACTICS, traced on a concrete embankment. (We seem to be somewhere outside, in a park perhaps: we see grass growing above the weathered face of the embankment). Already lesbianism is figured as an intentional act of inscription, one that happens in an indeterminate zone between nature and artifice. And the title itself, with its semantic charge of strategy, force, and intention, does very different work than a different title (say, “Lesbian Love”) might have done. The next shot is a complex superimposition of two close ups. One is of what appears to be at least two women’s feet walking in grass. The other is of a woman wearing aviator-style sunglasses behind the steering wheel of a moving car; she initially

appears in profile, shot from the passenger seat, but she turns to face the camera directly with what seems to be a wry, understated smile. Only seconds later, as more shots of women in nature are combined with the footage of this woman driving, we glimpse, fleetingly, the woman driving holding with her left hand a white vibrator that she seems to raise to her nose, as if to smell it. Other superimpositions that occur later, in the first half of the film, feature footage of women washing each other's hair with footage of a naked woman handling a still camera, holding the lens up to face the lens of Hammer's film camera.

In a recent and inventive reading of Hammer's practice in the 1970s, Greg Youmans describes the experience of watching *Dyketactics* as "gentle and sensual," due to a variety of the film's formal features, including, significantly, "the prevalence of superimpositions" (106). Youmans links these features and their contribution to the film's overall tone or feeling to "cultural feminism," which he defines as connoting "any 'cultural' (as opposed to explicitly 'political') feminist phenomenon"; "the belief that women are fundamentally different from men, as well as the project of building an autonomous women's culture"; and "[e]ven more specifically... two currents that were especially strong in the 1970s on the west coast: biologically essentialist understandings of gender and projects of lesbian separatism" (103). Youmans' brilliant article helps us to see how Hammer's films of the 1970s already (in advance of recent theoretical and artistic work) articulated a mode of feminist practice that was not organized by the axis of essentialist vs. constructivist binary oppositions. Youmans is intrigued by the fact that contemporary (post-2000) lesbian and trans media makers seem to have identified with Hammer's work and its historical circumstances. Their interest, he wagers, is evidence that something complex is at stake in Hammer's 1970s work, much of which was dismissed by some radical feminist critics like Andrea Weiss, for instance, who accused Hammer of "adopting the masculine romanticized view of woman" (30). Youmans argues that an emphasis on the performance of "rituals" in Hammer's films brings together the performative and the essentialist dimensions of her work so that we can see how "the performative seeks to essentialize, to assert new truths at the level of the self and make them stick" (121).

Curiously, Youmans seems to locate these possibilities more in Hammer's explicitly humorous films, like *Menses* (1974) and

Superdyke (1975) (115-119). Youmans privileges the performances of these films' actors over any of their specific formal features, though he does emphasize their "feeling" of amateur "vacation" footage as key to the work they perform (119). But his evocation of the "gentle and sensual" experience of *Dyketactics* seems to elide how that film also frames—through the deframing and overloading of the frame produced by the superimpositions—an experience of lesbianism that performs its essentialism, in exactly Youmans' terms. In these superimpositions, we are given at once images of women's naked bodies, images of the vibrator as the technology of lesbian sexual pleasure, and images of the media technologies for which these bodies pose and perform. The emphatic use of superimposition, moreover, offers us composite images that can only be seen in this film, through the recombination of footage that has been luminously laminated together through the editing process. The film's technological form itself, then, is one of the principal means by which the performative and the essential are made to interact in unpredictable ways.

Youmans sees the performativity in Hammer's films as actually *doing* something. He writes that "the performative act strives to make real what is not yet real, to conjure forth and to confirm a new reality. "In other words, the performative seeks to essentialize, to assert new truths at the level of the self and make them stick" (121). I agree with Youmans' argument here, but also suggest that there is another way of construing Hammer's films as actions. The ambiguity of *Dyketactics* that I find so compelling, and that it shares with the films that Youmans emphasizes in his essay, extends out of Hammer's impatience with footage as it was originally shot. What Hammer's story tells us is that the scene of making is a scene of judgment: "This was not cinema." In other words, Hammer's process of making is a mode of dis-identifying with the footage she had shot. She refuses to recognize—or cannot recognize—this footage as art. But in being judged not to be art—Hammer calls the footage, as it existed, "relaxation"—the footage also seems to fail as a genuine intervention into social reality. The activity of aesthetic judgment is crucial to the production of the new aesthetic artifact, and, I would argue, to that artifact's purchase on the political. Hammer's process of making, depending as it does on the activity of judgment, does not re-cognize or reconfirm the intention of the footage—an intention grounded in a concept—but rather it finds something new by abandoning the concept

that had grounded the initial stages of production. In Arendt's terms, what had begun as fabrication turns into action, and does so through the activity of judgment. Hammer has said in a recent exchange: "Film is thinking" ("Film is Thinking"). By this I think that Hammer does not intend the (to my mind rather suspect) ascription of mental/cognitive processes to the filmstrip itself. Rather, she means that making film is a process of exclusions and inclusions, of an engagement with a set of materials that extends from but at the same time exceeds what is known about those materials at any given point in time. In the same interview, another of her accounts of editing *Dyketactics* runs thus:

In the intimacy of the editing room in one sweaty night of work with machine (the Steenbeck flatbed editor) and body very close together, I cut the whole feature down to four minutes of body, body, body to achieve something different from my original intention.

The imperative of the materiality of film ("the intimacy of the editing room") and the imperative of lesbian representation ("body, body, body") merge together here in a scene of making that in turn produces a made thing whose nature could not have been foreseen (and certainly could not have been deduced from either of these imperatives). In fact, as Hammer says (in perfect coincidence with Kantian aesthetic theory), she ends up making something that she did not intend to make; no rule hovered before her eyes.

After producing a body of work that sought to address the lack of lesbian representation through the relative abstraction of formal experimentation, Hammer turned the camera away, from herself (her body—naked and clothed, making love or dangling from a trapeze, in and out of beds—appears in most of her films of the 1970s) and onto her audience. *Audience* (1983), in fact, is the title of the film in which this turn to her spectators takes place. The film, roughly thirty three minutes in length and shot in black and white, with Hammer both in front of and behind the camera at various points, begins with Hammer asking patrons of the Roxy Cinema in San Francisco, who are in a queue to see a screening of her films, to explain what it is they are there to see, what they are expecting or hoping to see. Some women mention wanting to see images of themselves that are "different," that correspond to their own experiences (of being women, of being lesbians). One woman, who appears to be middle aged, who is dressed in what might be considered masculine or "butch" clothing, and who

has a noticeable beard on her chin, mentions that she is hoping to see images of women like herself. (Hammer mentions that she has taken a series of photographs of bearded women and vaguely offers to take this woman's photograph at some future date.) Immediately following this footage, the film shows us Hammer appearing before the audience at the Roxy, on the proscenium in front of the screen. She reveals to those who did not know already (and many of her interviewees reveal themselves in the film to be more than familiar with her and her work), that she, the person who was just interviewing them outside, is actually who she is—Barbara Hammer.

The footage shot outside the Roxy directly engages with questions of recognition and identification. The women in the queue communicate a sense of not having identified with the cinematic representations of women that they have seen heretofore and are hoping that they will see something with which they can identify. Hammer then identifies herself to these women, her interlocutors, and thus assumes the burden of delivering to them some collection of images, some representation that will embody their somewhat inchoate sense of longing for an object of identification.

The second movement of the film gives us footage of "rap sessions" that took place after screenings of Hammer's work in London, Toronto, and Montreal. In these scenes the women have already seen the films and are now gathered together to share their responses and to give Hammer, who is present at each session, their feedback on her work. (Interestingly, there are two elisions in the film: 1) for obvious reasons, *Audience* does not show us the films as they were being projected; 2) for less obvious reasons, there is no feedback session with spectators in San Francisco. Perhaps this was due to the large scale of the retrospective screenings at the Roxy, whereas it seems that in London, Toronto, and Montreal the films have just been screened in more intimate venues.) Similar to the expectations that Hammer solicited outside the Roxy, the women's feedback often praises Hammer's work for showing them a version of lesbian life that felt more recognizably theirs. At the same time, the women often seem to express their delight at seeing things in a way that they had not anticipated. There are also moments of disagreement and accusation. Some express consternation at the films' focus on the explicit female body. The women in London even remark on how cheerful and upbeat the women in the queue outside the Roxy seem to be.

Described this way, the film might seem to offer nothing more than an incredibly charming archive of lesbian looks, bodies, attitudes, convictions, and even modes of sartorial comportment across two continents at a particular moment in time. However, the film, in its simplicity, is much more complicated than this. To begin with, at the level of form, the form that this archive—this documentary footage and its diachronic organization—takes in this particular film is complex, nearly aporetic at times. For instance, in the section in which women in Toronto discuss their reactions to Hammer's work, one woman expresses her pleasure at being filmed at just that moment, and thus being sewn into the film that *Audience* was at that moment becoming. Her delight is occasioned particularly because, as she explains, she has just seen her daughter in the film's first frames, in the footage shot outside the Roxy in San Francisco. "She's over there in San Francisco and I'm here in Toronto, and I'm really glad to see her." Here, the film seems to produce the possibility not just of the archive, but also of putting into proximity bodies that (however intimately related) exist far from each other in space and time. The woman interviewee speaks as if, from her position in the film (which does not, strictly speaking, yet include her at the moment at which she speaks), she could be gesturing to, or hailing her daughter who might, from the other end of the film, gesture back to her. In this sense, the film's own textuality seems to intervene in and almost magically reconfigure the social and spatial relations of bodies. A moment like this one could be understood to act as a performative in the terms that Youmans uses: as constituting an action through this woman's utterance and its inclusion in and auto-reference to the film's textual organization. The film could be seen to summon and constitute a community of social actors across space and time, actors who share a common interest (whether that is in lesbian films or lesbian sex or lesbian politics).

However, I want to see what it might mean to think of the film as doing more than constituting (and documenting) a community, and I want to pursue this line of thinking by calling to mind the fact that the community that *Audience's* making constituted was, importantly, a community organized around judgment. We might imagine the first activity of *Audience* to be simply an exercise in recording the differences among lesbians, among women, among audiences, and human individuals. Hammer, in her evocation of the circumstances in which the film was made, expresses her pleasure in "the experience

of the multiplicity of differences among lesbian-feminists" (*Hammer!* 118). But Hammer's evocation of this process of making has less to do with the mere pleasure of "differences" (those particularities that seem always to threaten political movements) than with the scene of judgment that such differences can participate in. In her diary of the film's making Hammer writes:

The obvious question is, what do I as a filmmaker do with the varied responses of my international audiences? First, I listen. I think about what has been said. I try to be open. I let the commentary sink in and hope that it will be part of future choices... I note the diversity of attitudes and often contradictory ideas. This great array of views enhances my freedom to continue to make personal decisions, to give permission to my preferences without analytic judgment, and to continue to do what pleases me as film artist, lesbian, and feminist. Maybe one way for all of us to learn from each other and see our differences and similarities is by watching our response to the same piece of art. (118)

Here, despite the—I imagine vernacular—declaration of a desire to escape from "analytic judgment," Hammer is actually organising her artistic practice around a scene of aesthetic judgment: "watching our response to the same piece of art." The practice of judging and being immersed in other peoples' judgments operates here as the constitutive ground of artistic (and social) practice. This immersion in plurality does not impede Hammer's work; rather, it offers her "freedom" to pursue a process of making in a manner that would not have proceeded in the same way without her willed immersion in the *mise-en-scène* of judgment. For Hammer, "the obvious question is what do I do...?"

Hammer's insistence on what I *do* rather than what I *am* resonates with the question of freedom posed by Arendt's unusual distinction between the "what" and the "who." Arendt makes the observation that:

The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a "character" in the old meaning of

the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us. (*The Human Condition* 181)

Arendt's emphasis on vocabulary is interesting insofar as her own choice of using "who" and "what" as distinct terms is itself somewhat confusing. For Arendt the "what" someone is can be named by a predicate of that person: her hair color, her nationality, her height, her gender—in short, her identity. "Who" someone is can only be understood through that person's actions and speech. For Arendt, each "human life" "tells its story," and this story is "the outcome of action" (184). Although an individual may be the agent of the actions that constitute his or her life story, because actions uncontrollably reverberate, multiply themselves and generate unforeseen consequences, "we can never point unequivocally to him as the author of its eventual outcome" (185). In other words, we can categorize, fix, anticipate, and identify "what" someone is. "Who" someone is, however, resists reification, and exceeds any identification we might make of her, or she might make of herself. In Arendt's terms, "who" someone is remains radically contingent, open to becoming, at least up until that person's death.

In Zerilli's reading, Arendt's distinction between the "who" and the "what" becomes absolutely crucial for understanding this distinction as fundamental to the political itself, and to feminist politics in particular:

Whereas feminists have focused on the question of whether political agency is possible in the absence of the "what" (for example, an identity such as "women"), Arendt insists that politics is not about the "what" and agency, but always about the "who" and nonsovereignty. By contrast with the feminist sense of crisis that emerged in relation to the critique of the subject, Arendt holds that politics, the realm of action, is possible *only* on the condition that there is *no* agent who can begin a process and more or less control its outcome, use a means toward an end. (13)

Zerilli's deployment of Arendt in the service of feminist theory is, she admits, somewhat contentious, but is warranted by Arendt's critique of instrumentality (3). The "what" is fundamentally an instrumental category of understanding; the "who" is a groundless category. Zerilli connects the distinction between the "who" and the "what" to the

question of judgment via the connection that Arendt makes between a person's "self-disclosure" (of who he or she is) and judgment: "By his manner of judging, the person discloses to an extent also himself, what kind of person he is, and this disclosure, which is involuntary, gains in validity to the degree that it has liberated itself from merely individual idiosyncrasies" (Arendt quoted in Zerilli 159). Here we see how Arendt's thinking draws on Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment in which a judgment is a fundamentally public act, since it can only take place inside the plurality given by the other human others who guarantee by their presence the activity of judgment in the first place. We do not make aesthetic judgments for ourselves on our own—even when we are on our own, like Hammer, up all night at her Steenbeck.

Zerilli, in her consideration of the experience of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, is keen to establish that a properly political plurality does not consist in an enumeration of the various "whats" that attach themselves to subjects. Of course, Zerilli's argument is a difficult one to accept, at least at first, given that we have so often construed the activity of politics—especially as it is practiced in minority and progressive communities—as exactly this: the counting up of all our differences. Zerilli argues for a vision of plurality that consists in doing, rather than counting or naming: "Plurality is not a demographic or existential fact, but a political relation to social differences; it requires that I do something in relation to such differences, that I count them in some politically significant way" (106). Judgment depends—ontologically, we might say—on plurality—on the presence of others, and is also a mode of acting, of doing something. Moreover, action and judgment share in their fundamental groundlessness a constitutive alienness to the concept, to that which can be identified in advance. The political plurality that is constituted by the scene of judgment "is irreducible to the indiscriminate recording of each and every woman's opinion," Zerilli writes (106). In other words, plurality is not an archive; it is a scene of action.

For Hammer the work of judgment initiates a doing. Indeed, judging itself is a kind of action. Zerilli insists that plurality is not "an ontological condition of human differences... Rather, plurality requires that we *do* something in relation to whatever empirical differences may exist: plurality names not a *passive* state of ontological differences, but

an *active* and... *imaginative* relation to others in public space" (145). Finally, judging, for Zerilli "is a practice that alters the world" (160).

Scenes of judgment proliferated as Hammer toured her work—from the Roxy to London, Toronto, Montreal, and elsewhere. Across and as a result of these activities, so did the film *Audience* increase in length and expand in complexity. *Audience* documents its own coming into being, and its own initial reception. The film becomes—or perhaps, during the process of its fabrication, it was becoming—not merely a record of differences of opinion about Hammer's work (of course it is that, too), but rather an active, unpredictable intervention into the space in which differences could exhibit themselves.

As a film that documents a lesbian filmmaker as she tours her work, showing it to communities of lesbians in various parts of the world, we might expect *Audience* to conform to and elaborate an experience of identification as confirmation, as solidification of a cognized concept of what a lesbian life or life world might look like, or of what lesbian art might look like. I hope, however, to have shown the way in which judgment's centrality to the production of both *Dyketactics* and *Audience* reveals that these films operate through the groundlessness that grounds both aesthetic judgment and the plurality of the political. This groundlessness is the grounds for claiming that these artworks perform actions, or, at least, model both the artwork's intimate relation to a scene of judgment and its own offering of itself as the object of a judgment that will be plural, groundless, and therefore, political. In the account of feminist film theory that I offered earlier, a female spectator, because of (in Arendt's terminology) "what" she is (that is, a woman), would be restricted in her capacity to make something happen—to do something—with a film or in response to film. Conceiving of filmmaking (the production of films) and film spectatorship as necessarily bound up with judgment allows us to see, in a new, and I hope liberating way, how a film might be said to act, or how a spectator might be offered the opportunity to act in response to a film.

In describing what is possible when we see film as bound up in the question judgment-as-action, I do not mean to suggest that filmmakers or film spectators simply make or remake the world (and its oppressive social and material conditions) in accordance with the mere whimsy or even the sturdy application of the will. Rather, such description releases us into understanding that we need

not resign ourselves to responding to a film or to the call to make films on the basis of “what” we are, what we have already identified ourselves to be. The project of responding to the world’s injustices and exclusions requires that we commit ourselves to finding out “who” we are through the activities of action and judgment and judgment-as-action. Zerilli identifies the groundless, non-conceptual nature of judgment and action as key to the political project that is feminism. In the closing sentence of *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, Zerilli argues that the freedom we participate in when we judge and when we act is a freedom “that... cannot be proved like a truth or possessed like a substance, but only practiced or enacted by present and future generations” (182). We must follow Hammer’s example when she exclaimed in judgment “this was not cinema”—and proceeded to act, as a lesbian, as a feminist, and as a filmmaker.

Notes

¹ Zerilli’s work draws heavily on both Arendt’s *The Human Condition* and her *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*. In the *Lectures* Arendt makes use of Kant’s aesthetic theory to ground a conception of politics. Zerilli’s dense deployment of Arendt and Kant is to some extent a deployment of Arendt’s reading of Kant.

² See not only Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*, but also Düttmann’s *Visconti* and Deleuze’s “Having an Idea in Cinema.”

³ I recognize that these characterizations are crude generalizations.

⁴ Jacquelyn Zita thoroughly engages the claims of representational(ism) in regards to lesbian experience, while Claudia Gorbman discusses Hammer’s growing tendency towards abstraction in her work of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

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