ROBIN BLAETZ, *editor*

Women's Experimental Cinema

critical frameworks

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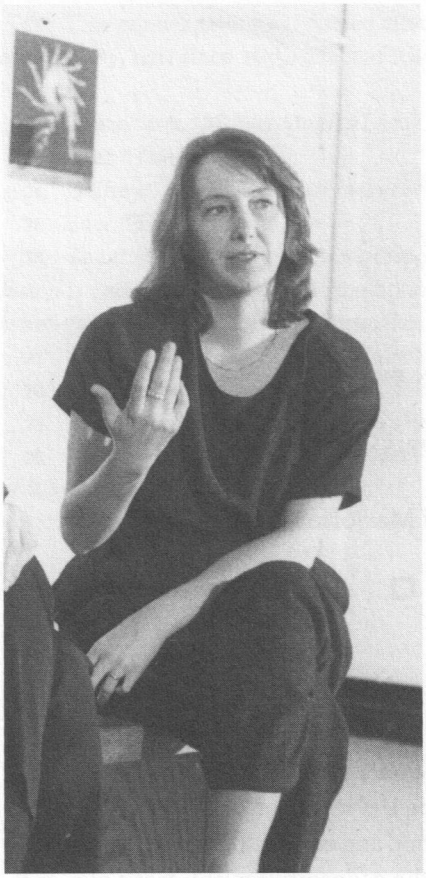
Amnesis Time

The Films of Marjorie Keller

Marjorie Keller (1950–94) was one of very few experimental filmmakers as active in scholarship and teaching as in artistic pròduction. Keller received a doctorate from the cinema studies department of New York University in 1983 and taught at the Ùniversity of Rhode Island until her death in 1994. Throughout this period and earlier, she was active as both a filmmaker and as a participant in the cooperative avant-garde film communities in Chicago and New York. Despite the widespread recognition of her more than twenty-five films and the fact that her body of work is now complete, Keller has received little critical attention. This oversight is partially the result of the neglect of avant-garde film practice in general, particularly the work of most women artists. However, the more intriguing and unsettling cause for Keller's obscurity concerns her informed refusal to work within the paradigms established by feminist film theory in the mid-1970s. Having studied with the likes of Annette Michelson, she was not unaware of the significance of Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which introduced the precepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis into film studies and called for a countercinema in reaction to classical Hollywood structures. Rather, Keller rejected film practice based on feminist theory because she believed, as she said in a review of E. Ann Kaplan's 1983 book *Women and Film*, that theory "obfuscates women's filmmaking in the name of feminism."[1]



Marjorie Keller in 1987. Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives. Photo: Robert Haller.

In the context of the heightened emotions that characterized debates in the 1970s and 1980s about varieties of feminism, Keller's status as an outcast was assured.[2] Not only did she reject the structural demands on her work made in the name of feminist film theory, but she also declared openly that her primary influences were the maligned lyrical and diarist filmmakers Marie Menken, Gregory Markopoulos, and Stan Brakhage. Added into this mix is the fact that Keller was not just a practitioner of poetic cinema but also a committed activist in the politics of her day. Thus she was not one to accept passively the decree that her work was nonfeminist simply because her films did not follow a trajectory put in place by people who were not, for the most part, practitioners.

Keller's convictions as a filmmaker were not swayed by the rejection of her work by the feminist critical community, but she was inspired in the late 1980s to write a book that covered those filmmakers who traced

their roots to Maya Deren rather than to theory. Instead of writing about Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman, or Sally Potter, all filmmakers who overtly deconstructed the Hollywood gaze, Keller set out to write about filmmakers less known at the time—including Abigail Child, Leslie Thornton, and Su Friedrich—whose work was not as easily analyzed under the rubric of feminist theory. The notes for the book, which was left unwritten at the time of her death, provide a useful entry into Keller's own concerns.[3] She writes of this group of filmmakers as manifesting a derangement of classical cinema through what she called "a radical distortion of values and perception . . . often associated with insanity." Reprocessing imagery from Hollywood, home movies, educational film, and instructional film, these films see "old forms . . . as if through an anamorphic lens." The reference to the lens is crucial here. Keller was concerned with the film artifact not on the level of character and story, but at the level of the image: in the image of woman and the self-image of the filmmaker "from the ground up: as film emulsion struck by light, as domestic shadows of their male cameraman counterparts, as edited out of the picture." Keller sought new strategies of cinematography, editing, and sound, but she refused to accept the notion that there was only one road available to the feminist filmmaker.

Like many filmmakers of the American avant-garde, as well as the earliest documentary filmmakers of the feminist consciousness-raising movement of the 1960s, Marjorie Keller used the raw material of her life for both the images and the themes of her films. From her earliest film diaries, which weave fragments of the faces and bodies of family and friends with images from the suburban, pastoral, or foreign-travel contexts in which she saw them—for example, *Objection* (1974) or *Superimposition* (1975)—to her final film exploration in *Herein* (1991) of the physical space in which she lived much of her adult life, Keller drew from her rich domestic world to fashion gemlike renderings of the conflicts and challenges facing a feminist in the second half of the twentieth century. The problem at the heart of her visual and aural explorations involves the psychological adjustments demanded of women who were born and raised in the traditional domesticity of upper-middle-class America in the 1950s but who came of age in the unsettled social and political seas of feminism.

Keller was born in 1950 in Yorktown, New York, the youngest of seven children and the daughter of the chief executive of a large lighting company. She grew up in a prosperous, mostly conservative, Protestant family.[4] As many who knew her have attested, she was beautifully trained by

her mother in traditional feminine arts such as cooking, entertaining, and gardening. Unlike many feminists of her generation, she never rejected these skills and their pleasures but instead used them both in her life and as the basis of her work. Keller graduated from Tufts University in 1972, although she completed her coursework at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago after she was expelled from Tufts for participating in a protest over the racially motivated firing of a departmental secretary. This kind of political activism was typical of Keller and her close friend and companion at the time, Saul Levine, who had been Keller's first film instructor at Tufts. Levine and Keller settled in Chicago, where Keller enrolled in and coordinated Stan Brakhage's film courses at the Art Institute, worked side by side with B. Ruby Rich, and became part of the growing film community there. During these years Keller became interested in the artisanal mode of filmmaking practiced by Brakhage and, like Rich, was involved in the programming and discussion of women's cinema.[5]

Keller left Chicago in 1974 to attend graduate school at New York University, where she received a master's degree in 1975 and a doctorate in 1983. During these years she lived at 100 Forsyth Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a derelict neighborhood that became symbolically important in her films (particularly *Herein*) and was a literal center for many of the filmmakers and scholars nourished by her dynamic presence and warm home. In 1986 Keller married P. Adams Sitney, one of the founders of Anthology Film Archives and one of the first major proponents of American avant-garde cinema; they became the parents of twin girls in 1991.

During her years in Boston and Chicago, Keller was a committed social activist. During the 1960s she was a member of the central committee of the Students for a Democratic Society; she resigned only as the movement began to dissolve in reaction to the violence of the Weather Underground, the faction that had become dominant by the end of the decade.[6] In Chicago she worked with Levine on several of his political films, including *Note to Patty* (1968–69), *The Big Stick* (1967–73), and *New Left Note* (1968–82). More famously, she was arrested at the White House in a protest over the Nixon administration's price control policies, and she participated in the demonstrations at the 1972 Republican National Convention in Miami. A photograph of her at that event—where she disrupted a fashion show for politicians' wives to model the typical outfit of a poor working woman—appeared on the front page of her hometown newspaper.[7]

In the early 1970s Keller made a documentary film about the welfare

system and racism called *Hell No: No Cuts!* The film was flawed by intrusive camerawork and was successful, according to Levine, only to the extent that it provided Keller with a model of an ineffectual film.[8] Like many filmmakers, Keller came to understand the difficulty of making a political film that is interesting, unpedantic, and clear enough for a general audience, not just an audience of the converted. Although she considered all of her work to be documentary in nature, she never again made an explicitly activist film. Instead, she directed her political energies toward local problems, working throughout her life on issues such as welfare reform, labor union rights, and AIDS activism. Committed as she was to real political practice, she had little tolerance for theoretical leftists whose involvement with race, class, or gender issues never strayed from the page or screen.

Both at NYU and later, Keller was an indispensable part of the New York experimental film community. Between 1984 and 1987 she served on the board of directors of the Collective for Living Cinema, and between 1985 and 1988 she was the founding editor of the collective's journal, *Motion Picture*. During this time (1984–85), she was also the managing editor of the film journal *Idiolects*. At the end of the 1980s, during an embittered period of reorganization, she took over the helm of the major East Coast distribution house for experimental filmmaking, Film-Makers' Cooperative in New York. Considered the voice of reason and an endless font of common sense and good humor, she was what J. Hoberman called "an unselfish champion of the American Avant-Garde."[9] In 1975 she began teaching occasional film production courses in the art department of the University of Rhode Island. Eventually she developed an entire interdisciplinary film studies program there and became a professor of filmmaking and film history.

Over the course of her career Keller made more than twenty-five 8mm and 16mm films of from one to sixty minutes, which were exhibited at film festivals and in museums internationally. A revised version of her dissertation, *The Untutored Eye: Childhood in the Films of Cocteau, Cornell, and Brakhage*, was published in 1986, as was an exquisite and charming children's pop-up book written and illustrated by Keller called *The Moon on the Porch*. Her book on women experimental filmmakers, as well as three films, remained incomplete at the time of her sudden death in 1994. Of particular interest was a film about her young daughters learning the alphabet, tentatively called "Learning to Write," and described by Keller as a feminist film about the creation of the female voice and the interaction between drawing and writing.[10] As the many

people whom Keller touched both professionally and personally over the course of her life have attested, her greatest accomplishment may have been the warm, gracious world she created for her family and friends, a milieu that both inspired and served as the source for her cinematic legacy.

Amnesis and the "Lost Object"

The driving force behind Keller's films can be described as an exploration of the repercussions of being born in one era and coming of age in another. The most obvious manifestation of this phenomenon in Keller's life was the rupture experienced by women raised in the 1950s to be homemakers in the mold of their mothers who found themselves functioning in the professional world of their fathers. However, if Keller had explored this notion only in terms of personal experience, and the difficulty of finding role models for the integration of personal and professional life, her body of work would not carry the weight that it does. She was able to see that this disjunction, involving problems of time and absence, is not limited to a particular historical situation but is common to much of human experience in general.

Many poets and critics speak of memory in relation to time passed and the recalling, or recapturing, of what came before. Even modernist art and poetry, which value indeterminacy and acknowledge the role of invention and confabulation in memory, envision the past to be retrievable through searching the unconscious or creating concrete symbols that connect the present to the past. Visual and verbal images, in this sense, are created as dikes against a sea of forgetting.[11] Keller's work, however, manifests more of an interest in ruptures of history and in the absence of a usable past. To approach this absence—or this amnesia—I turn to the work of Nicomedes Suarez-Araùz, a poet of the Amazonian jungle, where all traces of human life are continually eradicated in the tides of nature and political upheaval. Suarez describes what he calls "amnesis time" as multiple, nonlinear, fragmentary, and inclusive of past, present, and future. He says, "We are, in large measure, what we have lost and can never recover or recall."[12] According to Suarez, memory is a kind of a lie, since it offers as history what inevitably is the work of the imagination. The notion of amnesis offers a different model for aesthetic representation, replacing recall with invention. Amnesis art overtly intimates absence through

images that represent what Suarez calls the "lost object." It points to a space that is empty of images and disconnected from chronology, and it erodes the logical connections between conventional meanings of signifiers to create "a tangled world of surprising and shifting meanings."[13] The work of amnesis art represents, but does not recover, what has been lost both personally and collectively and reveals history to be a series of fragments. Rather than simply acknowledging this "underlying oblivion," it celebrates the freedom inherent in a rejection of history.[14]

Many modernist artists have alluded to concepts akin to amnesis. Suarez points to Stéphane Mallarmé's mystical, creativity-heightening silence, to Samuel Becket's preoccupation with the void, to John Cage's work with relative levels of sound, and of course to Marcel Proust's unexpected recall through sensory experience.[15] However, none of these ideas reaches as far as Suarez's metaphor of amnesia, which is applicable to all communication and experience; the dispersion of meaning functions everywhere, at all levels of discourse. In art this absence appears as what philosopher John Rajchman calls "the world it is not yet possible to see or to foresee. For as it occurs, it changes what we can and cannot see."[16] The absence at the heart of amnesis might fruitfully be compared to Michel Foucault's countermemory—a transformation of history into a different form of time, in which the narratives of history are made to reveal the hidden contradictions that in turn uncover the workings of power.[17] In discussing the work of the genealogist, Foucault returns again and again to the words and images of profusion and entanglement—elements that are particularly suggestive of Keller's films. Both Suarez's amnesis and the films approach the world and experience in this mode, using the surface of the world to suggest all that has been forgotten and unspoken. Like Foucault's genealogist, the artist looks for myriad beginnings, "whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by the historical eye" in order to "[liberate] a profusion of lost events."[18]

At first glance, film—a photographic medium—would not seem an ideal mode for capturing the ephemera of lost time. Indeed, in its most conventional formats, film follows in the long line of recording technologies that have sought to contain the past ever more accurately through indexical images and recorded observations. In fact, Keller's choice of such a medium involved the embracing of such a paradox, since her project was, in film scholar Paul Arthur's words, to express not only "what is 'beyond' the powers of representation," but also "what is 'inadequate' or 'impossible' for film." Keller was fascinated by the mystery of

the image; according to Arthur, she intended specifically to examine the "material/psychic/metaphysical continuities of cinema."[19] In her dialogue with the medium of film, Keller concentrated on the spaces between images. She found in editing not the means to seamlessly join images from the world, but a space in which to suggest the lacunae of memory.

Keller's editing practice was modeled on the work of Gregory Markopoulos, particularly the blinking or strobe format, in which an image either fades or turns to black or a solid color to create a rhythm and to stress the integrity of its form. Markopoulos, for his part, had credited the filmmaker Robert Beavers with suggesting "the invisible image between the frames which is seemingly never photographed, and that other invisible image between film frames which is never projected."[20] Keller's complex editing created puzzlelike films in which images and blank leader produce an ahistorical collage of discontinuities, resonances, and ambiguity. In Foucault's terms, the films reveal that things that are not seeable at a given time may be invisible but are not hidden. They present us with what Foucault might call a "polyhedron of intelligibility"—images and sounds that surround the "lost object" with multiple ways of comprehending it. In the mode of the genealogist of the absent world, Keller encourages the viewer to ask how things are given to us to be seen, how they are seen, and what is not seeable at a given moment.[21] Her films contain "scattered and fragmented images, suspended figures, ghost-like shapes, objects at the edge of cognition, negative forms, multiplane perspectives, impossible architectures, topological forms suggestive of absence, [and] indeterminate narratives."[22] Nevertheless, while these descriptive terms suggest an esoteric practice and indecipherable texts, Keller's work is fully accessible. By means of, rather than in spite of, all the visual and aural fragmentation, and through the surfaces of the world she records and the internal reality she creates, her films achieve a reintegration of that world.

Like Foucault, Keller directed her gaze and exploration "in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history—in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts."[23] While her material is composed of the recorded visual and aural artifacts of her everyday life, the films, as shaped and edited constructions, evoke the lost and unspoken and thus defy narrative readings. The films that one might examine in this regard include *Superimposition* (1975), in which Keller worked with the images and sounds of a couple's car trip, *On the Verge of an Image of Christmas*

(1978), a portrait of a family's holiday celebration, *Six Windows* (1979), a study of the windows of a home, and *The Fallen World* (1983), a rendering of the rippling effects of a dog's death.

The first of the two films that I will discuss is *The Fallen World*, which Keller described for the Film-Makers' Cooperative catalogue as "an elegy for a Newfoundland dog named Melville and a portrait of his owner" (P. Adams Sitney). The film offers, in both black and white and color, images from many different angles: close-ups of Roman monumental statues, grave stones, Venetian buildings, canals, and gardens; images of Sitney riding in a gondola, visiting the grave of Percy Bysshe Shelley, and in the Melville Memorial Room in the Berkshire Atheneum; a large, black dog running on a half-frozen pond; a leaf-covered deck in the rain; and a section of film resembling Brakhage's 1965 *Pasht* (his quasi-abstract portrait of the bodily surfaces of a cat) in which Sitney seems to be playing with the dog by a fire. These thematically and visually disparate elements are edited rapidly so that they do not tell a story but rather evoke a sense of the connectedness of all things and the ways in which we incorporate a life-altering death into lived experience.

Keller's tools for this task are simple. Her carefully framed but loosely filmed images are cut elliptically to highlight texture, color, and movement, and then they are rejoined to create rhymes, gaps, and flow. Blank frames are intercut between images to create rhythm and pace, to prevent the search for narrative, and to assure the integrity of each image. An interesting reading of *The Fallen World* can be derived from studying the presence of water and the images of fluidity throughout the film. The film opens with and returns often to a close-up pan of a monumental stone foot, an image of the cultural attempt to hold onto the past in all its detail and at all costs. But its first sound is a sea chantey evoking the passing centuries and, in connection with later frames, the themes of Herman Melville. Water connects the fragmented images of Sitney's tightly framed profile floating down a canal, snow covering the world over the drowned Shelley's grave, and then, in a key image, the dog playing on a surface that is at once solid and liquefying. A requiem is sounded, and then an image of the dog in the snow viewed from above flashes into a high-angle shot of a fountain in an Italian garden, rain drenching the deck above the dog, and empty Venetian canals. The overall emphasis is on flux and on the ties between the past and the present. The monuments, grave markers, and memorabilia in the Melville archive are opposed to the flowing water of the ever-changing present, expressed finally

by the sequence of fur, teeth, movement, and fragments of faces that formally present the experience of life with the dog, now gone. The film is both an elegy for the dog, Melville, and a commentary on the ways in which we search through the past to understand present losses. While Paul Arthur's brilliant analysis of the film suggests that death is represented in the film,[24] I would argue that *The Fallen World* gives the viewer a sense of life itself as it flows through all forgotten objects, events, and beings, and through all time. With its sensual camerawork, which both frames and manipulates the surfaces of the world, and painstaking editing, which forces us through unlikely juxtapositions, to see the world anew, Keller's film connects the viewer to all that history makes invisible.

Besides their complex editing, the blinking format using solid leader, the play with focus, and the fragmentation of the body, Keller's films are characterized by a layering of images. Like Brakhage and Markopoulos, Keller sought to go beyond the chronology that inevitably remains with even the most rapidly shifting images. Following the solution elaborated by Maya Deren in her search for a poetic, vertical cinema rather than a narrative one, she adopted the practice of showing multiple images on a single plane.[25] The early 8mm film *Superimposition* is, as its title indicates, a study in layering. The film centers on a couple's journey to places that are at times recognizable—San Francisco landmarks, city streets, beaches, a carnival—but are more often indeterminate. In typical Keller fashion, the man and woman are introduced as fragments, with the top of the woman's head seen at far left and then the torso and the head of the man seen from below. Although one of the film's actual locations is a carnival, the entire film's quick cutting, deliriously panning camera, and shifting focus create the sense of an endless Tilt-a-Whirl ride. Particularly striking are the superimposed images, which allow day/night and interiors/exteriors to penetrate each other so that the boundaries of time and space are erased. In a particularly evocative image, the screen is filled by the torso of a woman wearing a white sweater and gold necklace, over which is layered a series of events that she seems to be emitting. They represent both what she perceives in the world and what she projects outward; the journey is both exterior and interior, and the lost object is imaginatively constructed rather than remembered as a series of discrete episodes. At the end of the film, a sequence of images of a woman cooking and the couple eating in a kitchen is layered over images of people walking and playing on a beach and a pan across the sea to a rock jetty. First one set of images dominates, then the other, so that the man

and woman seem to rise out of and then sink back into the ocean as they engage in the most mundane of activities. Here the film formally captures the sense of life lived and all the thoroughly forgotten moments that are, in the end, life itself.

The Notebook and Images of Childhood

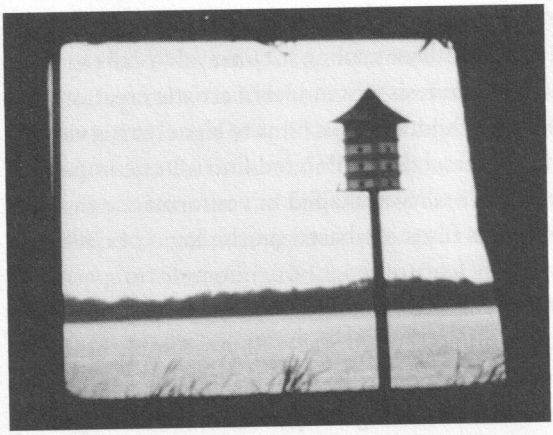
In his discussion of Keller's *The Answering Furrow* (1985), film scholar Scott MacDonald notes Keller's indebtedness to the work of Marie Menken and her home movie aesthetic.[26] Both women documented the world around them in a spontaneous, carefree fashion with a handheld, often swinging or quickly panning camera. The looseness of the shooting style allowed for poetry free of symbolism and also made clear that the films did not depict, for example, a garden or a home. Rather, they used everyday objects as markers of time passed and as fragments to be reintegrated into a more intentional kind of documentary than is possible with the in-camera edit of a home movie. As her early collaborator Helene Kaplan Wright noted in an interview, Keller shot film and recorded sound freely and continually in the midst of her domestic life. The familiar imagery and sounds of children, family, and friends provided the material, just as they would in the writing of a journal or notebook. She shaped these through meticulous and ruthless cutting of the images and the desynchronizing of the sound in order to evoke a particular place, person, or mood. While *The Answering Furrow* and *Objection* (1974) both highlight Keller's "notebook aesthetic" in their use of the nonintrusive camera and the highly flexible manipulation of sound, I will discuss *Ancient Parts* (1979), *Foreign Parts* (1979), and *Private Parts* (1988) in order to simultaneously discuss Keller's scholarly work.[27]

In *The Untutored Eye: Childhood in the Films of Cocteau, Cornell, and Brakhage*, the published version of her doctoral dissertation, Keller examines the work of three filmmakers known for their representation of children and for their romantic sense of childhood as a privileged, visionary period of life. Jean Cocteau's films were formally and conceptually intriguing to Keller for their faith in the power of photography and editing to confer plausibility on the most supernatural of events and to make these alternative realities believable, even to an uninitiated audience. By using similar textures of light, movement, and sound to unite the realistic and the purely imagined, and by avoiding the soft focus or slow motion

often used to mark the improbable, Cocteau created, according to Keller, a "complex layering of simultaneous realities."[28] Cocteau was not a surrealist, Keller points out, and he rejected Freudian thought because of its concern with analyzing and explaining the often mysterious and tenuous worlds created in art. For Cocteau, as for Keller, the aesthetic achievement of art was the very point of the endeavor, not the content to be explained via symbolic or psychoanalytic readings.[29]

In Cocteau's films, as in those of Joseph Cornell and Stan Brakhage, a child protagonist is particularly able to seduce the viewer into entering and believing in alternative worlds. Children are portrayed as fully and ecstatically aware of the universe in all its fullness, and childhood itself is understood as a mode of perception gradually destroyed with age and experience. Cocteau's androgynous young heroes seek to escape the debilitating effects of institutionalized education and the onslaught of adulthood. His primary motif is the child as voyeur, someone who visually and psychologically absorbs the sensory world while remaining unseen. His films are based on what Keller called a "hierarchy of seeing," in which the filmmaker reformulates his childhood relation to his parents by allowing his adult self the privilege of the child's all-encompassing vision, including its illusion of omnipotence.[30]

In several ways, Keller's first two notebook films in the "Parts" series explore this "hierarchy of seeing" as well. In both, the placement of the camera identifies the filmmaker as a voyeuristic presence that organizes the world at the moment of seeing it. *Foreign Parts* is most notable in this regard. The film consists of a rapid alteration, with some repetition, of scenes of children playing on a lawn that slopes down to a beach, of a woman walking on the lawn and a man cutting the grass, and images from nature (flowers, water, birds, cows) as well as from a more mechanical world (lawn mower, sliding glass doors, cars in a distance across a concrete driveway). Of particular note are a large, elaborate birdhouse on a pole in the yard and the cutting on movement that equates the birds darting back and forth with the running children. Keller described the film in the Film-Makers' Cooperative catalogue as "portraying the poetics of family life in an unfamiliar context." It charts how we make sense of the new through what we already know, and likewise, how what we know is changed by a new environment. The film's central images consist of the filmmaker's voyeuristic framings of familiar figures in a different space. In one instance, the person behind the camera seems to be crouching indoors as she looks out through the lens at an older man riding a lawn mower; the door slides shut in the middle of the shot, so that the glass



From Marjorie Keller's *Foreign Parts*, 1979. Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives.

distorts the world and calls attention to the importance of seeing and how conscious looking changes what is seen. Near the end of the film, from the same crouched position, the filmmaker looks through the space created by the arm, back, and seat of an aluminum lawn chair to see a woman walking along the beachfront lawn where children previously had been playing. The camera pans right to remove the woman from the space, then back again to include her in its intentional framing. The filmmaker, having placed herself at a child's height, creates an image of a threatening parental world in which she alone controls what is seen and thus assumes power over the adults.

Like Cocteau, Cornell was interested in portraying simultaneous realities. However, while Cocteau embedded his alternative universes in conventional cinematic narratives, placing them on the same phenomenological plane as everyday reality, Cornell was bolder. In both his films and the three-dimensional collage boxes for which he is famous, Cornell worked with the objects that entranced him, including found footage; his particular vocabulary consisted of stellar imagery, birds, printed words, scientific paraphernalia, and children, all grouped in such a way as to show them in a new light. His method as a filmmaker was characterized by what Keller called "visual equation"—the rearrangement of apparently ephemeral, disconnected images according to a rhythmic or graphic logic. Each image is connected to the previous and subsequent ones in a "complex of simultaneities," in which meaning is subtly shifted in a nonsequential, nonnarrative way. Throughout her career, Keller remained interested in the child psychologist Jean Piaget's notion of a natural order in which things and events in the world are understood by children without being explicitly stated.[31] The practice common to Cornell and

Keller of using bits and pieces of the present world to suggest a natural order and to evoke that which is absent, taboo, or unsayable calls to mind once more the importance of amnesis as a model of artistic creation.

Like Cocteau, Cornell used children in his films to signal to his viewers that he was operating from the child's untainted and all-encompassing mode of perception, in which reality is shaped in conformance to a private vision. Like Brakhage, his films are based on the logic of children's prerational game playing; they feature repetition, nonrealistic space, and an absence of narrative flow, as well as a childlike attachment to certain images that carry magical significance. Cornell's films resemble his boxes more than they resemble other people's films; their meaning depends on one's holding all the images and iconography in mind and integrating them into the distinctly Cornellian system.[32] The viewer, rather than remembering specific images and connections, retains evanescent visual ideas in which children, birds, stars, and all the other forms become disembodied and recreated in a mysterious and charming new world.

Keller too used fragmentary images and motifs in a cyclical, nonnarrative structure, although her goal was not to disembody childhood and children, but rather to embody them. Keller's films do not reduce the complexity of adult life by returning to childhood's magic. They present the layers of simultaneities in order to speak about the transition from childhood to adulthood and all that is lost. A case in point is the brief single-roll film *Ancient Parts*, which more than any of Keller's films resembles a Joseph Cornell box. *Ancient Parts* consists of minimal action in a tiny room that includes a small boy, a mirror, a bed, and a mother in a nightgown. These iconic elements are united by the golden, grainy quality of the film and the tilting, ever-shifting camera work. Most important is the fact that most of the film was shot into the mirror, so that visually it resembles a box within a box. As the boy gazes upon and touches parts of his body, with the filmmaker and the mother as audience, he almost enacts the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's mirror phase of development, in which the child conceives an idealized sense of the body's functional wholeness, or ego ideal. The toddler attempts to climb into the imagined mirror space, an action that is echoed by the filmmaker's recording of the reflected scene as she and her camera assume the same gaze as the boy. Like the three filmmakers she analyzed in her book, Keller literalizes the process whereby a filmmaker shows the world through the child's superior perception. But she also reveals her adult consciousness of what the child is experiencing. Twice in the film the boy turns away from the mirror and climbs onto his mother's lap, sequences that are filmed with-

out the mirror's mediation. As the camera moves to a close-up, the boy's face is seen to be scraped and scratched, as if to indicate that the task of separating from the mother is not without pain. Unlike her predecessors, Keller is interested in infusing an image with a certain amount of humor and an indication of her adult awareness.

Keller's focus on the difficulty of crossing from childhood innocence to adult experience suggests a stronger resemblance to Brakhage than to Cocteau or Cornell, although the final film in the "Parts" series also manifests the ways in which she learned from, and then moved beyond, her teacher. *Private Parts*, as the title indicates, is about the filmmaker's private life, and it features her family and friends in uncharacteristic long takes that make their identities clear. Keller took to heart Brakhage's admonition to work within the sphere of daily life, as well as his Emersonian belief that the deeper one looks inside oneself, the more universal one's observations become.[33] The setting of this film—on another lawn, in front of yet another house on the water—also reflects the indirect influence of one of Brakhage's mentors, the poet Charles Olson, who advised artists to fix themselves in a particular place in relation to the world and examine that place in terms of a larger history, from the geological and archeological to the anthropological and the mythological.[34] Whereas Brakhage placed himself in the Rocky Mountains near Boulder, Colorado, Keller worked at the shore of the Atlantic Ocean in Rhode Island. In *Foreign Parts*, as in many of her films, shots of the water (with or without boats), the horizon, and the rocky or sandy shoreline are powerful representations of places where the particular textures of daily life meet the flow of time. People foraging for clams among the rocks show the same intuitiveness and deliberation as the filmmaker using her handheld camera to record the textures and forms of their bodies. This mundane search for dinner is alternated rapidly with shots of the ocean, allowing the filmmaker to connect the daily world with the larger one encompassing all of human relations as well as the connections between human beings and nature.

Like many experimental filmmakers, Keller was indebted to Brakhage's well-known text "Metaphors on Vision," in which he asks the reader to imagine the world as it would appear to a child who has not learned language. According to Keller, Brakhage thought of a child as both "a being and a metaphor" and he urged filmmakers to see the most common of life's events as if for the first time, in close up and with attention.[35] In truly seeing the world as it was before it disappeared behind linguistic markers, the filmmaker makes available for his camera the raw material of

creation. Keller believed that Brakhage had a more honest relation to childhood than that of either Cocteau or Cornell, who used this stage of life mostly as a rhetorical guise to approach forbidden truths. Brakhage's films, on the other hand, chart a deeply felt search for personal mysteries that are painful and finally insolvable.[36] Keller learned from Brakhage how to rigorously structure the material gained from the search as recorded in sketchlike bits of film, then how to use repetition and the serial presentation and visual rhyming of key imagery (water, gardens, horizons, birds, vacant spaces, fragments of bodies) to give the viewer multiple points of view. As Keller wrote, "one sees the child and alternately sees how a child might."[37]

Where Keller differs from Brakhage is in her intentionality. She wrote of her mentor that he was part of a Romantic tradition that allowed him to think of his films as "given" to him to make, just as his children were given to him by his wives. In line with this prophetic tradition, his films were revelations that he shared with his audience.[38] Keller also approached the world nonintrusively, recording it with an eye tuned to whatever was present. But she structured her films to illustrate what lies under the surface and also to provide a commentary on those observations. The title of *Private Parts*, for example, refers clearly to the people and places that it shows. But it also alludes to the dominant event of the film, the three firings of a phallic-formed rocket by a boy and his father. The rocket, which disappears into the sky or the ocean, celebrates some elemental bond between father and son, and the launching also unites the people scattered across the lawn, who are all excited by it. Eventually they gather around a table, and a young girl who has been peripheral to but interested in the main event walks back and forth from the house to the guests, transporting food. Throughout the film, this girl had been shown along with other women holding small children, thus suggesting, as a parallel to the male rocket sequence, the gendered division of labor and pleasure. Intercut with these scenes are fragments of an episode in which the father hands a manuscript to another man, who is shown reading it. This image is captured from over the reader's right shoulder in a fairly tight shot, which flashes into red at the end of the film reel. One feels here that Keller is commenting on the very process of constructing meaning—of turning the particulars of life into art—with the manuscript a metaphor for the work of the film and the red beneath the film's emulsion a metaphor for complexity beneath appearances. *Private Parts* may give the appearance of a home movie, revealed to its maker in the shooting,

but like all of Keller's work it is a carefully constructed film that must be read and interpreted.

Politics and Feminist Film Theory

In the early 1980s, a hostile interview with Keller in the feminist film journal *Camera Obscura* and Keller's dismissive review of E. Ann Kaplan's 1983 book *Women and Film* solidified Keller's alienation from feminist psychoanalytic film criticism.[39] Linda Reisman, the interviewer, had the clear and reductive agenda of proving that Keller was not a feminist filmmaker because she was too close to the male-dominated American avant-garde, particularly Brakhage, with its personal filmmaking and what Reisman perceived as its refusal to engage in the critique of ideology. *Camera Obscura* took the position that Keller's poetic documentary practice could not be feminist because it failed to clearly and logically uncover the constraints imposed by patriarchal discourse. One could look at Sally Potter's 1981 film *Thriller* to find an ideal of feminist countercinema practice during this period. With its meticulous archeology of the myriad, arbitrary-seeming systems of repression underlying Giacomo Puccini's eternally popular nineteenth-century opera *La Bohème*, the film contains an unambiguous message.

But while Potter and other filmmakers such as Yvonne Rainer and Laura Mulvey worked deliberately to reveal the unconscious rules guiding patriarchy and particularly classical Hollywood cinema, Keller was more interested in dissolving conventions. In the tradition of Foucault's genealogy and Suarez's amnesis art, Keller traced and suggested what has been forgotten or repressed in female experience in order to provide some of the missing pieces of the puzzle of human experience. Her films do not seek specific historical roots or announce essential truths but instead force the viewer to see and thus to think differently. Two of the early films, *She/Va* (1973) and *The Outer Circle* (1973), as well as her two best-known films, *Daughters of Chaos* (1980) and *Misconception* (1974–77), exemplify her artistic response to these issues. This section will cover *Daughters of Chaos*, which is particularly interesting when viewed as Keller's rejoinder to Kaplan's psychoanalytic feminism, and *Misconception*, which, on the other hand, may be seen as Keller's feminist response to the version of female experience presented by her teacher Stan Brakhage.

Saul Levine has noted that Keller was both "bothered and amused"

that feminist film critics ignored her work.[40] She was amused because she was well aware of the integrity of her work. But she was bothered by what she saw as single-mindedness on the part of feminist theoreticians, who overlooked not only her own work but also that of filmmakers such as Deren, Schneemann, Menken, and Friedrich simply because they were not feminist "in our contemporary sense."[41] In her review of Kaplan's *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, Keller suggests that the book's feminism—as well as one of Kaplan's own sources, Laura Mulvey's enormously influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"—was based on a narrow interpretation of psychoanalytic theory that neglected and obscured some of feminist film history's most complex and influential work.[42] In particular, Keller was irritated by the wholesale acceptance of Roland Barthes's assertion that "visual pleasure is narrative pleasure," as well as what that notion meant for filmmakers whose films were not narrative or whose narratives were not scripted or dependent on mise-en-scène. The narrowness and reductionism of theorists like Kaplan were captured, for Keller, in statements such as Kaplan's assertion that "narrative at its most hysterical, melodrama, is the form proposed for the fullest achievement of women's aesthetic or political potential." It seemed to Keller arbitrary, confining, and downright antifeminist to engage so fully with the work of a single male theoretician so that only those filmmakers who fit the paradigm were worthy of attention by the feminist film community. Since Rainer and Potter, both dancers, were explicitly engaged with issues of the body, performance, and the relation between the spectator's gaze and the image, their work fit easily with the theory.[43] Keller, on the other hand, worked from a much broader knowledge of film history and film theory, and she had more complex intentions and ambitions.

Daughters of Chaos is probably Keller's best-known film. As she told an interviewer for *Camera Obscura*, it is about a particular wedding and all that the event evokes about memories of girlhood and the place of weddings in the fantasy life of girls in much of Western culture. To the questioner's comment that the film is filled with mere "decoration," Keller responded that there is no such thing because everything in the visual and aural track works to create and shift mood. Keller did not apologize for the personal and demanding nature of her films, and she insisted that poetry and feminism were not necessarily at odds.[44] Like all of her films, the thirty-minute *Daughters of Chaos* consists of a quickly edited set of her usual sorts of images recorded with differing focuses and from various distances: girls performing, water, boats, gardens, flowers, animals,

From Marjorie Keller's *Daughters of Chaos*, 1980. Courtesy of Film-Makers' Cooperative.

and the like. In this case, the images are used in the context of a wedding filmed through the windows of a contemporary church (with the filmmaker's reflection sometimes visible) and several segments of young girls in boats moving across the water or stopping to visit the Statue of Liberty and other New York landmarks. Some of the images were taken from old home movies, and some were recorded for this film, with the latter serving as its core. As they travel in the boat, outside the church and beyond the city, the girls examine a set of photographs of their mothers and respond with hearty laughter and ironic commentary. In her notes for the film, Keller described them as "narrators, foreigners."[45] The sound from this scene is often used over other shots in the film, particularly those of the wedding.

In this complex film, other key images and juxtapositions emerge. The wedding itself, with its fragments of traditional hymns and its bouquet of bridesmaids in all shades of pastel chiffon and long, flowing hair, is intercut with other images: an empty lawn chair in the garden, which comes to represent the bride's mother; shots of the Statue of Liberty and the girls gazing up at her impossible height; the muscular body of a horse; a young girl in a red bathing suit entering the ocean; and a naked woman leaving a pond. While the meaning of these images seems obscure at first, Keller's tropes and the ways in which they are used are fairly straightforward. The performing girls in the home movies are preparing to wear the costume of the bride in order to execute their roles and assume their places in the world modeled by the mother. The same message is transmitted by the rear view of the adolescent girl in red entering the sea and the naked woman leaving the water. In the midst of these images, shots of flowers and the sky, the color red, and swish pans of water from a boat shift the

mood and tone from the sentimental to the ironic to the analytic. More pointedly, fragments of sentences spoken by the two girls studying the photographs (which are never shown) comment implicitly on other parts of the film. After a voice-over of the minister at the wedding declaring, "Time will come when I shall know," the girls are heard to say, "Not true." Later, after the minister speaks of love, the girls burst into laughter. A different tone is created by a series of images—the horse's leg and its eye in close-up, the bride, the naked woman at water's edge, the wedding, a girl in the boat looking over her shoulder, and the color red—accompanied by other sounds: the voice of the minister speaking of ideal marriage, the girls saying that "everyone wants to get married," the minister saying "never to be seen again," and then dead silence. All of these fragments convey the sense that the internal reality of the girls in the boat challenges assumptions about the world shared by those in the church.

Dominated as it is by nonlinear, prismatic editing featuring the color red, unfocused close-ups of multi-hued flowers, and glinting water, *Daughters of Chaos* is like a jewel-encrusted box that both represents and responds to the confusing process of becoming a woman in a patriarchal culture. The film shows the outside of the box, as it were, but calls attention to what is inside and cannot be seen. Absence is present in the concealed images in the photographs perused by the girls and in the empty chair in the garden, which is marked by a sign saying "Keep Out." The mothers' lives have not been recorded since their weddings, although their presence remains powerful in the continuation of the rituals they enacted as they, themselves, left girlhood for marriage. This film is both poetic and personal, but it is also feminist in its acknowledgment of the complexity of female adolescence and its critique of the seductive institutions that thwart women's development. *Daughters of Chaos* is balanced between what Keller referred to as "irony and sincerity [that are] internalized and organic."[46] The film is the work of a woman bred to look forward to a wedding but educated to understand all that such an event represents and destined to live within the contradictions so created. In an optimistic gesture, Keller gave this film (which happened to be of her niece's wedding) to her stepdaughter, who is the girl in red entering the sea. Perhaps she meant to encourage her to keep swimming.

Clearly, Keller was openly indebted to the work of the American avant-garde and particularly to Brakhage. As a student of Annette Michelson as well, she understood that these filmmakers were "deeply transgressive" in their rejection of industrial modes of production and in the representation of eroticism.[47] She learned from Brakhage in particular

the value of the domestic environment as subject matter and the means of creating a subjective vision through quick cuts, the use of the textures of the film itself, the freely moving camera, and the full range of exposure and focus. But she was also fully aware of the weakness of the male-dominated American avant-garde, and she engaged this problem primarily through the use of sound. While Brakhage's films are largely silent, Keller experimented with the effect of sound on image and the way in which sound, with all of its potential for humor and irony, is able to deidealize and deromanticize the world. Her most explicit commentary on Brakhage—and his problematic relation to women and the female body—is *Misconception*, a film that was made at the very time that the feminist critique of woman as muse and bearer of meaning for the male artist was beginning to be articulated in film theory.[48]

Ann Friedberg has called *Misconception* a "loving critique" of Brakhage's 1959 film, *Window Water Baby Moving*, in which the filmmaker's wife is shown before and during the birth of the couple's first child.[49] Like Brakhage, Keller approached childbirth with awe and was determined to convey the experience on film. Keller said, "I challenged childbirth to see if I could come up with a film that would be as strong as if I asked an audience to experience a childbirth in person."[50] Both *Misconception* and *Window Water Baby Moving* are heavily edited, and both feature a searching camera that marks the filmmakers' active involvement in the process and lack of a preconceived design. Keller, in fact, never even filmed the actual birth of the baby, irresistibly drawn as she was to the mother's face. Where Keller differed from Brakhage was in her desire to explore the difficulties of pregnancy and childbirth from a woman's point of view. Her film is divided into six numbered sections, each of which features a dialogue in both sound and image about the subject in question. Discussions take place about topics as diverse as the difficulty of raising children, pain control in childbirth, and the validity of Pavlov's experiments, while imagistic polarities are created through the juxtaposition of indoor and outdoor shots as well as alternating views of a house being demolished and a woman receiving an internal medical exam. The most obvious response to Brakhage occurs in the second section, in which the pregnant woman takes a bath with her toddler son. Whereas Brakhage's film features rosy close-ups of his wife's belly as it emerges from a bath, flecked with drops of water and lit by twilight to resemble a planet coming into being, Keller's sister-in-law is fully present in a mildew-rimmed tub in a brightly lit bathroom, hoisting her heavy body around as she splashes water on her child and later struggles to bend over

to pick up discarded towels. Intercut are scenes of labor, in the full meaning of the word, and the sounds of screaming, male doctors giving directions, the mother laughing and singing with her child in the bath, and silence. To Brakhage's silent romanticizing of the birth process, Keller responds with something close to the real thing, and the viewer feels bodily the experience that Brakhage reduced and mythologized beyond recognition.

Misconception is more than a dialogue with an earlier film, however, and more than the presentation of the many ways in which men and women differ in their conceptions of pregnancy and childbirth. The film formally elaborates the sensual experience of birth and, more importantly, foregrounds the way in which its own cinematic form transforms the experience and presents it as if for the first time. *Misconception* evokes perhaps the most profound of lost objects by conveying the inability of language to describe birth, the most central of human experiences. The film's fourth, elliptically edited section consists of a father and son navigating a waterfall in soft focus, accompanied by sound that is reduced to static, fragments of imagery suggesting the woman in labor, and finally by silence. The segment, which begins with the father lecturing the child about birth, ends in total abstraction. At the end of the film, in which the woman giving birth is shown with extremely quick editing, swish pans, and soft focus, the mother speaks to her own mother on the telephone and tells her that the baby is a girl. She says, "It wasn't nothing, but right now it seems as if it was." Absolute silence then accompanies an extreme close-up of her vibrant, active eyes as she continues the now unheard conversation. Keller's film gives the viewer something of the experience of childbirth and at the same time, manifests the degree to which patriarchal culture, by failing to find the language to describe childbirth, has elided it from representation and thus from human experience.

Conclusion

Keller referred to her final film, *Herein* (1991), as a "reinvention of documentary film form from a personal and feminist view point."[51] The film was motivated by Keller's acquisition of the FBI files detailing her activities in the SDS in the 1960s and 1970s and her observation that everything important had been deleted. The governing image in the film is the multipage document in negative, with the erased material appearing as empty rectangles scattered throughout the text. The film is a search for

what these holes represent, for what has been lost over time of all that Keller was and all that she did during her period of social activism. The focus of the film is her youthful home—the apartment and the building in New York City that she described as "a kind of background to my life."[52] This building, in a poor and neglected urban neighborhood, is juxtaposed against her later middle-class home in Rhode Island, which represented her entry into a new phase of adulthood. The film of the building, and the building that becomes the film, reflect Keller's longtime fascination with the work of Cornell and the ways in which he adapted his box structure to filmmaking. *Herein* begins and ends with images of windows; the opening shot looks out at a wintry park at dusk, with bare trees forming lacy patterns on white, while the final shot through a barred window reveals the green of springtime. In between, Keller's roaming camera searches the cluttered, tight interiors that contain the lives lived in the building.

The film, like the building, is dominated by a bearded storyteller, an Orthodox Jewish cantor who was known for befriending the neighborhood's prostitutes and pimps, and who relates anecdotes about the people who have passed through the site. His voice, chanting in Hebrew, accompanies the opening images of the FBI document; various parts of his body are filmed with the same tight close-ups and tracking shots that the filmmaker uses to reveal the building's peeling, cracked, and broken walls. The camerawork signals her distrust of the man's appropriation of these stories, the way in which his questionable personal relations with the women compromise his social activism, and the filmmaker's determination to frame and film her own versions. The film opens with a voice reading a text by Emma Goldman in which the early-twentieth-century feminist describes her anxieties about supporting herself as a prostitute. Goldman speaks, in a sense, for Keller herself: for the filmmaker's youthful decision to live among the prostitutes on Forsyth Street as a political act and a repudiation of middle-class society, and her eventual rejection of these convictions as naive.[53] The rest of the film explores, through a cinematic investigation of the literal space that once was so important to her activist self, the psychic space she occupied at the time.

The film is composed largely of close-up pans and tracking shots of dirty, dilapidated hallways; glimpses through doors into small, disorderly, sometimes occupied rooms; and the interior of a well-maintained apartment featuring plants, books, a cat, and a window that further divides the space into a self-reflexive series of boxes within boxes. The sound track is reminiscent of Leslie Thornton's work, with its layering and overlapping of bland Asian music, Hebrew chants, unidentified film sound tracks, and

voices reading from anarchist texts. But the most significant footage consists of images from or references to other filmed scenes—which are shown in the process of being shot in and around the building and also as they appear on a television inside the building. These scenes both contain the building and are contained within it, "dissolving like dioramas" into one another, just as *Herein* both creates the building of Keller's youth and is created by it.[54]

The film contains excerpts from at least two films from 1985 that were shot in and around the apartment building: segments from *Almost You* (Adam Brooks), a love story about a less-than-successful actor and a visiting nurse, and a sequence from *Evergreen* (Fielder Cook) showing Hasidim pushing carts to market. Old footage recording the production of *Evergreen*—in which the neighborhood was returned to the early twentieth century by way of set and costume—are used in *Herein* as a marker of any film's flexible relation to time. As a film within the present film, the *Evergreen* material allows the Forsyth Street building to be present in three times simultaneously: the past of *Evergreen*'s fiction, the moment of *Herein*'s reflexive shooting, and the eternal present in which all the films are viewed. The films within the film are held up against the male storyteller's self-centered and often cruel invention of the building, on one hand, and Keller's cinematic version, on the other. The former, resembling Hollywood films, exploits both facades and interiors in order to arrange the past in a historical mode, with a single point of view. The women's films, both Keller's and two from which she quotes (Su Friedrich's *The Ties That Bind* [1984], and Mary Filippo's *Who Do You Think You Are* [1987]), suggest an alternative mode of creating an image of a place and all that it contains of time. The images that flash and are superimposed on the screen defy the controlling orderliness of conventional narrative. Keller does not eliminate the dark corners that do not fit a predetermined story. She includes, rather, all the contradictory, obscure, and mysterious images and sounds in a prismatic structure that documents her own experience of the place that formed her.

One of the last images in *Herein* is a televised version of a negative of the FBI document that inspired the film. As a challenge to the institutional attempt to erase the difficult parts of her life, Keller's film has literally filled in the empty spaces of the text with the sounds and images of the building that housed her radical self. She has made a "palimpsest" (as spoken at the end of the film), one that does not retrieve the irrecoverable past but forms a layered image that speaks of her personal history in relation to her present concerns. *Herein* can thus be understood as a lost

object that helps to reconcile ongoing conflicts in the lives of women: the sexual politics that affected the women of her generation and complicated their relation to organized politics; and the contradictory constraints, ambitions, and desires that continue to plague them in relation to family and labor. Keller's final film is similar to all of her work in its use of sensual handheld camera movement; heavy editing, quick cuts, and flashes of color and light; play with exposure, focus, angle, and shot distance; and flexible, ambiguous sound. The film differs, however, in both its overt political intentions and in its imagery, for Keller has moved here from the natural and familial world to one in which found footage plays an important role. Just as her unfinished book project sought to examine women's films that deranged patriarchal constructs by manipulating media manifestations of them, this last film contrasts two versions of a world she knows well: the narrow descriptions of women's lives offered by Hollywood and a dominating male voice, as opposed to the far richer version created by the wide-open eyes of the experimental artist fully aware of cinema's potential.

Although Keller's premature death ended her intriguing and stimulating career as a filmmaker and a scholar, her body of films forms a bridge linking the concerns and aesthetics of the American avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s with feminism. Her reconsideration and revision of Brakhage's themes and approaches in light of feminism, along with her challenge to feminist film theory to pay attention to women's experience and to the variety of female voices, makes Marjorie Keller a unique figure in the history of experimental cinema.

Filmography

Hell No: No Cuts!, ca. 1972 (25 min.): si., b&w; 8mm
Backsection, ca. 1972 (4 1/2 min.): si., col.; 8mm
History of Art 3939, ca. 1972 (2 1/2 min.): si., col.; 8mm
Part IV: Green Hill, ca. 1972 (3 min.): sd., col.; 8mm
Turtle, ca. 1972 (2 1/2 min.): si., col.; 8mm
Untitled, ca. 1972 (7 1/2 min.): si., b&w; 8mm
Pieces of Eight, 1973 (3 min.): si., b&w; 8mm
Duck Fuck/Rube in Galena, 1973 (4 min.): si., col.; 16mm
Swept, 1973 (3 min.): si., col.; 16mm
The Outer Circle, 1973 (6 3/4 min.): sd., col.; 16mm
She/Va, 1973 (3 min.): si., col.; 16mm
Objection, 1974 (18 1/4 min.): sd., col.; 16mm

Film Notebook: Part 1, 1975 (12 1/4 min.): si., col.; 8mm
Superimposition (1), 1975 (14 3/4 min.): si., col.; 16mm
By Two's & Three's: Women, 1976 (7 min.): si., col.; 8mm
Film Notebook: 1969–76; Part 2, Some of Us in the Mechanical Age, 1977 (27 min.): si., col.; 8mm
Misconception, 1977 (43 min.): sd., col.; 16mm
The Web, 1977 (10 min.): si., col.; 8mm
On the Verge of an Image of Christmas, 1978 (10 1/2 min.): si., col.; 8mm
Ancient Parts/Foreign Parts, 1979 (6 min.): si., col.; 16mm
Six Windows, 1979 (7 min): sd., col.; 16mm
Daughters of Chaos, 1980 (20 min.): sd., col.; 16mm
The Fallen World, 1983 (9 1/2 min.): sd., b&w, col.; 16mm
Lyrics, 1983 (9 min.): sd., col.; Super 8
The Answering Furrow, 1985 (27 min.): sd., col.; 16mm
Private Parts, 1988 (12 3/4 min.): si., col.; 16mm
Herein, 1991 (35 min.): sd., col.; 16mm

Notes

I extend my gratitude to several people for their help in the writing of this essay, including P. Adams Sitney, Saul Levine, Helene Kaplan Wright, Sky Sitney, B. Ruby Rich, Joan Braderman, M. M. Serra, and Ann Steuernagel. I also note that a fuller version of this essay has been published in the *New England Review* 26, no. 4 (2005): 135–60.

1 Keller, "Review of E. Ann Kaplan's *Women and Film*," 46.

2 See Rich's lively and informative book about this period, *Chick Flicks*.

3 The notes for the proposed book, tentatively to be titled *What Do Women Want?*, are found in Keller's personal files, currently in the possession of P. Adams Sitney, Keller's widower. All references to the book are taken from notes in these files. The book was to begin with an introduction covering the work of Germaine Dulac, Deren, Menken, and Schneemann and then cover the films of Abigail Child, Mary Filippo, Nina Fonoroff, Su Friedrich, Heather McAdams, Ester Shatavsky, Leslie Thornton, and Sokhi Wagner.

4 Most information about Keller's life is taken from personal interviews with P. Adams Sitney, Saul Levine, and Helene Kaplan Wright in March 2003. I have attempted to cross-check both facts and impressions and apologize in advance for any perceived misinterpretations.

5 See Rich, *Chick Flicks*, 116–20. In a personal interview in July 2003, Rich noted that Keller was not particularly interested in feminist women's cinema at this time and became so only once she started teaching film. In the late 1970s, Keller was one of the organizers of the national Women's Studies Association's meetings at the University of Rhode Island, at which Rich was invited to speak.

6 The SDS was a radical student group formed in 1960 from the youth organization of the socialist League for Industrial Democracy. In the Port Huron Statement, written in 1962, the group advocated nonviolent protest against racism, poverty, and war and called for a fully participatory democracy. After the 1965 march on Washington, D.C., against the Vietnam War, the group became increasingly militant and ever more present and disruptive on U.S. college campuses. With the police reaction to the student protests at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago and the killing of four students at Kent State University in Ohio in 1970, the factions of the movement that advocated violence, particularly the Weather Underground, began to dominate and by the mid-1970s, the movement was over.

7 Interview with Saul Levine, March 2003.

8 The filmmaker Jeff Kreines worked on this film for several days and remembers it as an agit-prop film with nothing in common with Keller's later work (correspondence with the author, August 12, 2003).

9 Hoberman, obituary for Marjorie Keller. Other obituaries appear in the *New York Times* (February 19, 1994) and the *Providence Sunday Journal* (April 10, 1994).

10 A thirty-second digital film that was part of this project, called *Gust*, was produced during a winter intercession in January 1994 at Middlebury College.

11 Suarez-Araùz, *Amnesis Art*, 29.

12 Ibid., 93.

13 Ibid., 8.

14 Ibid., 29.

15 Ibid., 5.

16 Rajchman, "Foucault's Art of Seeing," 141.

17 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 93.

18 Ibid., 89, 76, 81.

19 Arthur, "Letter to Marjorie Keller," 66.

20 Markopoulos, "The Intuition of Space," 73.

21 See Rajchman, "Foucault's Art of Seeing," 119–21, 133.

22 Suarez-Araùz, *Amnesis Art*, 57.

23 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 76.

24 Arthur, "Letter to Marjorie Keller," 64. Arthur's argument is based on the notion found in both Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin that film is a death mask that represents eternally what is dead and gone.

25 See Deren, "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film," 267–322.

26 S. MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine*, 58, 73.

27 I note that Keller made several 8mm films early in her career in the notebook mode, some of which are titled as such.

28 Keller, *The Untutored Eye*, 69.

29 Ibid., 78.

30 Ibid., 15.

31 Ibid., 100–111.

32 Ibid., 105.

33 Ibid., 183. Keller notes that Brakhage was influenced by Ezra Pound's demand to "make it new," by Gertrude Stein's belief that one need not look farther than the things in one's own milieu to find subject matter, and by Emerson's valorization of the sights of daily life and children (181).

34 Ibid., 184. See R. Elder, *The Films of Stan Brakhage*.

35 Ibid., 179. See Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision."

36 Pruitt, "Review of *The Untutored Eye*," 82.

37 Keller, *The Untutored Eye*, 204.

38 Ibid., 192.

39 Reisman, "Personal Film/Feminist Film," 60–85, and Keller, "Review of *Women and Film*," 43–47.

40 Levine interview, March 2003.

41 Keller, "Review of *Women and Film*," 45, referring to E. Kaplan, *Women and Film*, 87.

42 Keller, "Review of *Women and Film*," 44–46. See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

43 See Bruno, "Women in Avant-Garde Film," 141–48.

44 Reisman, "Personal Film/Feminist Film," 78–79.

45 Keller files.

46 Ibid.

47 Michelson quoted in Bruno, "Women in Avant-Garde Film," 147.

48 Friedberg, "*Misconception* = the 'Division of Labor' in the Childbirth Film," 64–65.

49 Ibid., 64.

50 Keller in Reisman, "Personal Film/Feminist Film," 74.

51 Keller files.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.