

This issue, devoted to film, has been organized and edited by Annette Michelson.

COVER: Ken Jacobs, Still from *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, 1969.

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FOREWORD IN THREE LETTERS

Sirs:

In a remarkably wrongheaded piece, Annette Michelson, in the June *Artforum* asserts, with reference to Michael Snow's film, *Wavelength*, "Snow has redefined filmic space as that of action." Now even the most simpleminded film goer such as myself knows and feels, intuitively (and rationally, if *ratio* is needed) that space has always been defined in terms of action (inner and outer). What else is a western, gangster film, situation comedy, etc? "The object of Farber's delight, the narrative integrity of those comedies and westerns," is nothing but a reactionary, model-oriented mode of film-making indulged in by just about everyone in the commercial cinema, and certainly not indulged in by Mike Snow. The basis of Miss Michelson's hypothesis is blatantly and patently incorrect. Other, smaller assumptions seem to get carried along in the tide of shallow insight and intellectualization: "Snow, in re-introducing expectation as the core of film form," is distinguished from "the stare of Warhol." Expectation is inextricably bound to action within a defined space, whether in commercial, experimental, or any other sort of film. And nothing increases expectation more than Warhol's stare, which, in structuralist film terms, was to some extent an important basis for Snow's exploration and esthetic. It is sad that the most important film maker currently working (Warhol has long given up to his untalented assistants) receives much-needed and honestly-held critical attention through the dubious intelligence and esthetically backward critical approach of Annette Michelson in *Artforum*. But the cover was beautiful. And at least she *tried*. Which is more than one can say for most ART critics.

—Peter Gidal
London



(Courtesy of Hollis Frampton.)

Dear Mr. Gidal:

You could not, of course, suspect that your letter addressed to the Editor would reach, in fact, that hybrid of Contributor and Guest Editor for this special film issue of *Artforum*, myself. But then, I could not know that the very same mail would bring me your brief article on Snow, published in *Cinema*, no. 8. Since chance has focused your views in this unexpected emphasis of superimposition, I'm allowing us the luxury of direct communication, setting aside the convention which has Correspondent and Writer talking to one another through the fictive mediation of the Editor. I do this not because I want to parry or return your thrusts at my own essay, but because your letter does raise, ultimately and implicitly if not directly, a question which deserves reply.

First things first, however. Your own text on Snow begins with the remark that *Wavelength* "is considered by many film makers, a seminal, perhaps great film and is also somehow the test of an audience; if you can let yourself get into *Wavelength* you're at least not on the opposite end of the dialectic." And yet, to judge from the tenor and tone of your letter, despite our mutual enthusiasm for the film (you are, I observe, somewhat more cautious in your judgment, advancing the opinions of "many film makers" rather than your own as to its being "perhaps" a great film), despite our agreement upon its importance, you seem to feel, at the very least, that you and I do indeed inhabit "opposite ends" of that "dialectic" whose terms remain undefined in your article as in your letter, but whose character and range one can begin to deduce.

Trying to account for this contradiction and for the tone of your letter, I do entertain the possibility

of that passionate dissent common in the context of shared tastes. But it becomes obvious that I've been drastically misread. The "narrative integrity of those comedies and westerns" is a descriptive phrase, in no way normatively intended; it refers to the quality of being whole or entire, and thus to that spatio-temporal continuity which is the formal postulate of those *genre* films, and its use should hardly have elicited from an attentive reader the judgment of my own position as "backward." The notion is familiar, I should imagine, to yourself as to any film critic, as one element in that conservative Bazinian esthetic spontaneously anticipated in the critical work of Farber, the most original and distinguished American exponent of the tradition of cinematic "realism." You will, by the way, find this postulate examined in some critical detail in an essay of mine on Bazin, published in the June, 1967 issue of *Artforum*, a copy of which is on its way to you, for it alludes to the special implications of Warhol's work when seen in that particular theoretical context.

As to Snow's redefinition of "filmic space as that of action," surely you might have perceived that the object of discussion was precisely that: the manner and importance of that *redefinition* of action as the movement of the camera itself. This kind of redefinition, neither so dreadfully obvious nor so byzantine in its perversity as you suggest, is made by major artists in almost any medium one could name. Drawing, however, upon art-historical precedents, one might see Michael Snow's work with regard to the dynamics of expectation, contingent upon the playing out of spatio-temporal *données* as analogous to Jasper Johns' redefinition of pictorial space as compounded of actualization and representation.

While I do agree with you as to

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the seminal importance of Warhol's work (discussed, as I'm sure you will be pleased to find, with clarity and rare sophistication by Stephen Koch elsewhere in this issue), I imagine that upon reflection you might agree that the initial installment of an extensive presentation of a major artist could not examine its context in entirety. (Did you really not notice that the published text was marked "Part One," thereby informing the reader of more to come?) It seemed preferable, then, in that installment, to situate Snow historically, stylistically, between the radically antithetical formal options provided by Brakhage and Warhol, developing them in order.

A similar reply must be offered to your observations on my discussion of the nature and role of expectation and its transmutation in *Wavelength*. This is, admittedly, a complex matter hardly clarified by your impatient claim that "nothing increases expectation more than Warhol's stare which in structuralist terms (italics mine) was to some extent an important basis for Snow's exploration and esthetic." To my own mind, limited perhaps by formation in the Paris of the '60s, "structuralist terms" simply cannot suggest themselves with any clarity or relevance in the context of our particular discussion. I am, you see, unwilling to impute to anyone not yet demonstrably guilty, the sophomoric misappropriation of structuralist vocabulary current in precisely those Anglo-American critical circles concerned with "model-oriented" modes of film-making which you so distrust. I am assuming that you, of all people, are not suggesting imposition of those analytical grills now applied to the narrative work of Hawks, Ford, Truffaut, and Fuller in that *élan* of academic euphoria which has succeeded the provincial bewilderment attendant upon the

belated discovery of *la politique des auteurs*.

No, I suspect instead an allusion to the seminal article on structural film (another matter entirely), published in the Summer, 1969 issue of *Film Culture* and now reprinted in *The Film Culture Reader*, published by Praeger in 1970, in which both Snow and Warhol are discussed. I am thus led to suspect as well that your haste in reading is equaled only by your haste in writing, and that these, rather than "knowledge and intuition as a film goer, however simple-minded," are responsible for the curiously exacerbated tone and contradictions of your attack, since as such it must be finally acknowledged.

For you are, of course, by no means a "simpleminded film goer"; you are, in fact, as you elaborately explained to your readers in *Cinema*, a film maker, and you are, as well, the author of a monograph on Warhol. Yet Critic and Artist have chosen the guise of 'simplemindedness' and the strategy of hasty and inaccurate attack, disdaining to consider the reasons for which critics with allegiances so dissimilar as those of Farber and myself could unite in our enthusiasm for this particular master work. I now invite you to consider how it is that writers of such obvious temperamental differences as yourself and myself should care so passionately for the same film. The answer, explicitly given as one main focus of my essay, lies of course in Snow's transcendence of those antinomies and contradictions revived in the rhetoric of your letter.

It is true that my conviction as to the nature and importance of that transcendence and its redefining function is grounded in an interest in critical traditions richer than that of film — in the history and criticism of art and music, in certain methodological options offered by contem-

porary philosophy. And, since one is, in situations of this sort, grateful for small mercies, I'm not inclined to reject the concession that "at least she tried. Which is more than one can say for most ART critics." (Given the claim to 'simplemindedness' that concession is understandably reluctant.) I'm even less tempted to claim the dubious prestige of the 'real' FILM critic, though instances of film-critical activity are scattered throughout a few other periodicals.

For, if most ART critics have not been 'trying' very hard, most FILM critics now at work are simply not, nor ever will be, equipped for the critical task on the level which the present flowering of cinema in this country demands. This present issue of *Artforum* is, then, designed to evoke — largely through the work of younger critics — for some of the artists, critics, and their audiences, who compose a visually literate public here and abroad, the urgency of recognition for an achievement whose importance will eventually be seen as comparable to that of American painting in the 1950s and onwards.

That achievement is radically indebted to the disciplined energy, the generosity and prescience of men like Jonas Mekas — a statement which is no sooner made than it forces remembrance that there is indeed none quite like him. That achievement is, moreover, amply and cogently set forth in the collection of New York's newest film museum and research center, the Anthology Film Archives, for whose assistance every contributor to this film issue is grateful.

Advanced film-making in this country demands to be studied in relation to the growing constriction of pictorial and sculptural energies and the inflation of an economy which has reactivated, through the desperate polarity of 'conceptual'

and 'body' art, the esthetic syndrome of that ancient obstinate ma-lady, philosophical dualism.

The existence of Anthology is a radical critical gesture, the nature of its critical function described below in Mekas' letter which I recommend for its firmness and openness. It has made accessible a corpus of advanced filmic art set in a rich, if incomplete, context, and in projection conditions — those of an "Invisible Cinema" — superior to those of any institution in this city.

It therefore now seems possible that the kind of training in perception and in the techniques of description gained through art-critical experience, that the kinds of models or working methods offered by the very rich tradition of Anglo-American criticism (to cite only one possible source), when made available to a new generation of film goers, may altogether translate the level of discourse on film.

The critical task is going to be re-defined by those for whom both reading and writing serve the medium, by those, above all, in whom cinematic consciousness has been heightened by the disciplined readjustment of the perceptive processes which film requires of artist and audience. New critics are demanding a situation in which that cinematic consciousness can develop with a rigor not totally disjoined from generosity. It is time for a transvaluation of values; only then will conventions perpetuated in the disingenuous rhetoric of intellectual pathos and personal coquetry be dissolved.

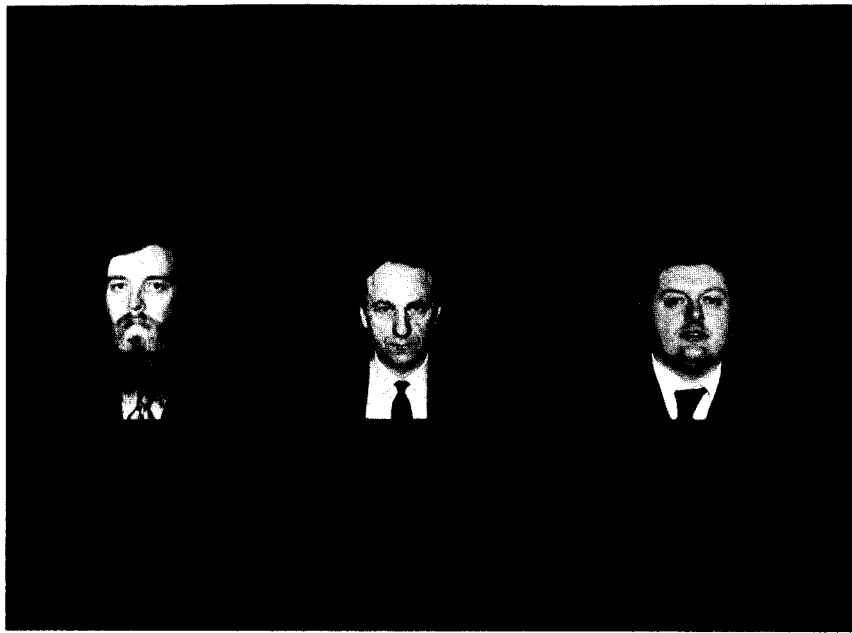
—Annette Michelson
New York City

Dear Annette:

You asked me, last night, how the Film Selection Committee (of Anthology Film Archives) was chosen. We rambled around that question, last night. Today, I thought, I'll make an attempt to put it down on paper. It's still a ramble. Because there was no clear plan, at the beginning. The plan emerged as we went. It is still in the process of emergence, even today. Because our Selection Committee is not a finite committee; it's a committee in process.

And so is Anthology Film Archives: it's a process of defining or, rather, discovering what cinema is. It's a tool. It was clear, from the very beginning, that there wasn't and couldn't be an agreed yardstick about what Film Art *is*, or was, or *will* be. The best thing we could do was to select a few people who, we felt, had experience, vision, and passion to see the achievements of the past and to admit the achievements of the present, in all their variety. Practically, it came down to a certain few key names, such as Lumière, Dziga Vertov, Feuillade, Dreyer, Brakhage, Warhol. We felt there were certain key artists on whom one had to agree *a priori*, otherwise there could be no serious talk about the art of cinema. And as we went through most of the names of candidates for the Committee, names of established film critics, historians, and film makers, we kept crossing them out because of their narrowness. So that the Committee became a young committee, in a sense. All three of us, on whose heads all the early decisions rested — P. Adams Sitney, Jerome Hill, and myself — felt that at this point it was more important to choose the right direction than to achieve Instant Perfection. We knew that our Committee would lack knowledge in certain areas. But that, we knew, we could balance and correct during our coming meetings, as time went on, by inviting authorities in the neglected or less known areas to assist us.

So that the activity of the Selection Committee has to be looked at as a process of investigation into cinema. The selections themselves represent an indication of some of the possibilities of cinema—not selected according to some predetermined rules of what Film Art is, but according to the intuitions of some of the best minds



Anthology Film Archives (Left to right) P. Adams Sitney and Jonas Mekas, Co-directors; Peter Kubelka, Designer of the Invisible Cinema.

making films and writing on cinema today. Very often during our meetings and sessions this became only a question of passion, not knowledge at all. Despite all our elaborations, knowledge, and precisions, this thing that we called passion, this thing kept coming in, as we proceeded with our selection work. It kept coming back and gaining a special meaning, becoming almost a criterion. Whenever, now, we have a serious doubt about a film and get tired arguing, very often we drop into a deep silence and one of us says: "OK, is anyone of us willing to defend this film with a real passion?" Or: "Is there anyone here who is passionately for this film?" And if there is one, we know there is something there that we shouldn't dismiss too easily.

So that now, when yesterday you said that you spoke with P. Adams Sitney and you read the brochure, and you have the impression that we go by some predetermined though undefined ideas of "art" and "avant-garde" — and I know there is an obvious stress on those words in our brochure — then the only way of looking at it is something like this: even the statements and stresses in our brochure are part of the process of discovering the art of cinema. The historical approach to cinema in all the film museums and cinémathèques has been so over-

done that the exaggerated stance that we are taking for the art of cinema is correct. Correct as vision and as passion, not as a formula. We arrived at it by way of passion. As vague as that. If you have the impression, from the brochure or from talking to us, that we are more fixed than that, then it's not true. Because, although our results are precise and unwavering and almost academic, the way we arrive at them is through a process, and that process defies all rules. The way I see it, even *you* are part of that process, we have used even you as part of that passion without your knowing it — you have helped us and are helping us continuously to keep our passion for the art of cinema alive, to grope towards the direction of a possibility of an anthology of cinema not as a dead body of closed works but as an art of cinema in process. If we manage to establish these Anthology Film Archives as an idea and a process, then it won't matter that much if, because of some "wrong" member of the Selection Committee, a few "wrong" films get voted into the Anthology, and our standards dip "down." Some day a young Duchamp from Florida or Missouri will come and he'll set it all "straight" again.

—Jonas Mekas
New York City

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HOLLIS FRAMPTON

"The cinematograph is an invention without a future."—Louis Lumière

Once upon a time, according to reliable sources, history had its own Muse, and her name was Kleio. She presided over the making of a class of verbal artifacts that extends from a half-light of written legend through, possibly, Gibbon.

These artifacts shared the assumption that events are numerous and replete beyond the comprehension of a single mind. They proposed no compact systematic substitute for their concatenated world; rather, they made up an open set of *rational fictions* within that world.

As made things strong in their own immanence, these fictions bid as fairly for our contemplative energy as any other human fabrications. They are, finally, about what it felt like to reflect consciously upon the qualities of experience in the times they expound.

In order to generate insights into the formal significance of their *pretext* (that is, "real history"), such fictions employ two tactics. First of all, they annihilate naive intuitions of causality by deliberately ignoring mere temporal chronology. And then, to our cultural dismay, they dispense, largely, with the fairly recent inventions we call *facts*.

These fictions were what we may call *meta-histories* of event. They remain events in themselves.

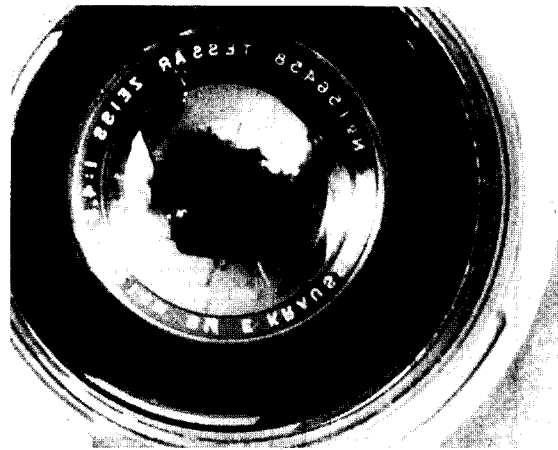
It is reasonable to assume that Dean Swift, desiring in his rage to confound the West, invented *the fact*.

A *fact* is the indivisible module out of which systematic substitutes for experience are built. Hugh Kenner, in *The Counterfeiters*, cites a luminous anecdote from the seed-time of *the fact*. Swift's contemporary savants fed dice to a dog. They (the dice) passed through the dog visibly unchanged, but with their weight halved. Thenceforth a dog was to be defined as a device for (among other things) halving the weight of dice.

The world contained only a denumerable list of *things*. Any *thing* could be considered simply as the intersection of a finite number of *facts*. Knowledge, then, was *the sum of all discoverable facts*.

Very many factual daubs were required, of course, to paint a true picture of the world; but the invention of *the fact* represented, from the rising mechanistic point of view, a gratifying diminution of horsepower requirement from a time when knowledge had been *the factorial of all conceivable contexts*.

It is this shift in the definition of knowledge that Swift satirizes in *Gulliver's Travels*, and Pope



Dziga Vertov. *The Man with the Movie Camera*, 1929.

FOR A METAHISTORY OF FILM:

COMMONPLACE NOTES AND HYPOTHESES

laments in *The Dunciad*.

The new view went unquestioned for generations. In most quarters it still obtains: from which it should be quite clear that we do not all live in the same time.

Who first centered his thumbs on Kleio's windpipe is anyone's guess, but I am inclined to blame Gotthold Lessing. His squabbling progeny, the quaintly disinterested art historians of the 19th century, lent a willing hand in finishing her off. They had Science behind them. Science favored *the fact* because *the fact* seemed to favor predictability. Hoping to incorporate prophecy wholesale into their imperium, 19th-century historians went whole hog for *the fact*, and headfirst into what James Joyce later called the "nightmare" of history.

There were, quite simply, too *many facts*.

They adopted the self-contradictory stratagem of "selecting" quintessential samples, and conjuring from them hundred-legged theories of practically everything. They had backed themselves into a discriminatory trap, and Werner Heisenberg wasn't there to save them: it was a time of utmost certainty.

Isaac Newton spent the last part of his life writing a score of Latin volumes on religion: the nascent atomization of knowledge was a fierce wind from which he took shelter in his age. As young physicists, he and Leibniz had inherited the analytic geometry of Descartes, and the triumph of its use by Kepler to predict the motions of the planets. Algebraic equations dealt well enough with the conic sections, but Newton was absorbed by the motion of bodies that describe more intricate paths.

Complex movement in space and time was difficult to make over into numbers. The number "one" was much too large; the mathematical *fact* must be vastly smaller. Even the arithmetic unit was surely an immense structure built of tiny stones: infinitesimal *calculi*, indivisible increments.

Given that much, it was a short step to the assumption that motion consists of an endless succession of brief instants during which there is only stillness. Then motion could be factually defined as the set of differences among a series of static postures.

Zeno had returned with his paradoxes to avenge himself through the deadpan Knight of Physics.

In 1832, Georg Bücher wrote Woyzeck. Evariste Galois died, a victim of political murder, leaving to a friend a last letter which contains the foundations of set theory, or the metahistory

of mathematics. Fox-Talbot and Niépce invented photography. The Belgian physicist Plâteau invented the *phenakistiscope*, the first true cinema.

In the history of cinema these four facts are probably unrelated. In the metahistory of cinema, these four events may ultimately be related.

Fox-Talbot and Niépce invented photography because neither of them could learn to draw, a polite accomplishment comparable to mastery of the tango later and elsewhere.

Plâteau had the Calculus in his mother's milk, so that its assumptions were for him mere reflex. He took an interest in sense-perception and discovered, by staring at the sun for twenty minutes, one of our senses' odder failings, euphemistically called "persistence of vision."

His hybridization of a sensory defect with the Newtonian infinitesimal began vigorously to close a curve whose limbs had been widening since the invention of the alphabet.

Plâteau's little device started putting Humpty Dumpty together again. Like dozens of other dead end marvels, it became a marketable toy, and was succeeded by generically similar novelties: *zoëtrope*, *praktinoscope*, *zoöpraxiscope*.

All of them, unconsciously miming the intellectual process they instigated, took the form of spliceless loops: an eternity of hurdling horses and bouncing balls.

And they were all hand-drawn. Photography was not mapped back upon the sparse terrain of palaeocinema until the first photographic *phenakistiscope* was made, in 1968.

The union of cinema and the photographic effect followed a clumsy mutual seduction spanning six decades. There was a near-assignation in the vast *oeuvre* of Eadweard Muybridge, before whose fact-making battery of cameras thousands paraded their curiously obsolete bodies.

In one sequence, piercingly suggestive of future intricacies, the wizard himself, a paunchy naked old man, carried a chair into the frame, sat down, and glared ferociously back at his cameras.

But the series suggested to Muybridge only the ready-made analogy of book space: successive, randomly accessible, anisotropic with respect to time. Accordingly, he published them as editions of plates.

The crucial tryst was postponed, to await the protection of two brothers bearing the singularly appropriate name of Lumière.

The relationship between cinema and still photography is supposed to present a vexed question. Received wisdom on the subject is of the chicken/egg variety: cinema somehow "accelerates" * still photographs into motion.

Implicit is the assumption that cinema is a special case of the catholic still photograph. Since there is no discoverable necessity within the visual logic of still photographs that de-

mands such "acceleration," it is hard to see how it must ever happen at all.

It is an historic commonplace that the discovery of special cases precedes in time the extrapolation of general laws. (For instance, the right triangle with rational sides measuring 3, 4, and 5 units is older than Pythagoras.) Photography predates the photographic cinema.

So I propose to extricate cinema from this circular maze by superimposing on it a second labyrinth (containing an exit) — by positing something that has by now begun to come to concrete actuality: we might agree to call it an *infinite cinema*.

A polymorphous camera has always turned, and will turn forever, its lens focussed upon all the appearances of the world. Before the invention of still photography, the frames of the infinite cinema were blank, black leader; then a few images began to appear upon the endless ribbon of film. Since the birth of the photographic cinema, all the frames are filled with images.

There is nothing in the structural logic of the cinema film strip that precludes sequestering any single image. A still photograph is simply an

isolated frame "taken" out of the *infinite cinema*.

History views the marriage of cinema and the photograph as one of convenience; metahistory must look upon it as one of necessity.

The camera deals, in some way or other, with every particle of information present within its field of view; it is wholly indiscriminate. Photographs, to the joy or misery of all who make them, invariably tell us more than we want to know.

The ultimate structure of a photographic image seems to elude us at the same rate as the ultimate structure of any other natural object. Unlike graphic images, which decay under close scrutiny into factual patterns of dots or lines, the photograph seems a virtually perfect *continuum*. Hence the poignancy of its illusions: their amplitude instantly made the photograph — within the very heart of mechanism — the subversive restorer of *contextual* knowledge seemingly coterminous with the whole sensible world.

Cinema could already claim — from within the same *nexus* — a complementary feat: the resurrection of bodies in space from their dismembered trajectories.

The expected consummation took place at quitting time in a French factory, on a sunny afternoon towards the end of the century, as smiling girls waved and cheered. The immediate issue was an exceptional machine.

Typically, all that survives intact of an era is the art form it invents for itself. Potsherds and garbage dumps are left from neolithic times, but the practice of painting continues unbroken from Lascaux to the present. We may surmise that music comes to us from a more remote age, when the cables were first strung for the vertebrate nervous system.

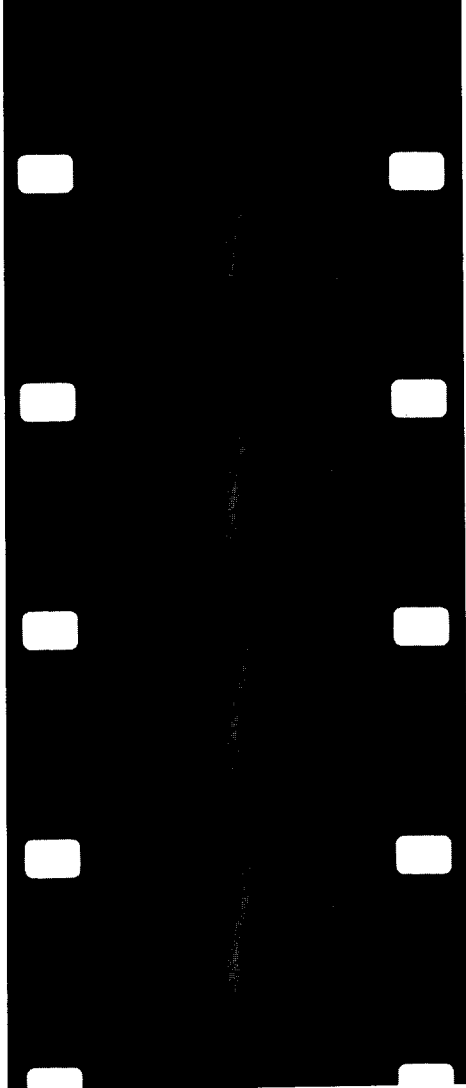
Such inventions originally served the end of sheer survival. The nightingale sings to charm the girls. Cave paintings presumably assisted the hunt; poems, Confucius tells us in the *Analects*, teach the names of animals and plants: survival for our species depends upon our having correct information at the right time.

As one era slowly dissolves into the next, some individuals metabolize the former means for physical survival into new means for psychic survival. These latter we call art. They promote the life of human consciousness by nourishing our affections, by reincarnating our perceptual substance, by affirming, imitating, reifying the process of consciousness itself.

What I am suggesting, to put it quite simply, is that no activity can become an art until its proper epoch has ended and it has dwindled, as an aid to gut survival, into total obsolescence.

I was born during the Age of Machines.

A machine was a thing made up of distinguishable "parts," organized in imitation of some function of the human body. Machines were said to "work." How a machine "worked" was read-



Filmstrip : Hollis Frampton.

ily apparent to an adept, from inspection of the shape of its "parts." The physical principles by which machines "worked" were intuitively verifiable.

The cinema was the typical survival-form of the Age of Machines. Together with its subset of still photographs, it performed prizeworthy functions: it taught and reminded us (after what then seemed a bearable delay) how things looked, how things worked, how to do things . . . and, of course (by example), how to feel and think.

We believed it would go on forever, but when I was a little boy, the Age of Machines ended. We should not be misled by the electric can opener: small machines proliferate now as though they were going out of style because they are doing precisely that.

Cinema is the Last Machine. It is probably the last art that will reach the mind through the senses.

It is customary to mark the end of the Age of Machines at the advent of video. The point in time is imprecise: I prefer radar, which replaced the mechanical reconnaissance aircraft with a static anonymous black box. Its introduction coincides quite closely with the making of Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*, and Willard Maas' *Geography of the Body*.

The notion that there was some exact instant at which the tables turned, and cinema passed into obsolescence and thereby into art, is an appealing fiction that implies a special task for the metahistorian of cinema.

The *historian* of cinema faces an appalling problem. Seeking in his subject some principle of intelligibility, he is obliged to make himself responsible for every frame of film in existence. For the history of cinema consists precisely of every film that has ever been made, for any purpose whatever.

Of the whole *corpus* the likes of *Potemkin* make up a numbingly small fraction. The balance includes instructional films, sing-alongs, endoscopic cinematography, and much, much more. The historian dares neither select nor ignore, for if he does, the treasure will surely escape him.

The metahistorian of cinema, on the other hand, is occupied with inventing a *tradition*, that is, a coherent wieldy set of discrete monuments, meant to inseminate resonant consistency into the growing body of his art.

Such works may not exist, and then it is his duty to make them. Or they may exist already, somewhere *outside* the intentional precincts of the art (for instance, in the prehistory of cinematic art, before 1943). And then he must *re-make* them.

There is no evidence in the structural logic of the filmstrip that distinguishes "footage" from a "finished" work. Thus, any piece of film may

be regarded as "footage," for use in any imaginable way to construct or reconstruct a new work.

Therefore, it may be possible for the metahistorian to take old work as "footage," and construct from it *identical* new work necessary to a tradition.

Wherever this is impossible, through loss or damage, new footage must be made. The result will be perfectly similar to the earlier work, but "almost infinitely richer."

Cinema is a Greek word that means "movie." The illusion of movement is certainly an accustomed adjunct of the film image, but that illusion rests upon the assumption that the rate of change between successive frames may vary only within rather narrow limits. There is nothing in the structural logic of the filmstrip that can justify such an assumption. Therefore we reject it. From now on we will call our art simply: *film*.

The *infinite film* contains an infinity of endless passages wherein no frame resembles any other in the slightest degree, and a further infinity of passages wherein successive frames are as nearly identical as intelligence can make them.

I have called film the Last Machine.

From what we can recall of them, machines agreed roughly with mammals in range of size. The machine called film is an exception.

We are used to thinking of camera and projector as machines, but they are not. They are "parts." The flexible film strip is as much a "part" of the *film machine* as the projectile is part of a firearm. The extant rolls of film outbulk the other parts of the machine by many orders of magnitude.

Since all the "parts" fit together, the sum of all film, all projectors and all cameras in the world constitutes *one machine*, which is by far the largest and most ambitious single artifact yet conceived and made by man (with the exception of the human species itself). The machine grows by many millions of feet of raw stock every day.

It is not surprising that something so large could utterly engulf and digest the whole substance of the Age of Machines (machines and all), and finally supplant the entirety with its illusory flesh. Having devoured all else, the *film machine* is the lone survivor.

If we are indeed doomed to the comically convergent task of dismantling the universe, and fabricating from its stuff an artifact called "*The Universe*," it is reasonable to suppose that such an artifact will resemble the vaults of an endless film archive built to house, in eternal cold storage, the *infinite film*.

If film strip and projector are parts of the same machine, then "a film" may be defined operationally as "whatever will pass through a projector." The least thing that will do that is nothing at all. Such a film has been made. It is the only *unique* film in existence.

Twenty years ago, in the grip of adolescent needs to 'modernize' myself, I was entranced by Schopenhauer's remark that "all the arts aspire to the condition of music," which I then understood to approve of music's freedom from reference to events outside itself.

Now I expound, and attempt to practice, an art that feeds upon illusions and references despised or rejected by other arts. But it occurs to me that film meets what may be, after all, the prime condition of music: *it produces no object*.

The western musician does not ordinarily *make* music; his notation encodes a set of instructions for those who do. A score bears the sort of resemblance to music that the genetic helix bears to a living organism. To exist, music requires to be *performed*, a difficulty that John Cage abjures in the preface to *A Year from Monday*, where he points out that making music has hitherto largely consisted in telling other people what to do.

The act of making a film, of physically assembling the film strip, *feels* somewhat like making an object: that film artists have seized the materiality of film is of inestimable importance, and film certainly invites examination at this level. But at the instant the film is completed, the "object" vanishes. The film strip is an elegant device for modulating standardized beams of energy. The phantom work itself transpires upon the screen as its notation is expended by a mechanical virtuoso performer, the projector.

The metahistorian of film generates for himself the problem of deriving a complete tradition from nothing more than the most obvious material limits of the *total* film machine. It should be possible, he speculates, to pass from *The Flicker* through *Unsere Afrikareise*, or *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, or *La Région Centrale* and beyond, in finite steps (each step a film), by exercising only *one* perfectly rational option at each move. The problem is analogous to that of the Knight's Tour in chess.

Understood literally, it is insoluble, hopelessly so. The paths open to the Knight fork often (to reconverge God knows where). The board is a matrix of rows and columns beyond reckoning, whereon no chosen starting point may be defended with confidence.

Nevertheless, I glimpse the possibility of constructing a film that will be a kind of synoptic conjugation of such a tour — a Tour of tours, so to speak, of the *infinite* film, or of all knowledge, which amounts to the same thing. Rather, some such possibility presents itself insistently to my imagination, disguised as the germ of a plan for execution.

Film has finally attracted its own Muse. Her name is *Insomnia*. ■

¹The verb is McLuhan's who (as usual) swallows the whole bait, along with its attached heavy sinker.



Joyce Wieland, Stills from *La Raison Avant La Passion*, 1967-69.

“TRUE PATRIOT LOVE”: THE FILMS OF JOYCE WIELAND

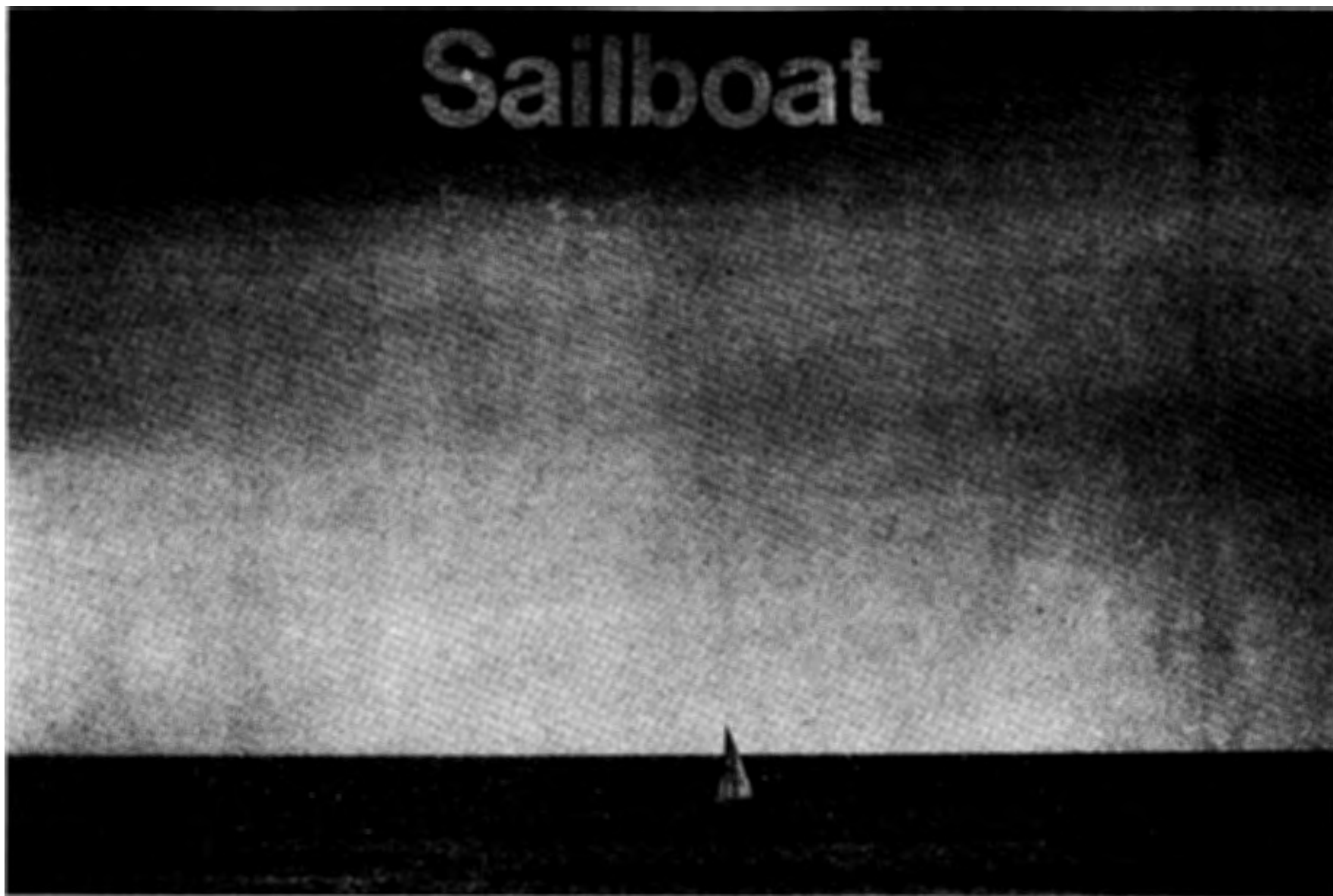
REGINA CORNWELL

Joyce Wieland's films elude easy categorization. The body of work as a whole is varied — there are films of a formal nature, and others which are less so. Several are political, concerned with technology, ecology, and her native land, Canada. Her films are informed by her involvement in other, more directly tactile art forms—painting, drawing, construction — and in crafts such as quilting. She makes padded wall hangings, pillowed quilts, and embroidery. There is an evident concern with textures and/or colors and their relationships within the frame and within the shaping of each film as a whole. There is, moreover, a cross-fertilization process at work between film and the other art forms in which she works. For instance, in *Hand Tinting*, she used fabric dyes to individually color sections of the film, and the perforations which appear in the segments of tinted leader between shots and scenes were made with her quilting needles.

While Wieland's use of titling and subtitling first came from her early work in commercial animation, and appears in four of her personal films to date, she has also incorporated it into her drawing, painting, and quilting. In fact, while making the film, *La Raison Avant La Passion*, she did three other related art works, a “Reason over Passion” etching and a pair of quilts with large stuffed letters, one bearing the inscription in French and the other in English.

Since 1967, Wieland has centered more and more of her artistic energies in film. In considering her work from this period, those short films of a more formal nature — *Sailboat*, 1933, *Dripping Water* and *Hand Tinting* — will be examined first. Chronologically, *Sailboat* (1967-68) is the earliest of these. In a series of shots a sailboat is seen moving across the screen from left to right. The title is superimposed on the screen for the duration of the film. Its sound consists of waves mixed with an airplane engine and occasional voices. None of the shots is repeated,

but the same boats recur because Wieland carefully anticipated them with her camera by moving down the shore to await their reentry into the frame. A number of the shots are animated, as when a boat appears to pop back from the right to the center and off right again. Several other small things occur to disrupt expectancies and make the viewer attend to the images more carefully. As the last two boats begin to fade into the horizon, they seem, at the same time, to be absorbed by the more pronounced film grain in these very light shots. This and other instances in *Sailboat* stress film's dual nature, on the one hand, presenting images, while at the same time breaking through the illusions to expose the film material itself. And, as a further example, even while attending to the image, one is forced to note the “presence” of the boats somewhere off-frame, and thus also to note the frame itself, delimiting the image. And the flat letters of the title contrast sharply with the illusory images over which they are superimposed.



Joyce Wieland, Still from *Sailboat*, 1967-1968.

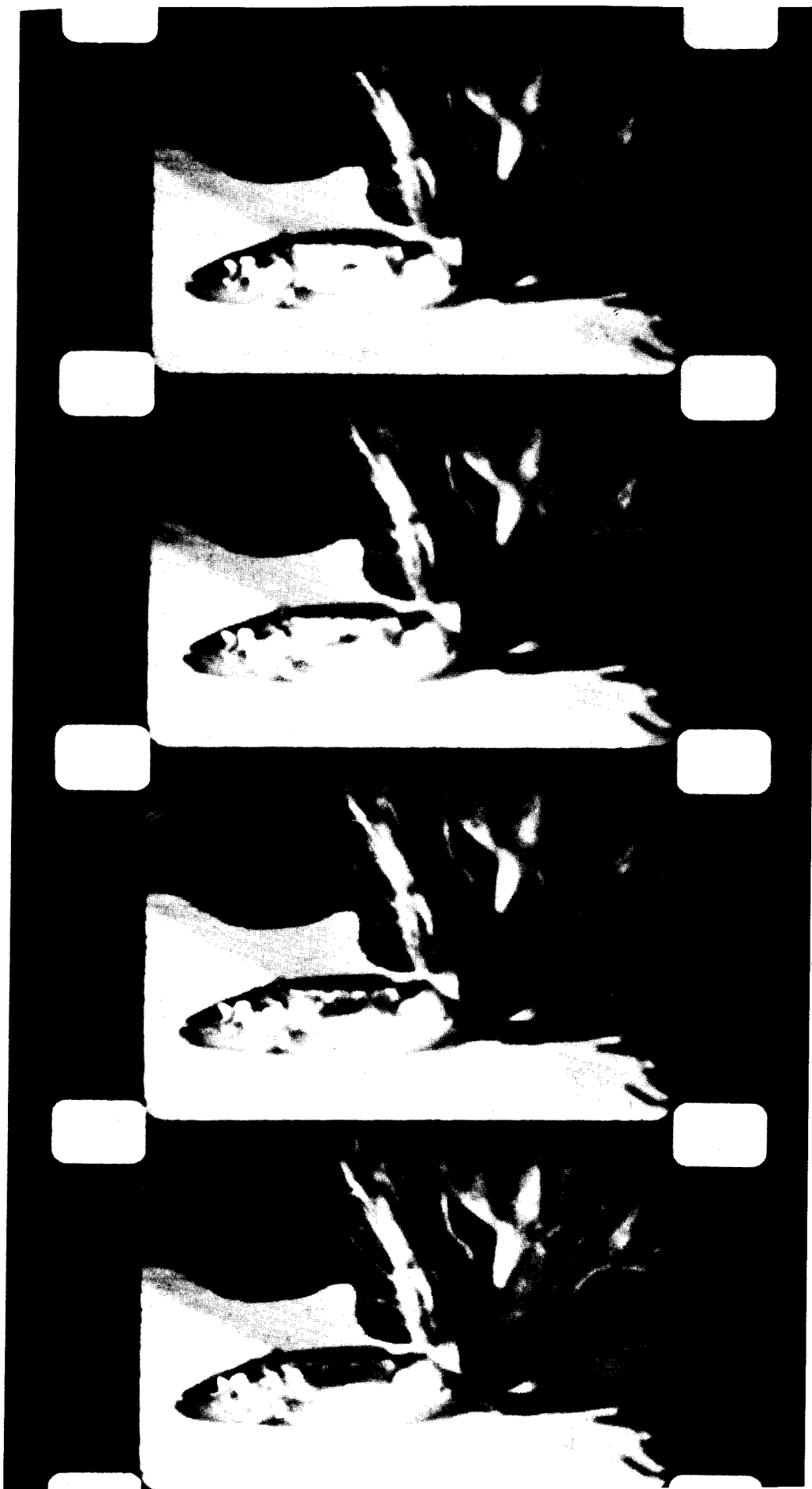
While the superimposed title in *Sailboat* literalizes itself through the images, the title *1933* (1967-68) does nothing of the kind. Wieland commented that one day after shooting she returned home with about thirty feet of film remaining in her camera and proceeded to empty it by filming the street scene below. She explains in notes: "When editing then what I considered the real footage I kept coming across the small piece of film of the street. Finally I junked the real film for the accidental footage of the street. It was a beautiful piece of blue street. . . . So I made the right number of prints of it plus fogged ends." The street scene with the white streaked end is loop-printed ten times, and *1933* appears systematically on the street scene for only the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth loops. Wieland says of her choice of the name: ". . . a title that causes more questions than the film has answers." And later, that it "makes you think of a film's beginning. But, this is the film." While the meaning of the title, *1933*, is

enigmatic and has no real and ostensible relationship to the film's street scene and white streaked section, in its systematic use as subtitle, it becomes an image incorporated into the film. It is not the title of a longer work, but an integral part of the work.

And while the title remains unexplained, so does the brief loop action of the street in fast motion, slowing down for a moment and then resuming its speed. It is merely a fragment of incomplete action, moving in and out of and around the frame. Each time something else is perceived. Not only is the street footage seen over and over, but it is seen in unreal time. And its illusory three-dimensionality is sharply contrasted with the flatness of the white section. Even more markedly than in *Sailboat*, all of these factors become, to use film maker Ken Jacobs' term, "illusion-defeating devices," which call attention to the strip of film as film. And the white dominated sections incorporated into the film assert themselves as valid images, equal

to the street scenes.

Wieland's most recent work, *Dripping Water* (1969), was conceived by her and directed with her husband, artist and film maker, Michael Snow. The idea came from a tape made by Snow of dripping water and street sounds, and this tape accompanies the film image. A section of the dish into which the water is seen dripping is offscreen, and is apparently the source of the water's escape, for the water level in the dish remains the same throughout the film. The offscreen activity and the fixed camera, never moving to reveal the source of the water nor its escape, nor the source of street noises heard on the sound track, serve to emphasize the film frame. One becomes acutely aware of these presences somewhere beyond the perimeters of the frame. The irregularity of the dripping causes curious patterns to form which, at certain rhythms, look like oscillating grains of film emulsion, reminding one again of the film material itself. The sound of the water is at times syn-



Joyce Wieland, Frame enlargement from *Catfood*, 1968.

chronous and other times asynchronous with the visual drip, and this vacillation draws the viewer's attention more closely to the image, heightening the complexity of the experience.

In *Hand Tinting* (1967-68) poor young white and black women in an "education center" dance, swim, and observe each other's recreation. For this work, Wieland used black and white outtakes from a Job Corps Project on which she worked as a camerawoman in 1965-66, and as described earlier, hand tinted the footage with fabric dyes. Various shots are repeated in different tints. Yellows, reds, blues, violets, and greens dominate. As in *1933*, no action is completed and every action is fragmented. Often movements seem frustrated because of the repetitions and the occasional alterations in camera speed. The abstractions created by the medium shots and close-ups, by the repeated shots, and by the tinting, often streaked and uneven as if tie-dyed, disorient the viewer. Moreover, the film's silence underscores the strange and sad setting. While creating a series of single and group portraits of the young women, Wieland at the same time allows the permutations to protrude upon the images. The short repetitions, the tints and their irregularities, the added tinted sections between shots and scenes with their occasional perforations, the film grain which at times becomes pronounced, and the fleeting segments of other unrelated footage—the very things which break through the illusions, paradoxically strengthen the work both as portrait and as film object.

Catfood and *Rat Life and Diet in North America*, both made in 1968, have as their titles suggest, animals as subjects. Less concerned with film's dual potential for producing tactile illusions and at the same time breaking through these illusions and pointing to the materials of film, as in the works discussed above, these films concentrate on the images, highlighted through color and texture. In *Catfood*, a large, sensuous and relaxed cat approaches one fish at a time and begins to eat, usually starting at the fish's tail. Soft fur and whiskers are contrasted with firm and scaled silver blue and silver green bodies. There is a curious impression of displacement created by the cat eating the dead fish on a white tablecloth, accompanied by the sounds of the sea. As the film maker herself describes it, it is as if the cat were in a box, "enclosed with the sound of the sea." The sound, because it is present throughout the film, and although it is spatially displaced, enforces the feeling of continuity in time. And the use of close-ups and medium shots on the cat and his eating habits concentrates it even further.

In notes for *Rat Life and Diet in North America*, Wieland writes: "I shot the gerbils for six months, putting different things in their cages: food, flowers, cherries, grass, etc. . . . When I put them in the sink in an inch of water I began to see what the film was about . . . a story

of revolution and escape." It is a beast fable with gerbils as the oppressed and the cats as the oppressors. Once again titles are used, but not as in *Sailboat* and 1933; here sometimes they are flashed on the screen over action, at other times they serve to introduce subsequent episodes. The allegory relates the escape of the gerbils from an American political prison in 1968 to freedom in Canada, and how they take up organic gardening in the absence of DDT, occupy a millionaire's table, and enjoy a cherry festival and flower ceremony. However, it ends on a less than humorous note: an American invasion. The film is very meticulously shot and controlled, and even more than in *Catfood*, the color and delicacy of Wieland's approach to the animals and their surroundings create sensuously textured images and relationships.

With *Rat Life and Diet in North America* as the first, *La Raison Avant La Passion* (1967-69) becomes the second part of what Wieland characterizes as a political trilogy, to be completed by a work still in the planning stages, *True Patriot Love*. *La Raison Avant La Passion* is her longest film to date, and takes the form of a prelude and three parts. In the prelude, the Canadian theme is unfurled in the shape of the new Canadian flag and the singing of "O Canada." Part I begins with Pierre Trudeau's statement in French and English: "*La raison avant la passion; c'est la thème du tous mes écrits.*" / "Reason over passion; that is the theme of all my writing." The first and third parts consist of a journey across Canada; in the center section, a French lesson is followed by a portrait of the prime minister. As Wieland has stated in notes: "The

Trudeau portrait is sandwiched into my film where Ontario should be."

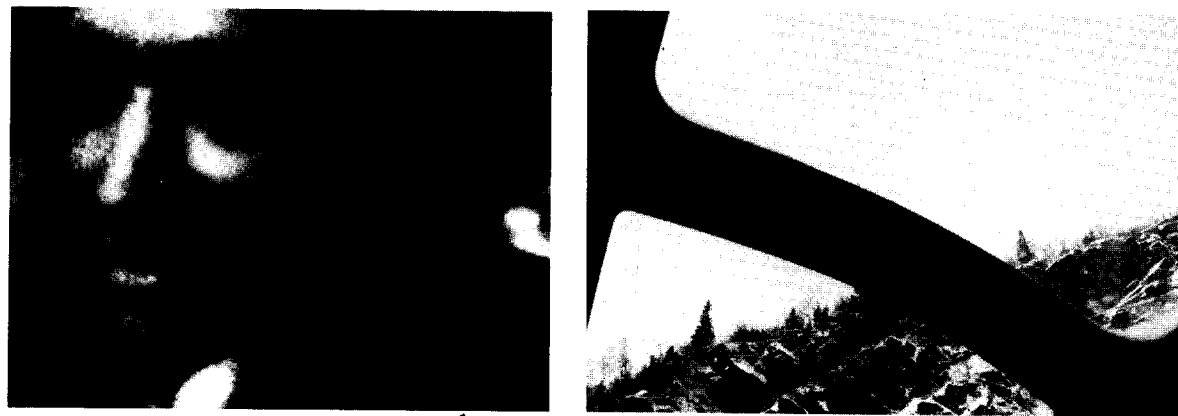
The film opens on shots of waves at Cape Breton on the Atlantic and ends at Vancouver on the Pacific with a postcard shot of a steamer, accompanied by "O Canada." It avoids cities for the most part and concentrates on the expanses of fields, lakes, streams, and mountains. There is almost constant movement during the first and third parts; when there is no movement of the camera, we see a figure crossing the screen, or waves in water or wind through flowers and trees. Across and into the illusionistically deep space of the screen, the film proceeds, revealing the beauty of the land through car and train windows, shot at different times of day, on various stocks and at varying exposures. These streams of moving abstractions remain always concrete, bound by the textures of the changing water, sky, and landscapes. And the illusions of depth are constantly qualified by the flat computerized permutations of the English phrase, "reason over passion," which flash on the screen and over the images in 537 different forms.

Wieland commented in an interview on the heard but unseen language lesson which precedes the Trudeau portrait: "The French lesson is a direct reference to Trudeau's idea of bilingualism. We must all speak French so that the French Canadian will feel at home in his own country. I found the teaching record in a stack of our old records. Luckily the man on the disc pretending to be a school child is named Pierre. And he is supposedly only eight years old." At the same time the lesson satirizes the simplistic and inadequate level at which the cul-

tural need for bilingualism has been fulfilled. The portrait of Trudeau stands in the heart of the film. Is it an homage or a criticism? Or is it simply meant to be ambiguous? It was shot when Trudeau was on his way to the prime ministry, at a time when he was Canada's hope. As American film critic Manny Farber describes it in *Artforum* (February, 1970): "*La Raison Avant La Passion* is a clutter of love for Canada, done in the nick of time before it changes completely into a scrubby Buffalo suburb."

As a Canadian, Wieland feels strongly about the politics of technology and the presence of U.S. technological enterprises in Canada which are gradually spreading across the country, in economic and spiritual domination. While this concern is evident in *Rat Life and Diet in North America* and implicit in *La Raison Avant La Passion*, her next long work, *True Patriot Love*, subtitled: *A Canadian Love, Technology, Leadership and Art Story*, will be her most direct film statement on the subject. A romantic narrative, it will be formal in conception. Working on the script has occupied Wieland for the past two years and it should be four or five years before the projected 2½-hour work is ready. *True Patriot Love* will be a bilingual allegory. Subtitles will be used in a form more complex than in any of her previous films. Set in Canada in 1919, the film will include both real and fantasy technology. French and English cultural differences and difficulties will be stressed.

The dialogue between film and other media will be continued in *True Patriot Love*. One can really predict of that dialogue only that it will proceed in unique ways. ■



Joyce Wieland, Stills from *La Raison Avant La Passion*, 1967-1969.

WANDA BERSHEN

Since its beginnings in the 1940s, American experimental film has had, as a body of work, a fundamentally evocative intent. A primary concern was the recognition of how central the pre-conscious and irrational level of experience is to all human behavior. Like poetry, these films attempted to appeal directly, by means of potent imagery and rhythmic structure, to our emotions (*i.e.*, our irrational and too often subconscious level of experience). The film makers were eager to explore *how* experience is constructed, how in fact the various levels of our minds interact in any given set of circumstances.

Their investigations fell more or less under the label of Surrealism, either lyrical (Deren, Broughton, early Brakhage) or epic (Anger, Markopoulos, later Brakhage). Labels notwithstanding, these films did share with Surrealism a fundamentally *psychological* concern. The nature of experience for these film makers was predicated upon an understanding of the conscious, rational, empirical mode as *norm*.

Evidence of a different and broader understanding of the nature of experience within the American art community began to emerge in the 1960s. There was a shift of emphasis from the *things* we experience (and thereby come to know) like objects, people, emotions, time, and

space, to the actual *process of experiencing*, the ways in which we come to *know* anything. That shift may be described as a repudiation of *psychology* in favor of *epistemology*.

Since 1964 a development called structural cinema has taken place which appears to have initiated an epistemological stage in this exploration of the nature of experiencing. Rather than trying to evoke a complex, many-layered experience, these films try to isolate single aspects of that complexity for close examination by the viewer. The films within this definition are minimal both in terms of elaborate technique and symbolic content.

Typically a structural film confines itself to

BEAUTY MAY BECOME A USELESS SENTIMENT AND ART SOMETHING BETWEEN ALGEBRA AND MUSIC—Flaubert, *Correspondence*, September 4, 1852.

Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 'X'.



**“ZORNS
LEMMA”**



Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 'Y'.

Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 'Q'.



featuring one or two aspects of experience at a time; the way a single particular space functions in film time (Baillie's *All My Life*), how light works on film (Conrad's *The Flicker*), how color is perceived on film (Sharits' *N:O:T:H:I:N:G*), how time functions within film "space" (Snow's *Wavelength*). Obviously each such issue involves many of the others, and while these films are minimal in certain respects they are immensely complex in others.

P. Adams Sitney has described them as "audio-visual objects whose most striking characteristic is their over-all shape."¹ If there is no "content" in the conventional sense of action, narrative or characters, the structure of the film becomes its only content, and the film itself becomes an object. Like most objects that we encounter it must be examined from all sides, generally sniffed about, and finally fitted in somehow to some category of our experience (presumably the category of "film"). Most conventional narrative films (and, indeed, the film-poem forms previously mentioned) place their viewers within the complex web of their own feelings and responses. Structural films do just the opposite by refusing the viewer all such pleasures, thus producing rather a rude confrontation. What is this thing that calls itself a movie? That is the underlying question posed by structural cinema. Isolating the various parts of the experience of watching a film seems an efficient way to explore such complex phenomena as time and space and rhythm and human perception. After a time the evidence gleaned from such explorations may enlarge our understanding of each phenomenon and its interactions with the others.

Hollis Frampton's recent film, *Zorns Lemma*, seems to me unique with respect to previous structural film in that it attempts just such a synthesis of evidence gathered from various corners. The film proposes a possible construct, a model in mathematical or scientific parlance, for the component parts and dynamics of the specific perceptual experience of film-viewing. (Presumably this particular situation will reveal itself to have implications for other life situations and experiences.) Zorn's particular Lemma was a proposition within mathematical set theory — basically a theory to describe the "relative preponderance of shared qualities"² for each element within a particular given situation, or set. As a title, *Zorns Lemma* is thus a succinct metaphor for the film's subject and function.

The film is divided into three distinct sections. Section I (ca. 4½ minutes) begins with no image, only a female voice reciting part of an 18th-century Bay State reading primer. Each couplet features an alphabet letter and is delivered in that morally instructional (and presumably elevating) tone peculiar to schoolmarms.

Section II (47 minutes, 9 seconds) begins with a silent run through a 24-letter Roman alphabet (no J or V) composed of large silver letters in



Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 'Z'.

relief on a black field. A word beginning with letter "A" (in this case the word is "a") appears, is followed by a word beginning with "B," and so on through the alphabet at a speed of one second per letter-word. The words all occur in the urban environment, on store fronts and other kinds of signs and notices. Each run through the alphabet preserves the same rhythm while the words and their contexts vary: On the 5th round the letter "X" is replaced by a shot of a bonfire at night. On the 7th round "Z" is replaced by an ocean wave advancing and receding down the beach, and on the 12th round a horizontally trucking shot of sea grasses blowing in the wind replaces the letter "Y." The film proceeds with the gradual replacement of each alphabet-word by an image until at the end of the section the final run-through is composed entirely of these replacement images.

Section III is a static frame of a deep expanse of snowy field with woods at the far end. A man

and woman, bundled in overcoats and accompanied by their dog, move slowly away from us into the depth of the screen. The sound track has six women's voices reciting a text by cyclically alternating a different voice for each word. The effect of this is highly rhythmical while the sense of the sentences is indiscernible. Instead key words stand out by repetition and volume: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water; and Form, Matter, Composition, and Entirety. The latter portion of this section (ca. 1 minute of the 11 minutes of the section) has no sound track. When the couple finally disappear into the woods, we are left confronting only the silence of a snowy country field, and then that fades out to white.

Watching the film is a complex and cumulative experience. On first viewing one may not catch the alphabetical reference in the opening recitation. Certainly the black, dark screen seems mysterious. Once Section II begins we can relax — this is more familiar. Silent film is

not so strange as unaccompanied sound track. The rhythm of the alphabet-words is even and pulsing. When the image-substitutions begin the game becomes apparent, and we enter into it, looking forward to what will happen next. After some time it becomes apparent that the game is going to proceed at its own leisurely pace and there is time to look around a bit. The individual images seem colorful and even amusing, but patternless. Towards the end of Section II tension builds up and the pace appears to quicken as we anticipate completion. That the film, in fact, goes on is a bit startling, but the six female voices of Section II take over and continue the pulsating rhythm of the alphabet images. Most of our attention, meanwhile, is taken up in trying to make sense of the "minimal" image (especially so in contrast to Section II) of the snowy field and walking couple. Eventually the sound track ends and we are left contemplating the empty field. Finally there is nothing, no sound

and no picture, only a rectangle of white light shining through clear leader. The film is over.

A second viewing of *Zorns Lemma* is necessarily quite a different experience from the first. The suspense is gone and we can approach the film with confidence now that we know approximately what is going to happen. The opening recitation is no longer eclipsed by the mystery of that dark screen. We realize that it is an alphabet, and thus rather a neat and economic introduction to the film. Eventually we are sure something will appear on the screen to fulfill our expectations of this event as a movie (i.e., at least partially visual). Accordingly, the first alphabet letter has considerable punch. It both ends the tension built up over the blank screen and, by means of its rhythmic repetitions, transforms that tension into a sense of "going somewhere" in time. (That knowledge seems to be a relief, and one might well ask why it is so disquieting for an audience to feel that it is "standing still" in time.)

Section II begins, on second viewing, to reveal the complexity of its rhythmic structure. The suspense surrounding the content of each new substitution is diminished and the relationships between images start to emerge. There are a number of progressive acts (an egg frying, a tangerine being peeled) which form a sort of counterpoint to the nonprogressive acts of their surrounding images. Frampton calls these convergent and nonconvergent actions. Additionally all the substitution images are divided into rhythmic or arrhythmic classes, so that there are four kinds of rhythms interwoven throughout this second section. All of that is, of course, playing against the 1-second pulse of the cuts from shot to shot. Since the effect of this is so absorbing, coming to the end of the section is a bit of a shock. By transferring the underlying pulse to the sound track (i.e., the six women's voices al-

ternating single words) and presenting the relatively "restful" image of a snowy field, we are eased out of Section II rather than traumatized. Finally we are left the silent snowy screen, a last resting place before being thrust out once more into the unsettling glare of "reality" which lies in wait outside all movie theaters. We begin in the dark and end in light, a suggestive metaphor for the experience proposed by this film.

The immediate sensual impact of *Zorns Lemma* bears a musical analogy. It functions similarly to a medieval canon, building up to a dense and highly controlled texture. In fact, the rhythmic structure of the film makes clear that film, like music, consists fundamentally of the rhythmic articulation of time by means of a basic unit of measure, one cut, one note, or groups thereof.

Having established itself as belonging to the generic category of "film," *Zorns Lemma* proceeds to totally ignore normal movie conventions. Not only does the structure lie bare, unclothed by any vestige of "content," but that structure is self-constructed. The film maker has provided a set of conditions and allowed them simply to take their course as if programmed by a calculating machine. A 24-letter alphabet at 24 f.p.s. provides the entire structural frame of the movie. The implication here, of course, is that the artist is less "responsible" than usual for his work. Rather than an inventor or "maker" he is a kind of "engineer," a director of forces which already exist in his world. The 24-letter alphabet is man-made, while the 24-f.p.s. film speed is a requirement of film machinery. Philosophically this suggests a considerably less egocentric concept of the artist than has prevailed even in the earlier decades of our own century. And if the artist is not permitted

full control of his creation, neither is the audience. Room is left for real interaction, for real discourse, in "real time" between the spectator and the thing observed. A work like *Zorns Lemma* is incomplete without the viewer's participation. If the film is indeed a model for the general category of film-viewing, that fact has broad implications. What does it mean for an event to be "complete"? Does not each interaction of each viewer with each event (or object) produce a unique situation? Is not experience (and therefore knowledge) of every sort finally subjective, and personal, and beyond a certain point, incommunicable?

These questions underlie the very existence of *Zorns Lemma*, and it is to the film's iconography that we must turn for a clearer understanding of their considerable ramifications.

Now then, you say, it has been established that *Zorns Lemma* is a movie, albeit strange. But what is the reason for its being like that? Why was it made? Upon closer inspection it becomes clear quite soon that the film is ultimately concerned with a kind of cosmology, that is, the theory of the universe as an ordered whole, governed by a set of general laws. The opening section has a biblical text, one interpretation of that order and its laws. Earth, Air, Fire, and Water as "primary structures" of the universe (as in the pre-Socratic philosophers and in Plato's *Ti-maeus*) pervade Sections II and III — another order, other laws.

In Section II the first four alphabet-substitution images occur as follows:
(fire) for X—a raging bonfire at night
(water) for Z—sea waves advancing and receding
(earth) for Y—slow trucking shot of cattails
(air) for Q—steam escaping from a street vent
The remaining substitution images are a catalog of deliberately banal events, changing a tire,



Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 'S'.



Hollis Frampton, *Zorns Lemma*, 'E'.

cutting cookies, bouncing a ball, etc., which fall into the rhythmic classes mentioned previously. This sequence of replacements, the four basic elements first with the rest following, is picked up and elaborated upon in the sound track for Section III.

A medieval Latin text by Robert Grosseteste (translated and edited by the film maker) forms the entire sound track for this last section. Entitled *On Light, or the Ingression of Forms*, it begins by positing Light as "the first bodily form" which "drew out matter along with itself into a mass as great as the fabric of the world." (A more apt description of the way film works would be hard to find.) Next, Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, the basic elements of the universe, were "brought forth" from Light.

That "fabric of the world" falls into four categories: Form, Matter, Composition and Entirety, in that order. Further, these categories equal the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4, the ratios among which constitute the stabilizing harmony of the universe. Thus they appear in "dances and rhythmic times."

From darkness to light, and thence to life (matter) and order — the metaphysical sequence both Greek and Christian. Indeed the cosmological imagery of *Zorns Lemma* seems to summarize a cycle — that man perceives order in the universe, has cataloged it before, and will attempt to do so again, in current terms for current needs. Darkness, the original mystery, the beginning of everything, turns out to be inside the mind. The overall order and general laws which are the cosmos have finally been located inside the human brain.

It is by means of this cosmological metaphor that *Zorns Lemma* signals its most fundamental and complex concern. Having posited the act of *knowing* as the ultimate measure of what *is*, the film leads us through increasingly complex kinds of knowledge. On the simplest level, *verbal* meaning is replaced by *visual* meaning as the alphabet turns into a set of images. It is significant that Frampton began as a man of letters, as he puts it, studying languages both living and dead while fancying himself a poet.³ Over a period of thirteen years in New York his interests evolved from verbal to visual modes. *Zorns Lemma* details that conversion in compacted time.

To begin with words, with language, is to begin with *symbolic* meaning. Language encapsulates experience in order to communicate it to another person or persons. In that process the experience is necessarily deformed. Its essential characteristic is distilled out, thereby discarding as residue the infinite variety surrounding that core. Nouns are to the things they name as notation to live music; they schematize their subject matter. The effect of symbolizing must be a diminishing of the object or person or event. It must involve as well an emotional distancing

for both writer (or speaker) and audience from their own as well as from each other's experience. Spoken language was the first step and written language the final one away from the immediacy of "real" experience.

Zorns Lemma thus begins with spoken language, progresses to written language (the relief alphabet in gilt letters) and arrives in Section II at the central problem, of linguistic (representing symbolic) versus visual (representing immediate) experience. The shots of words making up this section are hand-held, as many as possible containing movement of some sort. They strive for maximum variety of space, surface, texture, color, etc., almost all being drawn from the urban environment. There are, in fact, conscious references to painting, drawing, and photographic styles, perceptible only after extensive viewing of the film. We do not, however, need such references to perceive the tension between the richness and restlessness of the images, and the static, one-dimensional quality of the words. That tension arises from the juxtaposition of flat versus illusionistic graphic elements, and thus refers to only half the realm of possible visual experience, that is, to *representation*. Visual representation is a symbolic system like language, equivalent in function to words and to *written* language. The "actual" or "real" experience reflected by such a system is also available to us, and as *Zorns Lemma* wears on, we are increasingly offered the latter in place of the former.

The replacement images in Section II attempt to be "sculptural" or "tactile" by referring to experiential aspects of objects and events rather than to their appearances. In contrast to the word images they are almost all carefully framed tripod shots, deliberately banal in content, and share some quality, however oblique, with cinema.

Since the distinguishing characteristic of cinema has been earlier identified as having to do with the *articulation of time*, these replacement images must all in some way contribute to that process. Time and space in our experience are measured by *movement* of various sorts. In the film every replacement image but one (a single winter tree replacing the letter "F") has movement of some kind. That may be directional, in depth, repetitive, or imposed by the camera. Additionally there is the development of convergent acts throughout Section II. Those are:

- A—turning pages of a book
- B—frying an egg
- D—cutting cookies
- G—hands washing themselves
- H—a man walking one block and turning the corner
- I/J—grinding hamburger
- K—a man painting a wall white
- M—three men digging a hole
- N—dried beans filling the frame
- P—hands tying shoes
- T—changing a tire

U/V—peeling and eating a tangerine
X—a raging bonfire

In that we cannot know the outcome of these events and must "live through" them, they are equivalent to "real" experience. Similarly we must "live through" the whole of Section II and discern its overall patterning to notice that it progresses (though not in a straight line) from big close-ups in the opening images to long shots in the final ones. A certain amount of work is required to get at the experience offered by the film as its "meaning" becomes less and less schematized and encoded within the symbolic systems of language or representation. We are being asked increasingly to process "raw data," as we do from moment to moment all of our lives.

Since the film develops toward "reality," Frampton decided to deliberately incorporate within it a number of kinds of errors. His reasoning was that misfortunes are bound to occur in any "ambitious" work of art which functions within time and itself requires much time to make.⁴ These included *metric errors* (12 shots in Section II are 23 or 25 frames long instead of 24), *omissions* (typed-out words, superimposed rather than "found" in the urban environment), *errors* (shots made as though the cinematographer used the wrong color filter), *lapses of taste* (overt phoniness or artiness, like the hand un-writing "xylophone" backwards), *faking* (color collages pasted-up for backgrounds instead of images from the urban environment), and *breaches of decorum* (black and white still photographs with "real" objects lying on them, for instance a green toothbrush on "wig," etc.).

To detect these errors is hard work and in so doing the viewer is forced to recognize all of the film's organizing principles. That fact constitutes a kind of corollary to the basic epistemological position of *Zorns Lemma*, that knowledge is finally subjective and personal and possibly incommunicable. As some restraint upon the floodgates of subjective fantasy, we may recall that until we perceive the errors or lapses in a given situation we have not fully grasped its ground rules.

The final section of the film, predictably, approaches the limit between "cinema" and "real life." Its spoken text is manipulated so that it functions only rhythmically, *not symbolically*. Simultaneously the long-held image of a snowy field, empty of symbolic content and barely illusionistic, comes as close to an experience of "real" space and "real" time as is possible on film. Finally even that image fades to a rectangle of white light, the minimum definition of cinema.

Zorns Lemma ends by thrusting us back upon ourselves. If knowledge is ultimately personal and incommunicable, we are left to contemplate the ineffable solitude of that conclusion. ■

1. P. Adams Sitney, "Structural Cinema," *Film Culture*, #47, Summer, 1969, pp. 1-10.

2. Hollis Frampton, from his unpublished notes on *Zorns Lemma*.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

LOIS MENDELSON and BILL SIMON

Ken Jacobs' film, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, is, with Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, one of the two great works of a reflexive cinema whose primary subject is an esthetic definition of the nature of the medium. Jacobs himself has called it "a didactic film."¹ It deals with several major critical areas: with representation, narrative and abstraction, with the illusions involved in the film-viewing experience, with the possible ways of handling space and time, with structure and with perception. It is, as well, a work of radical transformation; a primitive work from the earliest period of film history is transformed into a highly innovative work, modernist in character, constantly pleasurable to the eye and, at the same time, a sophisticated exercise in film and art criticism.

Jacobs, then, has taken an early American film called *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, a rendering of the nursery rhyme, and recreated it. He first presents the original film as it was made in 1905 (probably by Billy Bitzer, Griffith's great cameraman). Then, for 70 minutes, by photographing the original film while it is being projected, Jacobs performs an exhaustive analysis of it. Finally,

climbing out of chimneys, climbing over or through fences, all ending in a barnyard filled with ducks, geese, and flying birds.

From this, Jacobs has made a radically different film. Using the basic procedure of photographing the original film from a screen upon which it is being projected, he employs just about every strategy known to film. He photographs varied portions of the original shots, sometimes showing a shot in almost its full size, sometimes blowing up a very minute part of the original. He moves his camera along, up, down, into, and away from the original, in which there is no camera movement at all. He uses the freeze frame technique, stopping the original on any one frame for any period of time, then going back into motion. He uses slow motion, reverse motion, superimpositions, masks, and wipes. He adds black and clear leader, creates a flicker effect, and leaves in the circles and flares that appear at the end of reels of film. He photographs the film strip as such and sets his screen within a larger spatial context, creating a kind of screen-within-a-screen. He does shadow play with fingers against the screen from which he is shooting, visibly moves that screen while the film is being

course on the nature of film. He has created a film that deals with several major esthetic problems and preoccupations.

The 1905 *Tom, Tom* is both a representational and a narrative film. It depicts a world which has reference to people, places, and objects that we can recognize and it tells a story which we are expected to follow. Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom* is quite different. Because Jacobs subjects the images to so many radical alterations, they frequently lose their recognizability and attain varying degrees of abstraction. The point of reference both to the outside world and to the original film, disappears. A human body becomes patterns of lines, forms, and light and dark. Thus, Jacobs' film constantly oscillates between two kinds of images — the completely representational and the completely abstract, with all the varying gradations between representational and abstract also included.

In addition, there is a constant oscillation between narrative and abstract images. As long as enough of the original images is shown, the actions of the original film are recognizable. The audience can react to what is being seen in terms of actions, of a narrative. On the other hand, when Jacobs photographs a smaller part of the original film or otherwise distorts the image, the audience can no longer react in terms of actions.

Two points become clear in Jacobs' treatment of this problem. The first is the degree to which representation and narrative are inextricable. The reaction in terms of narrative, of following actions, depends on representation, on the recognizability of people and what they are doing, on the existence of a certain kind of space in which actions can happen.

The second point that is very clearly elucidated by Jacobs is that these two modes of art elicit different kinds of experience. As long as the images are representational and narrative, we are following the film in terms of actions, with interest in and attention to these actions. When the images are abstract, a very different response is called forth. We must adopt a much more contemplative attitude and see the film largely in terms of the interaction of form, line, light, movement. Jacobs forcefully demonstrates the differences in these two experiences by constantly oscillating between the two poles of representation and abstraction.

Jacobs is also very much concerned with another element in the film-viewing experience. He is concerned with exposing, through the systematic reduction of images, the two major illusions upon which the filmic image depends.

The first illusion concerns light. Because he photographs a film off a screen and because he photographs it so closely at times, the image is reduced visibly to various intensities of light and shadow. The fact that the filmic image always consists of varying intensities of light projected

"TOM, TOM, THE PIPER'S SON"

he shows the original film in its entirety once again, adding a brief coda of his own.

The original film is 10 minutes in length and consists of eight tableaux or shots showing a crowd in pursuit of Tom and a stolen pig. All eight tableaux are photographed in a basically theatrical way — in long shot, with the camera placed front row center. The space in each of the shots is shallow and is articulated in a very simple manner—with some use of groups and with some suggestion of receding space painted on the sets. There is also very little rhythmic articulation. Events either happen all at once and are difficult to distinguish or else are strung out at great length one after another.

The film has great charm, largely because there is a decorative quality to the painted sets and the costumes (supposedly modeled after Hogarth prints²) and also because there is so much close attention to detail. In the opening tableau, at the fair, there are acrobats, jugglers, many revellers, a fight between sailors, as well as the stealing of the pig — a tableau crammed with simultaneous activities. The subsequent tableaux follow the chase with each of the ten or twelve chasers individually jumping into haystacks,

projected, and even photographs the light bulb of the projector. He also adds two color sequences which do not appear in the original film. All of these strategies are employed both individually and in the most extraordinarily complex combinations. Jacobs sets up an extremely rich vocabulary and proceeds to employ it exhaustively, using the basic montage principle (the possibility of combining in any way) to create a completely new work.

In doing all of this, Jacobs is essentially involved in an analysis, a contemplation, of the original work. "I've cut into the film's monumental homogeneity (8 statically photographed sets . . .) with some sense of trespass, cropped and given a Griffith emphasis to parts originally submerged in the whole — but (this is a didactic film) it was necessary to do so in order to begin to show how much was there."³ Very much attracted to the original film, he decided to show what interested him in it. His film is a revelation of the original, achieved by analyzing, fragmenting, and abstracting the original and reconstituting it as a new film. In revealing what interested him in the original, Jacobs has revealed what interests him in film. And in so doing, he has created a dis-



Ken Jacobs, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, 1969. Detail from the first tableau: the boy with the striped pants.

Ken Jacobs,
Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son, 1969. Freeze frame: the Tumbler.



on a flat surface, the fact that film is really always a kind of shadow play, is revealed by the process of reduction.

Much of *Tom, Tom* can be seen in terms of Jacobs' preoccupation with the nature of light and dark, a preoccupation that he has demonstrated in areas outside of film as well. He has created a number of shows involving shadow play (live people behind a white screen) and the illumination of dark environments. He is fascinated by the *Blackout* of 1965, stating that he felt more secure in the truth of the *Blackout* than in the usual illusion of security.⁴ It is possible to talk of his part of *Tom, Tom* as an "illumination" of the original film, as bringing the qualities of the original "to light." Jacobs' inclu-

sion of the flicker effect, of black and clear leader, of the flares and circles, of shadow play, of shots of the actual projector bulb, as well as his major exploration of the light and dark areas of the original film, all attest to his interest in and revelation of the light potentialities of film.

The second illusion that is revealed in *Tom, Tom* is the illusion of movement. By using the freeze frame technique (holding any one frame for any period of time) and by constantly alternating frozen frames with moving images, Jacobs reveals that the film image consists of a series of unmoving, still images. (The illusion of movement is achieved by the eye combining the still images into movement through the persistence of vision.) As always in *Tom, Tom*, this demon-



Ken Jacobs, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, 1969. Detail from the first tableau: the lady with the hoop.

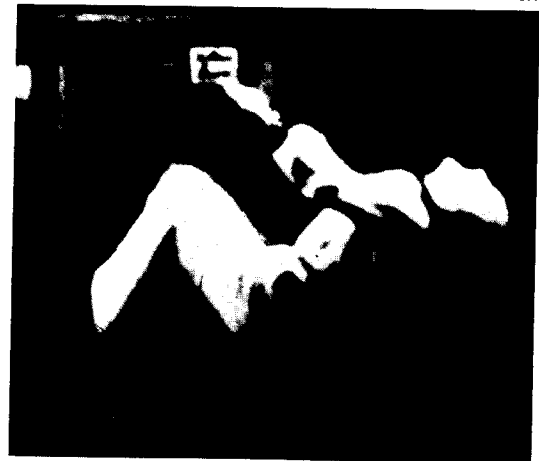
stration is taken as far as it can go. For instance, Jacobs sometimes moves his camera over a frozen frame, complicating and reemphasizing the fact of the frozen frame by insisting at once on the lack of movement in the frozen frame and on the presence of movement, albeit illusory movement, because of the moving camera.

Jacobs also demonstrates a deep interest in the spatial potentialities of cinema. He explores this aspect by using as his model or point of departure, a primitive film with shallow, stage-type space, in which the camera is placed at a fixed distance from the subject and in which the only change of space is accomplished by a cut and a change of setting. He transforms this

conventional concept of space by literally breaking down the spatial unity of the original and reconstructing from the fragments, a more radically filmic space.

He does this in a number of ways. For example, he is constantly compressing and expanding the space of the original film by juxtaposing the full range of shots from long shots which generally have deep space to extreme close-ups which are much flatter. He also juxtaposes moving images and frozen frames, taking advantage of the fact that a still of a moving image always appears to be flatter and therefore closer to the screen surface. Thus, the flat screen surface becomes a point of reference as the eye is drawn alternately towards and away from it. A tension

Ken Jacobs, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, 1969. Slow motion and reverse motion: the Tumbler.



is created between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space.⁵

Sometimes he demonstrates the process of this expansion and compression. In one sequence, involving the boy with the striped trousers, a series of stills of the boy is projected on the screen, each shot becoming progressively closer. Then, the still becomes a moving image, in slow motion, which flickers, and, at the same time, the camera begins a sudden and dramatic move forward into the picture. The movement continues until the black and white stripes are so close to the surface that they become flat black and white shapes, flickering and moving across a flat screen. In another sequence, the ladder-climbing sequence, the camera again moves into the picture until the magnification is so intense that the images appear to disintegrate into flat abstract shapes. Also, at this point, the grainy, pointillist texture of the image, evident throughout the film, is heightened to its magnificent best.

Still another point concerning the compression and expansion of space should be made. In addition to creating a tension between two- and three-dimensional space, which Jacobs does throughout the film, in certain sequences, he generates a dynamic tension within the flat screen surface itself. There is one outstanding example of this — the most magnified portion of the ladder-climbing sequence. Here, the shapes press against one another as they move in slow motion around the surface and off the edges of the surface. Light areas react against dark ones, large shapes against small ones, curved lines against jagged ones, and negative planes against positive ones.⁶ Altogether, this section is an exquisitely choreographed ballet of forms.

Another way in which Jacobs questions the spatial conventions of the original film is through experimentation with the notion of offscreen space. In the original, when the characters move off the screen, it is as though they walk offstage; their existence seems to stop at the edge of the screen. Jacobs, however, sometimes creates an awareness of space outside the limits of the screen. For example, one of the original tableaux shows three spectators watching people jump, one by one, out of a chimney. Jacobs shows a detail of these spectators in the act of watching but he excludes the spectacle which they watch. Thus, we are encouraged to fill in the missing images from our memory of the original film; the offscreen space is extended to our visual memory.

Later in the sequence, there is a shot which includes both the spectator and the spectacle. Now, both actions are "onscreen." Suddenly, the spectacle is "wiped out," as if a black shade were drawn halfway down the screen and again the spectators appear to watch nothing at all. This time, however, the offscreen action is taking place behind the black wipe. That is, the offscreen space is now part of the visual field.

Still another variation on this theme takes place later in the sequence when we are again shown both the spectator and the spectacle. This time, a complete wipe occurs. The black shade is drawn down to the bottom of the screen, is lifted briefly, exposing the image, and is drawn once again, leaving us to contemplate blackness. Although we are seeing nothing but blackness, the action seems to continue through our memory image of the previous shot. Now, all of the action takes place in offscreen, or, more precisely, behind-screen space.

There are several other interesting ways in which Jacobs shatters the spatial unity of the original film in order to construct a spatial concept which is special to the film medium. In the scene in which the chasers break down the door to the cottage, for example, there is a long shot of the interior which perpetuates the stage space of the original. Suddenly, there is a cut to a shot in which both sides are masked and the remaining central figure is frozen. The effect is dramatic. The illusionistic stage space is radically compressed and the image resembles a flat wall upon which an oriental painted scroll is hung. But Jacobs does not end his spatial experiment here. Instead, he unfreezes the still image and with an explosive burst, the moving figures reacquire their volume and spill through the door, puncturing the flatness of the screen and creating an exciting tension between two- and three-dimensional space.

Another commentary on film space is contained in an extraordinary set of ten sequences which are scattered throughout the film and which we shall refer to as the "screen-within-a-screen" sequences. In these, the screen we have been watching is suddenly reduced and set within a larger, black screen. Each of the ten sequences is different and each reveals, with varying degrees of complexity, the subtle relationship between the flat screen surface and the projected illusion of depth.

Several of these sequences shall be described here. In one, the small screen which is set within the larger one begins to jiggle and then moves quickly up, down, across, away from us, and back again, carving out a space for itself in the amorphous black field.

In another, the small screen shares one edge with the larger one. Its apparent diagonal intrusion converts what would have been simply a two-dimensional black surface into a dark, undefined suggestion of space.

The final screen-within-a-screen sequence to be described, perhaps the most spectacular of all, can be more easily visualized if we describe briefly the way in which the film was shot. The setup consisted of a transparent screen which was flanked on one side by a projector and on the opposite side by a camera facing the projector. As the original film was projected onto the screen from one side, Jacobs photographed it from the other side.

Keeping this setup in mind, one is better equipped to enjoy the subtleties of this sequence. This time, we see moving silhouettes which appear to be in front of the small screen-within-a-screen. A shadowy hand moves and turns up a corner of the small screen, jiggles it about, and then actually lifts it up, revealing the light bulb of the projector.

Like the other screen-within-a-screen sequences, this one deals with spatial ambiguities, but, in addition, it reveals the actual space in which this particular film was shot. And it goes still one step further — it extends into the space of the audience. We suddenly become conscious of ourselves watching an image projected upon a screen in which someone else is watching another image projected upon another screen. We experience not only the space between ourselves and the large screen but also the space, or, more precisely, the illusion of a space between the shadow man on the screen and the small screen-within-a-screen.

The short coda at the end of *Tom, Tom* involves the use of split screen. At first, the screen is split vertically into a black and a white panel. One panel is quickly replaced by a frozen frame and then by a moving, flickering sequence from a scene in the film. The other panel alternates between black and white in such a way that the eye is repeatedly bombarded by intense flashes and flickers. Although this section is extremely brief, it reiterates many of the spatial preoccupations of the film — such preoccupations as the tension between two- and three-dimensional space, the interaction of light and dark, and the juxtaposition of still and moving images.

Tom, Tom must also be studied in terms of Jacobs' treatment of time; it illustrates the many ways in which time can be manipulated in film.

In the most general terms, Jacobs' section of *Tom, Tom* can be seen as a distension, largely through editing, of the original film. A 10-minute film has been made into a 70-minute film. There are several factors involved in this process, the most basic of which is the elaboration of certain sections or parts of the original. This elaboration is achieved through the use of all of the various strategies we have already discussed and through extensive use of the principle of repetition. The most extreme example of this is the stepladder sequence. In the original, it takes the whole group of chasers about 30 seconds to climb the ladder; this sequence is expanded to about 20 minutes by Jacobs. One part of this sequence — a woman with black dress and white trim who is climbing the ladder, followed by a man with white sleeves — lasts about one second in the original and becomes an extended 12-minute, almost entirely abstract, section in Jacobs' film. Basically, what is happening here is that Jacobs is taking a portion of the original, fragmenting it, treating the fragments in various ways, and reassembling them into a new whole.

This general process of distension is furthered by several other factors, most notably the addition of extraneous material like black and clear leader and the two color sequences. It should also be added that within this overall pattern of distention, there is a minor pattern of contraction. Jacobs does not elaborate all of the material in the original film. While elaborating some of it at great length, he also completely omits other material, thereby illustrating the possibilities of ellipsis in film. In addition, Jacobs rearranges the order of the material within each of the original tableaux. In his treatment of the first tableau, for example, he starts with material in the middle, then goes back to material at the beginning (including the title), then treats material at the end. Interestingly, however, he maintains the order of the tableaux, never skipping back and forth between them.

Jacobs also illustrates the various kinds of temporal experiences possible with film. This is seen especially in his treatment of representation, narrative, and abstraction. As long as we have a clearly perceivable element of representation and narrative story-telling in the images, we tend to experience the passing of time in terms of the time of the events or actions seen. When the images become more abstract, this sense of narrative time begins to disappear, becomes much less pronounced. In the most abstract part of the ladder sequence, for instance, the sense of time of the original action, or of any actions, is completely lost and the time of Jacobs' film, the time in which the forms, lines, patterns of light interact, becomes paramount. In general, the extreme elaboration of a moment produces an extreme distension in which the sense of the duration of formal interaction, whether it be of line, form, and light or of edited pieces of film, becomes the predominant experience. This supremacy of film time can be illustrated with one more example — again with the use of camera movement over a frozen frame. The freeze frame absolutely stops, freezes, the time of the original film. The camera movement over the freeze frame produces a sense of evolving time, but the time, in this case, is the time of Jacobs' moving camera. It is Jacobs' newly created film time, not the time of the original film or of narrative actions.

In his remaking of *Tom, Tom*, Jacobs also investigates the overall structure or composition of the film. The original version is arranged sequentially, in narrative order. It consists of eight shots, each separated from the other by a distinct cut. Jacobs dissolves this simple and rigid structure and constructs in its stead a much more intricate and fluid one. He includes the model in his reconstruction, so that what emerges can be viewed as a kind of triptych: the original *Tom, Tom* shown twice forms the two narrow side panels, Jacobs' version forms the large central panel, and the split screen section at the end can be seen perhaps as a "misplaced" predella panel.

Like the side panels, the central panel is also divided into units. (These include the striped trousers sequence, the woman with the hoop sequence, the ladder-climbing sequence, and the abstract section within it.) However, these new units are of a radically different kind. Instead of eight long tableaux, there are now many units of varying lengths, often created by the isolation, magnification, and distention of small details taken from the original shots. In addition, the new units are freely interwoven and are combined without any regard to narrative development.

Although Jacobs systematically dissolves the basic structure of the original, his film is not an exercise in chaos. For one thing, he utilizes the triptych framework mentioned above. For another, in spite of the structural transformations which occur within the central panel, he retains certain aspects of the original organization, such as the movement from one tableau to another.

The special way in which Jacobs integrates the model into his structure is significant because it gives rise to a new dimension in film perception. Our viewing experience of the central panel is intricately linked to our memory of the first panel. When the figures or actions in the central panel are recognizable, one cannot help but identify them in terms of the original narrative arrangement. When we see the woman with the hoop, for example, we grasp our location in the original, our location, in fact, in someone else's film. During the long abstract sections, we are apt to lose our place in that other film, even though we have no difficulty following the flow of images in Jacobs' version. Whenever the images are recognizable, they serve as landmarks in an unfamiliar territory, as ever present reminders of the fact that the original film is literally the construction materials for the new film.

The memory image of the original is, in a sense, projected in our minds while we are watching the new film. That is to say, the original *Tom, Tom* is mentally superimposed upon our viewing experience of Jacobs' *Tom, Tom*. The model is thus continuously present in this unique manner, as a continuum of comparison to its own transformation.

In *Tom, Tom*, Jacobs presents a brilliant lesson in perception and perception-training. He shows us what to look for in the 1905 version of *Tom, Tom*. He selects for us those aspects of the film intriguing to him by isolating and magnifying details, by distending important moments. Those elements towards which he directs our concentration — formal elements for the most part — tend to draw our attention away from the narrative. When he projects the original film once again at the end of his reworking of it, he is allowing us the pleasure of viewing it with our newly trained eyes. At the same time, he is heightening our awareness of how much we have just learned about visual perception.

But Jacobs' film is not only about what to

look at in the primitive version of *Tom, Tom*. While one watches the unraveling of his visual analysis, one becomes aware of the fact that perception or perception-training is actually one of the subjects of the film. As P. Adams Sitney has pointed out, Jacobs retards the fictive development of the original and, through his process of elongation, induces an awareness of perception itself as a value and an esthetic experience.⁷

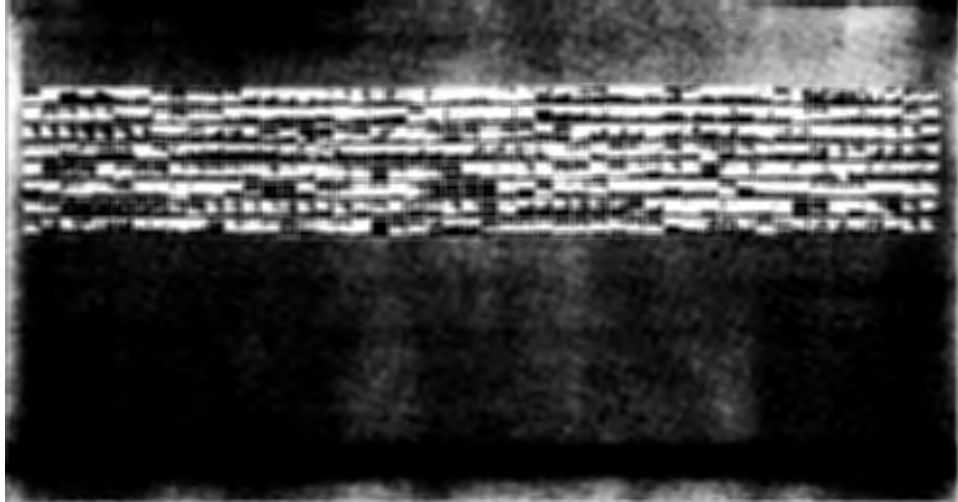
It is clear that Jacobs does not expect the viewer to respond passively to his method of perception-training. He presents a rigorous course for the eye and he demands, in return, a great deal of visual work. The level of difficulty of perception demanded of the viewer varies throughout the film; at times, one can easily grasp what one sees, while at other times, the images and interactions of images are so quick, complex, and elusive that repeated viewings are necessary in order to comprehend them. With each viewing, one actually sees more. One becomes visually more sophisticated and more attuned to the multi-faceted potentialities of cinema. One emerges with a set of visual tools with which to perceive not only the original *Tom, Tom* and not only Jacobs' intricate reworking of it, but also film in general.

The second point concerns transformation. We have already stated that the entire film involves a major act of transformation, the transformation of the original primitive film into Jacobs' radically modernist one. Further, we have implied that in each of the areas we have discussed, there is an element of transformation — the transformation of representational and narrative into abstract, the transformation of the image to reveal the illusions behind it, the transformation of space, time, and structure.

What is especially important about *Tom, Tom* is that we always perceive the process of transformation. The film itself is an act of visible transformation, demonstrated in the film. We witness the stages between representation and abstraction, we experience the state of forming. Similarly, we see the illusory image in the process of dissolving into light and dark, the moving image become frozen.

The space is visibly changed, and we feel the shifts in kinds of temporal experience. The fact that all film involves some degree of transformation is made manifest in film in which the subject is the act or process of transformation. ■

1. Ken Jacobs, Program note prepared for showing of *Tom, Tom, the Pipers Son* at the Gallery of Modern Art, New York, April, 1969.
2. *The Audio/Brandon Film Catalogue*, (Mount Vernon, N.Y., 1972/73), p. 380.
3. Jacobs, Program note.
4. Jud Yalkut, *Critique* #5, The New York Free Press, New York, March 28, 1968, p. 9.
5. It is interesting to note that Jacobs is pursuing his investigation of spatial problems by experimenting with 3-D film.
6. This section of the film seems to reflect the influence of Hans Hofmann with whom Jacobs studied painting for a period of time.
7. P. Adams Sitney, "The Avant-Garde Film," *Afterimage*, No. 2, London, Autumn, 1970, p. 4. For a restatement of this idea see Sitney, "Structural Film," in *The Film Culture Reader* (New York, 1970), p. 335.



A CINEMATIC ATOPIA

Robert Smithson, 400 Seattle Horizons (Destroyed), Instamatic snapshots, 1969. "We are lost between the abyss within us and the boundless horizons outside us."

ROBERT SMITHSON

Going to the cinema results in an immobilization of the body. Not much gets in the way of one's perception. All one can do is look and listen. One forgets where one is sitting. The luminous screen spreads a murky light throughout the darkness. Making a film is one thing, viewing a film another. Impassive, mute, still the viewer sits. The outside world fades as the eyes probe the screen. Does it matter what film one is watching? Perhaps. One thing all films have in common is the power to take perception elsewhere. As I write this, I'm trying to remember a film I liked, or even one I didn't like. My memory becomes a wilderness of elsewhere. How, in such a condition, can I write about film? I don't know. I could know. But I would rather not know. Instead, I will allow the elsewhere to reconstruct themselves as a tangled mass. Somewhere at the bottom of my memory are the sunken remains of all the films I have ever seen, good and bad they swarm together forming cinematic mirages, stagnant pools of images that cancel each other out. A notion of the abstractness of films crosses my mind, only to be swallowed up in a morass of Hollywood garbage. A pure film of lights and darks slips into a dim landscape of countless westerns. Some sagebrush here, a little cactus there, trails and hoofbeats going nowhere. The thought of a film with a "story" makes me listless. How many stories have I seen on the screen? All those "characters" carrying out dumb tasks. Actors doing exciting things. It's enough to put one into a permanent coma.

Let us assume I have a few favorites. *Ikiru*? also called *Living, To Live, Doomed*. No, that won't do. Japanese films are too exhausting. Taken as a lump, they remind me of a recording by Captain Beef Heart called *Japan in a Dishpan*. There's always Satyajit Ray for a heavy dose of tedium, if you're into tedium. Actually, I tend to prefer lurid sensationalism. For that I must turn to some English director, Alfred Hitchcock will do. You know, the shot in *Psycho* where Janet Leigh's eye emerges from the bath-

tub drain after she's been stabbed. Then there's always the *Expanded Cinema*, as developed by Gene Youngblood, complete with an introduction by "Bucky" Fuller. *Rats for Breakfast* could be a hypothetical film directed by the great utopian himself. It's not hard to consider cinema expanding into a deafening pale abstraction controlled by computers. At the fringes of this expanse one might discover the deteriorated images of Hollis Frampton's *Maxwell's Demon*? After the "structural film" there is the sprawl of entropy. The monad of cinematic limits spills out into a state of stupefaction. We are faced with inventories of limbo.

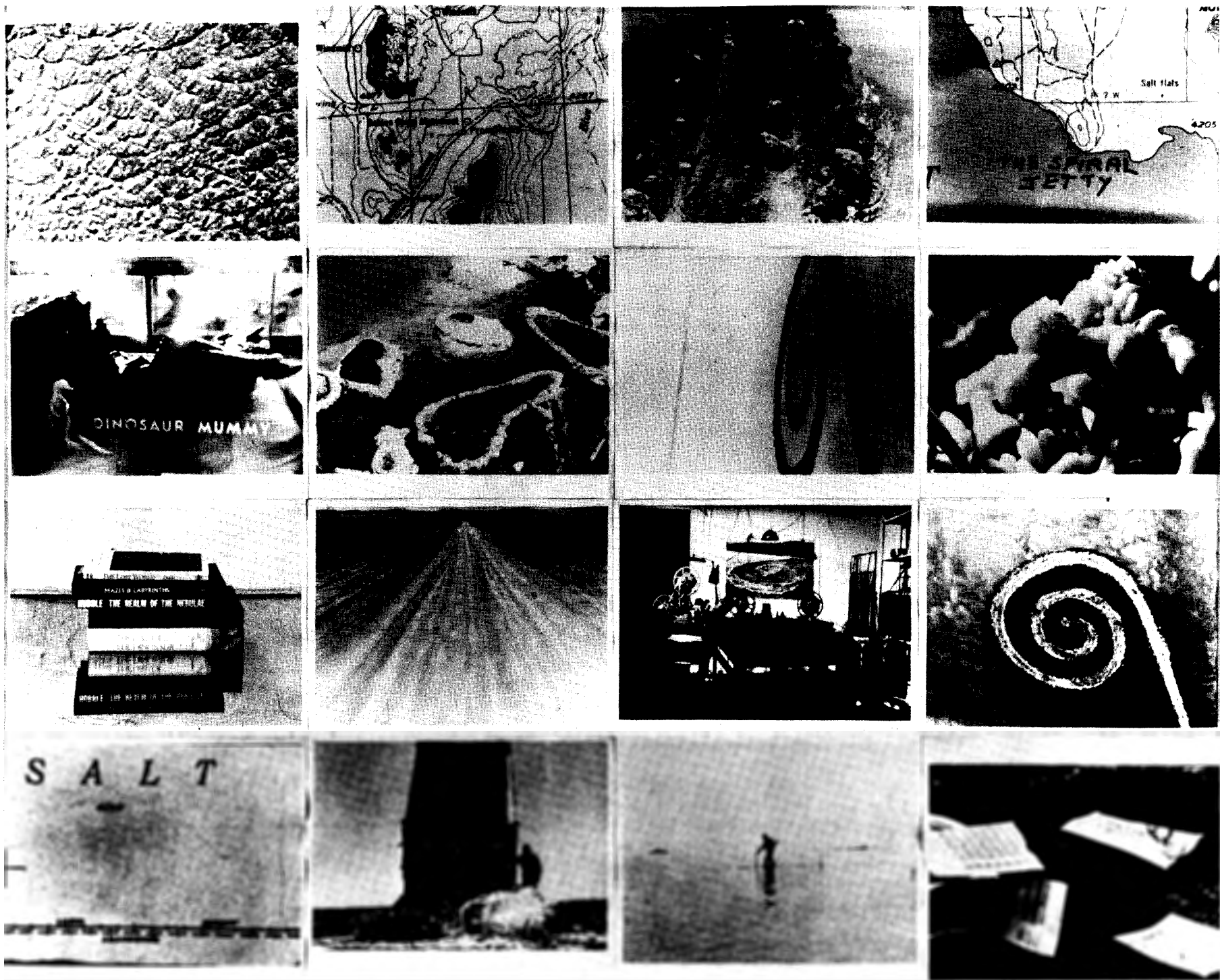
If I could only map this limbo with dissolves, you might have some notion as to where it is. But that is impossible. It could be described as a cinematic borderland, a landscape of rejected film clips. To be sure it is a neglected place, if we can even call it a "place." If there was ever a film festival in limbo it would be called "Oblivion." The awkwardness of amateur snapshots brings this place somewhat into focus. The depraved animation that George Landow employed in one of his films somewhat locates the region. A kind of aphasia orders this teetering realm. Not one order but many orders clash with one another, as do "facts" in an obsolete encyclopedia.

If we put together a film encyclopedia in limbo, it would be quite groundless. Categories would destroy themselves, no law or plan would hold itself together for very long. There would be no table of contents for the Table of Contents. The index would slither away into so much cinematic slime. For example, I could make a film based (or debased) on the A section of the index in *Film Culture Reader*. Each reference would consist of a 30-second take. Here is a list of the takes in alphabetical order: Abstract Expressionism, Agee James, Alexandrov Grigory, Allen Lewis, Anger Kenneth, Antonioni Michelangelo, Aristarco Guido, Arnheim Rudolf, Artaud Antonin, Astruc Alexandre. Only the letter A gives this index its order. Where is the coherence? The logic threatens to wander out of control.

In this cinematic atopia orders and groupings

have a way of proliferating outside their original structure or meaning. There is nothing more tentative than an established order. What we take to be the most concrete or solid often turns into a concatenation of the unexpected. Any order can be reordered. What seems to be without order, often turns out to be highly ordered. By isolating the most unstable thing, we can arrive at some kind of coherence, at least for awhile. The simple rectangle of the movie screen contains the flux, no matter how many different orders one presents. But no sooner have we fixed the order in our mind than it dissolves into limbo. Tangled jungles, blind paths, secret passages, lost cities invade our perception. The sites in films are not to be located or trusted. All is out of proportion. Scale inflates or deflates into uneasy dimensions. We wander between the towering and the bottomless. We are lost between the abyss within us and the boundless horizons outside us. Any film wraps us in uncertainty. The longer we look through a camera or watch a projected image the remoter the world becomes, yet we begin to understand that remoteness more. Limits trap the illimitable, until the spring we discovered turns into a flood. "A camera filming itself in a mirror would be the ultimate movie," says Jean-Luc Godard.

The ultimate film goer would be a captive of sloth. Sitting constantly in a movie house, among the flickering shadows, his perception would take on a kind of sluggishness. He would be the hermit dwelling among the elsewhere, foregoing the salvation of reality. Films would follow films, until the action of each one would drown in a vast reservoir of pure perception. He would not be able to distinguish between good or bad films, all would be swallowed up into an endless blur. He would not be watching films, but rather experiencing blurs of many shades. Between blurs he might even fall asleep, but that wouldn't matter. Sound tracks would hum through the torpor. Words would drop through this languor like so many lead weights. This dozing consciousness would bring about a tepid abstraction. It would increase the gravity of perception. Like a tortoise crawling over a desert, his eyes would crawl across the screen. All films would be



Robert Smithson, Stills from *Spiral Jetty*, 1970. "The longer we look through a camera or watch a projected image, the remoter the world becomes, yet we begin to understand that remoteness more."

brought into equilibrium — a vast mud field of images forever motionless. But ultimate movie-viewing should not be encouraged, any more than ultimate movie-making.

What I would like to do is build a cinema in a cave or an abandoned mine, and film the process of its construction. That film would be the only film shown in the cave. The projection booth would be made out of crude timbers, the screen carved out of a rock wall and painted

white, the seats could be boulders. It would be a truly "underground" cinema. This would mean visiting many caves and mines. Once when I was in Vancouver, I visited Britannia Copper Mines with a cameraman intending to make a film, but the project dissolved. The tunnels in the mine were grim and wet. I remember a horizontal tunnel that bored into the side of a mountain. When one was at the end of the tunnel inside the mine, and looked back at the en-

trance, only a pinpoint of light was visible. One shot I had in mind was to move slowly from the interior of the tunnel towards the entrance and end outside. In the Cayuga Rock Salt Mine under Lake Cayuga in New York State I did manage to get some still shots of mirrors stuck in salt piles, but no film. Yet another ill-fated project involved the American Cement Mines in California — I wanted to film the demolition of a disused cavern. Nothing was done. ■

REGINA CORNWELL

"At the risk of sounding immodest, by re-examining the basic mechanisms of motion pictures and by making these fundamentals explicitly concrete, I feel as though I am working toward a new conception of cinema. Traditionally, 'abstract films,' because they are extensions of the aesthetics and pictorial principles of painting or are simply demonstrations of optics, are no more cinematic than narrative-dramatic films which squeeze literature and theatre onto a two-dimensional screen."

When Paul Sharits submitted *Ray Gun Virus* and *Piece Mandala/End War* to the Selection Jury of the Fourth International Experimental Film Competition, Knokke-Le Zoute, in 1967, he wrote the above as part of his "Statement of Intention." These and his subsequent works indicate his preoccupations with the nature of the film medium, its dualities and complexities. *Ray Gun Virus* (1966) and *Piece Mandala/End War* (1966) and most of his other works to date are

flicker films: *Word Movie/Flux Film 29* (1966), and *Razor Blades*,¹ *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* and *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*, all completed in 1968.

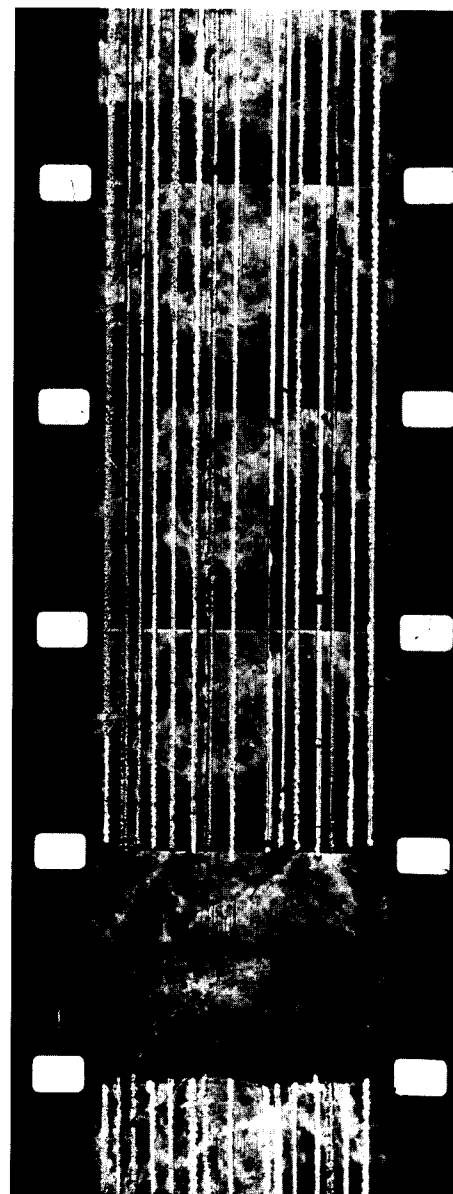
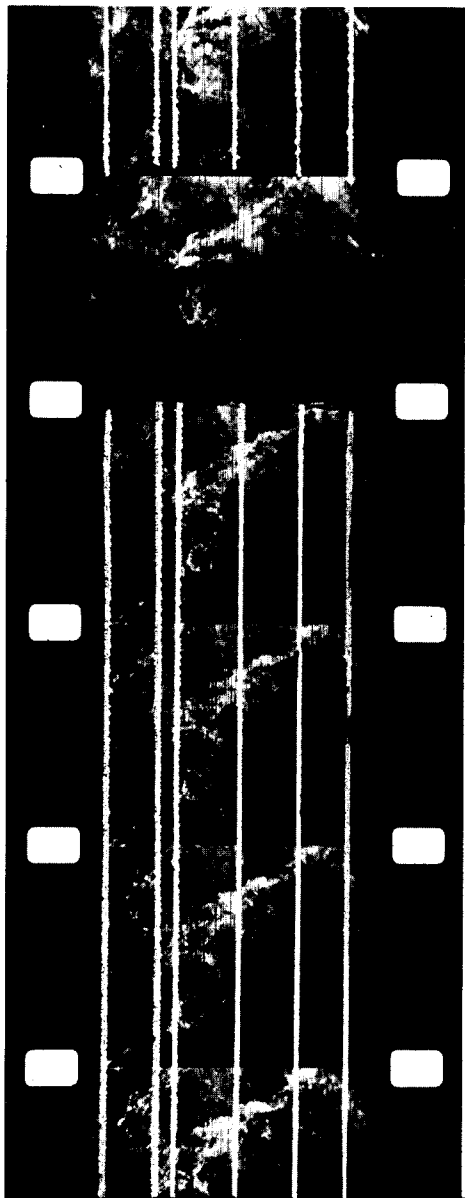
While still a graduate student in design at the University of Indiana in 1966, Sharits was completing *Ray Gun Virus* when he picked up *The Village Voice* and read in Jonas Mekas' "Film Journal" that Tony Conrad had just made *The Flicker*. This and Peter Kubelka's work came as a total surprise, if not a shock to him, at that time. And it was an understandable surprise because the flicker film as a genre was then and still is relatively new.

It had its beginnings in Vienna when Peter Kubelka made *Adabar* in 1956 and *Arnulf Rainer*, begun in 1958 and completed in 1960. But as a fundamental principle, flicker is as old as, in fact older than, the camera and projector. Awareness of flicker is revealed in the use of the term "flicks" for films or movies or motion pictures. "Motion pictures" and "movies" are descriptive names for the illusion evoked from film which is actually composed of separate still frames, whereas "flick" or flicker actually characterizes the nature of the intermittent illusion more literally. It is the intermittent movement of the film through the camera in registering the image and the shutter mechanism blocking out light as the image passes down and the next image is registered, and the duplication of these operations in projecting the image, combined with the persistence of vision which creates the illusion of a constant and uninterrupted image on the screen. At any time all one need notice is the projectile of the light beam as it travels toward the screen to observe the flicker effect created by the revolving shutter. In this way, one is reminded of the composition of the film strip—of separate still frames moving at 16 or 24 f.p.s. through the projector gate.

While the occurrence of flicker on the screen had always been thought of as an unwanted distraction, the flicker genre explores this phenomenon, indigenous to the light-time medium of cinema, considering the absolutely fundamental elements of film and the mechanisms of its operations. Taking its cue from the shutter and the intermittent movement of camera and projector acting upon the strip of separate frames, the flicker film in its fashion emphasizes the nature of the separate frames, the rapid movement of the frames, and through analogy and by way of hyperbole, the flicker effect of the shutter.

The flicker film can be described phenomeno-

logically as the short and very rapid succession of recurrent images which flutter or fluctuate in various structures throughout the work. In Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer* and Tony Conrad's *The Flicker* (1966) it is the structuring of black and white frames while Sharits' *Ray Gun Virus* is dominated by solid chromatic frames with some black and white. Yet it need not be composed purely of solid chromatic or achromatic frames, as evidenced in Kubelka's black and white silhouette work, *Adabar*, and in *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* and *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*, and Sharits' other flicker works in which there are recurrent referential images which animate with the solid chromatic and achromatic frames. While in much of the film work of Robert Breer there are rapid successions of images with some recurrences as in *Recreation* (1956) and *Blazes* (1961), and in much of the work of Stan Brakhage there is also rapidity of movement as in *Mothlight* (1963) and of movement and cutting as in *Dog Star Man* (1961-64), these are to be distinguished from the flicker film. For the brevity of the arrangements of recurrent structures of blank frames with or without referential images creates the quick light



Paul Sharits, *S:TREAM:S:S:ECTION:S:SECTIONED*, 1970.

PAUL SHARITS: ILLUSION AND OBJECT

flickering punctuations which have become the overt forming or shaping principle of the works known as flicker films.

Sharits had begun to explore the narrative film, but then left it due to his growing concern for the materials of film itself, and *Ray Gun Virus* was his first result. In working notes, Sharits describes the film as "striving toward blue." The chromatic structure of the film proceeds from a dominant yellow through a red center until it reaches blue. Briefly, black and white flicker formations follow the title, succeeded by very faint colors — faint to the point of barely being distinguishable from white, as if they were grasping for their existence — and then into a section dominated by yellow, flickering with other colors. The flickering red center is succeeded by fades from yellows to black and then fades from various hues to black. A random section follows, with no repetitions of color patterns in fades to white. These fades, which are at first long and smooth, become more abrupt and erratic and finally terminate in flashes. The film ends on the faint and unflickering blue.

As a further part of his "Statement of Intention" for Knokke-Le Zoute, Sharits wrote:

I wish to abandon imitation and illusion and enter directly into the high drama of: celluloid two-dimensional strips / individual rectangular frames / the three-dimensional light beam / environmental illumination / the two-dimensional reflective screen surface / the viewer's retina screen, optic nerve and individual psycho-physical subjectivities of consciousness.

Ray Gun Virus confronts these questions head-on, centering attention on the process of making and the perceiver's relationship to the projected work. It reduces the medium to its simple components while at the same time revealing the complexities of those components. Sharits deals consciously with the strip of film as a strip of individual frames of film, each frame of which is exposed to varying degrees of color and light, each frame having its own light/color image. In purposefully relinquishing film's traditional capacity to record the three-dimensional illusion, *Ray Gun Virus* projects its chromatic and achromatic frames onto a flat screen to create its own illusions and illusions of illusions. The image on the screen is in itself an illusion, once removed from the strip of film in the projector, twice removed from the original print. Just as any film is an illusion in this sense. But in confronting black, white, and colors here, the viewer becomes more conscious of the fact that he is facing an illusion, and paradoxically, at the same time, this illusion is an immediacy in time. It is one that is experienced in the present time and that does not, as with a representational illusion, refer back to a prior time and place. Malevich, in *Essays on Art, II*, speaks of a new realism attained through Suprematism and the other radical art forms of his time, and of the perceiver's relationship to those works: ". . . the new arts for the most part insist

on the expression of the real content of any given sensation, a reality that will always remain real for the spectator." And, crystallizing it further: "A real picture is also a new factor which does not bear us off to anywhere but compels us to perceive and experience it on the spot."² Such is the case with *Ray Gun Virus*.

The flicker as the hyperbolic analogy of the shutter mechanism indigenous to camera and projector creates various afterimages and illusions in its interactions with the solid frames. In a note, Sharits commented that he thought he had in *Ray Gun Virus* "actualized a sense of Pollock,"³ here referring to the overall homogeneity of the surface, inhibiting a focal point for the viewer. Indeed, at times, the very quick pulsating flicker creates polymorphic patterns throughout the screen, but one cannot seize and focus on any of these patterns. Sometimes for longer durations of individual colors there almost appears a center point, but it too is illusive and its duration too short-lived. Quick successions of colors cause, through afterimages, the effect of a "superimposition," a combination of two colors co-existing in the frame. One perceives, particularly with lavender and green, an overall movement of grain patterns. To add to the illusory ambiguity, there are both patterns of film grain and patterns of the paper grain from which the color footage was shot. One does not know if he is perceiving the illusion of the real grain of the film strip itself or the illusion of the filmed paper. And as if to ward off the possibility of the viewer conjuring up other more figurative kinds of virtual illusions from the patterns which appear on the screen in conjunction with his own psycho-physical operations, occasional splice marks appear on the screen to remind him that they are only illusion, and indeed film illusions of the most immediate kind.

In various ways in *Ray Gun Virus* the perimeters of the screen become the instrument of illusionary space. Most strikingly, *Ray Gun Virus* actualizes in film in analogous fashion, an idea derived from painting, Michael Fried's notion of deductive structure. The structure is dictated by the form of the materials themselves, and here in film, by way of light, color, and flicker as they affect the screen. It is a simple psychological phenomenon whereby changes of color alter eye convergence which in turn creates the illusion of alteration in size. And for the perceiver of *Ray Gun Virus*, the screen does measurably change its size. While the frenetic flicker patterns which vibrate in and out from the boundaries of the screen seem to keep the screen size constant, the slower movements from one color to another cause it to seem to shrink and expand. And the ambiguity of the experience is heightened even further because no one color reacts the same way each time. For instance, at first reds and yellows might appear to extend but later they seem to shrink the screen size, depending upon the flicker rate and the preceding and following colors. So the film means — light,

color, and flicker — acting upon the screen, create out of themselves a new stage for illusions.

And to carry it one step further, the fade-outs to black utterly obliterate the space of the screen. Color and light acting in time create the space of *Ray Gun Virus* and their absence annihilates this space altogether. The quick flashes to white serve the same function, but more elusively, because they momentarily blind one. The very negation of the screen is the negation of space, color, and light. During these moments one becomes aware of another phenomenon, alluded to in Sharits' "Statement of Intention" above. The color and light create and transform the space between the projector and screen and most particularly between the viewer and screen, so that this space as well as that of the screen is shaped through projection of the color by the light in time. And this other space participates and becomes amalgamated into the experience, actualizing the "three-dimensional light beam."

Ray Gun Virus' ambiguity arises out of the structuring of its highly reductive materials and their hypersensitive reaction upon and conditioning by both the perceiver's psychophysical state and the environment in which the work is projected. Even the film's simple, straightforward sprocket-hole sound may take on illusionistic associations, contingent upon the sound equipment itself, making it, as well as the visual experience, highly ambiguous.

By way of their structural symmetry, the mandala films, *Piece Mandala/End War*, N:O:T:H:I:N:G, and T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G contrast sharply with *Ray Gun Virus* which is linear but asymmetric in its structure. Each has a definite and pronounced center with the sections preceding and following the center, inversions of each other. *Piece Mandala/End War* and T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G are dense with referential imagery which operates within the flicker system, while N:O:T:H:I:N:G has sparse ordered flickering imagery with solid stretches of chromatic and achromatic flicker frames. This last is the longest of Sharits' flicker works, more than twice the length of *Ray Gun Virus*, and bears comparisons to it in these color stretches.

A graphic light bulb makes its appearance in six short interspersed sequences in the first and again in the third sections. The cartoonlike bulb which is at first white gradually loses its radiance and becomes black; after the middle of the film the black bulb proceeds to drain out its black light to the bottom of the screen, in this way completing its inversion. In the middle of the film, a chair appears upright and falls in animated flashes. Accompanying it is a complex of telephone sounds which acts as an inversion to the chair image. As Sharits explains it in working notes: "Where the visual image is redundant, the auditory image is active and as the visual image becomes active (begins falling), the auditory becomes redundant." Otherwise the overall silence of the film is punctuated by several discrete sounds — shattering, pouring, telephone

signals and a cow's mooing — which serve to create more reversals.

Comparing *Ray Gun Virus* with *N:O:T:H:I:N:G*, one's eyes feel the differences in flicker effect, and one begins to grasp the fertility of the color flicker genre. While in *Ray Gun Virus* there are some frenetic passages, the overall flicker in *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* could be described as violent and assaulting. The former film has stretches of smooth and graduated changes in color value, and while the latter has what could be described as slow rotations of color analogous to the gradual changes marked in *Ray Gun Virus*, it is composed largely of short bursts of color. These bursts of one to three frames each of two or three colors with similar subsequent clusters of other hues, the film maker describes in working notes as "open eye phosphene" segments. These are simulations of oscillating fields and other visual sensations affected when one closes one's eyes before falling off to sleep. This is one part of what Brakhage refers to as "closed eye vision." But while Brakhage seeks to create this and other "closed eye vision" illusions by filming images which approximate his own vision, Sharits, distinct from Brakhage, works with and through the solid chromatic and achromatic film frames, allowing them to act directly upon the eye and nervous system of the viewer. Brakhage asks the perceiver to share his own personal visions while Sharits allows each viewer to create his own illusions.

N:O:T:H:I:N:G employs a greater range of dark colors in contrast to *Ray Gun Virus* which overall, has lighter, fainter, and gentler colors. And more black and white are used in *N:O:T:H:I:N:G*, with another interesting reversal: white is more frequent in the first part and black more so in the last. And both achromatics appear in many of the "open eye phosphene" segments, intensifying their frenetic qualities. Because white and black are used so heavily in this way, there are fewer and less distinct fades and the screen size remains more constant in *N:O:T:H:I:N:G*.

The film is a complex combination of light and color affirming itself and then canceling itself out through inversions. Elements of the unexpected and the predictable on both the audio and the visual levels operate in waves and counter each other. When one sees the bulb, one anticipates its reappearance, but one doesn't expect the oxymoronic image of the dripping black bulb; then again, once it begins its dripping, one can anticipate the completion of that action. One doesn't expect the pouring to follow the shattering, or the cow again at the end which, as Sharits suggested in an interview, is the source of the pouring liquid.

In the earlier mandala work, *Piece Mandala/End War*, its symmetrical inversion takes place through two motions of lovemaking. The two separate lines of action alternate with each other from frame to frame in flicker fashion through the first and third parts, interrupted by the center. The woman is lying down; in one action

her head is on the right side of the frame as the motion begins with completion of a kiss and the man moves down her body into a cunnilingus position; in the other, where her head is on the left, lovemaking starts with cunnilingus and ends with a kiss. In this way action alternates from one side of the screen to the other. The two lines of gestures move through the film strip in time, becoming the inverse of each other from beginning to end, end to beginning, so that the opening gestures have essentially reversed places by the end of the film. While the two acts never fuse, their opposite lines of direction cause them to become, as Sharits describes it in *Film Makers' Cooperative Catalog No. 5*: ". . . one lovemaking gesture which is seen simultaneously from both sides of its 'space' and both 'ends' of its time." In the film's center, Sharits, who is the male lovemaking figure, appears alone in an absurd suicidal posture.

An acquaintance told me that after showing *Piece Mandala/End War* to his students, they went immediately to the projector to examine the strip of film. Sharits' films elicit this kind of reaction, underlining one of his concerns — the dualism of the film as projected and experienced image and the film as a strip of frames. In *Piece Mandala* this dualism becomes experientially hypertrophied. The fast animated montage of flickering color frames and alternating figures, cause the figures in instances to seem superimposed, at other times, to arc out from the screen into space and then circle back. Straight lines, diagonals, crisscrossed formations result.

There are no actual superimpositions, although there seem to be. A wide range of color is used for the flicker, but one really perceives red, blue, green, and some yellow; absorbed by the black and white action footage, many only perceive red and green flicker. When one tries to count the number of different shots of the alternating actions, one sees four or perhaps six on the screen, when in actual count, on the strip of film there are twenty-two different shots used for these two animations. The actions on the screen become ambiguous and diffuse by way of the careful optical strategies used. The control of the individual frame, the meticulous scoring of the whole, the unity of the two actions by way of their inversions in time and space serve to emphasize the paradox of the film system as strip of frames and projected illusion.

Ambiguity operates in each of Sharits' flicker films, whether in the perception of color and optical illusions as in *Ray Gun Virus* and *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* or in the perception of the figurative images in *Piece Mandala/End War*. If the ambiguity in the latter film serves to create a frenetic effect, it does this in *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* as well, and to a greater degree. Ambiguity functions here in several ways, to make *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* Sharits' most frenetic film to date.

On the audio level it operates by way of the one-word loop, repeated without pause through-

out the film, interrupted only by the silent center. On seeing *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* for the first time, one usually assumes that there are several word combinations which recur. With the single loop word, "destroy," one hears such things as "it's gone," "it's off," "it's cut," "his straw," "history," and more. And, having been present at screenings where spectators actually did not hear "destroy" at all, but other word combinations, it does operate as Sharits once described it at Millenium Film Workshop in New York (Dec. 26, 1970) when he commented that "destroy" actually destroys itself. Altering and annihilating itself in this way, the word correlates with the film's visual ambiguity and frenzy.

The title, *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*, written with each letter set off by a comma, signals the ordering of the film which is separated into six equal parts and a distinct middle section. If the bulb in *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* could be described as cartoonlike, certainly the dominance of lavenders, oranges, and yellows in the flicker system and the use of glitter create a consciously gaudy, cartoonlike effect, heightening the visual frenzy. In all but the middle, poet David Franks appears in medium close-up; and in five of these six parts he is involved in two basic actions which occur at different stages. In one, Franks initially appears with his outstretched tongue between green glitter-covered scissors; alternating with this, he is seen with a red glitter-streaked cheek, and a woman's long green glitter nails extending across his face from the side of the screen. As the film progresses, the two actions begin to move confusedly and indecisively toward and then away from the face, neither act assuming a definite direction. The indecisiveness continues into the fifth section, though with less action directed toward the face, and it ends with both hand and scissors withdrawing. But this development away from violence and potential destruction only finally becomes unambiguous in the last section where Franks appears with open eyes and without the glitter of destruction. Once in each section, including the center, are segments of alternating close-ups of eye surgery and sexual intercourse that are not readily perceivable as such. They too look ambiguous and suggest ominousness and violence; yet both are positive forms of touching. The incipient destruction involving Franks through touching gestures never actualizes itself on the screen and the ambiguity, while serving the visual frenetic effect, finally prevents the destruction from taking place.

In *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*, a symmetrical inversion, typical of the mandala films, occurs on the sound level through the rhythm of the drumlike beat which accompanies "destroy." The beat moves from a slow to a fast rhythm and then reverses itself after the center. Yet there is another and more important inversion, a spatial inversion, operating in an asymmetric and less pronounced fashion. It continues a developmental line which has its origin in *Ray Gun Virus*. The raised scissors and hand, particularly in their quick suc-



cessions of alterations and variations, seem to deepen the screen space. And when scissors and hand are poised at the edges of the screen, or moving from or to these edges, they fix the frame size. But then in the last section, Franks' image seems to extend out from the screen as the framing shapes figured in apparent superimposition flicker over his face and then vanish; finally, between frames of color, Franks' image appears as if on a rotating wheel, popping up from deep space and out to inhabit the theater space — to extend and create new space as does the color flicker in *Ray Gun Virus*. So that the frame, so strongly reaffirmed earlier in *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*, also seems to destroy itself in breaking out of its space.

Sharits describes his shortest film, the 3¾-minute *Word Movie/Flux Film 29*, in *Film Makers' Cooperative Catalog No. 5*: "... approximately 50 words visually 'repeated' in varying sequential and positional relationships/spoken word sound track/structurally, each frame being a different word or word fragment. . . ." As a brief example, the letter "c" remains positionally fixed in the frame, serving as structure for each different word frame, as with:

s p l i c e
 s c r e e n
 s p a c e
 i n c i s i o n

and so on, shifting from one letter cycle to another in this fashion throughout the film. A two-color flicker system, alternating one color per frame, back and forth through a letter cycle and then changing one or both colors on the next letter cycle, correlates with the word system. The sound bears certain structural correspondences to the visuals: two voices are heard, alternating with each other, each reciting a different, unrelated text, one word at a time.

More than any of Sharits' flicker films, *Word Movie* most closely literalizes the flicker effect of the shutter mechanism through its use of the separate word for each frame coupled with the single frame units of color. The word structure as a single unit becomes an analogue for the individual film frame. And at the same time as serving that function, the word emphasizes the screen frame perimeters as certain words are horizontally cut off by the frame line. But the word structure serves in another film analogy, one which is in contrast to the word/frame comparison. Sharits completes the above catalog description, saying:

"... the individual words optically-conceptually fuse into one 3¾-minute long word," the length of the film. Later at Millenium (Dec. 26, 1970), he contrasted it to the symmetrical mandala films, saying that "*Word Movie* feels like a straight line going through time."⁴ In this sense one can perceive it as a link to his preoccupations with the film as strip as evidenced in his most recently completed work, *S:TREAM:S:S:ECTION:S:SECTIONED* (1970), although

Word Movie only begins to intimate this linearity through the cycling of the fixed letters.

While the flicker form stresses the single frame and facture through control of the frame system and illuminates one of film's dualities, another aspect, film as a strip or, as Sharits refers to it, "a line in time," suggests a different emphasis and dichotomy. While the film is projected at 24 f.p.s., one perceives only one constant screen-frame with movement of the recorded illusion inside of it. But one does not perceive the actual passage of the film as it moves as a vertical strip or "line in time," for the shutter mechanism and the intermittent movement of the projector combined with the persistence of vision prevent one from seeing this. S:S:S:S:S:S attempts to deal with this aspect of the film system.

Perhaps everyone who has ever seen a film has noticed or rather tried not to notice scratches in the work. A scratch is generally considered a negative factor which distracts from and eliminates the illusion by cutting away at the emulsion base of the film itself. But in S:S:S:S:S:S, Sharits makes the scratch a positive factor in its additive and subtractive relationship to the recorded film illusion. And, at the same time, he uses the scratch to emphasize the linearity of the film material and its passage through the projector.

The film is composed of three repeated 14-minute sections of water current, each section beginning with six superimposed layers of current moving in different directions, decreasing through fades to one layer of current. Almost five minutes into the work, what Sharits describes as "scratch currents" begin, with three vertical scratches increasing in threes systematically over the length of the film until there are twenty-four scratches. Pronounced splice bars, horizontally halving the film frame, are peppered throughout, serving as film analogues to the images of rocks and boulders which appear on the screen. In conjunction with the splices, a beep is heard. Also on the sound track, a word is repeated for a section; another is added to it for a second section, equal in length to the first. This additive process continues until there are six phonetically related words which have none other than a structural correspondence to the visuals.

One usually thinks of a current, in this case a water current, as having direction, but one is not usually made aware of the vertical movement of the film through the projector. The situation is essentially reversed in S:S:S:S:S:S. The superimposed moving current layers cross over each other in pairs—horizontally, vertically, and diagonally, making it impossible, most of the time, to discern their direction; while in contrast, the film suggests its real direction through the projector by way of the scratches.

The scratch units appear in entropic fashion upon the screen, interacting with the illusions

of the water images. While the scratch deals directly with the current illusions, cutting through the film emulsion itself, subtracting from the illusions, at the same time, it is another illusion, adding to the images, altering and developing them as a continuous "line in time." As the scratches continue, they begin to accumulate the rough scraped emulsion forming dark patterns along their sides — in this way "re-creating" new illusions out of the discarded emulsion of the original filmed illusions.

Here as in Sharits' flicker works, there is a conscious concern with space. At first the overall movement of the current seems flat, hovering on the screen, but when the first scratches appear, they seem to set the current illusion back in space. A tension is set up; as more scratches are added, there is a curious oscillation: at times the current image or its fragments extend out of the screen beyond the scratches while at other times the current or fragments move back. Gradually the white scratches with their emulsion scrapings almost overtake the water currents, though they are still present beneath. The space is transformed again, to an almost flatness. And the illusory water currents are in large part removed in time by the illusory film current. As *Ray Gun Virus* creates the space and illusions out of the film materials, in a very different way, S:S:S:S:S:S modulates and transmutes its space through the illusions carved out of the strip of film itself.

When he premiered *S:TREAM:SS:SECTION:S:SECTION:S:S:SECTIONED* at Millenium, Sharits commented that he didn't think that there was as yet an esthetic of the scratch and so consequently he didn't know whether or not he had used the scratch technique well. Yet, all of Sharits' works pose this kind of question. *Ray Gun Virus* was the first color flicker film made and his subsequent figurative flicker works are unique to themselves. His works ask questions and challenge the forms and materials of film itself. At the same time, he challenges the viewer as well. All the things which the perceiver has learned in time to take for granted, without questioning — the frame, the strip, the projector, light, space, and even his own responses — Sharits asks him now to reconsider. If art is about perception and perceiving in new ways, the importance of Paul Sharits' work is unquestionable. He is working now on a slide piece concerned with the projection of the light beam back on itself, as well as working on at least four or five film projects. Among them is a work called *Reprojection*, whose title verifies the continued direction of his concerns. ■

1. *Razor Blades*, 25 minutes, b&w/color, two-screen projection, stereo sound. Because of its two-screen projection, it was not possible to arrange viewings of the work for purposes of analysis. For this reason it has been omitted from the following discussion.

2. Kasimir S. Malevich, *Essays on Art: 1928-1933, II*, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin, ed. Troels Andersen (Copenhagen, 1968), pp. 26 and 119 respectively.

3. In a note to P. Adams Sitney, dated August, 1969.

4. My thanks to Bob Parent for providing me with a tape of the Millenium proceedings.

MICHAEL SNOW

. . . . I've been trying to give some attention to how "one thing leads to another" or more accurately: "the ways in which one action leads to another." That isn't much clearer.

Apparently certain types of events and in myself certain states of mind bring about attention with this kind of emphasis. My perception of the nature of a situation (result of a vague yearning to codify "how one thing leads to another") if clear, includes everything. Ha ha. Everything which I was capable of receiving. I'm often quite fuzzy or don't care. Also every beginning is arbitrary. I have noted in myself the emergence of the kind of attention I'm describing and called that a "beginning." I'll write more about beginnings later.

Can't trace back this interest, it must be something to do with being and being an artist.

Don't expect to dispel many shadows. Mild illuminations. There's no end of mysteries, each solution a problem.

Often, frequently, repeatedly, instead of just living through a situation, happy, sad, etc., I hear the artist's mind-voice saying: "notice how this became that? Isn't that like the other? That means there's a family! Genus. Order. Classification of events! Sometimes there's not much pleasure in it, it's compulsive."

Though I can't make a "mistake," I can "change my mind." What a phrase!

Am I learning anything? I'm not learning much because there's so much to learn and there's so much to remember, I feel sure I forget a lot. I often have a kind of wrap-up intuition of the nature of an event, simultaneously esthetic, psychological, biological, philosophic, political . . . leaving a vaguer record than simpler experiences . . . and memory being somewhat selective (who really knows the mechanics of its choices?) the residue of this recently added "stuff," when sieved through the records of previous experience for re(?)examination, often seems to consist of somewhat familiar particles. Recollections are (naturally) "stylized" . . . and . . . perhaps excess memory can spoil while stored. So in a way I'm pleased that I apparently have a poor memory. Infantile freshness. What a strong wind! Reality was and always is a form of memory even at the moment of perception But in another way: I just don't know enough to *truly* experience. Range of references. I can quote that accurate statement (whose? when? really?) about: "those who . . . history . . . condemned . . . repeat . . ."

Have you read this essay before? Is it "original"?

Switch. *But* one of the many reasons why my observations are mine is that I *don't* have many out-of-my-own-experience facts to deal with.

Besides every event is completely new. What a burst of optimism! Not completely. They certainly can resemble each other.

I'm not scientific. No "ends," no "goals," no use. "This vague yearning to codify" is being reacted to only in the action of noticing "how one thing leads to another," I do not have a system, I am a system. There won't be any summing up. Perhaps there will. These observations are in my life with my work.

I've been led to prefer fortuitous personal experience education to searching out "processed" information: books, other people's work in any medium, asking questions of other people. What "whats"!

Further clarification: In literature "one thing leads to another," yes, but what we are discussing is noticing how "many events lead to many others."

In relation to events one can only be a participant or a spectator or both. Of course one can also be uninformed (events of which one is unaware take place constantly, to say the least). But is that a relationship? Yes.

Experience of an event can only be anticipatory, actual, and post facto. Or prophetic, intentional, guessed, planned or total or historic, reminiscent, analytical. And in this (lower) case it should be pointed out that I am using *your* words.

Behind this attempt at orderly noticing do I have a horror of the possibility of chaos? Would chaos be an inability to tell one thing from another? Is sanity only the ability to identify and to name? Cultural? Is ordering the "disorder" an order? Can there be "order" without repetition? Is there something necessarily fatalistic but also "religious" in affirming (quoting?) that disorder must be only a type of order the nature of which is not yet comprehended . . . ? But "the eye of the beholder" . . . not only is order projected but all is order; all is ordained? The reason for the shape of my nose the same as the reason a bus just passed this building. Oh, that's going too far.

Events take time. Events take place.

Named, scheduled events: bus ride, concert, Christmas, eclipse, etc. This is not what I'm interested in. Sub-events: not "what is," not "what is not," but what happens in between. In this case: "not."

"Passages" then, wherein or post facto or in anticipation, I may note revelatory unities and disparities. What's interesting is not codifying but experiencing and understanding the nature of passages from one state to another without acknowledging "beginning" as having any more importance in the incident than "importance" has in this sentence.

Or than "ending" in this



Michael Snow, Production still from ← →

STATEMENTS

RICHARD SERRA

On *Frame*, 25 minutes, b&w, sound, 1969. Cameraman: Robert Fiore.

Perception has its own abstract logic and it is often necessary to fit verbal and mathematical formulation (in this instance, measuring) to things rather than the other way around. The size, scale, and three-dimensional ambiguity of film and photographs is usually accepted as one kind of interpretation of (reality). These media fundamentally contradict the perception of the thing to which they allude. Objective physical measurement of real and physical depth coupled with apparent measurement of film depth points to the contradiction posed in the perception of a film or photo. The device of a ruler which functions as a stabilizing or compensating system in the film is the subject of its own contradiction. This contradiction is reinforced as a continuous

direction and dialogue between the performer and the cameraman points to the illusion of the frame space.

RICHARD SERRA

On *Color-aid*, 35 minutes, Kodachrome, sound. Cameraman: Robert Fiore.

A stack of color-aid swatches is filmed close-up, centered, and overhead. The color fills the frame. The frame changes continuously every five to thirty seconds by a simple hand wipe. This device, the hand-manipulated frame change of saturated color, alters consecutively the light, space, depth, and color of each image. Color changes and afterimages occur. The screen is received somewhat as an object, in as much as the surface and space of each frame is holistic. The sync sound is that of the swatches wiping.



Richard Serra. Still from *Color-aid*, 16mm, Kodachrome, 1970-71. Cameraman: Robert Fiore.



Richard Serra. Still from *Frame*, 16 mm, b&w, 1969. Cameraman: Robert Fiore.

"PAUL REVERE"

JOAN JONAS and RICHARD SERRA

The film is an adaptation from two sources: *Kinesics and Context* by Ray L. Birdwhistell, and *Choreomania*, a performance by Joan Jonas.

Off-camera narration determines actions, (some direction given by cameraman)

narration off-camera

The film you are viewing will demonstrate, with your attention and cooperation, aspects of an operative process in communication. A simple two-message system will be employed: The informational model of Paul Revere's signaling light tower will be the example, that is a lone light signaling that the British are coming by land ▲ two lights conveying the warning that they are coming by sea. ▲ This is a clear clean informational model. To modify this into a communicational model requires the recognition that as soon as there is a body of communicants united by the *knowledge* that one light means "by land" ▲ and two means "by sea" ▲ the communication is in operation. The message introduced by the recognition is: "As long as there are no lights the British are not coming."

There are thus immediately a series of elements isolable but interdependent in this structure: ▲

1. The continuous signal, no light: "No British." —
2. Presence of light: "British are coming." —
3. One light (which cross references absence of one light): "British are coming by land."
4. Two lights (which cross references as absence of one light): "British are coming by sea." ▲

Now let us imagine two contingencies which are statistically probable for 18th-century New England. Let us suppose that Farmer Tutt looks up at the tower of North Church and sees no light but begins to worry that the light has blown out. ▲ Or, let us suppose that Farmer Stone, noted for his eyesight, becomes so anxious that he hallucinates a light. ▲ Our case is not so simplified if he is also able to hallucinate the fact that the light has blown out. ▲

Let us conceive of the *breakdown* situation

Props: two 2000-watt light bulbs, one bell, one clock, one pane of glass, one lantern, instructional cards.

normal light (house lights) with two hand-held light bulbs in the frame

▲ one light bulb on and off

▲ two light bulbs on and off (entire frame becomes white)

▲ one light bulb on and off

▲ two light bulbs on and off (entire frame becomes white)

both light bulbs removed from frame

▲ wipe on card (1234)

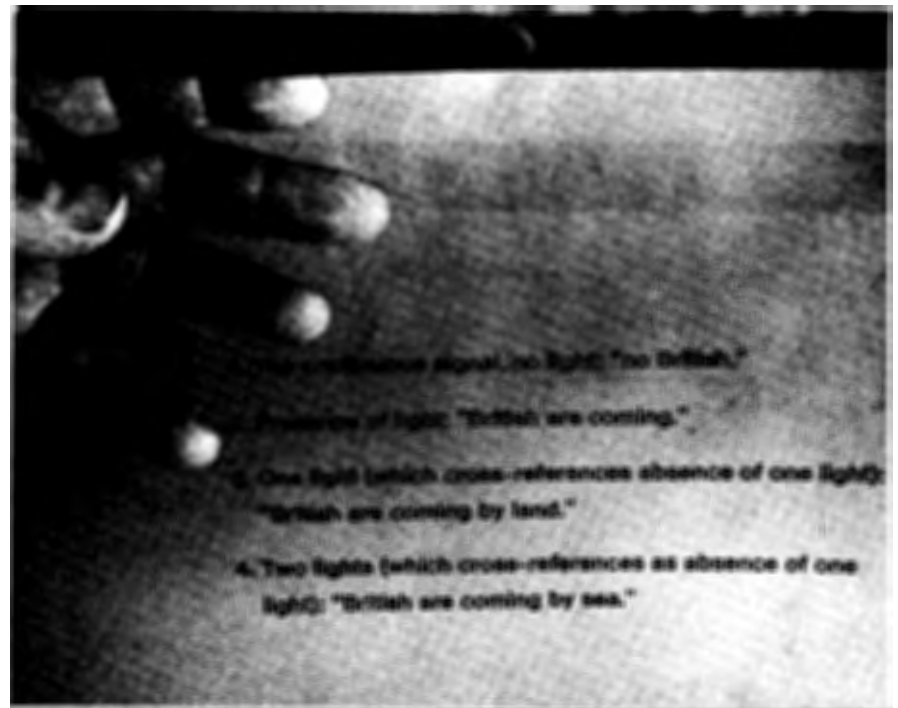
finger points to statements as they are read

▲ wipe card off to normal lighting

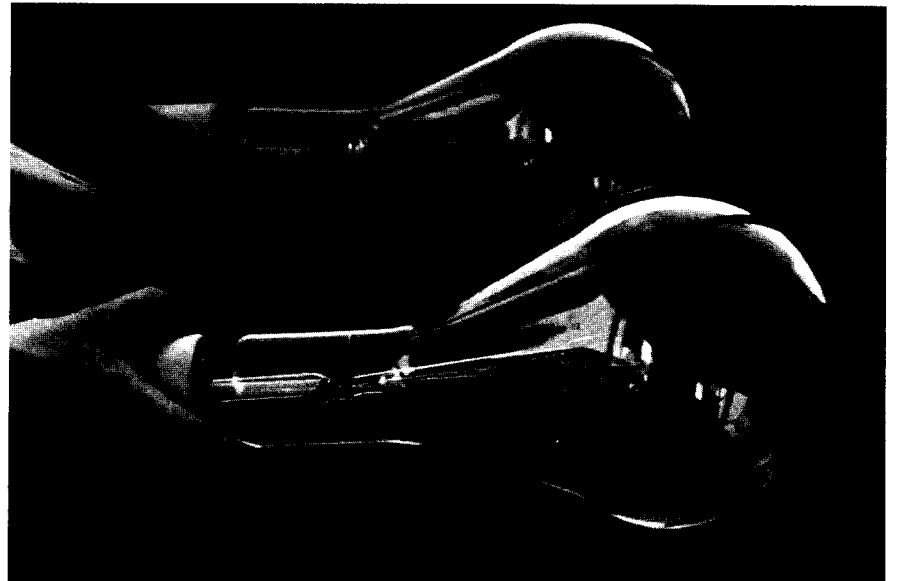
▲ house lights turned off — frame black

▲ head center framed — back lighted, haloed

▲ light out, frame black



Joan Jonas and Richard Serra, Still from *Paul Revere*, 16mm, b&w, 1971.



Joan Jonas and Richard Serra, Still from *Paul Revere*, 16mm, b&w, 1971.

which would occur if Boston teenagers decided to arouse the farmers out of bed now and then by slipping into the church and lighting the lanterns in the window. ▲

Even though the informational system has a minimum of uncertainties, it is clear that the farmers will soon become anxious for they will be alerted by darkness in the tower, and insufficiently aroused by a light in the tower. ▲ The alerting alarm system is too simple and fragile to meet the needs of the group.

The reliability of the system can be further reinforced by cross-referencing it from a second church tower. — In a second tower a lantern will be placed that will send the message that as long as it is *not* lit the message sent by the other tower is *correct*. — That is, as long as there is no lantern in church tower number two the absence of light in church tower number one indicates that the British are not yet coming. —

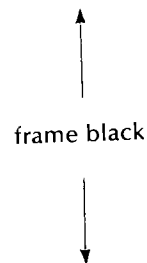
However, if there is a light in church tower number two the absence of light in number one means that the British are coming. ▲ If number two is lit and there is one light in number one this means that *the message is a lie*. ▲▲ However, we cannot yet know the content of the lie. We do not know whether this translates ▲ (A) The British are not coming, or (B) The British are not coming by sea.

The system is still too simple. It is sensorily inefficient. ▲ It is dependent upon the vigilance of a group who maintain all-night watches. Furthermore, because of the non-penetrating qualities of light, other sensory modalities must be readied (alerted) for stimulation and communicative activity. — To solve these problems we arrange to have a sexton ring a church bell as a signal to look at the lights in the tower of churches one and two. ▲ However, this church bell is already being used as the channel for a message system which sends both the integrational message "all is well" ▲ and the specific message denoting the hour, the

▲ hand manipulated lantern lighted and turned up revealing window pane

lantern off, frame black

▲ one light bulb on and off



▲ lantern placed in frame revealing second system (number 2 over lantern, no. 1 over bulbs)

▲ one light bulb lit
▲ wipe on card (message...)

▲ first card wipe off to reveal second card (A & B)

▲ AB card wipe off to reveal white card with numbers 2 & 1

▲ hand-held bell in frame

▲ bell rung seven times

quarter, and the half hour. ▲ Upon the approach of the British, the sexton is instructed to do one of two things. If the British arrive within a period of five minutes prior to the time of striking, the sexton is to omit the next ringing of the bell. — If, on the other hand, the British arrive during the ten minutes immediately following the ringing of the bell, he is to ring it again. ▲ Either the ringing or the absence of ringing, if appropriately performed, send the signal "Look at the bell towers." — ▲

The introduction of the bell demonstrates how much of a communicational system depends upon the proper internalization of the system. A listener would not be alerted by the unusual bell unless he had already internalized the rhythm of the time clock bell. Any mislearning or distorting of this piece of pattern would leave the individual unwarned and vulnerable. To say nothing of the viewer who confuses the identity of the two towers. — The example is simple. We are dependent in this instance for the British to come by night so that our lights can be seen. This system has built into it that the British can only approach with a plan of attack. What if they are landing on a peaceful excursion? Or what if the French decide to take advantage of this situation or are mistaken for the British?

This is a simple model of one phase of the communication process. It is intended only to direct attention to certain problems of communicational analyses. If we think of the simple example and imagine it multiplied astronomically, we gain some insight into the task faced by a child in becoming a sane member of his society. Finally it enables us to focus on the fact that if the child internalizes the logic of such a flexible, dynamic, and ultimately uncomplicated system he has learned to solve the problems solved by normal children in every society. ▲ This process may tell something about the nature of sanity and, by extension, insanity.

▲ hand-held clock in frame: bell rings once at hour, quarter hour and half hour as clock indicates

▲ bell rings
bell rings again

▲ wipe on statement "Look..."
statement remains on

▲ card wipes to reveal statement "This process..."



Joan Jonas and Richard Serra, Stills from *Paul Revere*, 16mm, b&w, 1971.

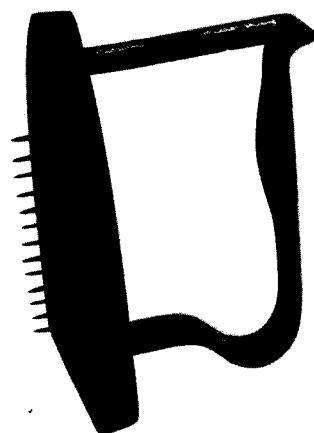




Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Still from *Life of the Lobster*, 1936.
(The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)

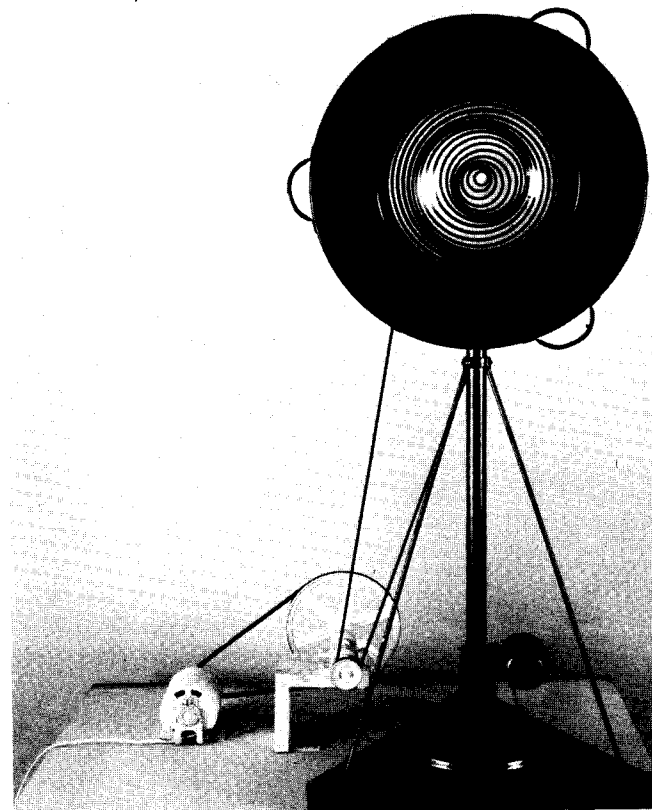


Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Still from *Gypsies*, 1932. (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)



Man Ray, *Gift*, painted flat iron with metal tacks,
ca. 1958 (replica of a work of 1921, subsequently
destroyed).

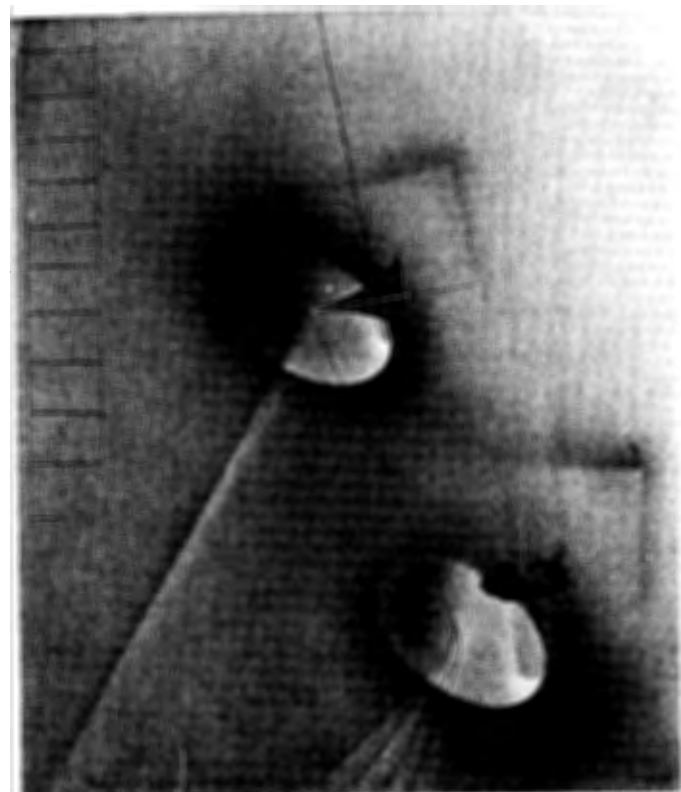
Marcel Duchamp, *Rotary Demisphere*, 1920.



KINETIC SOLUTIONS TO PICTORIAL PROBLEMS THE FILMS OF MAN RAY AND MOHOLY-NAGY



Man Ray, *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows*,
o/c, 52 x 73 $\frac{3}{8}$ " , 1916. (The Museum of Modern Art, New York.)



Man Ray, *Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematograph*, gouache,
1919

BARBARA ROSE

The films of the Hungarian Constructivist Moholy-Nagy and the American Dadaist Man Ray have special relevance as historical precedents for current cinematic activity on the part of painters and sculptors. Their films were a response to certain contradictions inherent in the very aims and ideologies of the modern movements themselves, and thus provide a locus for studying a crisis, within the plastic arts, which reasserts itself today.

Conceived during the period between the two world wars of the *détente* from Cubism, the films of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy attempted to formulate an alternative to painting at a time when painting had lost much of its innovational impetus. This period of relaxation after the extraordinary decade of experimentation that closed with World War I called forth doubts regarding not only "progress" in abstract art, but also doubts regarding the function of painting and sculpture within mass industrial societies. In this context artists questioned, as they are questioning today, the social relevance of the traditional arts, as well as their ability to sustain a level of innovation equal to that of modern science and industry. Given the problematic status of the traditional arts within such a revolutionary situation, the new art of film appeared to some a possible antidote to demoralization and paralysis. A mass art born of modern technology, free of the deadening burden of tradition, film began to attract artists eager to experiment with a young medium that seemed by definition the characteristic art of the industrial age. The camera had no need to ape machine imagery or adopt its mechanical forms because it was, quite literally, a machine. Not only artists eager to break with inherited traditions but the very apologists for those traditions, such as art historians Erwin Panofsky and Arnold Hauser, speculated that film might indeed prove the most significant medium in modern times.

Film fitted perfectly the futurist prescriptions of the modern movements: a reproductive art of multiple originals, hence a popular social art, film referred to the greater world beyond the narrow confines of the studio, which in a revolutionary climate often seems stifling. Eventually, film came to be seen, for reasons we will examine, as the means of reconciling the avant-garde artist, so long alienated from society, with his fellow men. In the context of the difficulties confronting the progress of abstraction — even Picasso and Matisse returned to more explicitly figural styles during the *détente* — film had a distinct advantage: its images were mechanically, and not manually, recorded. It had the capacity to banish the *hand* of the artist, detested by both Dadaists and Constructivists alike for related reasons. The revulsion against "painterly" painting among artists who carried the banner of vanguardism between the two world wars

can be explained by political and geographical factors. The tradition of painterly painting was a Mediterranean tradition. But Dada and Constructivism were creations of provincial artists. Revolting against painterly painting in the name of political protest, their radical manifestos implied that the single feature separating the fine artist from the mass of men was his unique talent, that is, his "hand." Democratization of art hence entailed the obliteration of such inherited distinctions in talent as well as that of wealth. Along with the hand would go that other relic of Renaissance individualism and social stratification, personal style.

Handcraft had already disappeared with folk art in advanced industrial societies. It was now proposed that handwork should equally disappear from art. Toward this end, Moholy-Nagy phoned in an order for an enamel painting to a sign factory in 1922, proving that art was a matter of concept and concept alone. The sense that the Renaissance world of fixed values was dead and that a new civilization as yet unnamed and unknown was being born, created a mood of imminence and a climate of disorganization nearly as exaggerated as our own. Artists searched for "modern" themes, exalted the urban environment, and envied scientists their greater prominence in the world. The interest in science had already generated an obsession with breaking through the traditional limitations of the space arts among Cubists and Futurists. Influenced by chronophotographs, the Futurists illustrated the passage of time through a literary conceit. The Cubists, more sophisticated conceptually, superimposed views of the same object from differing vantage points, and tried to incorporate the fourth dimension through simultaneity.

Their images picturing time were dramatic, but it soon became obvious only actual movement could combine time with space. Around 1920, a number of painters and sculptors experimented with kinetic art literally involving the dimension of time. Among them were Thomas Wilfred and Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack who worked with colored light projections and the early kinetic sculptors, the Constructivists Vladimir Tatlin and Naum Gabo and the Dadaist Marcel Duchamp.

Through Duchamp, whom he met in 1915, Man Ray became interested in movement. Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* of 1913 was not only the first "ready-made," it was also the first modern kinetic sculpture. In a single revolutionary gesture, Duchamp introduced the new genre in which he made several experiments, including one that almost killed Man Ray. Shortly before the two left New York for Paris, Duchamp was working on a revolving construction made of transparent planes painted with parts of a spiral supposed to fuse optically. Unfortunately, Duchamp's conception was ahead of his engineering. As Man Ray stood before the piece to photograph it, one of the planes of glass came flying

off and hit him on the head. Duchamp continued to experiment with "rotoreliefs" as he called his kinetic paintings. Eventually, the optical discs containing spiral motifs were mounted on the bicycle to make *Anemic Cinema*, which Man Ray filmed for Duchamp in 1926. In *Anemic Cinema*, Duchamp accomplished what he had set out to do in the ill-fated *Rotary Glass Plate* of 1920: he created the illusion of a spiral projecting three-dimensionally toward the audience.¹

It is impossible to disengage Man Ray's career from Duchamp's. His best known painting, *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows* is in a sense, a hard-edged synthetic Cubist female pendant to Duchamp's notorious *Nude Descending the Staircase*. Next, Man Ray proceeded to literalize motion by cutting the "shadows" of such a figure out and pasting them on pieces of cardboard attached to a revolving spindle. In Paris, he followed Duchamp by abandoning painting completely, turning to photographs, Rayographs, and Dada objects. From his interest in photography and motion, it was but a brief step to film, although it was a step it took him a few years to take. Initially, his interest in photography had been inspired by Alfred Stieglitz. In Paris, his assistant, Berenice Abbot, herself a gifted portrait photographer, introduced him to Atget's piquant and nostalgic Paris street scenes, which find echoes later in the scenes of *Emak Bakia*. Man Ray turned to photography as the modern form of representation. "I could not help thinking," he wrote in his autobiography *Self-Portrait*, "that since photography had liberated the modern painter from the drudgery of faithful representation, this field would become the exclusive one of the photograph, helping it to become an art in its own right."

His final experiments in painting involved the search for an automatic mechanical technique. In 1919 he executed his first Aerographs, paintings made with the commercial technique of airbrushing, often used in photo-retouching. One of these Aerographs, titled the *Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinématograph*, contained a rectangular grid on the left margin reminiscent of a film strip, marked with numbers indicating a progression in time.² He was particularly proud of the nonpainterly quality of the Aerographs, which closely resembled photographs. "It was thrilling to paint a picture, hardly touching the surface — a purely cerebral art, as it were," he said of them.

The following year, apparently by accident, Man Ray stumbled on the process of cameraless photography while developing some negatives. The process had been known since 1839 when Fox-Talbot first created photographic images directly in his photogenic drawings, but Man Ray's use of the technique to create elegant pictorial effects involving space, texture, and abstract composition, were remarkable.

Man Ray called these automatically recorded images Rayographs. According to Moholy-

Nagy, he was not aware of the Rayographs in 1922 when he began making Photograms, photographic images also produced without a camera.³ Technically identical, the Rayographs and Photograms differ, however, in the type of imagery record. The Rayographs emphasize poetic, allusive, and witty associations, whereas the Photograms tend toward purely abstract geometric arrangements. Not surprisingly, when the two turned to film, their imagery diverged in the same manner.

Man Ray was particularly pleased with the visual, nontactile quality of his films as well as with the Rayographs. He described his second film *Emak Bakia* as "purely optical, made to appeal only to the eyes."⁴ Freed from adherence to any convention of narrative, he mixed abstract and representational elements in both Rayographs and films. The sense of discovery he felt in so doing is understandable: the freedom to combine previously unrelated material was one of the few new areas of exploration available to experimental artists of the twenties and thirties.

Indeed the period between the two wars saw the principle of *assemblage*—of forms, concepts, materials, and images associated to produce new meanings—gain ascendancy in all the arts. In literature, the stream-of-consciousness technique allowed the free merging of material from the newly discovered subconscious. The common denominator of Dada and Constructivism formally was that both were basically arts of *assemblage*: Constructivism assembled planes, shapes, textures, and materials; Dada depended on collage (both flat and three-dimensional) to strike new meanings from the association of familiar objects. Man Ray's 1921 Dada object, *Gift*, one of the first Dada objects he made on arriving in Paris, combines an ordinary iron with a row of spiked nails to create a menacing image of aggression and potential danger. In film, the equivalent of *assemblage* and collage was, of course, montage. Through montage the film artist could create complex fusions of images charged with poetic and allusive meaning.

Because its very construction depends on this principle of association, film solved many dilemmas for Man Ray. Much as he loved photography, he also hated the literalism of "reality." (He left America, he claimed, because it had no mystery.) In film, he could combine "found" images, that is, images preexisting in the world, in novel and imaginative ways which poetically inverted and subverted reality. Later the Surrealists' desire to create *peinture-poésie* drove Dali, Ernst, Delvaux, and Magritte—and eventually Man Ray—to adopt all the conventions of academic art Cubists had discarded.

But "film poetry" permitted the literary identification of subject matter without requiring such a compromise with academicism. Given this situation, the *cinépoème*, Man Ray's subtitle for *Emak Bakia*, was a natural solution to the dilemma of reconciling representational imagery

with modern attitudes. This problem of imagery, a result of the literary origins of Surrealist imagery, could never be adequately solved in painting that aspired to be poetry. Film, however, offered the possibility of *cinépoésie*, which might even include abstract elements, provided they were subsumed in a context of poetic allusion.⁵

Despite the obvious logic of Man Ray's debut as a film maker (he prophetically signed Picabia's guest book as "Man Ray, Director of Bad Films" on his arrival in Paris), he fell into film work with characteristic insouciance. His initial film experience came in helping Duchamp try to make 3-D movies in New York in 1920, just prior to their departure for Europe. Always one jump ahead of the game, Duchamp used dual cameras attached to a single gear to record the same image simultaneously. Most of the film was ruined because the two experimenters used old garbage can lids which leaked as developing tanks; but a few feet were eventually projected through a standard stereopticon. According to Man Ray, the result was of three-dimensional images fused through binocular vision.

Man Ray made his own first film, characteristically, by chance. The poet Tristan Tzara announced he had placed a film by Man Ray on the program of the last great Dada evening, the *Coeur à Barbe*, held in 1923. Man Ray complained he had no such film, only a few random shots taken with a movie camera. Tzara suggested he make a lot of quick footage by using the technique of cameraless photography on film. Combining what he had with footage produced by placing objects on undeveloped film and then exposing it, Man Ray had enough for a five-minute film he called *Return to Reason*—the last thing any self-respecting Dadaist planned to do. A fight broke out, so that the film was a success by Dada standards. This persuaded the wealthy patron Monroe Wheeler to give Man Ray enough money to make *Emak Bakia*, a film of sufficient interest and originality to suggest Man Ray might have become a major Surrealist film maker, had he not been, as he readily admits in his autobiography, simply too lazy.

Between the making of *Return to Reason*, which is hardly more than an assemblage of unrelated images, and the far more ambitious *Emak Bakia* in 1927, André Breton had published his Surrealist manifestos, Léger had filmed *Ballet Mécanique*, and Man Ray had worked with Duchamp on *Anemic Cinema*. These events obviously contributed considerably to Man Ray's ideas on film. After *Return to Reason*, Man Ray had continued to think of film, experimenting with animating black and white stills. At about this time he was approached by the American film maker Dudley Murphy. Although Man Ray declined to work with Murphy (apparently for financial reasons), Murphy found another artist interested in making a film with him. Before starting *Ballet Mécanique* with Léger, however,

Murphy introduced Man Ray to the lenses that would deform and multiply images that lend *Ballet Mécanique* its distinctly Cubist quality. For this reason, *Emak Bakia*, whose title is most likely a punning reference to both *Ballet Mécanique* and *Anemic Cinema*, has certain visual effects, such as splintering images and fragmenting planes for example, that relate to images in Léger's film.⁶

Emak Bakia is a classic of early experimental cinema. With the help of special lamps, an electric turntable, and an assortment of crystals, Man Ray was able to create a number of stunning visual effects. Abstract passages, as well as the images developed through the Rayograph process incorporated from *Return to Reason*, were interleaved rather than organically related to the realistic action scenes Man Ray shot with a small automatic hand camera. These random shots recorded diverse kinds of movement: the legs of Kiki of Montparnasse dancing the Charleston; Monroe Wheeler's wife driving her Mercedes at 90 m.p.h.; a herd of sheep charging across the screen.

All of Man Ray's strengths as an artist are present in *Emak Bakia*. There is the spirit of adventure and risk, his willingness to use chance as a creative element in the unconventional shots achieved by throwing the camera in the air and catching it. This sequence, which follows that of Mrs. Wheeler in her Mercedes, he thought suggested a collision between the car and the herd of sheep. It reads of course more like a blur, but an exciting blur. Because of the randomness of Man Ray's approach, one cannot really speak of the structure of *Emak Bakia*, which like *Un Chien Andalou*, is basically a series of disconnected visual gags. Certain images reoccur, however, creating a kind of *leit-motif* that might be considered structural: there are many close-ups of eyes, including a montage of eyes overlaid with car headlights. The final dramatic sequence features Kiki, Man Ray's celebrated mistress, appearing to stare straight at the audience, only to open her eyes, revealing the eyes we have seen as painted on her closed eyelids! This image is pure Man Ray: a witty ironic *double entendre* concerning the process of vision itself—a piece of sly trickery unveiled at the last moment to convince us of the cleverness of the artist and his awareness of his illusionistic means. Together with the image of Man Ray with the movie camera that opens *Emak Bakia*, it frames the film and exposes its optical trickery.

So concerned was Man Ray that he might be taken too seriously that he chose to end with a satire on conventional movie endings. The last sequence of the film, which has been a Dada hodgepodge without rhyme or reason throughout, opens with the words—The Reason for this Extravagance—raising the expectation that we will be given the cause of all this madness.⁷ According to Man Ray, he ended with such a



Man Ray, Still from *Emak Bakia*, 1926-27.

satire on the movies "so that the spectator would not think I was being too arty." Actually, the effect is to introduce a false note of realistic narrative to further frustrate the spectator and deny him his right to logical explanations. Set up to expect a conventional flashback treatment of the cause of the events we have witnessed, we are allowed no such catharsis. Here is the essence of Dada, with its disdain for teleology as well as for the feelings of the audience.

The closing scenes of *Emak Bakia* are as topsy-turvy as the rest. A man drops collars to the floor. The collars come to life and jump around, twisting and revolving like kinetic sculptures.⁸ If *Emak Bakia* reveals Man Ray's strengths as an experimenter and imaginative artist, it exposes his weaknesses as well, which are not only his own, but those of the Dada esthetic generally. For Dada's main purpose, according to Man Ray was "to try the patience of the audience." Directed to the reaction of the viewer, Dada allowed audience reactions to gain precedence over artistic necessity.

Man Ray's next film, *L'Etoile de Mer*, was based on the Surrealist poem by Robert Desnos. The poem's imagery was easily translated into a film scenario closely following Desnos' text. Technically, *L'Etoile de Mer* is notable for the distortions created by use of a treated gelatin filter, which caused images to appear mottled "like a sketchy drawing or painting," according to Man Ray. Undoubtedly Desnos' poem appealed to Man Ray because of its calculated eroticism and romantic fantasy combining nature images with mysterious sinister undercurrents. (The filter apparently had to be designed because the nude scenes would obviously not pass the censors otherwise.) Like

Emak Bakia, *L'Etoile de Mer* had a considerable success in art houses throughout Europe.

Man Ray's last film, *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, was financed by the Vicomte de Noailles, a well known patron of the avant-garde. Filmed in a cubistic mansion designed by the fashionable architect Mallet-Stevens, it featured as cast the Vicomte's aristocratic friends, lavishly turned out in period drag. It is Man Ray's most preposterous and pretentious film, full of heavy references to Mallarmé's line, "A throw of the dice can never abolish chance." Essentially a sophisticated home movie made for the amusement of the idle rich, the *Château du Dé* suggests the malingering ennui of Axel's Castle with its "shall-we-go?," "shall-we-stay?," and "what-difference-does-it-make-anyhow-since-life-is-just-a-game?" dialogue.

Although the Vicomte de Noailles offered to back Man Ray as a film maker, the latter refused, and the money was given to two other rising Surrealist directors, Luis Buñuel and Jean Cocteau, to make the twin touchstones of Surrealist film, *L'Age d'Or* and *Blood of a Poet*. From this evidence, one may assume that Man Ray was not really interested in film as an independent art; indeed, he tells us so in his autobiography. It is not surprising then that little is distinctly cinematic even in his best film, *Emak Bakia*. Except for a few sequences such as the one in which Mrs. Wheeler's car hurtles forward directly into the spectator's space and another in which a figure walks back and forth through a series of doorways receding into space articulating a filmic third dimension, Man Ray confined himself mainly to the flat pictorial effects of still photography. The specifically illusionistic scenes of projection and recession within the film space were probably inspired by Duchamp's preoccupa-

tion with spatial effects in *Anemic Cinema*.

Man Ray renounced painting like a good Dadaist, but he continued to think as a pictorial artist when he made films. In the scenario of the *Mystères du Château du Dé*, the last scene is described as follows: "The pose becomes fixed like a photograph, against the sky as a background. The view gradually changes into a negative, white bathing suits against a black sky, like a piece of sculpture." It is true that Man Ray occasionally uses unusual camera angles, such as the shot from directly overhead in *Emak Bakia*; however, the movement of his camera is not the fluid continuous movement of film, but the series of disconnected shots of the same object from different points of view familiar from Cubist paintings. Even his most radical shot — the full 180-degree inversion of sky and sea — is not explored in depth, but remains a frontal, surface statement, a pictorial image that owes more to Surrealist conventions of inverting normal relationships than to any concern with articulating film space as such. Similarly, when a sculptural object, such as the dancing collars or the Dada object reminiscent of a violin handle known also as *Emak Bakia* is shown, the camera does not move in space to explore the object, rather the object revolves in front of a static camera. From this we may conclude that despite the use of *trompe l'oeil* effects created by defracting crystals, reflecting mirrors, and distorting lenses to deform and multiply images, Man Ray seldom if ever conceived films as anything other than animated painting and sculpture, kinetic solutions to pictorial problems regarding time, motion, and representation.

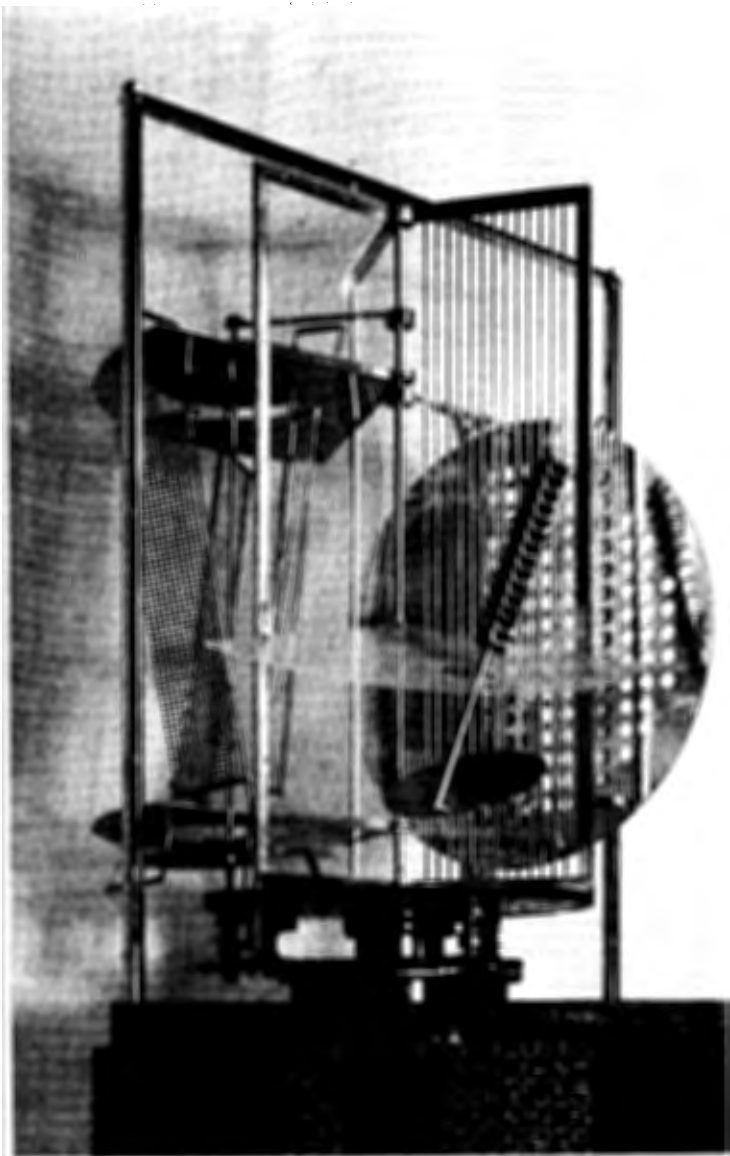
The same may be said of Moholy-Nagy, although he was far more informed and systematic in his thinking about film than Man Ray. When



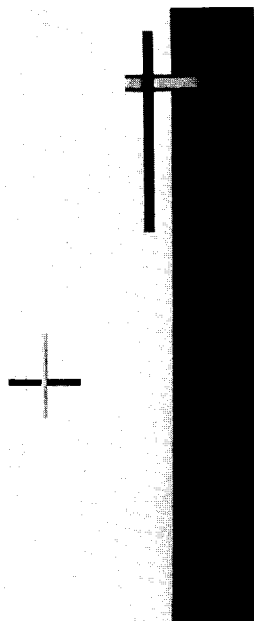
Man Ray, *Emak Bakia*, 1962 (replica of a 1926 original).



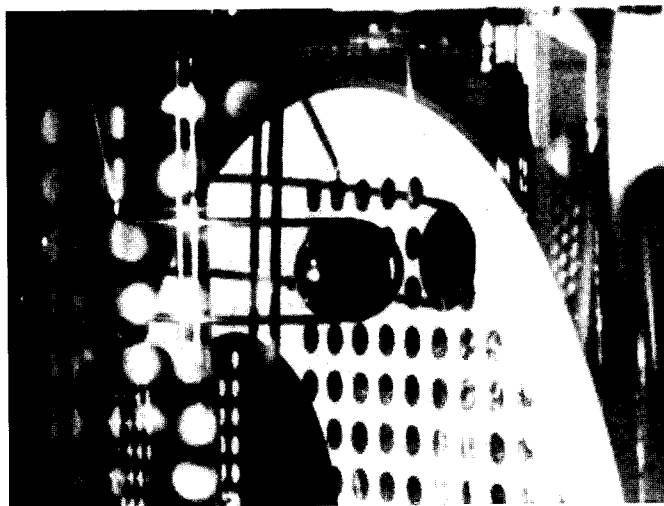
Man Ray, Still from *L'Etoile de Mer*, 1928.



Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Light-Space Modulator*, steel, plastics and wood, h. 59½", 1930. (Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University.)



Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Telephone Picture*.



Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Still from *Lichtspiel*, 1930.

working in film, Moholy exhibits that unnerving discrepancy between theory and practice characteristic of his entire oeuvre, with the possible exception of his highly influential typography. Long before he actually was able to execute one, Moholy dreamed of making films. In 1921-22 he wrote the scenario for a film sketch called *Dynamics of a Metropolis*. Bridges, cars, trains, crowds, the typical *mise-en-scène* of the Constructivist cinema, are all present. Camera movements are not only described, in the original version they are diagramed like a musical score. Interestingly, all the directions can be projected on a two-dimensional plane; none describes a complex movement into space, or any sequence of shots of continuous movement. The opening sequence of a crane is described as follows: "shot from below, diagonally, from above." In other words, from the different viewpoints from which a Cubist painter might depict an object he is analyzing.

Given his belief in artistic "progress," Moholy's emergence as a film maker was inevitable. Early in his career he had already begun numbering painting's days.⁹ In fact his first thought on seeing Malevich's *White on White* was that it was the ideal projection screen for moving reflected images. In 1934 he wrote a friend: "Ever since the invention of photography, painting has advanced by logical stages of development 'from pigment to light'. We have now reached the stage when it should be possible to discard brush and pigment and to 'paint' by means of light itself. We are ready to replace the old two-dimensional color patterns by monumental architecture of light."

From photographs, Moholy progressed to kinetic sculpture, and finally film. His first film was a city picture, *Berlin Still Life*, made in 1926. Its reference to a painting subject is hardly coincidental, since his treatment of the city was as a pictorial study set in motion. In 1929, he made another city study, *Marseilles Vieux Port*, which had a number of striking photographic effects, and in 1930, the *Lichtspiel*, his only abstract film. During the thirties, he filmed a series of documentaries: *Gypsies*, the *C.I.A.M. Congress in Athens*, *Street Scene*, *Finland*, the *Life of the Lobster*, and a film on the architecture of the London Zoo. These films gave him an opportunity to concern himself with human and social issues without lapsing into illustration or sentimentalism. His last project was the special effects sequences for H.G. Wells' futuristic science fiction movie *Things to Come*, which was dropped from the final film. There was a certain irony in this, since Moholy had written in behalf of "a new vision," a Utopian communal expression marrying science, art, and technology with all the other "things to come."

Moholy's knowledge of film was extremely sophisticated. In a provocative article on film esthetics, "Problems of the Modern Film," written in 1928-30, he criticized films "exclusively

confined to the projection of a sequence of 'stills' on a screen." He identified the elements of film as vision, motion, sound, and psychological content. This last he left to the Surrealists, for he obviously had no interest in such subjective data, confining himself to objective documentaries or, in *Lichtspiel*, to the play of light. With a dogmatism quite astonishing considering later reversals in his career, Moholy announced: "It is quite conceivable that painting, as an exclusively manual craft, will continue to exist for some decades to come and that it will be retained for pedagogic reasons and as a means for preparing the way for the new culture of color and light." Moreover he was all for hastening the process of liquidation. This preparatory phase can be shortened, he advised, "if the problem is correctly postulated and systematic optical research is organized on these lines."

According to Moholy's reasoning, film would supercede the easel picture, subsuming both painting and photography. In his light studio of the future, Moholy wanted to set up a scenic background for the production of light and shade patterns on a trellis and skeleton construction, with walls for the absorption and reflection of light which would act as a complex of planes. Moholy was never able to realize this dream, but in *Lichtspiel* he put many of his ideas into practice.

In the essay on modern film quoted, Moholy cautioned film makers against working within the conventions of the easel painting. Yet it is clear he thought movement and images painted with light rather than pigment were sufficient to define the experience of the modern film. In consequence, *Lichtspiel* is a film without either cinematic space or structure. The *schwarz-weiss-grau* of the title refers to the tonal values of Cubist painting; its movement is determined by the movement of the kinetic sculpture which was its subject.¹⁰ Its illusions are pictorial illusions, not cinematic illusions. They deal with transparencies, overlays, positive-negative figure-ground reversals, the textures of grids, grills and perforations, the alternation between solid and transparent planes, the play of silhouette and shadow, which sometimes emerges as positive shape. *Lichtspiel* is a unique film: it is a great animated Cubist painting. Using as many as seven superimpositions, Moholy accomplishes what the Cubists depicted by combining different views of the same object simultaneously, examining interior and exterior in a continuous motion, reversing shadows and solids in imitation of Cubist interpenetration of figure and ground.

Moholy saw the camera as the instrument of the democratization of culture. The man of the future who cannot use a camera, he claimed, would be as illiterate as the man of today who cannot write. His concern with social values lead him to documentary film; ironically his last film was of the new habitat of the animals in the London Zoo. To see it now is to have the un-

comfortable feeling that even Moholy must have realized that only captive animals were going to have the rationally planned, ecologically sound environment for which he had fought. It makes a macabre double feature when viewed with the International Congress of Architectural Planning (C.I.A.M.) which he filmed earlier.

The contradictions regarding planning in modern society are no more glaring, however, than the many conflicts devolving from the problematic role and function of the arts in that disjunctive, dysfunctional society. Within the historical context of an antagonism toward the traditional arts as exhausted conventions, inimical to experiment and bound to an outworn social order, it was inevitable that some visual artists would turn to photography and film. The identification of the easel picture as dependent on capitalist economics and a system of patronage exploitative of both artist and public must be counted as among the strongest reasons for which artists turned their backs on painting during the period between the two world wars. The rejection of the hand as indicator of special talents separating the artist from the mass, and of personal style as the mark of an individualistic rather than a collectivist ethos, must also be counted as part of the impetus to turn to film.

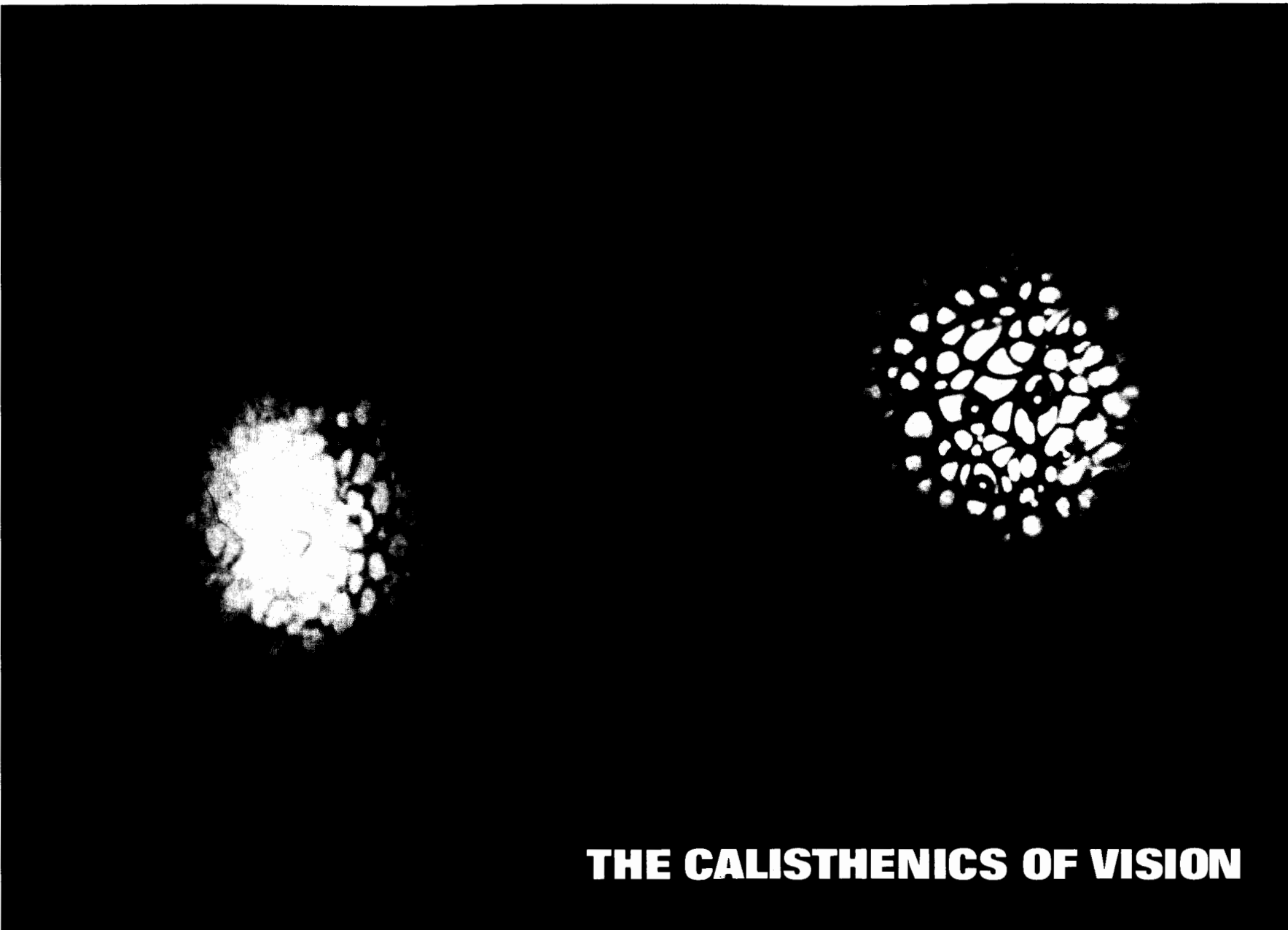
Revolutionary rhetoric, however, lasts only as long as the political climate which stimulates it. During the forties both Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy returned to painting of the most conventional and academic predictability. In both cases, as in the case of an artist like Charles Sheeler, their works in the reproductive areas of photography and film are consistently superior to their unique objects. Yet such is our continuing prejudice against the reproductive arts that their claim to glory continues to rest with their decidedly inferior museum pieces.

Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy were provincial artists forced to turn against the hand because neither had any real facility; in a sense they had to make pictorial films because they could not acquire the painting culture necessary for the creation of great painting. Their films were generated in opposition to a specific impasse in painting and by impatience with the limits of art. In the name of innovation *outré* experiments, like Charles Niedringhaus' Smell-O-Meter mixing different odors in a symphony for the nose, occupied artists unsure of their role or of the future direction of art. Malevich's reductiveness appeared to signal the end of experimentation in painting by defining its outermost limit. At the same time, Surrealist demands for the importance of a relevant "subject" lead back into academic art.

For Man Ray, the camera was an instrument of poetic transformation; yet his images continued to adhere closely to the frontal images of painting. In a film like *L'Etoile de Mer*, for example, the starfish of the title which reappears as a connective motif throughout the film, is pho-

tographed as part of a conventional still-life arrangement which some other artist might paint. The geometric solids which resemble pieces from a chess set designed earlier by Man Ray arranged in changing patterns in *Emak Bakia* find equal analogies in Cubist still life. For Moholy-Nagy, "the rectangular screen of our cinema theaters is nothing more than a substitute for easel or flat mural painting."¹¹ As long as these artists continued to see film as merely "moving pictures," they were bound and limited by the conventions of pictorial experience by which their vision was formed. Their films thus constitute a special and limited category tied not to cinematic values, but to the problems of animating painting and sculpture. ■

1. As usual, the image involved an erotic pun; when the spiral appears to swell and become convex, it resembles a breast.
2. The Aerographs were the earliest experiments with an automatic technique, and in this sense (but only in this sense) they were predecessors of such later automatic techniques as Pollock's dripping, Louis' pouring, and Olitski's spraying.
3. Schad, a member of the Zurich Dadaist group, had been experimenting with cameraless photography of junk collages he called "Schadographs." Aaron Scari, in *Art and Photography*, suggests that Tzara brought the news of these experiments back to Paris to Man Ray, and that he may have spoken of them to Moholy-Nagy as well.
4. Duchamp was the first artist to turn against the hand, proclaiming the superiority of an intellectual art of the mind as opposed to a purely "retinal" art addressed exclusively to the eyes. Man Ray's interest in film lay in precisely the "optical" qualities Duchamp had disavowed in painting.
5. Some of the most effective passages in *Emak Bakia* involve cuts from abstract to real images which are formally analogous (e.g., bursts of light and a field of daisies).
6. In his *Autobiography*, Man Ray says that *Emak Bakia* was named after a villa meaning "leave me alone" in the Breton language. It is more likely that the title is an anagrammatic combination of the sounds of *Anemic Cinema* and *Ballet Mécanique*, two films which were extremely influential on Man Ray's thinking. (Indeed one might think of the three films as a trilogy.)
7. The world of the experimental film maker of the twenties and thirties was even smaller than those of experimental film makers today; cross references such as those referred to above can easily be found.
8. The witty Man Ray could not resist a pun and once titled a collage, *L'Age du Col*. The dancing collars of *Emak Bakia* are thus an animated *col-age*.
9. Using Moholy's own logic, one might conclude, as he appeared to have done, that kinetic sculpture is merely a transitional step between plastic art and film; an intermediary mode doomed to wither with the flowering of abstract film, capable of subsuming all of its qualities, adding others, and eliminating the principal drawback of kinetic sculpture: its tedious repetitive cycles. Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy were, of course, not the only painters to seek an art form "beyond painting." Among those who believed painting would be replaced by a pure disembodied art of color floating freely in space were the Synchronist painter, Stanton MacDonald-Wright, and his brother, the critic, Willard Huntington Wright, whom Man Ray met in New York in 1916. In his book *The Art of Painting*, published the year Man Ray made *Retour à la Raison*, Wright considered painting's imminent demise a *fait accompli* and championed color-light experiments such as Wilfred's Lumia machine. Wright's futuristic prophecies paralleled Moholy-Nagy's predictions of an art of pure light projections, although by the time Moholy's work was known, Wright had stopped writing art criticism.
10. The kinetic sculpture which Moholy-Nagy filmed in *Lichtspiel* is variously known as the *Light-Space Modulator*, in German, the *Lichtrequisit*, or more familiarly as the *Light Prop*, a title which refers to Moholy's original idea of using it as a mobile stage prop. The original *Light Prop* was finished in 1930 and shown at the International Building Exhibition held in Paris that year. Motor driven, it was equipped with 128 electric bulbs of colored light operated by a drum switch. A replica constructed for the exhibition of Moholy-Nagy's work at the Guggenheim Museum was recently purchased by the Endhoven Museum while the original remains in the Busch-Reisinger Museum in Boston. An article by Istvan Kovacs in *Form*, 1968, describes the manner in which Moholy filmed the movements of the *Light Prop* to produce the shifting abstract patterns of *Lichtspiel*. The camera was focused on a perforated sheet situated between it and the light prop.
11. As an alternative to the flat screen, he proposed a concave multi-screen surface resembling Cinerama. He also predicted, before their invention, color film, direct sound recording of film, and simultaneous multi-screen projections.



George Landow, Still from *Bardo Follies*, 1967

THE CALISTHENICS OF VISION

PAUL S. ARTHUR

Stan Brakhage, by the magnitude of his effort and the articulation of a hypostatic universe, could well be posited as the Atlas of New American Cinema. George Landow might have been its Charles Atlas, a figure taken up with the analytic assumption of heroic postures, were it not for his rejection of "bulk" for "definition" (the former endemic to body builders, the latter to athletes). Instead, engendering a kind of popular hermeneutics, Landow emerges as an esthetic Jack La Lanne, that is, a guide for the retraining of the perceptual organs.

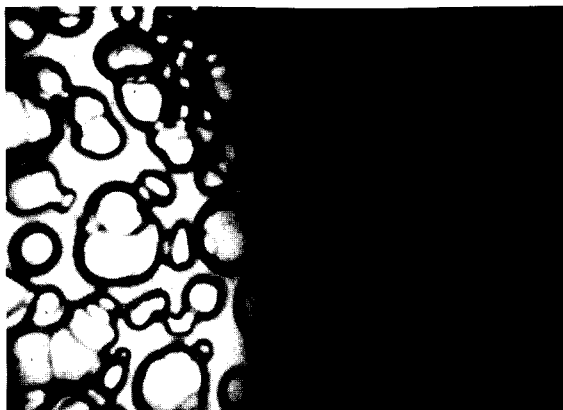
Though he shares certain phenomenological concerns with Jacobs, Snow, Sharits, and Frampton, the clearest analogues to his work are suggested by the programmed text, the military field manual, and certain medical teaching films.

The notion of "exercise," with its concomitant "instruction," formally and pictorially operative throughout the films, is conjoined to that of "reading" to elaborate the progress towards specific perceptual goals. Consequently, some of Landow's films contain built-in performance factors, with situations of multiple choice, both visual and conceptual, frequently amenable to multiple solutions.

The early 8mm studies and sketches, tentative and somewhat amorphous, reflect an initial preoccupation with the play of the flat image, the reduction of the illusion of haptic space. In *Not a Case of Lateral Displacement*, a time-lapse examination of a wound healing, the texture and color of inflamed tissue are gradually displaced by smooth scar tissue. If the movement of cell regeneration is imperceptible in any single shot,

the heightened presence of the film's grainy surface (due to a lack of sharp focus) suggests itself as a metaphor for the unseen organic process.

Are Era is a reanimation, through flash frames and rapid camera movements, of basically static television images of three newscasters. The extreme lateral distortion and fragmentation of this "re-creation" is that of a text, the news, at x number of removes from its spatio-temporal reality. That the film is silent only increases an expressiveness which is, in effect, less abstract than that of its static source. *Are Era*, with *Richard Kraft at the Playboy Club* (in which, as Landow states, "A face and a television screen exchange places, and the face becomes a screen for the TV") and *Adjacent Yes, But Simultaneous* (a first instance of the split screen, and ultimately incapable of explicating the metaphorical prob-



George Landow, Stills from *Bardo Folies*, 1967.



OPEN INSTRUCTIONS ON THE FILMS OF GEORGE LANDOW

lem posed by its title) constitute studies for the first major 16mm film.

If "*Fleming Faloon* deals with portraiture but is closer to still life" (Landow), it is further congruent with the details of local topology: the motionless face as a region for investigation, the screen a grid for the mapping out of formal and referential possibilities inherent in a single "locale." The parameters of the screen are redefined by a variety of methods: interframe editing in the prologue, split screen effects produced by the printing of unsplit 8mm stock, multiple superimposition, and pictorial divisions such as windows. The facial inventory (there are other incidental images such as a television screen and vaguely distinguishable interiors) is compounded by color filters, extreme out-of-focus close-ups, and slow dollying movements. In the presenta-

tion of as many as six or eight simultaneous exposures, each a possible point of visual attention, minute portions of screen space are deployed as objects for comparison (color, temporal alignment). The eye, once set in motion, darts from one locus to another in an attempt to reconstruct, in the mind, a logical pictorial whole from the displayed materials. The film is, finally, a map without a key, indecipherable not for scarcity of particulars, but of a generalized strategy with which to cross the field. An interesting corollary to this work is the 8mm *Fleming Faloon Screening*, in some ways more complex than its model. Here, an auditorium with its interior screen is photographed at different times in the course of a single screening, from several acute angles and distances, with windows opening onto trees and buildings, frequently visible above

and to the right of the screen. A member of the audience, viewed in silhouette crosses between the camera and the screen. The split screen imagery of the film, an illusion of movement, seems to oscillate in depth and texture when played against the static tableaux contained by the windows. This visual stress is alternately exacerbated by off-angle shots of the screen (a tactic developed independently by Jacobs in *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*) and attenuated by the intrusion of the silhouette. The exploration of off-screen space and rephotography clearly anticipates Landow's more recent efforts.

In 1966, with *Film In Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc.*, the concerns of *Fleming Faloon* are revived and expanded. This is the first film to which the term "exercise" properly applies. The basic aspiration of calisthenics is the resolution of motor ambiguities. A simple geometric movement or phrase is temporally extended to force recognition of, and eventually, equality in, performance levels occasioned by various participating muscles. The goal is not the perfection of a style (though this is often a consequence) but the initial isolation, then integration of constituent parts. Further, the integration is not an end in itself but is immediately convertible to the demands of parallel commonplace tasks. The "loop," although it suggests a moving freeze frame, from its inception in *Ballet Mécanique* to its commercialization in football's instant replay, has been associated with the analysis of movement. The seeming paradox of statics within constant motion has deflected critical opinion (Martin Wilson's comparison to a mural or "moving painting" in *Film makers' Cinémathèque* notes of May, 1967; Jonas Mekas' invocation of Mondrian in a *Village Voice* article dated July 1, 1965) toward the compositional scheme of *Film In Which There Appear*. The film maker outlines more precisely a structural correlative to the film: "The image itself is a kind of package, girl, palette of colors, dirt, sprocket holes, letters, a do-it-yourself art kit."

The initial task is one of orientation, the selection of a point of reference, a coordinate, from which one can correctly "read" the temporal reality of the film. The blink of the girl's eye at the lower right-hand section of the screen is a logical, though not mandatory, choice. Its position on the borderline between lighted cinematic space and black theater space at once draws the eye off the screen and propels it back onto the surface of the image. One can proceed to "count" the incidence of the blink and after divining a basic rhythm, test this perception against other portions of the screen. Rapidly, the conventional attractions of a human face yield to the more exotic virtues of scratches and dust motes. The eye, transcending the differentiation of color found along the edge of the Kodak test strip, trains itself to make minute distinctions: the difference in intensity of light within the

sprocket holes and in the surrounding area: the little tap dance suggested by two specks of dust on the lower left-hand frame. Some problems are more complex: the reading of individual edge letters requires the recognition of single projected frames. After a basic mastery of the loop is accomplished, variations, or more precisely, ellipses less than five frames in duration, emerge. In this regard, the difference between the 4½-minute version of the film, and the 20-minute version is the theoretical difference between a novice and a professional. And like any pedagogic exercise, some questions are ultimately open-ended: the nature of causality in the two adjacent views of the girl's face, the degree to which each subsequent projection, a function of history, alters in its imposition of further surface matter the composition of line and color values.

With its allusions to Eastern mysticism and its high degree of abstraction, *Bardo Follies*, Landow's best known work, seems to fall outside the considerations of this article. The film maker categorizes it as "diploteratological," the study of severe malformations in growing organisms, but it is more exactly related to cell morphology. It shares like procedures with *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, but suggests photographed microscopy: self-critical, articulating in the transformation of its found materials a universe of shape and texture, invisible, or at least overlooked, by conventional perception. It proposes a deliberate, active, method for the "reading" of a filmed image, that of close textural analysis.

The structure of the film is again quite simple: a loop of a woman leisurely waving at a passing tourist boat from Cypress Gardens' botanical luxury is repeated for some minutes. Then as if by the sexual force of the gesture, the image splits into first three, then two, small round cells reminiscent of the telescopic iris. In this basically arrhythmical section, the eye can scan the screen, picking up the wave or the boat at different moments in their continuum. The effect is that of a movement displaced laterally and serially, as well as temporally. The representational image of one cell then changes to an abstract mass of colored bubbles (actually a magnified film-frame melting, photographed from a screen) which expand and retreat off one side leaving a blank lighted circle, only to be replaced immediately by another melting form. One recognizes similar color tonalities and grainy surfaces in both abstract cell and remaining loop image, which shortly dissolves into a second abstract mass. Further, the movement of the bubbles recapitulates in tempo and direction the languorous wave and gliding boat. Briefly, the screen is filled with one abstract frame, then it divides into two series of burning frames for the remainder of the film. The cell structure is not constant throughout; the bubbles become more regular in shape, and in a flickering effect, emerge from darkness and evaporate in an imploding motion.

One by one, frames are "exposed," then disappear. The original shot (actually the footage is taken from the same strip) is re-viewed, first through repetition, then through extreme deceleration and magnification.

To paraphrase Brakhage (who was paraphrasing Blake), we see not "through" but "with" light. It is both medium and creative/destructive force. The process of radical reconstruction, really an ontogeny, reveals in each frame vestiges of the original image. The wave is a gesture of both approach and departure; as granules of emulsion are defined by light, they are simultaneously dissolved by it. Objectively, each successive run-

of a "jumping jack" exercise. In negative, a girl staring straight at the camera, points to, then tries to peer under or around the still drawing. These three basic actions are repeated three times. Another animator appears, inking a similar cartoon; it performs a kind of one-legged dance step. On the third repetition of this cycle, the moving demon slides off, or is pushed off, the bottom of the screen and replaced by the film maker's name.

Devoid of the variations in speed, duration, and texture evidenced in each repetition, perception of the film would be relatively uncomplicated. One would proceed immediately to the consid-



George Landow, Still from *Film that Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter*, 1968.

ning of the loop, though it appears unchanged, contains minute textural anomalies; each blown-up frame is isomorphic, though each behaves uniquely. The mode of vision posited here is perhaps utopian, reflexive if not self-abnegating, and its application is seriously tested by Landow's next work.

Film that Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter is the last (to date) elaboration of the loop structure. The relationship of animated drawing to photographed image is the area of inquiry stated as a problem in visual retention and definition. An animator is seen inking a sketch of what in context might be labeled "Maxwell's Demon," that hypothetical coordinator of energy reactions between molecules. The drawing is then brought to life through the recording of a series of "cels" depicting progressive increments of a fluid motion. The eyes blink, the mouth twitches, the arms perform the upper half

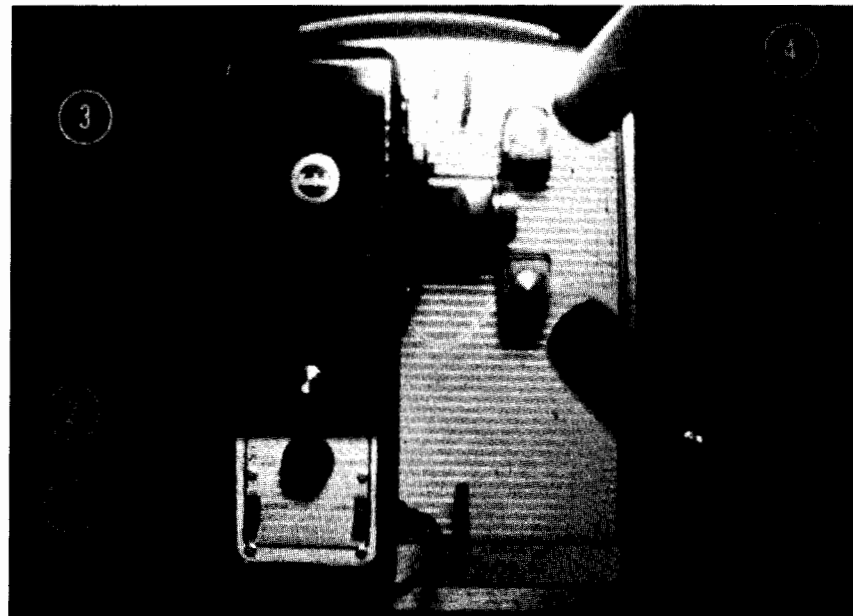
eration of how the animation of still images informs the cinematic process; of how, as G. T. Guilbaud contends, "All goal-directed organization demands closed circuits," hence the film strip as potential loop. Further, if the presence of the loop tends to flatten depth illusion in naturalistic photography, what is the distinction between the space occupied by the demons and that of the human figures? The first negative image of the girl suggests the notion of reversibility, of a plane of space, behind or latent in any three-dimensional system. The observation of different intensities of negative substance in the repetitions of this shot indicates a capacity for textural diversity approximating that of the "positive" image. In addition, the graphic sketch is more or less constant in both planes (explaining, perhaps, the girl's astonished expression and her efforts to see "around" the demon).

Once introduced, the questioning of causality

is infectious. The symmetrical nature of exercises performed by the drawings, the hand motions of the girl, the nervous gestures of the second animator, may have all been printed in reverse. The ellipses and subtle changes in speed confuse one's original perception of the repetitions as a loop — they might simply be recreations of an initial movement. When fast motion is applied to human actions, they acquire an increased sense of abstraction, of "animation." Paradoxically, this device imbues the drawings (in the last encore of the first demon) with a sense of human variation. The second demon completes this impression when he stutters, changes direc-

cut to her face — as if the screen were a test booklet lying face down and then turned over. A harshly formal voice intones: "This is a test. It is a test of how well you can follow directions." It is not a test of how well you can answer questions or assimilate ideas. Instructions are recited: "Do exactly what I tell you," "Do not ask questions," "Do not guess," "Do not worry," "Do not look at the picture," "Listen carefully for the first problem." These solicit responses which would negate the illusionism in a narrative film, and by their impossibility prophecy future spheres of innovation. As in the quiz game structure of Robert Nelson's *Bleu*

cal inactivity. Questions assume the form of existential disjunctions: "Put the umbrella away" (there is no umbrella in the picture), "Put a number 18 on what you would touch." The living room (increasingly overlaid with a set of discontinuous numbers) is seen only periodically after the initial question, being replaced first by miscellaneous multiple choice tests (a directive to "turn on the lamp" is coincident with a depth perception problem involving two lighted eggs), by a chart enumerating movie projector parts, and finally by a demonstration of projection procedures. The drone of verbal testing continues unabated ("Listen, listen again") until the order



George Landow, Stills from *Institutional Quality*, 1969.

tion in the middle of a step, and makes a timely exit, carrying with him, like a turtle, his private universe. Thus, *Film that Rises* engages in a process of breaking down the viewer's strongest preconceptions about the ontology of the cinematic experience. It is necessary to note Landow's first use of a sound track since the prologue to *Fleming Faloon*. It consists of a continuous burbling chant that may or may not be a repeated tape and it opens for inquiry the entire parameter of aural perception.

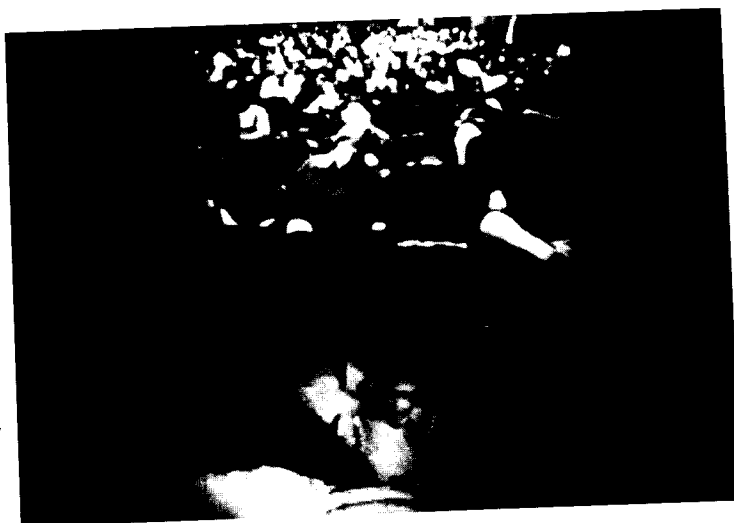
Institutional Quality and *Remedial Reading Comprehension* clearly delineate a new stage in Landow's development. The same concerns are present, but they are stated more didactically, more ironically. P. Adams Sitney has justly likened the former to a combination of "childhood psychological perception tests and the television series 'Winky Dink and You.'" *I.Q.* begins with a shot of the back of a girl's head and a rapid

Shut and the counting operations intrinsic to Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*, the screen occasions, instead of the unidirectional identification (either perceptual or emotional), a tension, an active dialogue with its observer in the form of anticipating on-screen movement and the figuring of contradictory information.

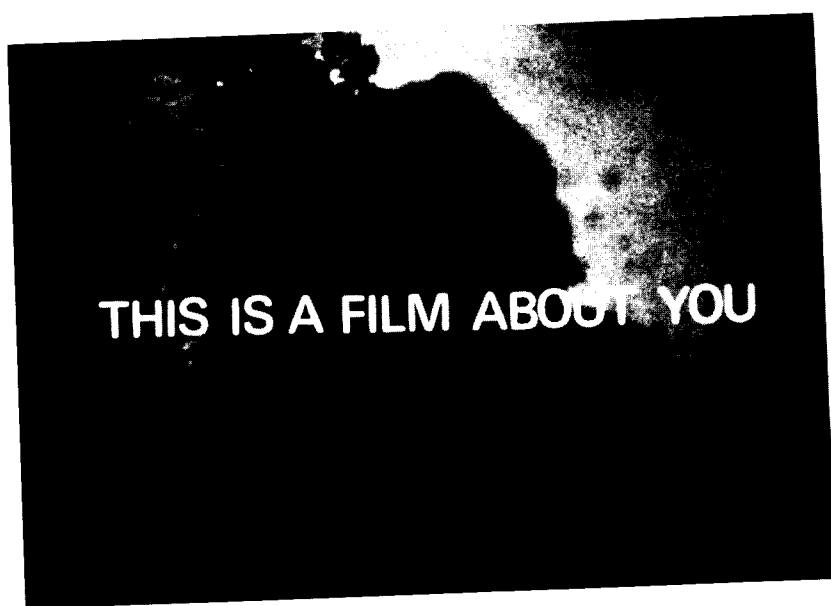
A view of a hopelessly bourgeois living room appears (the contemporary equivalent of a Vermeer interior with a flickering television set occupying the position of a figure): couch, mirror, wrought iron railing, table lamp. After several seconds, a hassock on the left and a rag draped over the railing disappear. When orders are given to "Turn on the television" (it is already on) and "Put a number 5 on what you would touch," a giant hand enters from one corner and marks a number over the set. This disruption of scale at once flattens perspective of the room and reminds the viewer of his own space and physi-

cal inactivity. Questions assume the form of existential disjunctions: "Put the umbrella away" (there is no umbrella in the picture), "Put a number 18 on what you would touch." The living room (increasingly overlaid with a set of discontinuous numbers) is seen only periodically after the initial question, being replaced first by miscellaneous multiple choice tests (a directive to "turn on the lamp" is coincident with a depth perception problem involving two lighted eggs), by a chart enumerating movie projector parts, and finally by a demonstration of projection procedures. The drone of verbal testing continues unabated ("Listen, listen again") until the order

to "write your first name and your last name at the bottom of the picture. Now put your pencils down." The film, 4½ minutes in length, is over. Its brevity and self-explanatory text immediately beggar explication. It is, in fact, a film about misinterpretation, about the amount of information taken for granted, processed automatically, in situations of commonplace, nonesthetic perception, specifically applied to learning exercises. But there is also a recognition of the essentially contradictory nature of cinema as authentic document/reenactment emanating from a strategy of personalization through distancing; in effect, the disjunction between filmic object, a strip wound on a reel (an image which appears briefly towards the middle of the film) and its projection. It is occasioned metaphorically by a wonderfully ironic passage: at the start of the projector demonstration, a superimposi-



George Landow,
Stills from *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970.



tion creates the disorienting effects of misaligned or torn sprocket holes stumbling through a projector. Quite logically, the passage, and the film, ends with a "flare-out," signaling the end of a roll and a return to clear light. The progression is from a consideration of textural elements of the film frame to its mechanics, how it is set in motion, and finally to the operations of contradictory evidence and deliberate technical imprecision.

It is appropriate, at this point, to briefly note the curious color tonality in Landow's work. One is tempted to describe it as commercial color, since it contains the lurid reds and blues of color television and the earliest technicolor process. The images convey a sense of document, of found object (extended in *I.Q.* by watery grays in the black and white sequences) even when they are autonomously produced. Landow is intrigued with the notion of "facsimile," of "counterfeit,"² and the primary function of his color is referential rather than expressive.

The amplification of perceptual exercise from an implicit to a didactic level continues in *Remedial Reading Comprehension*. In part a commentary on the film maker's recurrent pursuits (one of his earliest unreleased works is titled *Faulty Pronoun Reference Comparison and Punctuation of the Participial Phrase*), it borrows freely from the forms of nonesthetic film (television commercials, instructional studies) and traditional avant-garde cinema. There is an evocation of the dreamed image and intermittent appearances by Landow, seen running, superimposed over his silhouette traversing a shadowy landscape. This last image is of particular importance; the artist (breathing heavily on the sound track) either setting the pace for, or trying to keep pace with, the progress of his film.

A shot of a dramatically lit sleeping woman is eclipsed by an auditorium filled with students, expanding from the upper right-hand corner in superimposition. A similar view of an auditorium appears, someone calls out "lights" and a commercial extolling the virtues of precooked rice begins (a device analogous to one employed by Landow in the first version of *Film In Which There Appear*): "Suppose your name is Madge and you've just cooked some rice. Mmm. This rice is delicious." Two spotlighted grains are examined close-up (recalling both the depth-perception question in *I.Q.* and the concern for the grained texture of a film image).

The sleeper is viewed again; a superimposition of her face in profile occupies the center of the frame. These two images start to alternate rapidly in time to an electronic beep. An out-of-focus page of text is subsequently superimposed, individual words flashing into focus at breakneck speed. Finally, the second clause of a sentence begun in the first minute (the film is only about five minutes long), "This film is about you, not about its maker," moves laterally across the

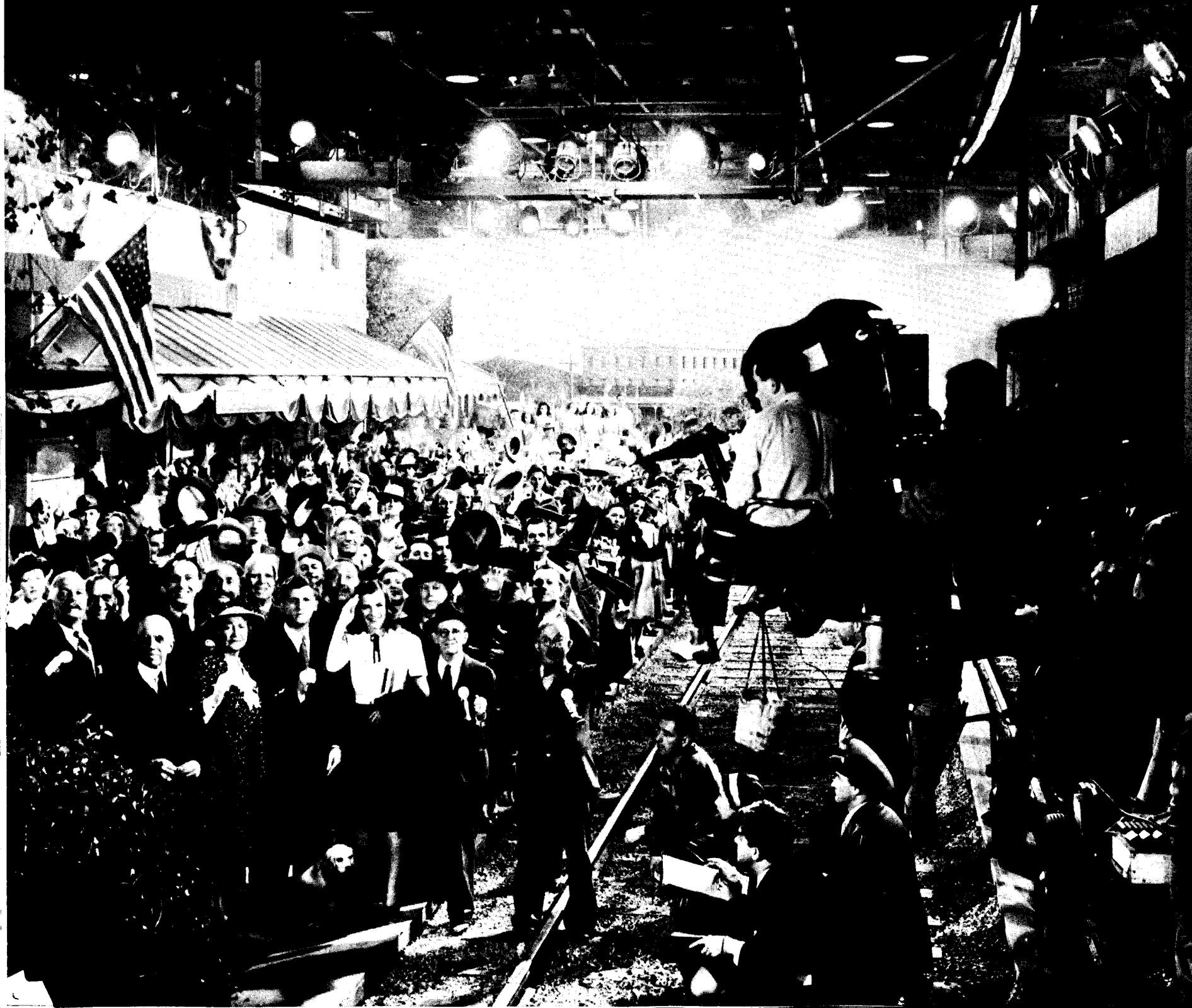
jogging film maker.

A temporal ordering of the imagery is possible (a film within a dream, etc.), but not very revealing of its instructional nature. A series of comparative reading exercises are entertained: the "suspended" sentence is perceived slowly in time, gliding across a spatially complex image. The textural distinction between rice grains, confused by spoken information ("purer, cleaner") can be digested in one glance. The figures in the auditorium must be scanned, like words on a page, to correctly calculate their slightly accelerated motion. The planes of space condensed by superimposition must be sorted for ground/figure relationships. The words of the text (an actual comprehension test discussing poor teaching methods and how teachers suffer from the "Jehovah complex," feelings of omnipotence common to medical doctors and, by extension, artists) are followed in rapid linear succession, making operative, "illuminating," every inch of screen space — the dynamic development of the screen as a graph. One has the sudden apprehension of cinematic projection as a recapitulation of the reading process; the rapid recognition, assimilation of discrete words/still pictures to form an integrated concept/movement. The proposition is one of linear process applied to nonlinear form.

Popular legend has it that Stan Brakhage can see twenty-four distinct frames per second and he has written in his guide to film-making, "The Motion Picture Giving and Taking Book," of pools of blue and yellow light eddying around the typed characters on a page of manuscript. He has likened the lens of a camera to a "wand," and has called its body, at times, an extension of his own, receptive to his mother and sensory variations. His films are a direct embodiment of how, as well as what, he sees. The elaboration of a methodology inherent to such an "art of vision" is the area of Landow's basic aspiration. ■

1. The film maker cites Guilbaud in notes to a screening of his 8mm work at the Film-makers' Cinémathèque (Aug. 2, 1965): "It has now become quite commonplace to represent all manner of mechanisms, organisms, and organizations by means of networks. In view of the wide variety of things that can thus be represented, it is easy and natural to make comparisons between them and to discover many similarities of form. At first we may be content with merely inspecting the diagrams, but it will soon be realized that it may pay us to call in the logic and mathematics of connectivity — the geometry of networks, which is a branch of topology. Thus although the most superficial inspection can reveal closed loops or meshes in a network of connections, the part played by these loops did not really stand out clearly until electrical engineers discovered how a complex network can be described by treating its meshes as elementary units. . . ."
2. "I would like to mention some ideas which are usually overlooked in discussions of my films. The idea of the facsimile is important. All of the visual material in *I.Q.* and some of the visuals and some of the sound in *R.R.C.* are facsimiles. That is, they are, more precisely, counterfeits, e.g., Kodak projector footage, rice commercial comparing polished and unpolished rice. (A counterfeit of a painting by an old master is less valuable than the original for reasons other than its execution, which may be as good as or better than the original.) Along with counterfeit images there is false information, e.g., "This is a test" "This rice is delicious" "Purer, cleaner, and rid of the coarse, hard-to-digest parts. . . ." The instructions in *I.Q.* are illogical and contradictory ("Look at the picture . . . and do not look at the picture"). In my most recent work (since *R.R.C.*) I have been exploring the perception of counterfeits and wrong information."

ON NEGATIVE SPACE



MAX KOZLOFF

First, if not foremost, Manny Farber is a connoisseur — excruciatingly knowing and hilarious — of movie jinks. He is able to calibrate the precise moral and spatial differences between Hawks and Huston, Sturges and Capra. Panofsky once said that if the connoisseur may be a laconic art historian, the historian is a loquacious connoisseur. One will find history of a sort (and unintended), in Farber's finally collected essays, *Negative Space* (Praeger, \$7.95): the history since the forties of most conceivable hang-ups, suavities, and euphorias of the fetishy, florid American film industry. But it is delivered to us in a short-term, yet nonstop, impressionistic prose whose subject — celluloid action — is zeroed in upon as if by a penlight. Loquacious about small, telling physical things, Farber is laconic concerning how they add up to a STATEMENT, still less a message. Yet, for all that he is voluptuous about dotty details, he is a hard-headed type who can tune up his incredulity to blare forth with cruel stringency. The connoisseur attributes a work to, or takes it away from, a painter. A similar chore burrows within movie criticism, where the "auteur theory" still sizzles with controversy. Farber is thoroughly clinching when he talks of the personalities of his directors, long before anyone translated the *politique des auteurs* into English. But he is far more absorbed with the vagaries of acting and timing as signs of a picture's personality. How little prime information we are given about that picture as a coherent, structured product, or as a vehicle of ideas, compared with the wealth of news regarding the way it looks, paces itself, feels, moves. These aspects of the film comprise its manner, and it is to manner this specialist addresses himself. Farber would be a formalist rather than an iconographer, except that, for him, form is shattered iconography. Each film is a spectacle of manner (and manners), to be prized or damned by inner credence or lack of it. For all that, he is on the most carnal terms with the films, the knack of making them utterly implausible and bizarre wonderments in the remembering mind comes reliably to him. No movie has become so familiar that Farber cannot limn for us its most singular and unnoticed traits, map for it a new, outlandishly accurate topography.

This, then, is a criticism of phenomena, oc-

cupied with existent surfaces and charades rather more than with how they came to be that way or how they function as narrative. And once again, this apparent avoidance of the deeper implications of content, this refusal to speculate about theme whenever he can describe style, is the earmark of the connoisseur. Doubtless, Farber himself would hate this label, with all that it suggests of the pedant and the elitist, the recondite, inchworming tally of emergent authorship.

However they might admit fine distinctions in signature, he celebrates the crassness of movies and always steers clear of microscopic lore or scholarly techniques inappropriately burdensome to the spirit of the material. (His pieces were never precisely reviews; yet they are more sketches than essays or studies.) Not for a minute, though, does this ally him with the campy enthusiast or buff whose infantile and trivial takes unconsciously demean the artistry in cinema. It may take a while for the unwary reader to realize that Farber is incapable of sentimentalism. But this means the sentimentalism of liberal intellectuals as well as pop cult fanatics. He tenderly slaps James Agee, "the most intriguing stargazer in the middle-brow era of Hollywood films," as a writer who "shellacked the reader with culture." Preferring Agee's writings in *Time* to those in *The Nation*, catching up and putting down every sanctimonious conceit or gimplike trick of socially-psychologically conscious "purpose" films, the author of *Negative Space* is no would-be dilettante who applauds film when it apes his more "elevated" literary taste.

We are dealing, rather, with a painter, and a painter's instinctive grab for usable form. But all his pragmatism (and verbal energy) have flowed toward film whose more liquid reaches prompt from him some quite glandular turns of phrase. Such a background and tropism made him an oddball in the esthetically hidebound *Commentary*, *New Leader*, and *New Republic*. Often enough he could have had little sympathy for their values, and less for their genteel style. And even in *Artforum* he stood out in wildly happy contrast to its prevailing academicism. Farber was engaged in far more pungent and realistic appraisals of American sociology (as reflected in the movies) than most of the writers of these periodicals, but he had, and has, no commitment

whatsoever to any social class, ideology, or counterstyle. It is not merely his temperament, but this disaffiliation that separates him from contemporaries like Warshow, Kaufmann, and Agee, as well as admirers such as Mekas, Kael, and Sarris. Beneath his riotous tone there is a core of disinterestedness that does not occur very often in film or any other criticism.

In a field whose anthologies bear such titles as *I Lost It At The Movies*, *Private Screenings*, or *A Year In The Dark*, Farber's is called, almost forbiddingly, *Negative Space*. By the latter, he means "the command of experience which an artist can set resonating within a film . . . a sense of terrain created partly by the audience's imagination and partly by camera-actors-director." Throughout the book, these variables seem to be gyrating around each other ever more frantically, so that one can never surely locate in the reading, as indeed in the theater, their precise points of origin. At any one moment the observation may be clear; it is just that Farber's thrust atomizes the moments.

The following illustrate the way he goes about things (I hesitate to call it a method): "From Walsh's *What Price Glory?* to Mann's *Men in War*, the terrain is special in that it is used, kicked, grappled, worried, sweated up, burrowed into, stomped on . . ." "The movie's verve comes from the abstract use of a jangling zither and from squirting Orson Welles into the plot piecemeal with a tricky, facetious eyedropper." (*The Third Man*) . . . there is nothing new about shooting into incandescent lights and nebulous darks, but there is something new in having every shot snotted up with silvery foam, black smoke, and flaky patterns to convey decay and squalor." (*Streetcar Named Desire*) "The high-muzzle velocity of Sturges's films. . ." "[Antonioni's] incapacity with interpersonal relationships turns crowds into stiff waves, lovers into lonely appendages, hanging stiffly from each other, occasionally coming together like clanking sheets of metal . . ." "Quinn plays the role as though the ground were soft tapioca, his body purchased from an Army-Navy store that specializes in odd sizes." "Fonda's entry into a scene is that of a man walking backward, slanting himself away from the public eye." "A cookie-cutter is used on Benjy, cutting away all ambiguous edges, fixing him in place." (*The Graduate*) Farb-

er's prose is like a litmus of manic dimension that equips him to handle every genre, whether it be the *film noir* or Michael Snow's abstract ping-pong.

Yet he shows a distinct preference, as moral as it is sensory, for "a kind of squandering-beaverish endeavor that isn't anywhere or for anything. A peculiar fact about termite-tapeworm-fungus-moss art is that it goes always forward eating its own boundaries, and . . . leaves nothing in its path other than the signs of eager, industrious, unkempt activity." There are ways worse than his spatial picturing to invoke a film's unity, poorer spot-checks of that discipline or happenstance that bring a film to life. For if the termite metaphor can be extended (it already illuminates his idiosyncratic idea of "underground" movies), we can say that the author-viewer frequently reads as if inside, if not always at home with, the work, which lords it over us, as it does on the screen. This kind of interior funneling of Farber's distinctly opposes the more usual miniaturizing view from above, which accords far less well with our experience.

Because he is uniquely exposed to cinematic texture and "weight," he likes them light. And he is most apt to detect poetry in film when there is a businesslike grace without pretension. He electrocutes flummery, theatrics, and attitudinizing with a vengeance—unless they be the stereotypes of a norm or mode which the director respects. "Lewton and his scriptwriters collaborated on sincere, adult pulp stories . . ." "*Point Blank* is an entertaining degenerate movie." And of Frankenheimer's *The Train*, he writes characteristically: "Lancaster half ruins his performance with innocent sincerity, but at that point where the script stops and Lancaster has his task before him, he sinks into it with a dense absorption. His energy of concentration is like a magnet that draws the atmosphere into the action of his hands." Farber's disrespect for reflex-jabbing, too often equated with "high art" in movies, is countered by his regard for the magic of craft. Limited though this may seem, it gives him the most pluralistic openness, appropriate to his fast worm's-eye view.

For in film, of course, unlike painting, standards multiply with genres whose demands can be fulfilled very specifically. Throughout these pieces there is the nicest equilibrium between his

approval of decent professionalism and his search for those various touches that illuminate formulae without transcending them. There is nothing new about honoring the talent and inventiveness that have gone into some otherwise quite un-serious entertainment. More unusual is Farber's affectionate irony, which simultaneously keeps his subjects in their humble place and infuses them with unexpected vividness and worth. Farber's criticism is particularly attuned to judge the triumph of means over ends in film, for his own technique mirrors that of his subject. But out of this, cued by his grasp of the intentions of manner, he can surgically isolate genuine, and therefore honest, superficiality from phony profundity.

In the end, he inflates nothing; he is merely sympathetic to hyperbole — perhaps the one quality, if well brought off, that excuses many a picture, and exalts not a few. "The nervous tantrums of slapstick in a Sturges movie, the thoughtless attention-getting antics combined with their genuine cleverness give them an improvised, blatant immediacy that is preferable to excess of calculation and is, in the long run, healthier for the artists themselves." (It isn't surprising that of all the subjects in this book, Sturges is given the greatest treatment in depth, and sustains the most acute distinctions of analysis.)

How gladdening to see Farber won over to some of the art-house films of the sixties precisely because of his own immediacy, his involuntary recognition that calculated excesses can establish a new style. Even if his rhetoric works against the film just as his responses are warming up to it, he is in a healthy position. Godard is far more suspect than Sturges but like him, too, one suddenly sees, and equally mind-boggling: "no other film maker has so consistently made me feel like a stupid ass." Here is a writer whose "prehumanism" of the forties is unsettled by the posthumanism of the sixties, and who yet lives out their connection in his work. Buñuel bridged this strange gap, too, and of his *Exterminating Angel*, Farber can say, with perceptive irresolution, "very tense, puzzling, sinister, and yet extraordinarily stodgy . . . the most redolent of the Barrier effect that seems to murmur through his films." In a sense, Buñuel is a test case for this criticism, because the most antique movie conventions and naive flaws co-exist simultaneously in his vision with the most

unclassifiable power. And this crazy-quilt mix is captured admiringly in *Negative Space*, not only because the writer is as insouciantly bloody-minded as the director, but because they share a view of worldly life seen through the comic lens of Surrealism.

Farber does not need to concoct or adhere to theories of displacement, myth, or automatism to judge all those early sleeper cheapies from the vantage of Surrealism and to see them with a cold ebullience. It is in defense of their inadvertent tics or instinctive fancy that he grinds down against "Hard-Sell Cinema" (e.g., Sidney Lumet), or "White Elephant Art" (*Citizen Kane*, which he would have us believe to be a fifties film *avant la lettre*). (If anything, we can now see in retrospect that fifties movies erred in their too *pustilanimous* juggling of cause and effect.) The odd thing is that his complaint about Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* is that it is ridden with "things that don't belong together, charging them up with hidden meanings, and then uniting them in an uneasy juxtaposition that is bound to shock the spectator into a lubricated state of mind . . ." Odd, because Wilder apparently should have presented "some intelligible, structured image of reality — on the simplest level, to tell a story . . ." As an apologist of depravity, Farber is often tripped up by his appreciation of innocence. And he can sound weirdly conservative when he writes, in 1966, that the "new actor is . . . an estranged figure merely jiggling around inside the role." One understands what he means, but such a jibe was out of phase with the new treatment of the actor as a deliberately opaque fixture or surface. But Farber, a man who often prefers supporting actors to the stars — Lee, instead of Spencer, Tracy — accommodated himself to that sensibility in which the mannered edges became the forensic center of the picture. Or, where "underground" was naturalized into the overground. "With its mangy, anonymous sets, lower-class heroes who treat themselves as sages, and the primitivism (the lack of cutting, rawness with actors, whole violent episodes shot in one take) . . .": the subject here could be Warhol (whose "blast of raw stuff" Farber likes), had it not been Sam Fuller. When sophistication becomes primitive again, the critic, teaching us all the way, finds himself on familiar ground, *Negative Space*. ■



Orson Welles, Still from *Citizen Kane*, 1940-41. ". . . a fifties film."

"THE CHELSEA GIRLS"



STEPHEN KOCH

In 1966, Andy Warhol's latest movie left the Film-Makers Cinémathèque to open in a "real" movie theater — the Regency at 72nd Street and Broadway — and the time had come at last, it was all up there in lights on the big marquee:

ANDY WARHOL'S
THE CHELSEA GIRLS

But though *The Chelsea Girls* was Warhol's first strong step in his drive toward the big world of the feature film's public — a drive which has grown more and more pronounced with each of his films since *Flesh* — it remains an experimental work, still tugging at the limits of the spectators' perceptions, still operating within a certain modernist tradition from which Warhol has since been progressively withdrawing. Much can be said about what is gained and what is lost in this development. But it is not what has to be said about *The Chelsea Girls*.

For to enter the world of the feature film is to enter the world of imagined time, that arena where film uses the momentary and concrete to seduce the mind into illusions of duration. But *The Chelsea Girls* does not imagine time. It attaches itself to literal time, and by drawing it into a context of total disjunction, confounds the sense of duration under the suzerainty of the steadily ticking clock. True, like a conventional feature, it concerns itself with the relation between time and event, but it presents both in a state of radical dissociation, a structured but irresolvable disarray in which the life of narrative is disjointed and made a function of the machine.

The machine in question is of course the camera. *The Chelsea Girls* is composed of twelve reels, each a separate episode in which various

members of the then entourage talk, and talk, and talk—playing at being themselves in more or less beguiling ways. Each reel is entirely unedited and of identical length; all have sound tracks; eight are in black and white, four are in color. The camera is invariably on a fixed tripod; its entire movement consists of zooms and swiveling on its stand. Each performer is set in front of the camera and told to stay there playing until the reel runs out. And so they do, pinned by the camera against a wall of time. "Dear God," Ondine asks at one point, "how much longer do I have to go?"

But the wall of time to which they are pinned is also a split screen. The film is projected two reels at a time, in a phased relationship which separates the beginning of each by about five minutes. Tradition, rather than Warhol himself, has established the standard sequence of the reels; the first time I saw the film (at the Cinémathèque in 1966, when it was presumably under Warhol's direct supervision) they were in an order which I have never seen repeated since. Theoretically, any arrangement is possible — and since every reel has a sound track, that arrangement would permute with any interplay between sound and silence theoretically conceivable. The sequence of the film freely offers itself to tradition or randomness or taste or invention; playing with it, the projectionist at last has his day as *chef d'orchestre*.

The screen strikes one first. Entering the theater, one instantly notices its unexpected elegance, its ratio far wider than any in ordinary use except Cinerama, but quite serenely flat. According to what is now established tradition, the film begins in the right half of this space with a sequence in color. Under a lurid red filter (which from time to time sinks so deeply toward the

infrared that the print looks almost like a negative), a blond boy (Eric Emerson) slowly toys with his fleshly presence before the camera, lost in a blinking, lip-licking masturbatory trance. He stares at his fingers, sucks at them. He squeezes his lips. He plays with his hair. He twists a flexible mirror between his hands, gazing with hanging lips as his face smears. Filters change; blue succeeds red, and it, too, ranges from a virtual indigo to the metallic electronic brilliance of an arc-light. The sound track is on, but we hear only the steady murmur of its tracking, interrupted by perhaps an occasional cough or the small clatter of equipment outside the visual field. Once or twice, the boy makes some noise somewhere between speech and a moan. We suspect, rightly, that it's only a matter of time before the narcissist up there begins sliding his clothes off, and losing himself in the vertiginous caverns of exposure. The camera pulls and jabs through the field with nervous, probing, swiveling zooms, but throughout the fleshy stillness of the autistic spectacle drips with quiescence, a kind of sexual waiting. This filmic massage continues uninterrupted for about five minutes.

Whereupon the left half of the screen lights into black and white: the sound of the color sequence on the right is extinguished and replaced on the left. Two sections of a couch have been placed back to back; draped over one of them in a hooded black robe, Ondine, one of the Factory's most compulsive and amusing talkers, turns directly to the camera and starts speaking through the polished confident grossness of his Bronx accent. He is a priest, so where the hell is somebody to come and confess? Then we hear, edged out of vision by the perverse inattentive camera, the shrill absurd voice of Ingrid Superstar.



Andy Warhol, *The Chelsea Girls*, 1966. Brigid on the phone.

And so, in an unequal but contested struggle for attention, silent color vies with sound and black and white, talk with eroticism. (After the sound in his episode is lost, the boy on the right begins his inevitable striptease. He also begins to speak, though, of course, his lips move in silence.) The complete disjunction of the split screen, along with its width, makes any simple composition of its entire surface impossible. One's eye moves uneasily back and forth, guided in part by the simplest reflexes of primary perception (for example, the tendency to look in the direction of sound and attend to someone speaking, as opposed to the tendency to pick up on color, particularly brilliant color). These operate with or against the happenstances of personality, since a given person is more or less interested in Ondine and Ingrid's interminable verbal sparring, or Ondine shifting from priest to analyst to gossip to one of the girls. The field of vision is disjoined; the disjunction is compounded by the compositional style on each separate half of the screen. The swiveling of the camera on its tripod repeatedly confounds the sense of a fixed frame suggested by the absence of editing and track shots, and does so most spectacularly in the color episode where Marie Menken assumes the preposterous but beguiling pose of being Gerard Malanga's mother, railing at him over his equally preposterous claim to have married Hanoi Hannah, who meanwhile sulks in a far corner of the room huddled in mute fury. The room is thus split between logorrhea and solipsism. The camera moves in manic, crazifying agitation, both with and against the structure of visual interest in the room and the flow of conversation, driving its own movements into a thoroughly asserted counterpoint to the field. In other episodes, such as the in-

stance of Brigid rapping in her room at the Chelsea Hotel, the camera is relatively peaceful. But whatever its mood, the style is consistent throughout. Anywhere, anytime, the camera may suddenly swivel and exclude something "crucial" from the field. Abruptly, it zooms. Focus is manipulated, at times bringing the image to virtual obliteration. Yet most of these lunges on our attention create the effect of further decomposition, and would probably be called distractions if we could only define precisely the thing from which we were being distracted. For the framed field is only the nominal point of interest; that sudden zoom may concentrate on an "irrelevant" point in the field's space or it may dive directly to its logical mark. In group scenes, the speaker may in the midst of his frenzy be edged out of the frame, drawn into a perfectly balanced close-up, or simply passed over by a rapid, unnoticed sweep of the camera eye.

The result of this restless, irresolvable pacing of the imprisoned camera, this drama of disjunction, is to relentlessly set the operation of cognition against the arbitrary. As one becomes aware of this experience, one becomes equally aware that despite the implied mechanistic rigidity of the subdivided compositional field, despite any effort to concentrate on the simultaneous mini-dramas before our eyes, almost every movement of awareness is actually being determined at the outer edges of perception: some sweep of color; a small, quirky, screwball twist of Ingrid's mouth; an abrupt, irritable, uncalled-for zoom; the silent movements of the boy's lips as he speaks; a new tone in the muffled Bronx honk of Ondine's speech. Playing against this are the psychological subtleties of the Warholian talk performance — about which much remains to be said — as they conflate with the

peculiar fascination of silence. Already a matter of major interest in the earlier films, silence here begins to scatter itself in a dialectic with sound. The varied sensory resonance of silence — the contradictory implication of distance and separation; a certain subtle *ritardando* it exerts over the visual tempo; its spectral resemblance to the operation of the eidetic and memory and, in consequence, a certain look of *pastness*; its somewhat truncated appeal combining with the intuition that it is more emphatically filmic, more serenely an experience apart — all this begins its long operation quite literally with sound in one's ears. The result is strange. The relation between what is seen and what is heard seems to be repeatedly gathered together in the mind only to fall apart and be lost. But this is only one dimension of a single effect. *The Chelsea Girls* is not so much a narrative as a spectacle, but it is a spectacle in a state of perpetual disintegration. As one looks at this cool, wide, virtually complete array of sensory dissociations, one becomes aware that the simple impulse to center one's attention and then move with time is being incessantly confounded at the outer edges of perception, and that at those edges, duration, the sense of human time, is being broken to bits. And the moment one realizes this, one realizes precisely what the dramatic interest of *The Chelsea Girls* is all about.

Once again, Warhol has located his work squarely in that arena where perception stands witness to itself. Any one of the twelve episodes of *The Chelsea Girls*, were it to be shown individually, would ensconce its spectator in merciless clock time, though it would be clock time with a precisely anticipated end, the mechanically defined duration of the length of the

reel. Using this rhythmless though timed unit, Warhol sets into motion the absolutely metrical alternating progression of the phased split screen, subsuming the crack-brained conversations of each episode into a stately formality. There are twelve reels, but there might be a hundred. The film's progress is potentially interminable. No episode "leads" to any other, though in two cases basic situations are repeated. There is no story, no narrative process, none of the events on the screen lead one to anticipate an end. There is no project in time; one is asked never to remember, never presume. One watches, one waits, patiently or impatiently as the case may be, knowing only that the film will at last conclude — conclude literally by closing in on itself — resolving itself into a single image on a single half of the screen. *The Chelsea Girls* is not a narrative work, but it does move through time in the rhythm of narrative. It does develop, in a strictly structural sense, toward a finality as opposed to a mere termination. But it is a finality which functions only by virtue of bringing the eye to rest. Indeed, it does even better than that: when the final reel at last stands alone, its image vanishes after a few moments, and the sound track continues imageless as the house lights return and the poor pestered senses are released.

The fact is that *The Chelsea Girls* retains narrative structure while entirely dissolving narrative time, and it does so by literalizing both on the simple device of the split screen. Structurally, the film has a coolly conjugated, recognizable and distinct beginning, middle, and end. But the very device which makes that possible (a kind

of substitute, by the way, for the editing process) removes any possibility of filmic, reinvented, narrative time reaching us. By dissociating time, the device makes it submit to the tyranny of the clock. Let us suppose we make some move to escape that tyranny—and we naturally will. The slow trickle of seconds through the tiresome routine of a middle-aged homosexual in bed with a male hustler begins to pall; on the right side of the screen is, let's say, the icy but beautiful Hanoi Hannah snarling in voiceless sadism at various girls draped around her room. Literal though the movement of time on the left half of the screen has been to some degree one will have entered into the particular quality of the duration that those moments of steadily observed reality induce. The mere movement of the eye from left to right makes one absolutely lose that subtle sense of participation in the film's time, and, slipping instead into an entirely dissociated temporal realm, one is thrust back upon oneself, upon the beat of the clock and the beat of one's own darting eye. In this and analogous ways, almost every movement of perception induced by the film has as its effect the disintegration of one's capacity to dominate or subsume the moment, or for that matter, even to participate in it in any but a very complex way.

The merest horror film or thriller is above all an invitation to participate harmlessly in its violent time. But the way *The Chelsea Girls* seduces the clock constitutes something closer to a prohibition, a refusal. In this sense, *The Chelsea Girls* seems almost an act of aggression, though it must be called aggression of a very special kind. A cliché leaps to mind: the film is mind-

blowing, an inept cliché that has leapt into a good many people's minds. The work overloads the circuit of perception. Some may find it a little explosive and shocking, there is a great deal of sadomasochism in it, and a great many needles shooting methadrene. And for its pleasures, the film may seem to fellate consciousness in a contactless voluptuousness. Fine, but I dislike the cliché. I feel a certain contempt for it. We should prize our minds more highly and *The Chelsea Girls* seems to me, on the contrary, mind-defining. That is its special little secret. However deeply involved in an esthetic of disintegration the film may be, it is nonetheless an esthetic. At the risk of sanctimoniousness, Dachau is mind-blowing, the prospect of nuclear war is mind-blowing. Remembering (or hearing once again) the rhetoric praising psychic and social disorientation, the flattery of madness and loss of self in which the sixties specialized, it should also be remembered that the unbearable has as its prime characteristic that of being unbearable — and no fooling. *The Chelsea Girls* is fooling. Its special characteristic is to flirt with the idea of entirely abandoning any esthetic, stretching itself across the realm of disorientation all the while quietly announcing its coherence.

That coherence is located in the elegance of its refusal, the serene coolness of the way it says no to the conventional experience of devouring filmic time. It is located in the voluptuousness of a spectacle which does not give. The finger of time drifts across the skin just at the point of sensation, and the film operates in that extremely interesting area, the point just before the point of boredom. The film engages us, but en-



Andy Warhol, *The Chelsea Girls*, 1966. Ed Hood, Mario Montez, and friend.



Andy Warhol, *The Chelsea Girls*, 1966. Ondine.



Andy Warhol, *The Chelsea Girls*, 1966. Ondine and Ingrid Superstar.



Andy Warhol, *The Chelsea Girls*, 1966. Pope Ondine.

gages us in its denial of conventional coherence. As a result, perception is thrown back on itself, and the film becomes an exercise in apperception. *The Chelsea Girls* is a work in which one must incessantly choose to disregard something, in which every act of attention explicitly involves some withdrawal of attention, in which every assent to the film's appeal must converge with some refusal, however delicate. Led nowhere, perception must constantly choose to find *itself* somewhere. Finding itself, it begins to follow itself through the movements of its own changes, witnessing its own scattered conjugation through time; exercising itself within its own willfulness and passivity; shadowing itself like a spy through its own regions of curiosity, amusement, intelligence, eroticism, distaste, sensuality, tedium — all the while running through its repertory of ways of looking at film, unsuccessfully attempting to establish itself in some singular mode of looking until it becomes plain that despite the cool self-containment of the spectacle on the screen, the only undissociated way of looking at this film is to look at oneself. And looking, one promptly finds oneself in a state of dissociation. In that state, one looks back at the devolving, serene spectacle on the screen.

I speak of elegance — elegance in *this* film, where Ondine swigs from an outsize Coke bottle and loudly belches; where Brigid snaps into the telephone, "Listen, I can't talk now, I'm on the john," where an aging queen snipes, "I want my property," jabbing a pudgy finger into a hustler's skinny shoulder. Well, let's say it is the elegance of the sixties. Or let Warhol say it: "People are so fantastic. You just can't take a bad picture." Finally, this cinematic spectacle is about the self-containment of a certain elegant discretion, the discretion of Baudelaire's dandy, the aggressive perfection of a passive-nonchalance. The discretion of mutism, of separateness, of perfect placement. It doesn't matter that at the same time it is talkative, chummy, and in disarray, for this discretion is about an ironic mode of consciousness that perpetually undermines its own means. It's within that mode (if you can get into it, not an easy matter) that you just can't take a bad picture. While it plays at disorienting and shocking the senses, it is in fact seducing them with the impression it couldn't care less.

By the way, I don't mean to suggest that *The Chelsea Girls* is so dreadfully elegant that it is not entertaining. In the vulgar sense, it is the most entertaining work I know within its particular tradition of elegance. In any event, every time I see it I repeatedly laugh out loud, though I'm sometimes the only person in the theater who does. As it proceeds from reel to reel, its solemn mechanistic stateliness is repeatedly undermined by the almost ostentatiously charming and repellent freak show on the screen. The film is so deeply involved in its ironic mode that it subsumes everything to it: its use of time,

its apperceptive drama, its claim to seriousness, its place in an artistic tradition. *The Chelsea Girls* seems to flicker not only on the edge of seriousness and of cinema, but on the edge of existence; no work has ever less portentously commanded us to know ourselves.

"Listen. I am too economical an artist to go on with this," Ondine asserts, his eye fixed on the camera in a steely gaze of mock determination during the middle of reel X. Brrrrrrrrrrring! "There's my telephone, so sit down and shut up." A very fat lesbian who claims she is no longer able to cross her legs (but who promptly, though with effort, crosses her legs) picks up the telephone. "Helleau?" she says, exuding mock sweetness.

There is a special kind of actor's presence in which Warhol specializes, and it should be possible to talk about it quite exactly. To do so, we must naturally talk about his actor's relation to the camera, and the most obvious fact about it is that it is a relation invariably more or less forthrightly acknowledged. "OK," asks Ondine. "Should I start now?" Twenty years of television have undoubtedly had some influence on the style: from the beginning, television's unintimidating small screen and absurdly poor resolution of detail have encouraged the close-up and an "eyes-front," (therefore "frank") variety of camera presence, causing what in 1939 would have been thought impossible, an even greater accentuation of the narcissistic show-biz dimension in the commercial media than had existed before. Along with this came an endless insistence on comedy; television quickly became the medium of the comic double-take, and in fact very much the same thing which makes us smile at Brigid on the telephone makes us smile at Carol Burnett's arching eyebrow. Likewise, one can trace to TV's revival of vaudeville the burlesque idea that one's role on the stage or screen is too absurd to maintain, that one can't help breaking up, stumbling out of the posture, kibitzing on one's own role. Finally, there is the mystique of the star, about which we will have more to say.

But more decisive factors probably are Warhol's refusal to edit and the use of the stationary camera. They result in a kind of performance otherwise almost never seen on the screen. Each one swims in a shoreless little half-hour ocean of time. Both actors and audience in *The Chelsea Girls* confront the problem of what to do with the length of that inexorable reel. But Warhol's almost flawless personal taste stands him in good stead; there is virtually nobody in *The Chelsea Girls* who fails to have a relation to the camera that works. Everybody is a good talker, except for those like Nico who never talk. Everyone lives with ease in the realm of narcissism in which living and *being seen* conjoin, and their self-absorption operates in a way that puts it on constant display. They are amusing. They are hip. They are, in short, ideal.

And their acknowledged relation to the camera,

whether it is direct or in some way deflected, whether burlesqued or done in character, becomes above all a structured means for playing out a narcissistic self-involvement — while a major factor of fascination in each performance is the specific texture of that relation, that means. Through the actor's awareness, one perceives the camera's felt presence as if in a mirror. And within the felt presence of that mirrored structure, the performance comes to life and is forced almost literally to reflect upon itself, driven by the camera into that mode of ironic sensuality and presence which is the Warhol style. It is at this point that the film can lay claim to an almost literary high seriousness. For *The Chelsea Girls* is haunted, dominated, by the problem of authenticity.

It is sensed through an extraordinarily delicate, though usually comic, exploration of its actor's presences as their eroticism is sensed through that presence. Everybody has surely guessed that, within the psychological structure of *The Chelsea Girls'* esthetic, there is an important link between the whole operation of the film and the exclusively homosexual, sadomasochistic sexuality which pervades it. Unfortunately it is a link so important and complex that it deserves its own, separate consideration. But the film is also an anthology of variations on an almost cautionary style of personal presence, something which has its own little drama, its own story. I would like to discuss only one instance, the most pyrotechnical performance in the film and one which has the advantage of being both exemplary and perfectly linear as it operates at the outer limits of a style.

In it, Ondine loses his temper.

The left side of the screen is once again in black and white. The set is the Factory, where the two sections of the couch are still placed back to back. Once again, Ondine sits down on one, though this time without his black robe. He has with him a paper bag, from which (with much noisy crinkling on the sound track) he extracts a syringe. Using his belt to tie his arm, he proceeds through the methodical ritual of giving himself a shot of methadrene. He releases his arm from the belt; again, with noisy crinkling he replaces the syringe in the paper bag and carefully sets it aside. He has that peculiar relation to objects most often seen in women wrapped up in an almost pampering relation to their bodies, who pick things up and set them aside with a particularly fleshly tactile discretion. Except that this time he is pampering a needle. Ondine then turns to the camera and asks if he should begin. "OK? OK. Well now, let's see." He arranges himself more comfortably. "As you are all aware, uh, I am the Pope. And, uh, the Pope has many duties. It's a crushing job. I can't tell you. And — uh — I've come down here today in order to give you all some kind of inside view of my life, and what I've been doing with my uhhhhh" — there is a long tracking pause — "Popage? Right, my Popage. Not just the Pope as Pope, but the Pope as a man. Right? First of all,



Andy Warhol, *The Chelsea Girls*, 1966. Hanoi Hannah.

you will undoubtedly want to know who, or what, I am Pope of. Well, uh-hh," a mock faggot groan, running his fingers through his hair. "Jesus! there's nobody left. Who's left?"

Time is being filled. The eye drifts to the right where, let's say, a silent color sequence shows a kind of light show playing on members of the cast. But now, back on the left, a woman walks on; somebody new has come to give her confession to Ondine, as Ingrid Superstar did at the beginning of the film. As she sits down and begins to talk, something seems slightly wrong, slightly off: the woman on the screen has a certain vanity all right, but it is a pedestrian, banal vanity. Worse, she seems faintly intimidated by the situation in which she finds herself. She's a touch "heavy." But we know that won't stop Ondine. The eye drifts complacently back to the right. The light show continues; Ingrid is smoking a cigarette and laughing. After a digression, the conversation on the left drifts back to confession and begins to spar. The girl seems to sense that this sparring with Ondine is part of the game, and so, somewhat smirkingly, she sets out to question the Pope's spiritual authority. She announces that she is hesitant to confess. Exactly Ondine's meat. "My dear, there is nothing you cannot say to me. Nothing. Now tell me, why can't you confess?" The inattentive ear hears the remark fall: "I can't confess to you because you're such a phony. I'm not trying to be anyone." Ondine seems at first able to duck this little rabbit punch easily, and still playing for the camera, tosses it back at her, his voice filled with mock music. The girl repeats her remark. Ondine has been holding a glass of Coca-Cola in his hand; he throws it into her face. She is startled; it takes her an instant to remember that this, after all, is only a movie. She pulls her wet hair from her eyes and comes back smiling. "I'm a phony, am I?" snaps Ondine. "That's right," the girl replies, and is instantly slapped in the face. The right half of the screen, as it were, vanishes. A sado-masochistic spectacle is by now very familiar —

but still. "Well, let me tell you something, my dear little Miss Phony. You're a phony. You're a disgusting phony. May God forgive you," and Ondine slaps her again, more violently, then leaps up in a paroxysmic rage. With his open hands he begins to strike the cowering bewildered girl around the head and shoulders. "You God-damned phony, get the hell off this set. Get out." In a momentary lull we see the girl's eyes again. They are squeezed shut. At last she seems to grasp what is happening to her. "Stop it," she says. "Stop it. Don't touch me." She is unable to move, but her voice is, at last, authentic. Ondine rages on. "How dare you call me a phony. Little Miss Phony, you disgusting fool," he begins to strike her again. She leaps up and runs.

There follows a torrential, self-righteous, hysterical rage. How dare she, the moralistic bitch. Who the fuck does she think she is coming onto a set and pulling something like that — "did you see it, did you see it?" — she's a disgrace, she's a disgrace to herself, she's a disgrace to humanity, the fool, the moron; she thinks she understands friendship, she understands nothing, she betrays, she insults. Ondine circles the room, hysterical — "I'm sorry, I just can't go on, this is just too much, I don't want to go on" — it is the longest camera movement in the film. Her husband is a loathsome fool, she is a loathsome fool, and so it goes. Phase by slow self-justifying phase, Ondine who has been beside himself, slowly returns to himself — that is, to the camera. And as he calms himself, the camera reasserts its presence.

In an ordinary narrative film (that is, one in which the actors play to the convention of an absent camera) such an incident would be thought of as a stroke of personal passion, and it would function as a piece of self-revelation, a moment of truth. At first blush, Ondine's outburst seems to do exactly the same thing. The point, however, is that the moment of truth begins to function at precisely the moment the cowering girl's face comes to the realization that this is not, after all, just a movie; at the moment when, understandably enough, the presence of the camera ceases to have any importance to her and she reasserts *herself*, eyes closed: "Stop it. Stop it. Don't touch me." Poor child, she was ill-equipped for her job. Trying to be ironic, trying to be authentic, she could do neither, and she found herself in big trouble instead. For that particular game, she had sat down at a table with pros. And it was exactly her incapacity for the task, subtly evident in her presence from the beginning, which provoked Ondine into his rage. It is interesting that the all-provocative word was "phony."

Phony? It's impossible to imagine that Ondine could be so enraged, even with the help of methadrine, merely by this silly epithet. It was the way she was there that set him off. In more or less perfect innocence, the girl provoked the peculiarly angered embarrassment one feels for a

person trying to be funny among people with a great gift for wit; or somebody trying to be brilliant among the very intelligent, trying for physical flash among athletes. It was the teeth-searing scrape of the chalk, behavior which, however mortifying for the person doing it, nonetheless seems like an act of aggression. The girl made the mistake of turning her mortified aggression into words. She was not mistreated for a lack of brilliance or wit or grace: she had stepped in front of the camera insensitive to the life it was structuring and which it required; she failed to understand that in front of it she had to live within its irony and that she was among people for whom that irony is life. Phony? One suspects that Ondine would be prepared to be called a phony by anyone, and at any time, provided they did not claim for that particular truth any authenticity whatsoever. He found the girl's remark judgmental and righteous, and so it was. But Ondine was himself perfectly adept at righteousness; ten full minutes are devoted to elevating his disgraceful behavior into a saintly act. What he called the girl's moralism was in fact the violation of a style, a style of life, and one which was being made to function at that moment in its most pristine form. Disasterously for her, she had tried to divert attention — ours, Ondine's, the camera's — from the mode of consciousness in which Ondine and the other important people in the film locate their capacity to live and act. Trying to be cute for the occasion, she violated the flicker of Ondine's, and the film's, life. Revenge was preternaturally swift.

Those for whom selfhood is located in the ironic mode of Ondine and his world are in the habit of calling any violation of that mode — any "heavy" — a "bore." It is one of the most favored words in their vocabulary. Needless to add, it was of the many epithets Ondine slapped into his wretched victim. Boredom? It is an uneasy boredom. Feeling it, such people hold their breath against the unbearable. What really went wrong? Had the poor girl lacked a certain delicate touch? So what? Had she called Ondine a nasty name? *The Chelsea Girls* is a 3½-hour parade of nasty names. None of this can have had the slightest importance. As she clumsily faltered within that life style to which *The Chelsea Girls* is a monument, the girl tried to pick up the beat she'd lost with a feinting little lunge of mockery. Wasn't mockery, after all, what everybody else was indulging? She failed to realize that once you've stumbled out of the cool, vibrant life of inauthenticity, mockery is absolutely forbidden. Her little ploy turned out to be a little act of ontological aggression, one which confronted poor high Ondine with an unexpected but intense little metaphor for death. Some bore. "You phony! You fool! You moron," he shrieks, the last remnant of a mind beside itself absolutely fixed on the camera, "you misery, you're a disgrace, a disgrace to yourself. May God forgive you!" ■

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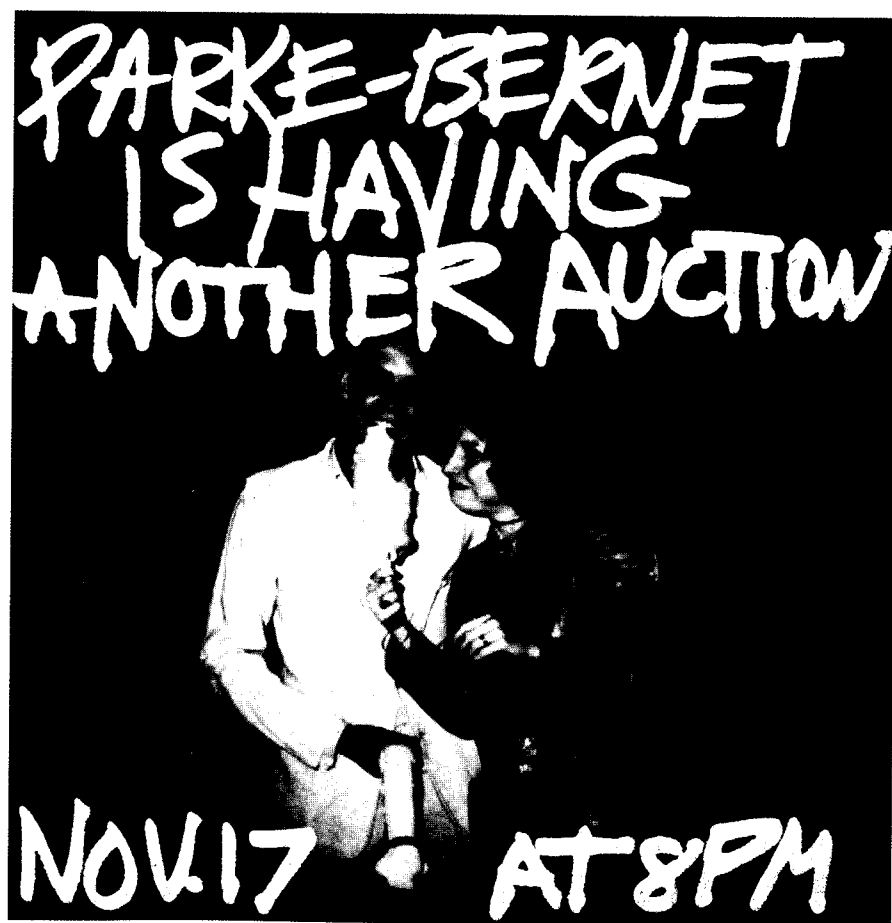
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