

\* THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/  
SAN FRANCISCO CINEMATHEQUE

# Big As Life

AN AMERICAN HISTORY OF 8mm FILMS

TYPE X



# Pieces of Eight: Interviews with 8mm filmmakers

## Donna Cameron

*Between spring 1996 and summer 1997 film/video artist and painter Donna Cameron conducted nearly two dozen interviews with 8mm filmmakers. Space limitations prohibit us from including all of those interviews here; to do so would necessitate the publication of an entirely separate volume. Therefore, I've selected what to my mind are twelve of the most revealing and informative interviews given the range of works included in the exhibition. The interviews are ordered so that they trace, loosely, the historical path of 8mm film art and the concerns of 8mm filmmakers as they've progressed from the late 1950s through the 1990s. I'd like to extend my gratitude to all of the filmmakers who participated in the interview sessions and, of course, to Ms. Cameron, whose enthusiasm for this project nearly surpassed my own. —Ed.*

## George Kuchar & Friends

George: Heyuh, Donna! These are some 8mm film people I'd like you to meet. Jim Brawley here makes 8mm religious pictures. He's doing a whole series now on the Holy Land. New Age Christian tapes. Very soothing on the nerves. And Larry Liebowitz—used to make cannibalism films in 8mm. And you know Floraine Cohen (aka Connors). Floraine was in some of our early pictures.

Larry: I've known the Kuchars since 1942.

George: Larry was from the Bronx and interested in cannibalism.

Larry: No, not really.

George: His mother ate his father or vice versa.

Larry: I made one of the first cannibal movies, before the *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* or *Night of the Living Dead*. I made an 8mm cannibal film back in the early sixties. Unfortunately the audience was grossed out when I showed it there. They ended up getting up and walking out, even though there were some other films that were going to be shown. My film kind of left them like they had just watched some kind of a I-don't-know-what... It was called *The Dark Tunnel*. I had my father in it and my mother only had a small part so she wouldn't come. And my sister's friends and Mike and George were in it—they had multi-parts. George played a tall girl, a drag queen.

DC: Sounds like a real classic.

George: It is. It was a first.

Larry: A cannibalistic "Brady Bunch."

George: "Splatter Bunch."

Larry: It was explicit.

George: Anatomically correct... Wasn't George Romero originally from the Bronx?

Larry: Yeah, he was from the Bronx. A lot of 8mm filmmakers were from the Bronx. Francis Coppola was from the Bronx. In fact he was from the old neighborhood.

George: Where did you read that?

Larry: You *know* that. He did stunts. He threw something off the roof also.

Jim: Yeah, I'm trying to remember...



*George & Mike Kuchar, c.1965*

Larry: Coppola made 8mm films. Allen Ginsberg made 8mm films too. In fact, he gave me my first joint, my first hit of marijuana. I thought, hey, this guy's so big, he can't be giving me poison, but that was the times. And there was another guy there...his name was Abbie. Abbie Hoffman...he wanted me to help him make movies. So I went to his place there on the weekend. And I went over there, you know he had a couple of girls—this was the sixties—and he tried to film and he did lousy openings. The openings there were like supposed to be shot at f6.8 and he took them at something like f1.8 with floodlamps and he took those pictures and they didn't turn out. Then he tried again, we were driving to Rockaway Beach. Ginsberg was there. And I met Ginsberg again about a year ago and I got an autograph from him. He didn't remember me...at that time though, he was wearing his American flag hat. It was a golden era.

DC: Why did you stop making 8mm films?

Larry: I had to take my 8mm projector and my tape recorder—reel-to-reel—and I had to synchronize it whenever I had a showing.

DC: Where did you show these?

Larry: I don't know. Red Grooms saw it.

George : Where did you play that thing? My class, one time... ?

Larry: Yeah, I had a showing there, and I showed somewhere else, where there was a big audience.

George: Where?

Larry: I don't know... there was a big audience. I showed it and it grossed them out and they left.

George: That was the 8mm Motion Picture Club.

Larry: I don't know. It was 1965. All I know is that I

was showing it and all of a sudden the guy moved the projector while the film was showing and all of a sudden the film is on the ceiling because the idiot decided he was going to move the projector, and I'm trying to sync the sound—turn it off, turn it on—I couldn't do nothing about it.

George: Ho! Too bad.

Larry: Yeah. And you know, I had a hard job at the time, you know I was working in a machine shop. I was really tired.

George: Yeah, Larry's mother was a big star in all Larry's pictures. She was a Mom who didn't mind acting in her kids' pictures.

Jim: Yeah. Frances Liebowitz. She was in *A Town Called Tempest* [by the Kuchars].

Larry: She was very willing. She did things there that you wouldn't believe. She played like Shelley Winters there like *Big Bad Mama*, with a machine gun.

George: A Bronx mother...going all out for the pictures. I did my film with the family there, and his cousin also, she was like a shaved Sasquatch, the alien Zelda.

Larry: She was kind of cute there but now she's kind of six feet tall and uh...

George: Big. Big. I just met her in Chicago and I used her as a wind barrier. The wind was coming off the lake and I just walked behind her. She was in our 8mm movies and then she went on to make a 16mm movie with Andrew Meyer, who later directed Lorne Greene in a Japanese disaster movie.

Larry: Yeah, something.

George: Donna, James here did 8mm. Now he does videos on transcendental religion. He uses Christian imagery. He does it out of the kitchen of his housing project in Queens...

Jim: I paint.

George: He put a robe on himself and then he grew the beard.

Jim: I look like Moses in one picture. In another one I look like someone in diapers. You know my face has changed a lot.

George: He went from UFOs to a near-death experience in which Jimmy died, or was close to death and was brought back to life on the operating table: he'd had a heart attack. And now he recreates these transcendental or out-of-body experiences. He was always religious. Now he makes 8mm pictures about it. And he doesn't go to the Holy Land, he does it all in his kitchen.

Larry: What's cooking? Something's cooking.

Jim: Toast. I was making toast.

Floraine: Oh! Something's burning.

DC: Stella [George and Mike's mother] told me that you always liked the movies, that you were crazy to make movies, even when you were little kids, and that you wanted a camera for your twelfth birthday.

George: Yeah, well, that was because I used to get it from my aunt, and my mom and my aunt didn't get along. So that was an important turning point there: I was to get a camera so that I didn't have to get it from my aunt anymore.

Larry: Hey, I brought my camera, so if you want I'll take some pictures.

DC: Take some pictures.

George: The Museum of Modern Art is having an 8mm show. That's where you should show your pictures.

DC: You should show your pictures in the show, Larry.

Larry: I don't want to be in it because I don't want to

have any problems with the synchronization of sound.

George: Oh stop with the worrying about the sound.

DC: You should do it before the sprockets shrink so bad that it won't thread.

Larry: I haven't had any trouble with the films, my films are from the fifties.

DC: Then you're very, very lucky.

Larry: It's just the way I keep them there...maybe it's the conditions. The colors haven't faded...

DC: You're probably right. If you don't ever show them you don't take them out of the can. Then the oxygen won't get to them, and the polluted air doesn't catalyze their disintegration.

George: If anybody wants to preserve them they are welcome to.

Larry: I keep them in a cool place, and I'm trying to get your picture. I'm sorry...

George: It's a double conversation.

DC: I have a camera too, but it only has B&W film in it. It's a Minolta, the last model they made in the 1980s before the camcorders hit. It has an intervalometer...

George: This is really light and streamlined.

DC: Maybe with all these cameras we'll get a picture.

George: I knew a guy in the Bronx and he was making 8mm CinemaScope movies. He had an anamorphic lens...

Larry: Let's see. The best opening here is...

George: John Keel, the science fiction writer, used to make 8mm films and he showed them with us at the 8mm Motion Picture Club in the 1950s. It was a

fuddy-duddy group. But they were renting huge ballrooms in hotels with big chandeliers and they got all dressed up for the event. It was run by a man who used to be named Joe Hollywood. He was a guy in his late sixties...

Larry: A used car salesman.

George: And you used to win a prize at the Mineola fair if you submitted your 8mm movies. I won something there. So 8mm was very big. It took over from 16mm. Floraine has beautiful 16mm movies of her honeymoon...everything's on a tripod.

Floraine: I am really glad that I did that. It's wonderful to look back...

Larry: OK, everybody look over here. I hope I get the right opening. I had to use a blue filter so that the hole will be correct...I don't have a flash, I hate flash...

George: Well, in 8mm, if I brought the film to be processed in a local drugstore in the Bronx, the pictures did not last the decade. The emulsion was greenish and it cracked after about ten years or so. But if you sent it to Kodak and you got it back it lasted for decades. Otherwise it looked like a decaying fresco.

Larry: Well there was something about color films there... they said that any films taken in the fifties, there's no survivors. Whether you kept them in the darkness or the lightness, they changed. They faded out there. And they were asking for any survivors, if there were any pictures left that didn't change, they wanted them. They said please give them to us because they wanted samples of the pictures that were taken in that era...

George: I've got movies from the fifties, that I had sent out to Kodak. But the local processing was crap.

Floraine: There's no way of preserving them?

George: Yes, but it's expensive.

Floraine: Are we going out? Where are we eating?

Larry: I going to have to ask everybody not to move a fraction—I'm at 1/8th of a second, so that the hole will be correct.

Floraine: You have B&W. Do you have color? Do. You. Have..?

Larry: Color? Yes, because I don't have a flash. She has a flash. Is that OK? You're the one who asked me to bring my camera. Do you want to take a self-portrait?

Floraine: No, take. Take of everybody. I have to go to the photographer, anyway. I need pictures for my acting career.

George: Floraine's in a big picture, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*. It's good. It's a big hit.

Floraine: It's at the Plaza. Funny, I never even knew there was a Plaza until they were playing my movie.

Larry: Is it a big role there?

Floraine: It's a cameo. At the end. The director was...wonderful.

George: Hey, we'd better get something to eat. Do you want Chinese or Vietnamese? Or where was that Afghan place, remember?

DC: There's something open around here at this hour?

Floraine: George, you pick. You're the birthday boy. It's George's birthday.

Jim: Happy Birthday, George.

Floraine: Well, not really, but we'll celebrate it anyway. It's a little premature.

DC: Larry, can I move yet? Did you get the picture?

Larry: I got something, I hope....I hate flash...

George: I'm looking up Afghan in the phone book. *A-f-g-h-a-n*. It's on 2nd Avenue.

Larry: I'm ready.

## Mike Kuchar

### **"Insignificant despised mediums...an eternal trend."**

"It was Regular 8mm back in 1956, before Super 8 came in. My mother asked my brother and me what we would like for our twelfth birthday and we said we'd like a movie camera, because we went to the movies a lot. I remember that it was evening and we were under the Third Avenue El in the Bronx. There were a lot of department stores there, and I remember she bought a Dejur metal camera, which we still have. It still works. This is Regular 8mm. Super 8 came in about 15 years later. When Super 8 came in, by that time I'd made so many 8mm movies that I decided that maybe I would change to 16mm which I found out about when I was introduced to the Underground...

"We did narrative, costume epics. *The Wet Destruction of Atlantis* was the first one. We would pull my mother's drapes off the windows and use them as togas, and we would go up on the roof, playing hooky—I was a notorious hooky player—eleven and twelve years old. Also, we would raid my mother's make-up from her bureau. We would put on Egyptian eye make-up and use her lipsticks as rouge. A few times she caught us—she was usually working 9 to 5—and in a total embarrassing panic our friends who played hooky with us scampered away with a scolding. We shot the outdoor scenes—we needed forests and mountains—in the Bronx Park, the Bronx Botanical Gardens and the Bronx Zoo. We used that place for our thirty-minute war picture, *The Naked and The Nude*. We were in high school at that point. We went with friends with surplus army equipment and costumes from an Army-Navy Store. But they were narrative pictures. They are narrative because I was raised on narrative pictures from 20th Century Fox and Warner Brothers. My favorite movies were the science fiction monster movies from the fifties, like *It Came from Beneath the Sea*, also the CinemaScope and romantic adventure pictures were fascinating to me. Movies in general, Biblical

spectacles, Lana Turner in *The Prodigal*, glamorous stuff with full music scores. I guess I learned filmmaking from watching those pictures.

"Hollywood movies inspired us. It was another world operating: a two-dimensional world inhabited by its own people. Of course, they were the stars. But I related to it. It was an alternate world. Full of glamour and things that real life didn't have. In real life we're not underscored with music. But if you go to see a movie the actors would have background music behind them and whenever their emotions would shift, so would this music...all these gimmicks. So that made me conscious of the process of movie-making. I was probably studying it and all the effects you get with certain combinations of angles and music and action and things. So I got my education in filmmaking by watching movies in the movie theater. And then, of course, they were 75 cents for a double feature. That was in the heyday when movie theaters were palaces. That's another reason why movies were fascinating. A lot of movie theaters were built like temples dedicated to the movie stars. They were literally grand palaces, ornate structures. Artistic, with architecture and glamour. It was like being transported into another era; very elegant. Some theaters were built like gardens. They had goldfish ponds in them. This is in the fifties, when movies were the major entertainment. The theaters they were shown in were duly erected in honor of movies with all the glamour and all the fancifulness. It was a fun era. And to encourage people to come, I remember, every Thursday there would be dishes given away. The husbands were out working, and the housewives were in the house. To get them to go to movies...every Thursday they would eventually get a whole dinner table set. Bela Lugosi would have a 'fright' stage show like a 'Fright Night Friday' usually at 8 o'clock, around Halloween. The horror stars would come...there would be a little stage production before a double feature. This was in the Bronx. At one of the most beautiful of the movie theaters, like the Loew's Paradise, the RKO Chester.

"George and I would take turns photographing and directing. We would invent the film while we were

making it. It was never scripted in long hand, it was just sort of invented as we went along. We had an idea of what it would be—perhaps a kind of costume picture or a war picture or a jungle picture. But we never knew what the plot was going to be. We'd invent it as we were making it.

"Twice a month artists and bohemians would get together in a loft because they got away from painting, wanted to see if they could work with another medium. People were beginning to use cameras as tools of expression. This was downtown—way downtown—in lower Manhattan. It was spread by word of mouth. People would bring their 8mm and 16mm films there. They were not travelogues or home movies of relatives. They were actually trying to express themselves, present their visions, putting it on film. Since the camera was a consumer product, people were using it just like they were using other visual mediums. We were invited to go with some friends. They said, 'Why don't you bring your films to this loft?: an open showcase where people sit around and chat and have wine and mingle and share the movies they're making.' So we went and brought a couple of our movies and they made a hit. They asked us to come back. A film critic attended. He heard from word of mouth that our pictures were interesting. He came and wrote a good article in the *Village Voice*. It was Jonas Mekas who wrote the article, and then asked us to show our films at a theater they rented. We had enough to fill a couple of ninety-minute programs. We had a show, a lot of people came, and they really liked our pictures.

"We showed there, at the 'New American Cinema.' Andy Warhol, Kenneth Anger, Allen Ginsberg made movies and acted in them. Warhol came to our shows. Gregory Markopoulos, Jack Smith, Ron Rice—all were in the midst of making their movies and I got to see their work. John Waters—he saw our films. He wrote an introduction to our book, *Reflections on a Cinematic Cesspool*. He said we were an inspiration and gave him the incentive to make his pictures. I didn't know that until about a week after I saw one of his movies, *Pink Flamingos*, and then I met him at a party. He said that my films

gave him the inspiration and incentive to finish *Pink Flamingos*. I feel so happy to know that in some ways I was instrumental in instigating that picture on the world. It's nice when something you do inspires individuals in the audience to make masterpieces themselves to inflict upon this bland world.

"And that's one thing good about filmmaking: how your visions and your attitudes can open gates and possibilities for other people to explore. That's what it's about. It's a kind of conversation, a sharing that lights a spark in other people...a communicating...you never know who sees it, and who's inspired. It can happen in the dumpiest basement theater. You never know what the domino effect will be of somebody seeing it...taking it further. We converse with each other through our work. Somehow we advance and show further possibilities. That's one of the interesting things about working in a medium and exploring your own vision. It might be totally nuts, it might be completely avant-garde, but just go ahead and do it. You never know the consequences. In 8mm the sprocket holes are almost one-third the width of the film. It squeezes the picture off to the other side of the film. Then somebody decided to make the sprocket holes smaller and allow the picture to be larger, to fill up more of the 8mm width. That's o.k. It's still 8mm but it's 'super'-sized. This is good in many ways, but I find that you can't do slow motion as well...the sprocket holes in Super 8 are shrunk down and therefore there's a tendency for them to slip, being pulled very fast by the cameras. They tend to foul up. The alignment is more critical with the smaller holes, it's harder for the prongs of the camera to fit in and pull them. I never minded the smaller 8mm image where the grain is evident and detail is minimal. It's more impressionistic.

"Regular 8mm now is extinct. The joy of working in miniature movies is that they are less expensive than the larger formats. It was inexpensive to produce. If Super 8 goes up in price, the high cost defeats itself. 8mm has been stigmatized—it's despised and considered insignificant; just something for 'home movies' that you make when you go to see Aunt Lily and Uncle Jim. It is miniaturized—but the ideas you

put into it don't have to be small. Mediums come and go. They are things to use. The human spirit will always be around, the human imagination. The mediums might change, but that's just a technicality. It's the human imagination and spirit and what they do with these mediums that counts.

"I'm working in 8mm again. But this time it's 8mm videotape—Hi-8. That's another despised medium, like when I was working in 8mm film. We sort of took it out of the home movie thing and made it into an affordable, storytelling cinema. It's 8mm and it's affordable. It's what I use for what I do because I have to finance it myself.

"My advice to new filmmakers is: Try not to get yourself bankrupt. This way you can be productive. I always use insignificant despised mediums to express myself. Play with the other toys that are available."

## Ken Jacobs

KJ: Hi. Oh, you called just in time. This is perfect.

DC: We had a power outage...

KJ: What's that noise?

DC: FEEDBACK. It took a couple of calls to get through. Maybe it's my turn to postpone the interview.

KJ: Can't you just reduce the screeching noise?

DC: Only if I remove myself in some way...O.K.? I'm detaching the receiver... So just tell me what you're up to, what you're working on, the whole 8mm story...

KJ: Can you hear this, over here?

DC: It sounds like film whirring...

KJ: It is. That's the sound of the original 16mm camera original of *Blonde Cobra*. I'm now going to wash my



hands from the film cleaner—I just cleaned the original camera roll—I'm about to make a new inter-negative from it and I have to take the chemicals off my hands...

You know, here I was working in 16mm, I didn't start out in 8, I started out in 16. I never even thought of 8, originally. When I had the money, which was my mustering out pay in Alaska during my two-year Coast Guard stint, I got a Bell & Howell camera because I wanted a very sturdy tank, a combat camera. I expected to do combat in the streets of America—literally. So I chose to get this chunk of metal rather than a sophisticated Bolex, which was the same price. What got me into 8 was having the 16 stolen. I lent it to Paul Morrissey, who had a little store on the Lower East Side. It was broken into, very likely by a friend of his, Ron Rice. That's what Paul thought, because Ron Rice visited, and Paul said that he was clearly coveting the camera. He was of a mentality which decided that anything he wanted he could just have. Other filmmakers were negligible, except for, probably, Jack Smith.

The 8mm Motion Picture Club—that was a club for amateurs, not artists. This fantasy that there was a club—there was no Jonas Mekas motion picture club. They were merely people who were very startled, and also very consoled to find that there were other people besides themselves working this way...and of course the Film-Makers' Co-op came out of that. Led by Jonas. It's clearly a joke on history to imagine that it was a club....

So, I had my camera stolen, and Paul was able to come up with some money to replace it. I was working as a waiter at the Limelight at the time and decided that I really wanted to work with this new zoom lens that had become available to people. It had come down in price, and one was now able to work with a zoom lens. Now, *Blonde Cobra* had come out and *Little Stabs [at Happiness]* had come out, and a few people knew my name, and I was working as a waiter, and still I had no money.

I was living near the Brooklyn Bridge. My idea was to photograph what I was seeing down there. I was liv-

ing on Ferry Street. It's no longer there. We sometimes held screenings in our loft. Richard Foreman, Amy Taubin came. Bob Cowan. He brought the Kuchars. I got an 8mm Bolex with a Schneider-Variogon zoom lens. The importers were in New Jersey, and they were extraordinary people. I got a lens and I went back because I didn't get exactly what I was seeing in the viewfinder. It was a reflex viewfinder built into the lens. It screwed onto a non-reflex 8mm Bolex camera. The 8mm Bolex was modified for 8mm so that I could put in a 200 ft. roll of film—that's a 100 ft. roll of film exposed on half the width of the film, so then you flipped it around and got another 100 ft. to shoot.

One of the deeper reasons for the 8 was that it was so cheap to work in. The developing was absurdly cheap. I could buy film for a dollar, or a dollar-fifty, and I could get it developed for a dollar for the cartridge. For the 100 ft. roll it was \$4.32, and this would come with expert developing by Kodak. It was the golden age of Kodachrome. Plus there were all kinds of other films around that you could experiment on and get the looniest results from, just freaky film that would show up in 8mm from Japan and what-not—that was mystery film. And you would get avant-garde results from them...

One of the things that happened when the films *Blonde Cobra* and *Little Stabs* came out, and I was trying to get money for *Star Spangled to Death*, was that I became anxious. *Star Spangled to Death* was a long—hours and hours—film that I'd shot in 16mm and collected in 16mm. I wasn't getting any money and by 1963 I was very, very frustrated with a film that was just stalled and I wanted to shoot again. But I recoiled from it. For funding, I found myself in competition with people whom I never knew existed. I found myself vying for attention...or I found myself feted and other people that I respected would become "and others." You know "*Blonde Cobra* and others." And it wasn't my nature. My name wasn't on *Blonde Cobra* and my mother's name was on *Little Stabs*, K.M. Rosenthal. It was a way of insuring, I thought at the time, for an intimate cinema, my obscurity and my mind.

I thought consciously of making films that were chamber works. Composers, I knew, would sometimes take their most personal thoughts and feelings and experimental ideas and work them out in chamber works rather than concert hall ideas. So I was withdrawing from bigness in a way, just trying to maintain my personal life.

My camera had a new lens on it and it had a magnificent reflex. Reflex was really very new to people then in the amateur territory...for me, it was perfect. So I began working on my idea with chamber cinema. In fact, that idea may've inspired Stan Brakhage. I said "chamber works" to Brakhage and off he went. You know, sometimes you're going along the road, driving a car, and someone goes after you so fast, you have to wonder whether or not you are stalled. Stan began to bring out the *Songs* right after that—just *Song* number this, *Song* number 30—you know, an astronomical number, and I'm working in a slow way and it was shocking, shocking to me.

There was a short period when Underground Film was a buzzword. There was the kind of glow of celebrity about some of the people making work. The celebrity made those people crazy and the lack of celebrity made the rest of us crazy. I just had to get out of that. The next thing was making works in 8mm and then discovering that they were almost unshowable. One had these gorgeous 8mm originals and less satisfying prints. It became clear that one actually needed to blow these works up to 16mm. I understood this rather early in the sixties, but I didn't have enough money to do this until later. I did *The Winter Footage*. I also blew up the much more ambitious, feature length *The Sky Socialist*. So these films exist on 16 now, but they have almost no social existence.

There are problems going from 8 to 16. Blowing up from Regular 8, I was able to preserve the entire frame, almost. The ratios are different from Super 8 to 16. And for people who really consider their frame, that's really problematic. My students are still given assignments on Super 8. We do black-and-white, and then we develop it ourselves and keep the price down. Super 8 color, on the other hand, seems to be prohibi-

tive. It's expensive. It takes too long to send the film out and get it back again. I gave a color assignment last semester, and then after a while I just thought it was cruel. Now I'm looking at the little digital video cameras and I really must say that if the department could afford it, I would say that one should only work in 16 now, and work in video. And the digital format now makes me think that in maybe two or more generations of these cameras it's going to deliver the acuity of film. The little digital JVC, which I've got, allows one to pull a camera out of a pocket that nobody reacts to in terror. It doesn't even have that watch ticking. It's utterly silent, it's utterly ready. And it's quite an image. I'm quite impressed. But... Regular 8 film, Super 8 film are miracles of information. It's a miracle how much information could be stored in just that tiny area of film. The best of video today that I've seen does not approach Regular 8 Kodachrome.

One last statement. There are very few true color films being made. I saw one last year at the Berlin Film Festival by a Russian guy—Sokurov—a fabulous color film! So apparently it can still be done... In black-and-white too, we've adapted to an inferior quality of film. I've seen old nitrate prints, the common prints at the turn of the century, and before the turn of the century...its amazing the amount of subtlety and richness of tones and variety of densities and kind of detail one could achieve. There was more silver in the emulsion...

Some form of video is the future of the moving picture. The quality of film image is being degraded and the quality of video image recording is being upgraded. And working in 8 is almost impossible now. There's no saving it. It's actually a technology that will be routed out of history. Let's just hope that there will be people around who care enough to preserve what's been made.



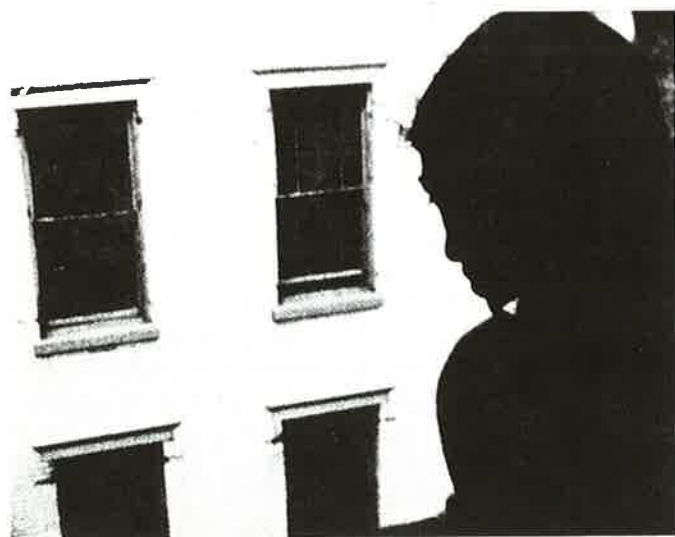
## Stan Brakhage

### "An At-Oneness"

"For me, it doesn't matter what gauge the film is, it's the lightness of the camera equipment which permits an intimacy, an at-oneness with the maker. And that you can carry it in a pocket and that it can be, in some easy way, a constant part of you. I wouldn't care if the images were recording on wires or on digital...but there are things so far that are distinctive and to me unsatisfactory about all other moving-picture mediums...

"Again, it is not the gauge of film, but that the smaller gauges permit a smaller camera and therefore a greater intimacy between the maker and the equipment he or she is using and that you can slip it into a pocket and not be weighed down by it...slip it into a pocket as you do a pencil or a pen.

"I have a recurring dream that you have a thing that you can hold in your hand, that you can pick up images with it. That you can edit them as you stare down into it by working various pressed buttons. And that you could project back and that people can actually speak to each



Ken Jacobs: *Window*

other by moving-visual thinking. But no such thing exists. The closest to it, I suppose, would be some form of video, but the problems for me personally with video are one, it seems to be intrinsically hypnotic—any two people meeting in a room with the TV on know this, because both eyes keep sliding toward the TV—and two, I also know as a colorist that it has no fixity of color. The subtleties of color you've created making it will be transformed to whatever the machine is on and/or whatever anyone watching the machine turns the dials to. So it can't be significant as a color medium. An art cannot be hypnotic—the extent to which it would be hypnotic would be absolutely against all that we understand from the whole previous history of human arts as to an essential, to wit: people have to be left free in the art experience, they have to have a maximum freedom...

"In the 1960s all my 16mm film equipment was stolen out of a car and the insurance wasn't high enough to replace it...I went out to get some groceries and we didn't have a lot of money but as I went I passed, in a store window in a couple of shoe boxes, somebody's discarded home movie 8mm equipment. I really desperately needed to work with film so I thought, well I could pick them up for maybe \$20 and bring home maybe half the groceries. And I almost immediately began making *Song 1*. It was very freeing. There were things that I was missing, that you could do with 16, or a larger gauge, but there were also distinct advantages to being able to carry it with me. By weight I could hold it much more simply and work with it hand-held. Then I got some 16mm equipment again and was able to work with both of them side by side.

"I gave up on it five or six years ago because it became evident that they were going to phase everything out...fifteen years ago I started translating them into 16mm blow-ups because I thought that they were going to be lost otherwise...there weren't very many people using 8mm projectors to project things anymore and so on... In the meantime I had made six or seven Super 8 films. It was a little heavier, a little closer to 16mm, still, its weight was accessible. But 8mm produced a kind of Impressionism intrinsically, because if you blew it up, as Jonas Mekas did for instance when

he screened all the *Songs* in New York (at Anthology Film Archives), you were viewing the actual chemical constituency that was making up the images as well as the images: they really were imbedded in the very crystals that made for a yellow shape as distinct from a red shape and it was quite a spatial experience! If you blew them up large enough you could almost see through the space the various dye levels.

"I don't want to prophesy, but it could be that 8mm will come back through all these people that love it dearly enough. I know people that are buying these old machines so that they can split 16 and continue to work with 8...so, like a harpsichord, it may be kept alive... One of the problems with museums and other institutions preserving things is that too much is bureaucratized and things revolve around committee meetings...what really works in preserving things is that someone loves something so much they preserve that form of it that they can..."

## Saul Levine

"Super 8 films I actually started in 1975. I had been making Regular 8 films since 1963 or '64. I had for a long time been drawn to thinking about making films myself. I was a writer and interested in theater, but with actually very little confidence in any of my abilities in those directions. Like everyone else I was told I was worthless and nothing...especially as a visual artist. I actually thought—this is ironic—that I should get into the business end of it.

"Somehow I was running into a lot of walls as a writer, as a poet, and also in theater. The kind of theater I became more and more interested in had less to do with story and drama. I couldn't see myself making love stories or cops and robbers and cowboy movies, as much as I liked that stuff. I wanted to make films...

I thought: 'There must be something else...' It wasn't until I saw Maya Deren's *At Land*, and Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* in the Yale Library

that I knew there was something else. I also knew that there were people who did stuff outside the industry. There was P. Adams Sitney, George Landow, and other people I knew involved in the New Haven Film Society when they were in high school and I had just gone to college. I was groping towards...the real thing for me... I was involved in culture magazines following what was going on in the avant-garde in New York...in *Kulchur* magazine...like Yoko Ono and other people who were involved in conceptual art... I read La Monte Young's stuff...it was an important source for me. Also reading Mekas' column...I saw Brakhage at Trinity...I went to high school with George Landow...all this stuff was kind of in the air there then...

"My aunt, who used to enter contests, won a Regular 8 movie camera. So, my aunt remembered that I was talking about being a filmmaker. She said, well, would you like it? Of course! I would have killed for it. It was a plastic Kodak camera, just a simple fixed lens Regular 8 camera. That's how I started. I really started thinking I wouldn't be able to use the camera, and got other people to shoot it for me...I started out making a story—an existential suicidal super drama... I never really finished it...I did some animation kinds of things...I was very caught up, right from the beginning. So I got into Regular 8 because it was what I could afford...I got thrown out of Clark and went to BU night school...they taught 16mm and documentary filmmaking...I tried to conform to their way of doing things and I couldn't...when I showed them the films I was doing they said what do you want to be, an interior decorator? At BU I met Andy Meyer who had made *Shades and Drumbeats*...there were a lot of things validating my use of Regular 8... I didn't realize some of the trouble I was getting into. I had this hope that Regular 8 would be more like poetry. That people would be able to see it more individually, see it whenever they felt like it, that it would be more like buying a book or a record...that people would turn each other on to the stuff more informally, rather than follow the movieland apparatus...

"I liked it, it was a very manageable technology for me. I liked how small it was, myself being a not very big person, being a little guy, being able to carry the equipment