

The Weave

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Emergence

Larry Gottheim: When I arrived at Harpur College in 1964, I was still working on my dissertation, which was on the ideal hero in the realistic novel, focusing on Dostoevsky (*The Idiot*), George Eliot (*Daniel Deronda*), and the German Paul Heyse (*Kinder der Welt*) [*The Ideal Hero in the Realistic Novel*, Yale University, 1965]—my adviser was the great theoretician René Wellek.

After Yale, I'd spent three years at Northwestern University, but I came to Harpur College because it was supposed to be a very special place, the *public* Swarthmore. And actually, my students at the beginning *were* fantastically literate, more like Yale graduate students than Midwestern undergraduates. Harpur was on a trimester system, which allowed for a lot of flexibility; in fact they were willing to hire me and let me have the first trimester off so I could work on my dissertation. But as soon as I finished my degree and started to face up to the rest of my life, I didn't feel so comfortable. I was being groomed in the English Department to be the new young scholar/teacher, and I could see my future laid out before me: assistant professor, associate professor, professor—something in me rebelled.

Meanwhile, Frank Newman, who, like me, was in the English Department (and much later became the chairman of the Cinema Department for a short period), had started the Harpur Film Society. I wasn't so involved at the beginning, but I felt a pull. Like everybody else in the humanities, I was interested in Fellini and Godard and the other international directors, through whom we were also discovering the earlier American cinema. So I got interested in the Film Society and because of the way things are in these organizations, as soon as you show serious interest, you're elected president of the group.

Camille Paglia: There is no way to fully express the enormous impact that the Harpur Film Society had on my intellectual development! I was in Binghamton from 1964 to 1968, seeing one major film after another. While still in high school, I began making a list of the movies I saw in theaters, so I have a complete record of films I saw at Harpur. The very first month I arrived, it was Roman Polanski's *Knife in the Water* [1962]—what a start! I'd been suffering through the perky, garish Doris Day/Debbie Reynolds era, and that oblique, minimalist film was a revelation.

There were so many pivotal moments for me—for example, the audience walking out on Antonioni's *L'Avventura* [1960], while my front row of gay guy friends and I were absolutely entranced. And the same thing happened with Andy Warhol's *Harlot* [1964]—we were riveted and stayed for a second showing. Those amazing early experimental Warhol films turned me into a “Warholite.”

But Cocteau's *Orphée* [1950] captivated everyone—no disagreement there! A magical night—people were floating as they poured out onto the dark quad. And Ingmar Bergman's oeuvre always floored everyone too.

Larry Gottheim: During this same period I was also reading the *Village Voice*, and had begun to see underground films in New York—in particular some of the Warhol films. I was getting interested in this other kind of cinema that was being shown in various out-of-the-way theaters: Aldo Tambellini's theater on Second Avenue, for example—at that time the only place where you could see nudity. There were big audiences. I was interested in the nudity of course, but also in the other aspects of the films shown there.

I remember going with Debbie [Deborah Chess, Gottheim's first wife] to Philadelphia for a weekend, getting the newspaper to look up what was going on, and seeing a little announcement of a program curated by Jonas Mekas, whose name I knew from the *Voice*. We went to this screening and saw films by Bruce Baillie, Bruce Conner, and some others—the program helped open my mind to this new world of cinema.

Camille Paglia: My cinema experiences at Harpur remain a major touchstone for my life. For example, when the *Sunday Times Magazine* in London reprinted a piece I had written for the *Hollywood Reporter* [December 6, 2012] attacking the blandness of current women pop stars, they wanted a blurb for the contributors' page, and I instantly sent them this: “Worshipping European art films in college in the 1960s, I dreamed that the revolutionary new woman of the future would be modeled on Jeanne Moreau, Catherine Deneuve, Anouk Aimée, Monica Vitti, and Julie Christie. How wrong I was!”

I think the Film Society showed a new film virtually every week—including Hollywood classics and screwball comedies. In December 1967, I saw Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* [1963], which was followed by Jonas Mekas's *The Brig* [1964]. I remember fabulous handouts prepared for each film, with basic information and comment. In 1973, at my first teaching job at Bennington College, I organized a Women's Film Festival where I chose the films and wrote handouts modeled in both tone and format on the ones at Harpur. (See fig. 6 on pages 26 and 27.)

I've often talked about how that public film series was a model of education that should be imitated by colleges everywhere. The hushed, contemplative intensity of the Harpur audience was phenomenal—and I'm constantly nostalgic for it amid today's restless, easily distracted and disrespectful audiences.

Larry Gottheim: I was becoming more interested in *making* a film, not as the start of a career or anything like that; like a lot of people at the time, I was just interested. I knew somebody who had worked at one of the camera stores in New York and bought a used 16mm Bolex with one lens for \$250. I started to learn filmmaking from the little manual that came with the Bolex, just puzzling things out. I made some little films, one of them a narrative using people I knew through the Film Society. The film was awkward—I hated some of the acting—but the experience of making it was exciting.

In 1967, I began teaching a cinema class in the English Department, the first film class at Harpur: we looked at films and did some filmmaking. There were several students who were seriously interested in film. Jim Hoberman was in this first class, and Steve Anker, who had been in a freshman English class of mine. Hoberman was already a kind of film critic. To my astonishment, he had worked out a way to get a press pass to the New York Film Festival—as an undergraduate!

Jim Hoberman: I started at what was then Harpur College in the fall of 1966, before there really was a Cinema Department. Larry Gottheim was my academic adviser, an extremely sympathetic guy. He seemed very young, and was very accessible; we were friendly from the beginning.

I was already interested in film. When I was in high school, I used to go to movies at the Bridge Theater on St. Mark's Place and at Tambellini's Gate on Second Avenue, which was in the lobby of an apartment building—Manny Farber wrote a hilarious description of it.* Jonas

*See "Experimental Films 1968," in Manny Farber, *Movies* (New York: Hillstone, 1971): 246.

State University of New York at Binghamton
HARPUR FILM SOCIETY

Film Notes
March 21, 1968

HEAD AGAINST THE WALLS (La tête contre les murs) 1958

Directed by Georges Franju

With Pierre Brasseur, Jean-Pierre Mocky, Anouk Aimée, Charles Asnavour.
Music by Maurice Jarre. Photography by Eugène Schufftan

Short: THE BLOOD OF THE BEASTS (1949)

Directed by Georges Franju. Music by Kosma.

La Sang des Betes (The Blood of the Beasts) belongs to a small but interesting film tradition, what Susan Sontag calls “the poetic cinema of shock” (along with Freaks, Flaming Creatures, Fireworks & Scorpio Rising, & all Bunuel’s films). It is a travelogue (complete with the sun sinking over a canal) of several Paris slaughterhouses, its horrible reality blunted by black & white photography, guided by an objective, thorough narrator. Dispassionately we are shown the instruments & calmly we are told exactly how each is used, & suddenly a horse’s throat is slit, his blood raising steam from the ground. As we watch an axed cow’s contortions (gutters are over flowed with her insides) the knowledgeable voice points out that “total decapitation” is necessary for the best veal, that butchers often develop cysts, that the headless, writing animals are dead & moving on just reflex. Now it is lunch-time in the city & a butcher hews his ax in time to the twelve chimes of a church.

But Franju is not really passing a moral judgment—most men eat meat to live & animals must be slaughtered. The moral judgment is that of the individual viewer’s, Franju is showing us how, perhaps at what price, we obtain our meat (maintain our existence). The butchers have names & individual styles & histories (one was a champion boxer). The narration ends & a meatworker breaks into “Somewhere Beyond the Sea:” “...fleecy clouds like sheep...” (and we watch their bellies cut open), “...shepherd of the azure sky...” (the trained ‘traitor’ sheep leads the herd to the knives), “...the moist earth...” (the ground absorbs a cow’s intestines).

When Andy Warhol paints a Campbell’s Soup Can he asks us if we dig it, is it beautiful? Is it necessary? & if not, then why do we make or permit Campbell’s Soup Cans? With the same objectivity, with the same irony (though much more graphically) Franju is examining man’s more basic needs, his violent works & their rationale.

La Tête contre les murs (Head against the Walls) explores life within & without the conventional insane asylum. It is a metaphor which has recurred since films’ inception, from The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920) to The Titticut Follies (1967) and varying in purpose and subtlety from The Snakepit to Suddenly Last Summer to Marat/de Sade. A young, unstable motorcyclist is

Figure 6. Jim Hoberman’s program note for the March 21, 1968 Harpur Film Society screening, as it was originally distributed. Courtesy J. Hoberman.

committed to a mental institution by his hypocritical father. He makes three attempts to escape to an outside which, excepting the possibility of love, seems (in the nightmarish shots of Paris & the grotesque gambling sequence) hardly more rational or inviting than the bizarre life of the asylum.

Franju's primary concern is with freedom. Not only the immediate freedom of escape, freedom from authority (there are two authority figures operating—the father, & Dr. Varmont who believes that his job is mainly to protect the public & then to cure his patients) but also the question of how much freedom man really wants. Charles Aznavour plays an inmate who is obsessed with the idea of escape, but who also speaks wistfully of better wards & asylums by the sea. Though Aznavour seems relatively sane within the asylum, when he finally realizes his dream & does escape, he is seized by a violent fit. Gerane, the motorcyclist, exhibits the same tendency—after a successful attempt he flees compulsively from the sanctuary of his girlfriend's apartment into the arms of his captors.

Though much of the film is documentary & many of its best scenes are of actual inmates, the purpose of the film is not to illuminate the plight of the insane (in the sense that David & Lisa depicts the emotionally disturbed, or A Child is Waiting depicts the retarded). As Dr. Varmont puts it—"Insanity is a problem that publicity can't solve." Rather, Franju is concerned with the relationship between the "sane" & the "insane", between man. He is examining the nature of freedom & seems to find in it a Sartrean paradox—that the exercise of freedom is perhaps equivalent to the loss of freedom. Gerane's life before he was committed was aimless & dissolute. Only inside of the asylum was he able to fall in love with the girl who visited him, did his life have a purpose. Once he has escaped, love becomes again too great a responsibility & the burden of freedom too heavy.

--Jim Hoberman

Other films by Franju:

Hotel des Invalides (1951)

Le Gran Melies (1952)

The Horror Chamber of Dr. Faustus (1959)

Judex (1963)

Therese Desqueyroux (1964)

Next Showing, April 4, Antonioni's RED DESERT and Brackhage's WINDOW WATER BABY MOVING.

Shirley Clarke, one of America's leading independent film-makers, will visit the campus on April 8. There will be an evening showing of her great film PORTRAIT OF JASON, after which Miss Clarke will discuss the film. In the afternoon she will show and discuss her film THE CONNECTION. Watch for further announcements.

The Film Society design contest has been won by Judith Spencer Levy. Her design will appear on the next FILM NOTES.

PLEASE, NO SMOKING IN THE THEATER

Mekas's Filmmakers' Cinematheque was moving around; for a while it was in the theater where the Blue Man Group now does their shows—I saw Warhol films there—then it moved uptown to the Wurlitzer Building, which is where I saw *Chelsea Girls* [1966] for the first time. So I was already involved in avant-garde film. And I had a Super-8mm camera and was making films of my own.

Back then, there were no film programs in any school I knew about, so I ended up in the English Department at Harpur. I was quite active in the Harpur Film Society and did the film notes for the screenings. In those days, you joined a film society because you wanted to see certain movies and you were happy to subject the rest of the campus to them. The films we showed occasionally get referenced by Camille Paglia—she was there too, as was Steve Anker. Steve started around the same time I did, or maybe a term or two later.

Camille Paglia: I can visualize Jim Hoberman at the snack bar, the college's social center—we moved in vaguely the same large circle. He was friends with my friends. It was exactly the same for Arnie Zane, a soon-to-be famous dancer/choreographer who later died of AIDS, and also Art Spiegelman: I remember them as part of my larger circle, but had no independent dealings with them.

Larry Gottheim was a revered and maybe a slightly feared name on campus. Though I often heard him mentioned in my circle, I had no direct contact with him. My big mentor was the poet Milton Kessler who had been a student of Theodore Roethke.

Jim Hoberman: Camille Paglia was a colorful personality and a cult figure for a group of gay guys I knew. She was probably two years ahead of me and widely regarded as a genius, at least by this group of guys (all of whom she's written about). I had friends in the Theater Department, which is probably how I knew her circle and heard about her. I can't remember ever having a conversation with Camille but probably we were at some of the same parties—the theater parties were great with lots of stoned charades, et cetera. I remember her as a slim, slight, elegant personage—kind of mod, with Beatle-length hair, possibly a purple or violet peacoat and matching bell-bottoms, very Carnaby Street! I was struck by the fact that she was from Upstate New York.

Camille was also a totally out lesbian and completely fearless. A legendary story is that she and a girlfriend were drinking in one of the tough working-class, mainly Slavic bars in the neighborhood called the Second Ward, where we went to live dangerously (as opposed to Binghamton's one black bar, which was regarded as friendly territory).

Some guy began either hitting on the girl or hassling them or both, and Camille took her bottle of Utica Club, smashed it on the bar, and told the guy get the fuck away from her before she rearranged his face. It could be apocryphal. I wasn't there. But she certainly seemed capable of it. (See fig. 7.)



Figure 7. *Harpur Review* editors in photograph from the cover of the spring 1968 issue: in center (with foot up on a black cannon), editor-in-chief Peter Weber; on right, Hank Kune; and in foreground on left, Camille Paglia, “dressed in a trendy London mod way—unusual even at Harpur, where downtown NYC dance-leotard bohemian or studiously unkempt California hippie style reigned”; “We’re standing at the foot of the war memorial (the Soldiers and Sailors Monument) in front of the Binghamton Courthouse. There was definitely an anti-war reference there”—Paglia in e-mail to author, February 27, 2015. Photograph courtesy of Larry Lynn and Ellis Barowsky.

Steve Anker: A girl at Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn who I was involved with told me about Harpur; it sounded exciting. I applied and got in. As a senior in high school I'd been in theater and I played a couple of musical instruments; I was always a lover of literature and had grown up loving the movies; I'd even discovered international cinema (I'd sometimes watch the movies two or three times in a row—you could do that in theaters then).

But when I got to Binghamton in September 1967, it was like being shot from a cannon. I got involved in theater; and I became active in classical music and did a classical music program on the campus radio station. And my first week, I attended a call for people interested in the Harpur Film Society. The Film Society was run by Larry Gottheim, a young literature teacher whose lecture (on *The Brothers Karamazov*) I had heard my first day at Binghamton. I remember being knocked out by his energy and passion and his articulateness, so when I saw that he was running the Film Society I was excited.

There were seven or eight of us in the room. Larry talked about how they wanted to develop the Film Society into something substantial and that each of us would take on different assignments and run different programs. At the end of the meeting, the guy in front of me turned around and introduced himself; it was Jim Hoberman. He and I became friends and I quickly realized that Jim knew oodles more than I did about film: he and Larry and the others were talking about something called "Underground Film," which I'd never heard of.

Larry Gottheim: The Film Society started out using the Theater Department's theater, which had a projection booth fitted with large arc projectors, in both 16mm and 35mm. These were awkward to use and in need of repair.

Later on, during Nick Ray's time at Binghamton, Dennis Hopper came to visit. A 35mm print of Nick's film about the Chicago Seven emerged, and it was to be shown in that theater. A few brave souls climbed up the ladder to the booth and attempted to figure out how to work the projectors. There was a long delay, and I remember Dennis, looking like his character in *Blue Velvet* [1986], climbing up the ladder and cursing out the projectionists.

One of my earliest tasks with the Film Society was to develop some interest in replacing the Theater Department projectors with appropriate 16mm projectors, but nobody seemed interested, including those who later gathered around when the idea of a Cinema Department was in the air. The Cinema Department came into being just as the construction of the new Lecture Hall was completed. Our large classes were

in Lecture Hall 1. At first we set up the 16mm Kalart-Victor projectors on carts amid the seats. We also used Kodak Analytic projectors. Then we had a projection booth built at the back.

Eventually we were given exclusive use of one of the smaller Lecture Halls, Lecture Hall 6, and this became the site for most of the classes and events. A projection booth was built in the back, and one of the major innovations was painting the walls and ceiling black—to some extent influenced by the original Anthology Film Archives. A black-box theater was unusual for colleges at the time.

Steve Anker: Larry was beginning to make films and was especially interested in the Underground. I remember him running rolls of film through the camera, often as single takes; he was excited by the camera's ability to create a record of real time and capture details that might otherwise go unnoticed. Dan Rowe, another literature teacher, was interested in radical art and cinema and made a feature-length experimental film. Some students who already had a serious interest in film were making their own films with the cameras that Larry had been able to get his hands on.

Early on, I also hung out a bit with Ralph Hocking—and met Nam June Paik—during the time when they were working on an early synthesizer. I was moving from one thing to another, constantly excited.

Ralph Hocking: I was brought to Harpur by Bruce Dearing, the president of the university—before he and I even figured out what I wanted to do. Whacky! Who the hell hires you to invent your job? I'd been fired from Allegheny College, where Bruce's son Jamie had been in one of my classes. At Allegheny from 1960 to 1967, I had taught pottery and sculpture, drawing and design, photography—video didn't exist yet. When tenure time came around, the president tossed me out because I didn't have "a sense of community." That year, the students dedicated the yearbook to me.

At Allegheny, we used to take students to New York, and on one of those trips I ran into Nam June Paik at the Bonino Gallery: he was running around with magnets, stuffing them into the front of TV sets. I thought, what the fuck is *this* crazy shit? But I was fascinated: Nam June was *so* passionate—as if what he was doing *had* to be done.

There was so much money available for experimentation in those days! At Binghamton, they would buy a harpsichord and then decide well maybe we need another one. I decided to try to do something with television. I discovered that Sony was making portable television units, the CV Series. I'd never seen one, but Nam June was talking about them, so I asked the university if they would buy me some. "What are

you going to do with them?” “Don’t know: hand them to people and say ‘Here, do something.’ I’m kind of curious to see what’s possible for television besides what we already know.”

Larry Gottheim: Ralph Hocking went through several changes in Binghamton, just as I did. In the sixties and early seventies the university allowed people to find themselves, even if that meant changing disciplines. At first, Ralph wasn’t teaching any courses; he was just around. He got involved in photography, then became interested in video, in the idea of street recording, giving Portapaks to people and sending them out into the world. The Experimental Television Center grew out of that side of things. In time he connected with Nam June Paik, and he and Nam June and Shuya Abe built the first video synthesizer in the basement of the Lecture Hall building.

In 1968, through the Film Society, I heard about an independent film competition, run by Nick Manning who was teaching at St. Lawrence University. I think Manning’s festival had originally been in New York, but he had moved it to St. Lawrence. A group of the students who were seriously interested in film wanted to go, so we got a college car and drove to Canton.

I think Stan Vanderbeek and Jonas Mekas were supposed to be judges, but neither could come, and Ken Jacobs came as Mekas’s replacement. There was also a guy from the National Film Board of Canada.

Ken Jacobs: Jonas had asked me if I would take his place at the St. Lawrence event. When I got there, I was shocked that they had preselected films and, crazy-conscientious, asked to see *all* the films submitted. And I wrote comments on *every* film: my opinion, right or wrong. I didn’t want to be this judge officiating from above, and I did find some good things that had been thrown out by the faceless prejudices.

Flo Jacobs: This was like what you had done at Millennium when it was at St. Mark’s Church: you said anybody who had thirty minutes of work could show it; you weren’t going to preselect.

Ken Jacobs: But you had to take your chances on what would be said afterward!

Larry, who was in the English Department at the time, brought several students to the event. They dug my unrelenting style and apparently returned to Binghamton with the idea of my coming to help start a cinema department.

Larry Gottheim: At St. Lawrence the festival judges chose winners from among the films that had been submitted (I had entered my narrative film *The Present* [1968]). You could agree to show a program of the winning films at your college, but I said I didn't want to do that. I asked if we could take *all* the films that had been entered in the festival back to Binghamton and choose our own programs. We were allowed to do this.

We filled the trunk with cans of film and when we got back to Binghamton, we looked at both the winners and the films that had been rejected. That's where I saw the first films of Ernie Gehr—*Morning* [1967] and *Wait* [1967]. And there was a Frampton film, which is how I realized that this guy I had known years before at Oberlin College had become a filmmaker! There was also a Joyce Wieland film and a Morgan Fisher film.

I began to change the direction of the Film Society—to the disgust of the regular faculty and most everybody else. Before this, there had been a tradition of the cute short film before the foreign or classic narrative feature. That's what people wanted from film societies. But we were moving the Harpur Film Society in the direction of what Jonas Mekas had called the New American Cinema.

Jim Hoberman: I remember Larry going to some sort of film festival at St. Lawrence University, which is where he met Ken, who apparently created some kind of outrageous scene. I didn't know Ken, but I was familiar with *Little Stabs at Happiness* [1963] and *Blonde Cobra* [1963]. I'd heard that Ken had gotten involved in some sort of contretemps with Stan Vanderbeek—who knows what it was about—but this struck me at the time because I'd thought all these guys were great and somehow aligned; it hadn't occurred to me that there might be warring camps among the filmmakers.

Larry brought back films from the St. Lawrence event and we did a Harpur Film Society show with some of them; that's when I first saw Ken's *Window* [1964] and *Airshaft* [1967]. Those films surprised me; they were a new direction for Ken. Nelson's *The Great Blondino* [1967] was also part of that program. Seeing those films was exciting for us, though I don't remember whether many people came to our screenings.

Larry Gottheim: Harpur had started this program where the residential units became colleges with associated faculty members teaching classes in the residence halls, rather than in the regular classrooms. The individual colleges had budgets—there was a lot of money in those days. I was a fellow at Newing College, and we began getting programs of

experimental film to show at night in the lounge—a mixture of formal films and films where there was a little bit of sexuality: Bruce Conner films, Robert Nelson’s *Oh Dem Watermelons* [1965] . . .

The poet Milton Kessler, who was always a supporter of the Cinema Department, became involved in these Film Society activities the following year.

Steve Anker: In the early and mid-sixties, when I was in high school in Brooklyn, the ironic/sardonic reports on television about this or that Andy Warhol film or the Factory were my awareness of Underground Film. But I remember Larry and the others saying to me, “Perhaps you could get a little Underground Film series going in your dorm complex”—when I arrived at Binghamton, I’d been assigned to live in Newing College. I proposed a little film series and the proposal was accepted. We showed several programs of films in dorm lounges and meeting rooms, and they became popular since most people had never seen anything like the films we showed. (See fig. 8.)

I learned about Underground Film by programming it. In 1967–68 I showed Anger’s *Scorpio Rising* [1963], and *Chafed Elbows* [1967] by Robert



Figure 8. Steve Anker, photographed by Mark Goldstein. Courtesy Mark Goldstein.

Downey, and Taka Iimura's *Love (Ai)* [1963], which was already legendary. And Robert Nelson's *Great Blondino Preview* [1967]. I'm sure I showed *Little Stabs at Happiness* [1963] and *Window Water Baby Moving* [1959]. I'd never seen anything even close to these films and I was generally knocked out, although I was mystified by *Little Stabs* (Dan Rowe, an English professor, told me it was a masterpiece). I wasn't alone: our screenings were considered sensational and would usually pack the dorm lounge.

Early on, Larry arranged a visit by Shirley Clarke, who showed *Portrait of Jason* [1967] soon after it was finished. This was a huge, lively event that packed the four-hundred-seat theater. Fifty years later, I still remember a student attacking Shirley Clarke for being manipulative and taking advantage of Jason Holliday [aka Aaron Payne].

Larry Gottheim: I'd gotten in touch with Shirley Clarke, who had just finished *Portrait of Jason*, and through the combination of the Film Society and the money from Newing College, we brought her to Binghamton for a few days. We had a big screening of *Portrait of Jason* at the Film Society, but she also brought suitcases full of films from the Filmmakers' Cooperative that we showed at Newing College. Shirley was great, generous to the students and even to me: I showed her *The Present* and she was encouraging and supportive.

Camille Paglia: Shirley Clarke came to Harpur for two days in April 1968. The large theater was full for her evening event—standing room only. And there was an incident during that event that I've never forgotten. After the showing of *Portrait of Jason*, Clarke was onstage taking questions from the audience—the discussion was being moderated by a male faculty member (I don't remember who). Suddenly some guy in the balcony begins yelling at her—a real rant—going on and on about how exploitative she had been in the film and how unfair to Jason. I'm not sure if the guy was on drugs or not (it *was* the sixties!), but my impression at the time was that he was mentally unbalanced and that the film had simply pushed him over the edge. The audience was paralyzed—you could feel the shock.

Clarke got very quiet, very centered, listening with complete attention and respect. I remember being surprised and impressed with how she *lowered* her voice—an interesting strategy to me, because as an Italian American, I automatically *raise* my voice under attack and stress! The episode went on and on—painfully long for me and I think for most of the audience. I felt critical of the hosts of the event and thought the moderator should have intervened to protect an honored guest. But in retrospect, it seems very sixties “go-with-the-flow”—letting everything spool out without interference or assertions of authority.

Clarke was a tough cookie who knew how to handle herself when put on the spot. She made a deep impression on me and everyone, I think, as a strong and confident personality at a time when women of professional achievement were still rare in public life.

Steve Anker: Larry told us that the film festival he'd attended at St. Lawrence University had been really problematic; he didn't like most of the work and thought that the level of critical discourse among the judges was pretty low—except for Ken Jacobs, who'd challenged everybody and galvanized the proceedings. Larry asked me if I could find funding through Newing College to help bring Ken to Binghamton for a week in spring 1969, and I did.

Because the money had come from a dormitory complex and the Ken Jacobs residency was designed to last a week, we planned for the screenings to take place in one of the lounges, a relaxed setting. The space was not dark; people were stretched out on the sofas. Ken was not very happy with this, but he went through with the first program he had brought. He showed *The Man with a Movie Camera* [1929]—this is 1969 and the Vertov film was just resurfacing—and thirty minutes into the event, the lounge had almost cleared out. Jan Kaplan, my contact person with the dorm, was mortified. This was totally different and more challenging than the previous events he had helped fund.

We moved from the dorm lounge to a classroom. During the following week, Ken insisted on not doing the usual theatrical presentations and star filmmaker turns, and proceeded to lead a very intensive seminar on the aesthetics of cinema. The sessions lasted day and night. Ken showed many kinds of films (I remember him showing Baillie's *Valentin de las Sierras* [1968] several times, sometimes just the picture and sometimes just the sound), and ended up with a group of about twenty very serious, very focused, very excited young people. It was amazing how much was accomplished in terms of the depth of the discussions. It was a remarkable week.

I'm 95 percent sure that Ken was carrying Nisi on his back during the seminar. I remember marveling how different this was from the other filmmakers who had visited—and this is to take nothing away from them. It's just that their visits were more spectacle, whereas Ken was really about engaging the moment and challenging each situation, a whole different kind of experience.

Jim Hoberman: Ken Jacobs came in the spring of 1969, and basically talked nonstop for a week in one of the lecture halls. He was an amazing speaker; insight came pouring out of him. He didn't use notes; he'd just

show up with movies and talk. It was fantastic. I'd been an extremely diffident student—if it hadn't been for the war and the draft, I probably would have dropped out. Ken's visit was hugely important for me; I cut all my other classes to be there. And I was able to talk with Ken for the first time.

Helene Kaplan Wright: I started in Binghamton in 1967. I was an English major and Dan Rowe, one of the English teachers, was very interested in film, as were a couple of students who were a bit ahead of me: Jim Hoberman and Michael Gersten. There was rumbling about a film department getting started.

I'd been trying to transfer away from Binghamton, and then Ken Jacobs was brought in as a visiting filmmaker, and he was revelatory. His visit was *the* most incredible event. He showed *Little Stabs at Happiness* and *Blonde Cobra*, and my memory is that—and this may be an apocryphal story—before he showed *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* [1969; revised 1971], which was a work-in-progress, he locked the doors to Lecture Hall 6 where it was being shown and explained that it was either leave now or stay for the next two-and-a-half hours, keep your mouth shut, and watch the screen. I don't remember anyone leaving. Ken was charismatic; he had us in the palm of his hand.

Larry Gottheim: Gradually I began to work toward a program or a department of cinema that wouldn't be part of the English Department or the Theater Department, but would be separate and equal to the other arts programs. This became my mission. The university was open to experiment at that time, and some people within the administration said, "Well, okay, let's set up a committee to examine this idea." So they set up a committee—somebody from the Art Department, somebody from the Theater Department . . . and suddenly *everybody* was interested—all of these people who had *never* supported the idea of having better projection, had *never* come to the recent Film Society programs (some of these people *hated* the changes in what the Film Society was showing). This had hardened me; I knew I didn't want these guys to be involved in the new department.

One of the people from the Theater Department had taken film courses at some university and was presenting himself as an expert in cinema, and the committee was considering a program where people from different departments would teach courses: potentially a student could major in cinema by taking courses in the English Department (Film and Literature), in the Philosophy Department (Existentialism in Cinema), and so on. There would be all these different approaches.

Some of the hidebound traditionalists who didn't see cinema as an academic discipline wanted to stop the whole thing, and other people wanted to have a little bit of it, and—this could never happen again—in some miraculous way, people in the administration actually supported my idea of a separate Cinema Department. For a couple years we had an administration that was more visionary than the faculty! After awhile, these administrators got supplanted by more academic, business-inclined types and it was all over. But at that early moment, they supported my idea, and I knew that in order to make this work, I had to find somebody who had some stature, somebody who could out-rank the people in these other departments who were claiming to have expertise.

I'd become friends with Ken, who had had experience teaching *and* making film. I proposed him as somebody who with me would be the beginning faculty of the program—it was a program before it was a department.

Ken Jacobs: I was already a teacher during my teenage years; the Police Athletic League had after-school programs in poor neighborhoods. I still remember some of my students. This was a poor Irish area of Brooklyn, and I had three kids, a sister and two brothers named Jacobs—Irish but “Jacobs”—who were unbelievably talented. The littlest one would draw a picture and when it was done, he'd put swastikas all over it. I'd ask, “How come you do this?” And he would answer, “They're very exciting!”

I was a teacher whenever somebody would allow me to talk—I was so wound up. Even as a middle teenager, I was beset by ideas and if somebody gave me a signal to be forthcoming, I would roar. At some point after I got out of the Coast Guard (pressure of the draft: my aim was to be useless—Korea had clearly been a con—but I was okay about guarding the coast), a friend of mine who was teaching painting in Bronxville gave me her job teaching adults there—women mostly, very rich and very nice. I'd also taught some amazing old people at the Home and Hospital of the Daughters of Israel. There was a woman named Rose who'd come here from Russia with her husband to proselytize for the Revolution; she was very talented. I've kept some of the things she gave me all these years.

I also taught filmmaking at the Dalton School, and at a summer program at Fieldston [Ethical Culture Fieldston School]. I didn't have a license so I couldn't teach in public schools.

Flo Jacobs: Don't forget Millennium.

Ken Jacobs: And at Millennium, starting in 1966–67. I made Millennium into a kind of “university of the streets.” I taught filmmaking—practical,

historical, and theoretical; and we had the use of the St. Mark's Church in the Bowery to show films. Peter Kubelka's first screening in the USA was there. We began the practice of conversation after the films—not to everyone's liking. If people got the conversation going themselves, I wouldn't say anything; but if they didn't, I would speak and candidly. Bob Downey needed no help; he was deadly charming.

The first Millennium was destroyed by monsters of personal ambition, but we kept it going outside of church control with the help of other people, including Ernie Gehr.

I also taught at St. John's University in Queens, a Catholic school. The Art Department contacted me after the Millennium fracas, which had made the papers. Whether the kids were rich or poor, whatever color they were, whatever religion they were trying to rescue themselves from, I saw them as individuals and I did my best for them.

One memorable thing from St. John's: at some point I screened this Marxist South American film, *The Given Word* [1962, directed by Anselmo Duarte], that showed the failure of the Church to care for people. A semiretired priest—bad heart—who attended my classes and who had spent a lot of time in South America said to me afterward, "It's worse than that." The film was devastating but he said, "It's *worse* than that"! You never know what to expect from any individual.

The Art Department at St. John's wanted me to start a media center, then they suffered a big drop in funding. Binghamton made a surprising offer to us, and there were two other offers: one came from Stan Vanderbeek in Tampa, and Manny Farber recommended me for a position in California.

Flo Jacobs: I didn't want to leave our loft in New York. At Binghamton, Ken would get a three-year contract and we could keep our place. Stan Vanderbeek had offered Kenneth \$18,000, but it would have meant leaving here, as the California position would have.

Ken Jacobs: Say how much money we were living on.

Flo Jacobs: We were living on \$3,500 a year.

Ken Jacobs: Even back then, that wasn't much.

Flo Jacobs: I wasn't convinced about the move to Binghamton; I thought it might be like living in Albany, where I'd spent my first six years—I hated it there.

Ken Jacobs: You'd had a very bad experience with small-town anti-Semitism.

Flo Jacobs: But if we went to Binghamton, we could sublet our loft. I'd already put Nisi on the waiting list for Hunter Elementary School; I wanted her to go to school in Manhattan, not in small-town America.

Ken Jacobs: We'd met some of the Binghamton students, including Jim Hoberman, and they were great.

Flo Jacobs: Yes, they *were* great. So I thought, well, maybe after three years Kenneth will be able to get a job at a university in Manhattan and things will be fine.

Jim Hoberman: Larry was working to create a film department and already trying to figure a way to get Ken to teach in Binghamton—which, looking back, seems pretty extraordinary; I don't know if Ken had even gone to college.*

Larry was successful and the summer before Ken came to teach, he had a job teaching at the Aspen School of the Arts in Colorado. I basically invited myself to go along as Ken's assistant, and believe it or not, I got them to comp my tuition and maybe even my board—so that I could be Ken's projectionist and gofer. It was the sixties: I hitchhiked to Aspen. (See fig. 9.)

Michael Gersten, a buddy of mine from Binghamton, was in Aspen with us; he was another film buff, probably involved in the Film Society too, and wanted to be a filmmaker—so we spent that summer, or part of it, with Ken. I wasn't totally reliable: at a certain point a bunch of people I knew passed through and I took off with them to California, and then came back.

In Aspen I had to learn how to work with the Kalart-Victor analytic projector; Ken had a number of them. He was working on *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* at this time. You can't understand the Cinema Department

*Jacobs: "I took two courses, an intro to the movie camera (faces this way) and an intro to 16mm editing. That was my college education and not sure if it was graded, more likely another Certificate if that much. Hans Richter interviewed each potential student, said nothing, and was never seen again, as his assistant on his later cine-junk, Arnold Eagle, taught the class. Richter out-takes were given out to do the editing assignments and Bob Fleischner did his impressively, and so we met. . . . It was pathetic and most students, on the G.I. Bill like me, dropped the course before it was over." E-mail to the author, June 13, 2014.



Figure 9. Jim Hoberman in an early Ken Jacobs stereopticon photograph (c. 1970). Courtesy Ken Jacobs.

apart from the Kalart-Victor projector. The first thing Ken did when he was hired at Binghamton was order two. Essentially they were variable speed projectors: you could show films one frame at a time, and you could stop on a single frame. But they were extremely sensitive. The threading was extra complicated; there were all these little safety triggers; it was nerve-wracking to use them. They had been developed during World War II, and now were very cheap—Ken probably paid twenty-five bucks for them on Canal Street. He was a devotee of the Kalart-Victor. Later, at Binghamton, I was Ken's projectionist—it was my work-study job.

Daile Kaplan: I arrived in Binghamton in 1968, a naive girl from Brooklyn, and immediately developed culture shock. Campus life was much freer than life at home and required some adjustment. I had planned to major in Russian (like Larry Gottheim!), and was interested in becoming a diplomat. I was making photographs and interested in photography, but only as an avocation, a personal form of artistic expression.

I attended a film screening that Larry organized and was transfixed. I transferred to the Cinema Department in my sophomore year, soon after Ken Jacobs had conducted a visiting artist program that dazzled many of us—and subsequently was invited to join the brand new department.

Ken was/is an amazing presence, a charismatic lecturer who linked cinema, painting, performance, and other art forms in visceral and dynamic ways. I suppose he could be construed as a guru, given how

we revered him. I should also say that Flo, Ken's wife, was his partner and equal. Given the feminist revolution that was underway, this made a strong impression on me.

Larry, the academically trained professor-turned-artist, had been teaching at Harper College and living in Johnson City for several years; he was the yang to Ken's yin—a quiet, kind, and smart guy who, like his students, seemed to be groping for a new identity.

To a great extent my decision to move toward the arts was due to my being away from my parents, whose worldview was quite protective and limited (true of many of my friends' parents at the time). We students were caught up in the remarkable cross currents of what was then known as the "counterculture." After my parents met Ken, they recognized his positive influence on me.

Steve Anker: Larry managed to find a way to get Ken hired and in September of 1969, my junior year, the Cinema Department came into being. Larry was the architect of the program, and even then it was clear that he was a visionary who, in the right place at the right time, was bold enough to move from literature into the new academic area of cinema; and he was smart enough to be able to take advantage of the university's resources during a time of growth. Most importantly, he was drawn to the most radical possibilities of how this new area of study could be brought to the campus, and he was unwavering in wanting the most creative and challenging people to be involved. Hence, Ken Jacobs and, soon, a remarkable course of study for both film production and film appreciation.

Larry Gottheim: It's amazing how much can happen in a short time. The first actual cinema program courses were offered during the summer of 1970, after I had received an NEH grant and took a year off. By this time, I had transformed from an English professor who was interested in cinema into a filmmaker, and I had invited Ernie Gehr to teach with me that summer.

I'd been fascinated by Ernie's *Morning* and *Wait*, and at one of our projections one of his films got damaged. I went to see him to arrange to replace the print, or do whatever we could do, and we became friends. That was the summer when Ernie made *Serene Velocity* [1970].

Ernie Gehr: In the spring of 1970—around the time of the Kent State shootings—I was invited to show films in Binghamton. I showed the four films that I had completed up to then—*Morning*, *Wait*, *Transparency* [1969], *Reverberation* [1969], and possibly a section of *History* [1970]. Afterward, there was a long discussion, partially about the work and partially about why someone would make such works in a time of turmoil.