

ARA OSTERWEIL

## “Absently Enchanted”

The Apocryphal, Ecstatic Cinema of Barbara Rubin



We're in the months of love; I'm seventeen years old. The time of hopes and dreams, as they say—and here I am, getting started—a child touched by the finger of the Muse—excuse me if that's trite—to express my fine beliefs, my yearnings, my feelings, all those things poets know—myself, I call them spring things.—Arthur Rimbaud to Théodore de Banville, Charleville, May 1870

Unlike most female experimental filmmakers discussed in this anthology, Barbara Rubin (1946–80) was neither a skilled practitioner nor a prolific director. While Rubin was frequently seen wielding a camera at some of the most outrageous media events and happenings of the sixties, there was often no film in her camera.<sup>1</sup> On the occasions when her camera was fully loaded, much of the noncanonical footage that has been attributed to Rubin appears strikingly amateurish.<sup>2</sup> More a woman with a movie camera than a committed documentarian, Rubin nevertheless transformed the role of the camera from its most obvious function as a recording apparatus to a literal agit-prop with which to provoke her audiences. Challenging the presumed distinction between performer and observer, as well as the privileging of the products of filmmaking above the process of manipulating a camera as a corporeal extension, Rubin revised what it meant to be an experimental filmmaker in the 1960s.

Although Rubin conceived of many ambitious film projects, she only



Barbara Rubin in  
Andy Warhol's  
*Screentest*, 1965.  
Courtesy of the  
Andy Warhol  
Museum.

completed two films.<sup>3</sup> *Christmas on Earth*, made by the seventeen-year-old novice in 1963 with a 16mm Bolex borrowed from Jonas Mekas, is one of the most sexually explicit, beautifully hallucinatory films to emerge from the 1960s. *Emunah* (codirected by Pamela Mayo, 1972), which Rubin completed after her conversion to Hasidism, juxtaposes footage of Allen Ginsberg with Hebrew text and photographs of concentration camps.<sup>4</sup> Conceptually, *Emunah* implies reconciliation between Rubin's two seemingly incompatible worlds—the New York Underground art scene and the Hasidism toward which she later turned. Unfortunately, *Emunah* lacks the inspiration of her earlier work and fails to deliver more than a nebulous glimpse of the appeal Judaism held for Rubin.<sup>5</sup> Rather than illuminating the mysterious link between the corporeal materialism of *Christmas on Earth* and the spirituality of Rubin's religious quest, *Emunah* projects the filmmaker's sentimental longing onto the figure of Ginsberg, who is seen reading kaddish at the Royal Albert Hall in London and lingering at the gravestone of William Blake.

Had Barbara Rubin never picked up a camera, or appeared in front of one, her contributions to the art, music, and literary countercultures of the time would have still been considerable. Although her pose on the back cover of Dylan's album *Bringing It All Back Home*, where she is seen massaging Dylan's curls, suggests a certain passivity, Rubin was anything but an onlooker.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, Rubin's multiple roles as an organizer, agitator, and innovator in the artistic and musical milieus of her time had profound and lasting effects on the cultural developments that have increasingly become associated with the 1960s. Initially through her friendships with Jonas Mekas and Ginsberg, and then through her own determination, Rubin infiltrated the Underground scene, serving as a catalyst



Barbara Rubin in Jonas Mekas's *Walden*, 1964–69. Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives.

for the interaction between individuals whom she regarded as the best minds of her generation. Although Andy Warhol's biographer Victor Bockris characterizes Rubin as a "squirrel extraordinaire,"<sup>7</sup> she was, in fact, much more than a local emissary, although she frequently delivered musical celebrities like Donovan, Dylan, and the Byrds to Warhol's Factory. Jonas Mekas's poignant film *Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol* (1982) briefly captures Rubin's collaborative spirit in action. Following footage of Rubin conversing at a café table with Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and other Beats while the pyrotechnics of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable flicker in the background, an intertitle asserts, "We were all there because of Barbara."<sup>8</sup>

In this essay, I investigate the trope of the masquerade as it relates to the astonishing sexual representations in *Christmas on Earth* as well as to Bar-

bara Rubin's life and career beyond the film. By situating Rubin's work in the milieu of the early avant-garde film community of the 1960s, the changing legal and artistic landscape of sexual representation, and Rubin's own tumultuous biography, this essay aims to articulate the historical conditions that made Rubin's filmmaking career both possible and theoretically problematic. Through a brief comparison of Rubin's "sexperimental" cinema with films by the other female experimental filmmakers Carolee Schneemann and Yoko Ono, this essay establishes the ways in which *Christmas on Earth* simultaneously intersects with and departs from the work of Rubin's female contemporaries. Although this analysis inevitably privileges *Christmas on Earth* over Rubin's other, mostly uncompleted film projects, it also takes into account Rubin's more "apocryphal" work, including her activities as an Underground film organizer. Finally, by demystifying the circumstances of Rubin's biography, this essay interrogates the presumed rupture separating Rubin's early ventures as a filmmaker and her eventual renunciation of experimental cinema.

While Rubin's obscurity can be partially attributed to the unusual circumstances of her biography, the overwhelming absence of critical attention reveals the extent to which Rubin's only known finished film challenges dominant preconceptions about the limits of sexual representation in this period. While the sexually transgressive work of contemporaneous avant-garde filmmakers such as Warhol, Jack Smith, and Kenneth Anger has been salvaged in the post-Stonewall era of queer identity politics, Rubin's work remains decidedly unclassifiable. More sexually explicit than either *Flaming Creatures* (Jack Smith, 1963) or *Scorpio Rising* (Kenneth Anger, 1963), both of which were charged with obscenity, *Christmas on Earth* neither suffered nor benefited from the notoriety associated with these films.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, despite Rubin's status as a female experimental filmmaker, *Christmas on Earth* is not a characteristically "feminist" film, although its orgiastic beauty focuses on the myriad erotic possibilities of the body. Like many female experimental filmmakers of her generation, Rubin never identified herself as a feminist. Like the term *queer*, which has been belatedly affixed to the homoerotic films of Warhol, Smith, and Anger, the notion of a consciously feminist avant-garde did not hold currency until the late 1970s (and was still not always welcomed by female filmmakers) and would thus be anachronistic to apply here. Nevertheless, the quixotic trajectory of Rubin's career reveals both artistic and personal struggles that were doubtlessly influenced by the fact of Rubin's gender in a male-dominated social and cultural milieu.

Like many of the artistic legends from the 1960s, Rubin died young, at

age 35, leaving a myriad of counterfactual questions for subsequent generations to ponder. Constantly reinventing herself, Rubin was less the proverbial chameleon, which alters its hue in order to assimilate to its environment, than a caterpillar in a constant state of flux and becoming.<sup>10</sup> Like many of the artists of her generation—including both Dylan and Ginsberg, whose own (temporary) returns to Judaism were reputedly inspired by Rubin's growing interest in religion—Rubin underwent a quest for spiritual meaning that involved dramatic revelations and recantations. However, unlike many of these artists who underwent publicly acknowledged religious phases, Rubin remained committed to Judaism. From the time of her discovery of Hasidism in the late 1960s, to her death in 1980, Rubin never returned to the ethos of drug experimentation and free love that she previously epitomized. After Rubin severed nearly all of her ties to the New York avant-garde community and moved to a religious community in France in the early 1970s, the threads that tied her so closely to the cultural developments of the 1960s tapered off and eventually disappeared.

In hindsight, Rubin's endless mutability seems nothing less than the quintessence of the 1960s. Donning a turban over her shaved head, draped in flowing rags, and aglitter with bangles, Rubin looked hippie before it was acceptable, or even recognizable to do so. Although her persona hinged upon the appearance of spontaneity, Rubin had an uncanny way of stumbling onto the defining scenes of her generation. Undoubtedly, many of Rubin's debuts were more than accidental (she was known to consciously seek out celebrity); others seem more serendipitous. According to Rosebud Pettet, who hitchhiked around the country with Rubin in the early 1960s, the two teenaged girls "just happened" to arrive in Berkeley in 1964 at the height of the free speech movement. While Berkeley students rallied en masse to Mario Savio's rhetoric, Rubin recognized an opportunity to exercise her own personal freedom. In the midst of one of the most incendiary student rebellions in history, Rubin bought a razor at the local drugstore, chopped off all of her hair in the middle of Sproul Plaza, and threw the strands of it into the crowd in a gesture of defiance. Despite the appearance of being absolutely kindred with the counterculture zeitgeist, Rubin was simultaneously ahead of and behind her time. Although she pioneered multimedia, multiple-projection extravaganzas decades before this became the norm in installation art, her nostalgia and longing for the immigrant Yiddish culture of her ancestors drew her deeper and deeper into the religious traditions of the past.

A middle-class Jewish girl from Queens, Rubin came to the Underground film community in New York as a teenager. Unlike the average teenager, however, Rubin had just been released from a juvenile correction facility for her vast experimentation with drugs that had begun, paradoxically, after swallowing a handful of the diet pills with which she had been instructed to manage her weight.<sup>11</sup> Through her uncle, William Rubin, who then managed the Gramercy Arts Theater where many avant-garde film screenings were held, Barbara was introduced to Jonas Mekas, by far the most important advocate of Underground cinema as well as the founder of the Film-Makers' Cooperative and, later, the Anthology Film Archives. At the request of her uncle, who was attempting to find a creative outlet for some of Barbara's more irreverent behavior, Mekas hired Barbara to assist at the Coop. In 1963, Rubin borrowed Mekas's 16mm Bolex camera and over the course of three days filmed *Christmas on Earth*, the "most sexually explicit film to startle the preporn avant-garde."<sup>12</sup> Originally called *Cocks and Cunts* before being retitled after a phrase from Arthur Rimbaud's epic poem "A Season in Hell," *Christmas on Earth* consisted of two black-and-white thirty-minute reels, which Rubin customarily projected simultaneously, one inside the other. With the placement of various color filters on the projector lens, and the addition of an ad-hoc sound track culled from any available radio, the already densely layered *Christmas on Earth* became a multimedia performance evocative of multiple meanings and mutating effects.<sup>13</sup> The rich, resplendent textures of *Christmas on Earth* approximate the blinking, magical lights of the holiday to which the film's title refers. Nevertheless, the affinities between the traditional family celebration and Rubin's quite libidinous version of the fantasy plenitude of Christmas end with the kaleidoscopic display of colored lights.

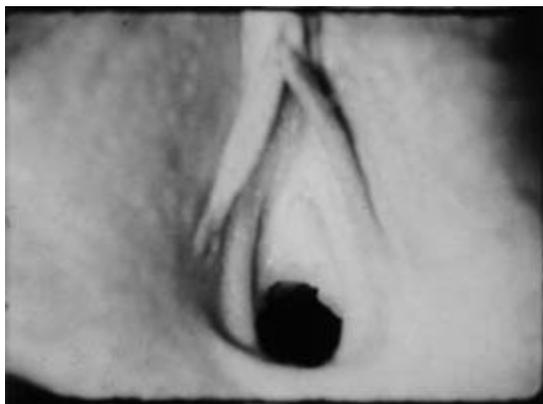
According to playwright Richard Foreman, who, along with his then-wife Amy Taubin, was an intimate friend and early supporter of Rubin, *Christmas on Earth* was originally shown unedited. Originally featuring long, "poignant" takes of lovemaking between painted and costumed Underground stars Gerard Malanga and Naomi Levine as they fornicated in nearly every position imaginable, *Christmas on Earth* was continually reedited for each performance. Foreman maintains that it was Rubin's exposure to the rapid montage of Gregory Markopoulos's films that inspired her to slice the original into dynamic fragments that, from his perspective, enhanced the kaleidoscopic effect of the film while diminishing its emotional affect. Although critics praised the reedited film for its virtuoso, seemingly deliberate juxtapositions, Rosebud maintains that Rubin, bare-

breasted and high on amphetamines, actually randomly parsed the film, dumped the fragments into a wastebasket, and mindlessly reconstructed it. Indeed, Rubin's euphoric description of her method of production seems to verify Rosebud's account:

A week out of nine months of mental hospital indoctrination and I meet Jonas and he gives me a camera and film love and trust and I shoot up down around back over under and shoot over and over speedily slow back and front end, the subject chosen by the creeping souls of the moment cocks and cunts, love supreme can believe to fantasy I then spent 3 months chopping the hours and hours of film up into a basket and then toss and toss flip and toss and one by one absently enchanted destined to put it together and separate onto two different reels and then project one reel half the size inside the other reel and then show it and someone tells me what a good editing job I did.<sup>14</sup>

In *Christmas on Earth*, at least five nude bodies are seen engaged in a variety of different sexual acts, including heterosexual genital penetration, homosexual anal sex, fellatio, cunnilingus, and masturbation. When watching the reels individually, one observes significant differences between reels A and B that are obscured when the film is seen through Rubin's preferred method of double projection. Reel A, for instance, privileges corporeal fragments much more than reel B, which is dominated by images of complete bodies. Commencing with a shot of a nonerect penis as it bobs up and down, reel A delivers a startling sequence of extreme close-ups, including the face of a woman screaming in ecstasy, fingers spreading open the lips of a vagina, an anus puckering open and shut, and a penis as it grows tumescent. Through Rubin's use of superimposition, penises suggestively overlap with faces, fingers appear to probe a mouth that simultaneously locks lips with labia, and tongues seem inserted in anuses. True to Rubin's original title *Cocks and Cunts*, reel A presents a seemingly endless array of genitals. Vaginas and anuses are repeatedly spread open, as if inviting the camera (and the observer) to penetrate these tempting apertures.

Orifices, however, are not the only organs that shift shape in *Christmas on Earth's* frenzied game of hide and seek. Presaging the outrageous work of film and video artist Vito Acconci, who daringly recorded himself with his penis hidden between his thighs in a series aptly titled *Conversions* (1971), *Christmas on Earth* subjects the male genitals to a sequence of dramatic transformations. In addition to including shots of swelling and diminishing erections, *Christmas on Earth* also includes images in



From Barbara  
Rubin's *Christmas  
on Earth*, 1963.  
Frame enlargement.

which the penis retreats from visibility. At a certain point in the film, a man pulls his testicles over his cock, hiding it beneath the bulge of his scrotum, before allowing it to pop out a few seconds later. As with the myriad images of spread orifices, this gesture suggests an insatiable swallowing, the body attempting to consume itself.

At the end of the first reel, the camera pulls back to belatedly deliver an establishing shot. Extricated from the tangle of body parts, the camera focuses on a group shot of the performers, who wear lavish amounts of exotic body paint. The main female protagonist is painted almost entirely black, except for white regions covering her breasts and stomach, which transform her torso into a spectral mask. The four members of her male harem, who sit surrounding her on the floor, are painted white. Not only does Rubin's use of body-paint situate sexual adventure in the ritual practices of the primitive other, but it also makes it quite difficult to distinguish between the participants, let alone decipher which body part belongs to whom.

Rather than inviting the spectator to identify with any one of these performers, as in a classical narrative film, *Christmas on Earth* privileges the viewer's identification with the apparatus itself. At one point in the first reel, the camera rhythmically zooms in and out as the lips of a vagina are pulled open and shut. Many critics have articulated the ways in which Rubin's use of double projection simulates the act of sexual penetration.<sup>15</sup> What has not been noted is the way in which the thrusting motion of the camera acts as a surrogate for the viewer by facilitating the desired penetration of the onscreen images.<sup>16</sup> In this intensifying "frenzy of the visible," Rubin's characteristically wild camera movements enable not only the ecstatic scrutiny of bodies splayed open, but the nearly tactile inter-

action between the observer and the observed as well. Like a lover so enthralled that she cannot decide where to cast her eyes first, Rubin's camera pans and swerves, enters and retreats. As the first reel ends in a blur of flickering white blotches, the participants wave at the camera, breaking the established Hollywood taboo against directly addressing either the apparatus or the implied audience. Like Shakespeare's Puck, the sexual "shadows" in *Christmas on Earth* humbly bid their audience farewell, acknowledging the artifice of their performance and the dream-like splendor of their visions.

The epilogue of the first reel is the subject of the second reel. Panning over the supine figure of the lacquered woman, Rubin's camera, like Willard Maas's in *Geography of the Body* (1947), explores the body as unfamiliar geographical terrain, at the same time that it insists upon sexual congress as a rapturous game of role-playing. Through the defamiliarizing effects of the paint, bodies become inscrutable juxtapositions of hill and valley, positive and negative space. Peering out from an inky expanse of torso, breasts develop eyes, and the sensuous rolls of the stomach grin like a Cheshire cat. Although reel B includes close-up images of body parts, it is significantly more oriented toward whole bodies and the performance of recognizable albeit taboo sexual acts. Whereas reel A creates the impression of interpenetrating body parts largely through the technique of superimposition, reel B offers diverse tableaux of nonsimulated sex. Through double projection and superimposition, it appears that many more than five bodies are visible. As Sally Banes has observed, these techniques produce "a seemingly endless array of breasts and penises, vulvas and exploring fingers—enough to belong to a crowd."<sup>17</sup>

Like Eadweard Muybridge's late-nineteenth-century photographs of human locomotion, Rubin's celebration of corporeal splendor exposes the metamorphoses of bodies as they engage in various actions. Whereas Muybridge necessarily excluded the body's involuntary reactions to sexual stimulation from his nearly exhaustive compendium of corporeal motion, Rubin explores both the voluntary and involuntary gestures of bodies engaged in a spectrum of sexual acts. At times, the performers in *Christmas* ostentatiously pose for the camera, as when the woman squeezes the folds of her stomach into a smile, or when one of the men spreads the cheeks of his ass open as he lies with his legs spread above his head. At other times, however, the bodies in *Christmas on Earth* depart from deliberate or theatrical gestures, permitting the audience to glimpse unstaged, involuntary confessions of corporeal pleasure. In what may be

the first “money shot” in experimental cinema, ejaculate rushes from a man’s trembling penis following a rather frenzied display of masturbation and anal sex between two male partners.

Rather than privileging this moment of corporeal truth over the manifold displays of unverifiable sexual pleasure in the film, however, Rubin treats male sexual climax as only one of the myriad possibilities of bodily ecstasy. Instead of culminating the erotic explorations in *Christmas on Earth* with this shot, Rubin insists upon the continuity rather than the cessation of sexual pleasure implied by orgasm, by immediately cutting to images of undiminished sexual plenitude. Although shots of male orgasm would not dominate the representation of sexual pleasure until the explosion of hard-core pornography in 1972,<sup>18</sup> as a hard-core film *avant la lettre*, *Christmas on Earth* presciently resists the kind of teleological impulse that would circumscribe later forms of visual pornography.

In her essay “Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions,” Linda Williams persuasively argues that Muybridge’s studies of human motion fetishize the female body through the addition of superfluous props that insist upon the constructed status of femininity. By comparing Muybridge’s photographs of women with his photographs of men, Williams observes that while male nudity is treated as a natural or self-evident component of the scientific study of the body, Muybridge’s representation of female nudity is oversaturated with narrative meaning. Whereas male bodies are generally displayed without adornment, and are seen engaged in banal activities like walking, catching, and throwing, women are often posed in intimate rituals of dressing and undressing, caressing and flirting. Frequently draped in diaphanous veils and accompanied by unnecessary props, Muybridge’s women engage in a primitive form of striptease that both presupposes and implants the perceived artifice of the female gender.<sup>19</sup>

Like Muybridge, Rubin relies heavily on veils and other types of costumes that simultaneously mask and reveal the human figure. However, rather than merely disguising the female body through excessive ornamentation, Rubin also represents masculinity as a thoroughly constructed artifice. Instead of objectifying the female body while preserving the agency of the male subject, Rubin disperses masquerade’s duplicity over both genders. Transformed into erotic objects through the geometrical designs inscribed on their bodies and the masks and other ornaments that they wear, here the male performers occupy what is typically considered the “feminine” position by rendering their bodies serviceable for penetration. Although critic Amy Taubin has observed that the



From Barbara  
Rubin's *Christmas on  
Earth*, 1963. Frame  
enlargement.

“dilemma” of *Christmas on Earth* “is maternity and its place in a definition of female sexuality,”<sup>20</sup> it seems that the film as compellingly presents the related desire of the male to open himself and his body as woman. In spite of the copious images of male genitalia, the structuring desire of the film is the ontology of the orifice, the urge to be spread, penetrated, and occupied. In *Christmas on Earth*, the dichotomies between male and female, subject and object, and “top” and “bottom” cease to obtain as the relationship between anatomical difference and prescribed sexual roles collapses in an orgy of fluid exchanges.

As Banes has argued, Rubin’s creation of “a fantastical, Orientalist sexual space” enables the white woman, “recast as a woman of color,” to be “sexually available in a way that white women are not supposed to be.”<sup>21</sup> Freed from the sexual guilt that historically accompanies white womanhood, here women partake in the giving and receiving of a host of sexual favors without suffering the attendant social consequences of perceived promiscuity. Similarly, the men in Rubin’s film pursue an expanded notion of sexual sovereignty. Painted to resemble vaguely primitive creatures, the men alternate between performing heterosexual and homosexual acts, implying that this kind of unregulated bisexuality is a

natural feature of human desire that has been repressed by Western society. Taking advantage of the widespread cultural double standard that persistently accepts provocative images of “native” sexuality while prohibiting images of Western or Caucasian nudity, *Christmas on Earth* proffers the perceived “innocence” of the native sexual encounter as one of many roles that can be taken up in the erotic adventure.

Much as in Jack Smith’s *Flaming Creatures*, the outrageously “costumed” players in *Christmas on Earth* are free to express conventionally taboo sexual desires through the use of both the racial and sexual masquerade. Prefiguring Warhol’s *Couch* (1964), which exhibits a range of both homosexual and heterosexual encounters on the eponymous piece of Factory furniture, *Christmas on Earth* depicts the sex act as an infinitely variable encounter whose pleasures cannot be circumscribed by the “norm” of heterosexual copulation.<sup>22</sup> Yet unlike *Couch*, whose constant exchange of sexual partners suggests the extension of the capitalist marketplace into the private sphere, Rubin’s intimation of a precapitalist ritualistic domain of pleasure hearkens back toward an imagined sexual utopia, unpolluted by the political economy of the present. Like Carolee Schneemann’s *Fuses* (1964–67) and Stan Brakhage’s *Cat’s Cradle* (1959), *Christmas on Earth* is a film documenting human sexuality that includes footage of a cat. While this may seem like a superficial or facetious similarity, the different approaches to feline representation in these works reveals significantly divergent sensibilities on the part of their respective directors. Whereas both Schneemann’s and Brakhage’s homages to love-making include the cat presumably as a signifier of the mode of coupled domesticity from which sexual intimacy emerges, *Christmas on Earth* humorously juxtaposes a pair of cats engaged in sexual intercourse alongside images of people fucking. Rather than referring to the domestic sphere that often includes a beloved house pet as accessory, *Christmas on Earth* situates its explorations of human sexuality on a continuum of corporeal fornication that includes the expression of animal lust.

As David James and Sally Banes have argued, the projection technique of *Christmas on Earth*, in which one reel forms a smaller square within the other, results in an interpenetration that is analogous to the sex act itself. In his book *Allegories of Cinema*, David James has noted both Rubin’s struggle as a female filmmaker in a cinematic vanguard largely dominated by men, and the way in which this struggle is allegorized formally through the “labial” interpenetration of Rubin’s double projection: “Figuring female bi-labialism both in its representation of the vagina and in the intercourse of one screen with other, it [*Christmas on Earth*]

suggests allegorical readings of image production and re-production. It polemically asserts the double-ness, the plurality, moving towards the polymorphous-ness, of the female against the fetishizing of the male that is figured, filmically, in the phallogormorphism of single projection and, socially, in the circle of filmmakers associated with the New York Cooperative at that time.”<sup>23</sup>

James’s observations about the ways in which the literal and symbolic “double-ness” of Rubin’s images constituted a potent challenge to the male-centered avant-garde film community are persuasive. Confronted by films in which male directors attempted to figure female sexual pleasure through phallogentric conventions and the illusion of mutual authorship, avant-garde filmmakers like Rubin, Schneemann, and Yoko Ono decided to make their own cinematic documents of the body. However, while it is useful to situate the corporeal films of these three female directors in relation to each other in order to distinguish an important alternative to experimental sex films authored by male directors, there are also important distinctions that merit recognition. Schneemann decided to make *Fuses* as a result of her dissatisfaction with Brakhage’s representation of her lovemaking with her partner James Tenney in his films *Loving* (1957) and *Cat’s Cradle* (1959). However, as the aesthetic of *Fuses* reveals, Schneemann’s debt to Brakhage is substantial. Although she obtains directorial control of the representation of her own body, Schneemann does not manage to emancipate her film from Brakhage’s cinematic signatures. Through the copious amounts of superimposition, repetition, upside-down shots, as well as her dyeing, stamping, and scratching on the film itself, *Fuses* pays significant homage to the very father it is anxious to displace. Stylistically, *Fuses* and *Christmas on Earth* bear considerable resemblance to each other, in their shared use of the superimposed, multilayered image, as well as their rapid juxtaposition of corporeal fragments with images of whole bodies engaged in sexual intercourse. Unlike *Fuses*, however, Rubin’s brilliant innovation of double-screen projection in *Christmas on Earth* manages to incorporate experimental cinema’s primary trope of the ruptured image while simultaneously critiquing the patriarchal inflections of the single frame.

In its materialist celebration of the body and body parts, *Christmas on Earth* also corresponds to the early motion-study films of Ono, including *No. 1 Eyeblink* (1966) and *No. 4 (Bottoms)* (also known as *Fluxfilm #16*, 1966). By focusing on the up-close movements of particular body parts in these films, Ono defamiliarizes the viewer’s relation to the geography of the human physique at the same time that she challenges the observer’s

assumptions about the relation between anatomy and gender. Looking closely at the buttocks presented in *No. 4 (Bottoms)*, or the slow-motion blink of Ono's own eye in *Eyeblink*, body parts and corporeal motions once familiar begin to take on an abstract life of their own, as do the many magnified orifices in *Christmas on Earth*.<sup>24</sup> Fittingly, critic Kristine Stiles has compared Ono's expansion of the erogenous zone to French feminist Luce Irigaray's description of woman's pluralistic eroticism. Woman, Irigaray argues, "has sexual zones just about everywhere."<sup>25</sup> For Irigaray and other feminist theorists, Freud's phallogocentric notion of sexuality ignores the multiple sites of corporeal pleasure constitutive of female sexuality. Like Rubin, Ono did not regard sexual plurality and multiplicity as the sole property and privilege of the female body. On the contrary, Ono extended the notion of plurality to include masculinity as well as femininity. By including male bodies as the subject of her cinematic inquiries into human motion, Ono simultaneously rejected "the traditional isolation of the female body as a subject of separate erotic observation, surveillance, and control."<sup>26</sup>

Despite the undeniable difficulty of being a female filmmaker in a male-dominated experimental film community, the critical tendency to employ essentialist or anatomical notions of femininity—including bilabialism, plurality, and doubleness—in relation to experimental films by women is problematic. Rather than privileging the bilabial properties of female anatomy over the supposed oneness of the male anatomy, *Christmas on Earth* deessentializes the anatomical body of both sexes by depicting the flesh in a constant process of metamorphosis. While the goal of this essay is not to submerge Rubin's inspired spontaneity in dense theoretical constructs, Mary Ann Doane's notion of the masquerade, in which femininity is theorized as a mask that can be donned and removed, seems a more appropriate frame through which to approach *Christmas on Earth*.<sup>27</sup>

Far from attesting to the naturalness or authenticity of native sexual culture or the feminine body, the various masquerades in *Christmas on Earth* suggest the ways in which sex and gender always already involve role-playing and the notion of being-as-performance. Like Schneemann, Rubin objectifies the female body in addition to fetishizing the racial or ethnic other. Several times during the nearly thirty-minute film, the woman's body "becomes configured as an abstraction of a face—her breasts become eyes, her pubis a mouth."<sup>28</sup> Whereas the woman's actual face is transformed into a mask by the decorative paint, her sexual organs are presented as a substitute for the defining features of her visage. Like René

Magritte's painting *The Rape (Le Viol, 1934)*, Rubin's reconfiguration of the female body as face reduces woman to a notion of pure carnality at the same time that it analogizes the female genitals to an all-consuming, insatiable orifice. However, unlike the misogynist trope of the *vagina dentata*, which conflates the mouth and the female genitals as a response to the male's fear of castration by the woman,<sup>29</sup> Rubin's visual conjunction of these two cavities suggests the polymorphous, nondiscriminating pleasures of what is known in psychoanalysis as oral eroticism.<sup>30</sup> In an onanistic gesture akin to Freud's interpretation of the masturbatory practice of thumb-sucking, the woman also presumably finds sexual satisfaction from her own body, as a rather feminine hand is seen stroking the lips of the vagina.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike Magritte's painting, whose title implies the violence associated with the objectification of the female body, *Christmas on Earth* celebrates this objectification as a strategy that enables women to pursue a variety of sexual pleasures. Since, as Banes observes, the female "body itself has oxymoronically become a mask," it can deflect the penetrating gaze of the spectator even as the camera "unmasks" the body's most private parts.<sup>32</sup> In Rubin's film, sexuality is never associated with violence or violation, even as bodies are exchanged between multiple partners. By celebrating the joys of sex and the wonders of the female body as a highly iconic, oversaturated visual object willingly submissive to the prodding, penetrating and thrusting extremities belonging to other (mostly male) participants, Rubin precociously challenged the kind of emerging feminism that would trade organized activism for individual pleasure.

According to Rosebud, Rubin was fully aware of the effects that her film would have upon the audiences of the day. For an eighteen-year-old girl, untutored in the arts of cinematography and editing, to make a film more explicit than any of the Underground films by established (male) experimental directors of her generation, quickly created a sensation. However, unlike Jack Smith, whose notorious *Flaming Creatures* propelled him to the center of numerous legal battles and earned him a reputation for obscenity, Rubin's sexual precociousness quickly transformed her into a beneficent, otherworldly innocent in the eyes of her public. In his review of the film published in *Film Culture* in the summer of 1965, Mekas waxed elegantly about the cinematic candor with which Rubin approached the sex act:

*Christmas on Earth*: A woman; a man; the black of the pubic hair; the cunt's moon mountains and canyons. As the film goes, image after image,

the most private territories of the body are laid open for us. The first shock changes into silence then is transposed into amazement. We have seldom seen such down-to-body beauty, so real as only beauty (man) can be: terrible beauty that man, that woman is, are, that Love is.

Do they have no more shame? This eighteen-year-old girl, she must have no shame, to look at and show the body so nakedly. Only angels have no shame. But we do not believe in angels; we do not believe in Paradise any more, nor in Christmas; we have been Out for too long. “Orpheus has been too long in Hell.”—Brakhage.

A syllogism: Barbara Rubin has no shame; angels have no shame; Barbara Rubin is an angel.

Yes, Barbara Rubin has no shame because she has been kissed by the angel of Love.<sup>33</sup>

While Mekas continued to be the most devout guardian and champion of Rubin’s oeuvre, the deliberate naïveté of these original reflections has unwittingly diminished the import of Rubin’s film. Rather than explicating the insistently corporeal mode of address that makes *Christmas on Earth* such a significant departure from other Underground films of the period, Mekas’s ethereal syllogism disavows the sheer physicality of Rubin’s exploration of bodies. Although Underground film historian Parker Tyler himself was prone to characterizing Underground films as infantile, primitive, and gimmicky, he astutely critiques Mekas for disavowing the “stark erotic subject matter of the film” through a patently “deliberate effort to replace black magic with white” and “to saturate adult sexuality with a ‘childlike’ innocence.”<sup>34</sup> Although Rubin promotes the stereotypes of both primitive sexual excess and the unselfconscious “innocence” of native culture, she does so strategically, with an intense degree of self-reflexivity. By appropriating these stereotypes, Rubin negotiates an alternative space in which to perform a critique of hegemonic notions of gender, identity, and sexuality.

With the exhibition of *Christmas on Earth*, Barbara Rubin quickly became one of the central figures of the emerging artistic vanguard. On New Year’s Eve 1963–64, Rubin, along with Mekas and P. Adams Sitney, led the charge to show *Flaming Creatures* illegally at the Third International Experimental Film Exposition in Knokke-le-Zoute, Belgium. After smuggling her film into the projection booth in the canister of Stan Brakhage’s *Dog Star Man*, Rubin and her associates tied up the secretly compliant projectionist, locked themselves in the room, seized control of the switchboard, cut the lights, and began to show to film. Even after the

authorities arrived and attempted to halt the screening, Rubin remained undeterred. As a riot erupted, Rubin shouted encouragement to the audience while hurling curses at the police. Unrestrained by the probability that she could be prosecuted for showing the film (exhibitors in New York had already endured imprisonment and formidable legal battles on account of showing Smith's film), Rubin attempted to project the film on the face of the Belgian Minister of Culture.<sup>35</sup>

Avant-garde film historian Sitney recalls Rubin's zeal as she traveled from Belgium to Cannes, Paris, Munich, and Italy. While Sitney longed to find an established audience and suitable exhibition venues for avant-garde cinema, Rubin was more committed to "showing films in the street and starting a revolution." Although they were both dedicated to gaining exposure for experimental cinema, Rubin was driven by the impulse to expand the meaning of cinema beyond the confines of the screening room and thus to eradicate artistic "censorship" in even its most benign manifestations. As she followed Sitney around Europe, Rubin frequently canceled screenings that he had labored to organize, preferring to project films on crowded streets and empty sky.

While many of her colleagues at the time remember Rubin as a nurturing, spiritual being, others, like Sitney and Ken Jacobs, recall Rubin's public impieties as brazen profligacy. These critics fail to take into account the ways in which Rubin's shock tactics employed the cinema as an instrument to challenge the bourgeois parameters of social etiquette as well as to expand the role of the media in the counterculture revolution. Conjuring the outrageous tactics of the Dadaists, Rubin used her camera to provoke and disturb, frequently transforming highbrow publicity events into carnivalesque debacles in which social hierarchies were inverted and ridiculed. As one of the primary organizers of the *Andy Warhol Up-Tight* series, Rubin both appalled and delighted audiences that had gathered for a glimpse of the New York Underground at various colleges and speaking venues. On January 13, 1966, Warhol was invited to be the evening's entertainment at the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry's forty-third annual dinner, held at Delmonico's Hotel.<sup>36</sup> Bursting into the room with a camera, as the Velvet Underground acoustically tortured the guests and Gerard Malanga and Edie Sedgwick performed the "whip dance" in the background, Rubin taunted the attending psychiatrists. Casting blinding lights in their faces, Rubin hurled derogatory questions at the esteemed members of the medical profession, including: "What does her vagina feel like? Is his penis big enough? Do you eat her out?"<sup>37</sup> As the horrified guests began to leave, Rubin continued her inter-

rogation: “Why are you getting embarrassed? You’re a psychiatrist; you’re not supposed to get embarrassed.” The following day, the *New York Times* reported on the event; their chosen headline, “Shock Treatment for Psychiatrists,” reveals the extent to which Rubin’s guerrilla tactics had inverted the sanctioned relationship between patient and doctor, expert and amateur.

By the late 1960s, Rubin’s anarchistic spirit began to wane as she became more interested in observant Judaism. In 1968, Rubin moved to upstate New York to live with Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky on Ginsberg’s farm in Cherry Valley. According to Gordon Ball and Rosebud, Rubin engineered the relocation of Ginsberg, with whom she had lived sporadically in New York, in order to live out her idyllic fantasy of bearing his children and growing old with him in the country. Although Rubin’s desire for a pastoral romance with Ginsberg seems incompatible with the poet’s avowed homosexuality, their unusual relationship did not in fact exclude erotic encounters. According to Ball, who lived with them on the farm, Ginsberg had “made love to Barbara on the dark green carpeted floor of the Coop/Jonas’s apartment” after seeing her film.<sup>38</sup> True to the model of fluid sexuality Rubin had represented in *Christmas on Earth*, in which sexual preference was less a permanent identity than a position that could be temporarily occupied and then exchanged, Rubin’s relationship with Ginsberg defied the rules of codified sexual behavior. Judging from Rubin’s deep and passionate kiss with actress/filmmaker Naomi Levine, recorded in a yet unpreserved sequence of Warhol’s *Kiss* (1963),<sup>39</sup> Ginsberg was not the only one who experimented with partners of both genders.

Although Rubin had always been interested in spirituality (Foreman remembers Rubin poring over the books in his library, seeking quotations for an anticipated “Anthology of Light”), it was during this period that she became involved in the rites and rituals of organized religion. Ball attributes Rubin’s seemingly contradictory embrace of Hasidism to her deep disappointment upon learning that Ginsberg did not share her fantasy of domestic bliss. Other friends, however, account for Rubin’s conversion through narratives of continuity rather than rupture, situating Rubin’s transformation on a continuum with her ongoing attraction to different modes of expanded consciousness that included the liberal use of mind-altering drugs and the hallucinatory perceptions afforded by multimedia happenings. Nevertheless, by the time Rubin returned to New York City, she had changed her name to Bracha, the Hebrew equiva-

lent of Barbara, and had begun to keep kosher, light Sabbath candles, and don a religious head covering.

At this point in Rubin's biography, details become vague and perspectives collide. According to Brett Aronowitz,<sup>40</sup> Rubin's immersion in Hasidism amounted to brainwashing by a cult; Rubin was gradually stripped of the traces of her irreverent personality by the dogmatic and retrogressive gender practices of religious fundamentalism. On the other hand, both Wendy Clarke and Rosebud insist that Rubin remained a renegade in spite of her adoption of stringent religious traditions.<sup>41</sup> Rosebud, who lived with Rubin on the Lower East Side during the time of Rubin's increasing religious zeal, insists that Rubin interpreted religious strictures to her own end, often in defiance of acceptable conventions of piety. For example, Rosebud maintains that Rubin insisted on wearing a turban even though she was not married and thus not required to according to the tenets of orthodoxy. Clarke contends that it was Rubin's interest in Kabbalah—which was not considered an acceptable area for women's study—that inspired her embrace of Hasidism rather than any attraction to the rules and regulations of religious fundamentalism.

From this perspective, Rubin's entry into the gender-divided world of Hasidism may be no more startling than her participation in the male-dominated experimental film community of the early 1960s; in both situations, Rubin survived by rewriting the rules according to her needs, flying in the face of convention when necessary. Furthermore, Clarke describes the Hasidic enclave in Brighton Beach to which Rubin belonged as a bohemian commune, full of like-minded artists, rather than a traditional orthodox community. In this light, Ball's claim that Rubin's first husband, rabbinical student Mordecai Levy, was not a born Jew but an enlightened convert, suggests that Rubin's "caterpillar changes" did not stop at the temple threshold but continued to influence her associations with other kindred changelings. Although Rubin's marriage to Levy ended after little more than a year, the bizarre image of their wedding ceremony further illuminates the extent of Rubin's dual citizenship. According to Rosebud, "young girls stood on rickety chairs to peer over the mechitza at Bob Dylan and Allen Ginsberg dancing on the men's side."<sup>42</sup>

Despite the desire to find another, more utopian way of accounting for her religious conversion, certain facts of Rubin's biography make it nearly impossible to maintain that Rubin remained entirely of double consciousness. In a note addressed to Leslie Trumbull, then director of the Film-Makers' Cooperative, Rubin, calling herself Brache,<sup>43</sup> ordered the

destruction of the only print of *Christmas on Earth*, a request that has thankfully not been fulfilled.<sup>44</sup> After divorcing Levy, Rubin married a French painter named Pierre Besancon; shortly afterward, they moved to France and settled in a Hasidic community. After giving birth to a half dozen children in as many years (although she is rumored to have been warned by doctors not to have any more children due to her excessive weight gain and slight frame), Rubin died of a postnatal infection in 1980, two weeks after the birth of her youngest son, Aaron. According to the “Preliminary Report of the Death of an American Citizen Abroad,” posted two years later by an American Vice Counsel in Lyon, Rubin was buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Ceffois-le-Bas, Haut Ruin, France.<sup>45</sup> Long before her death, Rubin had severed all ties to the New York art world and experimental film community.

While Rubin’s conversion to Hasidism has frequently been cast as a postlapsarian repentance of the sexual excesses of her youth, the strategies employed in *Christmas on Earth* actually provide a key with which to deconstruct Rubin’s seemingly radical surrender of the pleasures of the material world. In an interview with Rubin conducted by Mekas for the *Village Voice* in 1972, “Bracha” rather candidly discusses the paradoxes of orthodox Judaism, which she had already been practicing for several years. Despite her acknowledgment of many “male chauvinist pigs in Torah,” Rubin praised the divergent, often surprising gender roles advocated by Hasidism:

Torah holds that the man and the woman is like a microcosm of the universe. And Torah says, the woman isn’t the one of softness—it’s the man. It says, a woman is hard, she’s filled with judgment. In Torah, the male is the external force, and the woman is the internal force. External meaning that the man’s function in the universe is not going out and getting a job, and doing all that; in Torah, the woman does light. The woman takes care of the literal, physical world, and the man takes care of the spiritual. But without the interchange between the man and the woman, the spiritual world goes crazy, it flies away. Like men tend to fly away. And the female world, which is literal, tends to be harsh, and it gets so harsh that it’s like nature, starts to destroy. So there always must be that interchange, you see, between the two.<sup>46</sup>

Given this interpretative spin, it is less shocking that Rubin should choose to pursue something as “extreme” as Hasidism after making the shamelessly corporeal, sexually dazzling *Christmas on Earth*. True to the ethos of fluid gender identifications that Rubin presented, as well as the

insistently materialist tone of her approach to the body, Rubin's postconversion commentary reveals the extent to which she managed to incorporate her trademark of fierce femininity into organized religion. Taking into account Rubin's penchant for the exploration of ritual and performativity, it may be misleading to assume that Rubin's last role as pious Hasidic hausfrau was any more essential than the other masquerades—as Underground organizer, sexual outlaw, and irreverent filmmaker—that Rubin assumed in her ongoing emergence from the skin of the self's cocoon.

Had Barbara Rubin disappeared from the Underground community immediately after completing her first film, *Christmas on Earth* would remain one of the most compelling testaments to the spirit of experimental cinema of the 1960s and the counterculture, as well as a work of unparalleled formal and aesthetic consequence. While many critics have dismissed Rubin's later work in regards to her precocious debut, it is only through an examination of Rubin's entire, apocryphal career that the uniqueness of her vision, and the attending difficulty of her struggles as artist, woman, and filmmaker, begin to come into focus. In an environment in which it was nearly impossible for an untrained, underage woman to break into a world of established male auteurs, Rubin took flight, soared to unexpected heights, and offered unqualified glimpses of beauty along the way. In the process, Barbara Rubin answered the question that had been posed to her, generations before, by Rimbaud in "The Impossible," *A Season in Hell*: "When are we going to take off, past the shores and the mountains, to greet the new task, the new wisdom, the defeat of tyrants and devils, the end of superstition—to worship—the first to do so!—Christmas on this earth!"<sup>47</sup>

## Filmography

*Christmas on Earth*, 1963 (29 min.): si., b&w; 16mm

*Emunah* (with Pamela Mayo), 1972–73 (18 min.): si., col., b&w; 16mm

## Notes

1 In his journal entry for June 23, 1966, Jonas Mekas writes, "I have seen Barbara Rubin going through entire evenings of shooting with an empty camera" ("On the Tactile Interactions in Cinema," 248).

2 Callie Angell, assistant curator at the Whitney Museum of Art and director of the Andy Warhol Film Project, has distinguished the footage Rubín shot for the *Andy Warhol Up-Tight* series from Danny Williams's on the basis of Rubín's barely legible imagery. However, compared with the intimate clarity of Rubín's camera in *Christmas on Earth*, her wild, spinning camera movements and habitual underexposure seem to indicate the deliberate refusal to acknowledge the established rules of filmmaking rather than the simple lack of proficiency.

3 *Christmas on Earth Continued* (1965), coauthored by Rubín's friend Rosebud Pettet, was conceived as a billion-dollar fantasy epic that required the construction of a massive fairy kingdom in Ireland and the casting of virtually every significant enfant terrible from the music, literary, cinema, and art worlds, including Jean Genet, Lenny Bruce, the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Marianne Faithful, the Supremes, and Marlon Brando.

4 Belasco, "A Note from the Underground," 50.

5 Although Anthology Film Archives has a print of *Emunah* in their collection, it has not been preserved and thus remains unavailable for public screening and distribution.

6 Most of Dylan's biographers pay scant attention to the singer's friendship with Rubín, who helped nurse Dylan back to health after his devastating motorcycle accident in 1966. Nevertheless, it is rumored that Dylan wrote part of his song "Desolation Row" about Barbara Rubín: "Now Ophelia, she's 'neath the window / For her I feel so afraid / On her twenty-second birthday / She already is an old maid / To her, death is quite romantic / She wears an iron vest / Her profession's her religion / Her sin is her lifelessness / And though her eyes are fixed upon / Noah's great rainbow / She spends her time peeping / Into Desolation Row." See Bob Dylan, *Highway 61 Revisited*, prod. Bob Johnston (Columbia Records, 1965).

7 Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol*, 181.

8 Rubín also appears in several other experimental films of the period, including Mekas's *Walden*, and a yet unpreserved sequence of Warhol's *Kiss*. In addition, Rubín's *Screen Test* (Warhol) is available for viewing at the Museum of Modern Art.

9 American experimental film of the period evolved in relation to the changing legal and aesthetic standards of Hollywood, domestic independent and foreign film, stag, exploitation, and hard-core pornography. Characterized by similar struggles over censorship, the history of the American avant-garde nevertheless progressed according to a significantly different trajectory. As with the commercial cinema, experimental film in the 1960s was riddled with legal struggles, including the seizure of film prints by the police, the confiscation of film equipment, the shutting down of theaters, court cases revolving around obscenity, and the arrest of prominent figures from the avant-garde film com-

munity. Nevertheless, due to its relative “invisibility and opacity vis-à-vis public discourse,” avant-garde cinema generally enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than the commercial cinema. See Suárez, *Bike Boys*, 298.

10 The caterpillar metaphor is Rubin’s own; in 1967, Rubin organized a multimedia performance program at the Cinematheque on 125 W. Forty-first Street, whose title she changed from “Kreeping Kreplach” to “Caterpillar Changes.” Although the program featured a range of different performances, from the music of Gato Barbieri, to projection of films by Harry Smith, Andy Warhol, Shirley Clarke, Jack Smith, and Storm de Hirsch on torn sheets, the real caterpillar, as Mekas noted soon after, was Rubin herself (“More on the New Sensibilities in Cinema,” 275).

11 Watson, *Factory Made*, 99.

12 Hoberman, “Personal Best,” 141.

13 Many experimental films from this period, such as *Christmas on Earth* and Ken Jacobs’s *Blonde Cobra* (1959–63) did not include a sound track on the celluloid of the film. Rather, in the projection instructions, the filmmakers specify that the projectionist set an actual radio to certain kinds of stations during different sequences of the film. In this way, filmmakers like Rubin and Jacobs ensured that their films would provoke multiple experiences and different points of view depending on each particular moment of their reception. Regarding *Christmas on Earth*, Rubin also allowed that the different reels of the film could be shown in different orders and enhanced by various color filters. Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 245.

14 Ball, *66 Frames*, 232.

15 See Sally Banes’s discussion of *Christmas on Earth* in *Greenwich Village 1963*, as well as David James’s analysis in *Allegories of Cinema*.

16 Carol Clover has designated genres such as horror and pornography “body genres” because their aim is to move spectators toward a convulsive response to the images (to jump with fear in horror films, or to shudder in sexual ecstasy in pornographic films). Building upon this notion in her essay “Film Bodies,” Linda Williams has argued that pornography aspires to propel the body of the spectator to “an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on screen” (*Hard Core*, 143). For spectators of hard-core pornography, there is an implicit contract between the text and its audience, which stipulates that explicit sexual pleasure will not only be seen, but also be experienced by the viewer.

17 Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 215.

18 See Williams’s analysis of the money shot in *Hard Core*.

19 As Williams has argued, Muybridge’s chronophotographic studies of the human body are hardly gender neutral. Inextricable from the discourses of power from which they emerge and to which they inevitably respond, Muybridge’s photographs do not merely reflect traditional gender stereotypes but

actually impose or “implant” perverse modalities of desire upon the photographed body. For a more in-depth discussion of gender relations in Muybridge, see Williams’s chapter “Prehistory” in *Hard Core*.

20 Taubin, “Women Were Out Front, Too,” 22.

21 Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 224.

22 See Sigmund Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* for his account of the relation between perversion and normative sexuality.

23 James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 317.

24 Like Rubin, Ono’s first cinema experiments were made with a camera borrowed from an established male figure in the art world—George Maciunas, the leader of the Fluxus movement. For a more thorough discussion of Ono’s film work, see Haskell, “Yoko Ono,” and Iles, “Erotic Conceptualism.” Also see Stiles, “Unbosoming Lennon,” for a discussion of the problematic collaboration between Ono and Lennon.

25 Quoted in Stiles, “Unbosoming Lennon,” 28.

26 Iles, *Erotic Conceptualism*, 203.

27 For an in-depth discussion of the female masquerade, see Doane, *Femmes Fatales*.

28 Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 224.

29 Melanie Klein explains that the notion of the *vagina dentata* stems from the earliest identifications of the child, in which the child perceives unreal and distorted images of the objects it wishes to incorporate. See “Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict and of Super-Ego Formation,” 136. During this phase, the fantasy of the *vagina dentata* represents the child’s unconscious fear that the female genitals are a dangerous opening that threatens to subsume and devour the subject.

30 During this pregenital or infantile sexual phase, satisfaction is primarily associated with the mucous membranes of the mouth, through which the child consumes the breast milk of its mother (Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 48).

31 *Ibid.*, 47.

32 Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963*, 224.

33 Mekas, “Notes on Some New Movies and Happiness,” 322–23.

34 Tyler, *Underground Film*, 99.

35 Mekas, “*Flaming Creatures* at Knokke-Le-Zoute,” 111–12.

36 Angell, *The Films of Andy Warhol*, 27.

37 Watson, *Factory Made*, 259.

38 Ball, *66 Frames*, 135.

39 According to Callie Angell, many more than thirteen kisses were recorded for Warhol’s project, including this still apocryphal smooch between Rubin and Levine. Interestingly, the version of Warhol’s *Kiss* distributed through MOMA does not include any female/female kisses, although it does

include other “illicit” kisses, one between two androgynous men as well as an interracial kiss between a black man and a white woman.

40 Rubin was a dear friend of Al Aronowitz’s family and acted as a maternal surrogate/babysitter for his children when their mother died.

41 Rubin was also a devoted friend to filmmaker Wendy Clarke and her mother, the avant-garde director Shirley Clarke, with whom Rubin collaborated on several unrealized film projects. In the late 1960s, Rubin and Wendy Clarke opened a hippie clothing store together on Christopher Street between Bleecker and Hudson Streets in New York. Although frequent visits from Bob Dylan and other celebrities transformed the store into a popular Village hang-out, it went out of business after approximately one year. Rubin’s delight in serving tea and snacks to visitors to the store quickly bankrupted the business.

42 Belasco, “A Note from the Underground,” 50.

43 In my extensive research on Rubin, I have come across three different spellings of her taken Hebrew name: Bracha, Brache, and Brucha.

44 Belasco, “A Note from the Underground,” 49.

45 Horrigan, “Program Guide” (in awe of).

46 Quoted in Mekas, “Interview with Barbara Rubin,” 65.

47 Rimbaud, “Mourning,” 101.