CANYON COLLECTIVE ARTISTS: MICROPOLITICS IN WEST COAST EXPERIMENTAL FILM, 1960-79

Ekin Pinar

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Supervisor of Dissertation

Christine Poggi

Professor of History of Art

Co-Supervisor of Dissertation

Karen Beckman

Elliot and Roslyn Jaffe Endowed

Professor in Film Studies

Graduate Group Chairperson

David Brownlee, Frances Shapiro-Weitzenhoffer Professor of 19th Century European Art

Dissertation Committee

Christine Poggi, Professor of History of Art

Karen Beckman, Elliot and Roslyn Jaffe Endowed Professor in Film Studies

Timothy Corrigan, Professor of English, Cinema Studies, and History of Art

To my dear mom

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ABSTRACT

CANYON COLLECTIVE ARTISTS: MICROPOLITICS IN WEST COAST EXPERIMENTAL FILM, 1960-79

Ekin Pinar

Supervisors: Christine Poggi and Karen Beckman

In 1961, filmmakers Bruce Baillie, Chick Strand, Larry Jordan, and film critic Ernest Callenbach founded Canyon Cinema for weekly film screenings of a diverse selection of avant-garde, experimental and art-house films, newsreels, cartoons and animations as well as commercial Hollywood movies. Canyon screenings took place on locations expanding from San Francisco into Oakland, San Jose, and Berkeley as many as three times a week. This gravitation toward mobility, variation and flexibility also showed itself in the prolific film production of the members of the collective. Through use of methods such as appropriation, fragmentation, and reflexivity, Canyon filmmakers developed more intimate (memory), immediate (experience), and imaginative (fantasy) ways of engaging with the past. At the same time, their search for historic and ethnographic "realities" constantly question the conventional methods, genres, and medium-specific elements of filmmaking. In my dissertation, I re-evaluate the ways in which Canyon filmmakers approached the ethical, political, and cultural issues inherent in the representation of culture and history through the help of three concepts:

performance in Strand's ethnographies and found footage films, allegory in Baillie's newsreels, and indexicality in Jordan's animations.

In the first chapter, I focus on the evocation of issues of sexuality, minority politics, and history in Bruce Baillie's films. Reflecting on Baillie's approaches to representation of race, culture, and gender, I consider how and what type of minority movement allegories transpired in Baillie's cinema. My second chapter concentrates on Chick Strand's films in its entirety comprising both found footage and documentary works. I analyze Strand's citational, reflexive, and performative uses of pleasure, desire, and humor as productive strategies of bridging the then-wide gap between experimental and feminist cinemas. Larry Jordan's animations and live-action films, which explore the dynamic tensions between still and moving imagery, visual and tactile sensations, and surrealist, lyrical and ethnographic modes of filmic expression, constitute the focus of the third chapter. Considering the notions of repetition, transformation, layering, and materiality that dominates Jordan's films, I question how his films resist linear narratives by revealing alternative paths, multiple voices, and cyclical repetitions of histories.

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INTRODUCTION

To us, it [Canyon Cinema] was theater.
Chick Strand[1]

"What is Canyon Cinema?" asked the editorial of a 1962 issue of *Canyon CinemaNews* (then dubbed *Canyon Cinema: The News*). They continued, "A vicious nihilist threat to the Established Order? A giant international syndicate of independent production? A secret society dedicated to the overthrow of all that is decent American life?"[2] The humorous, anarchist tone of the essay on the brief history and the premise of Canyon Cinema not only accords with the *Canyon CinemaNews*' attitude and its scrapbook-like structure that featured any kind of news, letters, and trivia relating to cinema (even including cooking recipes from filmmakers[3]) but also with the jolly and occasionally carnivalesque atmosphere of the Canyon screenings. How the essay subsequently defined Canyon Cinema, "in a phrase, a floating underground theater also active in production," forms the focal point of this dissertation in which I map the resonances between Canyon filmmakers' separate yet formally and thematically

[1] Chick Strand and Jane Collings, *Out of the Seventies, L.A.'s Women in Film and Video: Chick Strand*
[2] The News editorial, "What is Canyon Cinema???" *Canyon Cinema: The News* 1, no. 5 (May 1963): 5.
[3] See, for instance, Chick Strand, "Letter," *Canyon CinemaNews* 72, no. 1 (1972) in which she includes her rum pie recipe.

interrelated film production, their attention to audience reception, and the socio-cultural atmosphere of the West Coast.[4]

In 1961, film enthusiasts Chick Strand and Bruce Baillie co-founded Canyon Cinema Collective, an initiative to showcase, produce, and distribute films.[5] The collective soon became larger by the addition of other filmmakers, such as Larry Jordan, and film critic Ernest Callenbach. They named the collective after Canyon, a small town within "a very beautiful redwood forest" just a few miles from Berkeley, where Baillie and Strand lived at different points in the late fifties and early sixties.[6] Callenbach recalls that at the time Canyon was "an unincorporated haven for artists, anarchists, and related free souls who lived in a state of siege by the water company whose land holdings entirely surrounded the town."[7] The collective's weekly film screenings quickly expanded from Canyon to multiple locations comprising San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, and Berkeley.[8] They would occasionally hold as many as three screenings per week.[9] Due to the Do It Yourself roots of the collective and shortness of money, the spaces varied from the backyards of the collective's members,

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[4] "What is Canyon Cinema???" 5.
[5] Bruce Baillie and Chick Strand, "Canyon Cinema Program Handout" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, 1962), 1 and Kathy Geritz, "Interview with Ernest Callenbach: The Screenings, February 2011," in *Radical Light: Alternative Film & Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-2000*, ed. Steve Anker, Kathy Geritz, and Steve Seid (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 112.
[6] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 44.
[7] Ernest Callenbach, *Bruce Baillie: A Monument, An Illumination, An Attempt to Reach a Lost Friend* (Minneapolis: Film in the Cities and Walker Art Center, 1979), 5.
[8] Diane Kitchen and Gunvor Nelson, "Chick Strand's Recollections of Canyon Cinema's Early Beginnings with Added Commentary from Chick Callenbach," *Canyon Cinemanews* 76, no. 2 (1976), n.p.
[9] San Francisco Cinematheque, "A Welcome Return… After 12 Years…" in *Scrapbook: Bruce Baillie*, ed. Timoleon Wilkins (San Francisco: San Francisco Cinematheque, 1995), n.p. and Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 55.

high school gyms, coffee shops, an International Workers of the World restaurant, to colleges, the San Francisco Tape Music Center and cheap rental theaters.[10] Sometimes they would borrow chairs from a local funeral home.[11] Baillie and Strand met everyday to brainstorm and plan their upcoming programs. Strand printed handouts through "Anarchist Press" and hand painted big posters.[12] They also announced their screenings by getting the attention of some people working at the *San Francisco Chronicl*e, *The Oakland Tribune*, and the *Berkeley Barb*.[13]

The screenings of Canyon Cinema featured a diverse selection of avant-garde, experimental and art-house films, newsreels, serials, cartoons and animations as well as commercial Hollywood movies. A program announcement from the Fall of 1963, for instance, advertises a program including a 1960 French experimental film *Dream of the Wild Horses* by Denys Colomb Daunant, followed by "old cartoons" and selections from "New East Coast Short Films."[14] The same handout also lists a screening that juxtaposes Akira Kurosawa's famous 1950 film *Rashomon* with Bruce Baillie's newly-finished film *To Parsifal*. Another program from 1962 announces a

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[10] Kitchen and Nelson, "Chick Strand's Recollections of Canyon Cinema's Early Beginnings," n.p., San Francisco Cinematheque, "A Welcome Return… After 12 Years…" in Wilkins, ed. *Scrapbook: Bruce Baillie*, n.p., Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 53-55, and Kathy Geritz, "Interview with Chick Strand," in Anker, Geritz, and Seid, ed. *Radical Light*, 118-120.

[11] According to Chick Strand, the place was Truman Funeral Parlor. Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 54; 60. Later on, this evolved into a myth about Canyon in which they held a screening at a local morgue.

[12] Kitchen and Nelson, "Chick Strand's Recollections of Canyon Cinema's Early Beginnings," n.p. and Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 58-59.

[13] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 58-59.

[14] Chick Strand and Bruce Baillie, "Canyon Cinema program flyer" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, 1963), reprinted in Scott MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of An Independent Film Distributor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 11 and Anker, Geritz, and Seid, ed., *Radical Light*, 116.

screening in September that brings together the films of Charlie Chaplin with those of Larry Jordan.[15] As Chick Strand recalls, to Stan Brakhage's dismay, they once coupled Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* with Brakhage films.[16] Unlike the Canyon Cinema artists, Brakhage "never thought of the commercial cinema as in any way related to his own enterprise," as David James put it.[17] In contrast, we can definitely observe a blurring of the demarcations between the commercial and experimental cinema (the widely distributed 35mm and 16mm films of limited availability) in the collective's attempts to familiarize a local community with avant-garde forms of art.

The screenings themselves were instrumental in building this community and its subsequent expansion. As Baillie suggested in an interview in 1989, the collective started as amateur efforts to gather local people to watch a mixture of films:

> We got an army surplus screen and hung it up real nice in the back yard of this house we were renting. Then we'd find whatever films we could, including our own little things that were in progress (…) I had no occupation. I couldn't get a real job anywhere. So I thought, I'll invent my own occupation. I set up a little part of the house as an office. I had to call it something: I put up a little sign and it turned out to be "Canyon Cinema" with a light bulb next to it. Fairly soon, we had weekly showings. Kikuko [Baillie's girlfriend at the time] made popcorn. The kids around the neighborhood gathered the community benches and chairs, and we'd sit under the trees in the summer with all the dogs and people and watch French or Canadian Embassy films and National Film Board of Canada stuff, along with our

[15] Bruce Baillie and Chick Strand, "Canyon Cinema Program Handout" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, 1962), 2.
[16] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 54 and Kathy Geritz, "Interview with Chick Strand," in Anker, Geritz, and Seid, ed. *Radical Light*, 118.
[17] David E. James, "Introduction: Stan Brakhage, The Activity of His Nature," in *Stan Brakhage: Filmmaker*, ed. David E. James (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 15.

> own. I let it be known immediately that I had a place to show films, if any filmmakers were coming through town. I let Jonas [Mekas] know right away. At first we were in touch with Larry Jordan, and later, Jordan Belson.[18]

According to Ernest Callenbach, the people attended the screenings numbered around thirty and forty at each screening and there were regulars who came to watch films at least once a month.[19] At the same time, the demographics of this community was rather diverse as Chick Strand recalled in an interview conducted in 1976:

> … [K]ids would come, it was a real family kind of thing (…) that was a whole different bunch! There [was] a lot of people that hung out in North Beach, the old beatniks that were still there, San Franciscans that didn't want to go to Berkeley.[20]

This gravitation of the screenings toward mobility, variation, flexibility and community building is simultaneously manifest in the proliferative film production of the members of the collective. The showcase aims of the collective went hand-in hand with their intentions to produce of their own films. They spent the donation money collected at the screenings to buy film equipment, including a rewind and a splicer and to set up a small studio in Berkeley where they experimented with editing.[21] Bruce Baillie, who already received education in filmmaking techniques, taught the others,

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[18] Scott MacDonald and Bruce Baillie, "Bruce Baillie," in *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers 2*, ed. Scott McDonald (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 113-114, also reprinted as "An Interview with Bruce Baillie," *Wide Angle* 14, nos. 3, 4 (July / October 1992): 32-49.

[19] MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema*, 8, from an unpublished interview of Scott MacDonald with Ernest Callenbach on November 6, 2002. Also see Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 55. Strand states that they had approximately fifty – sixty regulars.

[20] Kitchen and Nelson, "Chick Strand's Recollections of Canyon Cinema's Early Beginnings," n.p.

[21] Baillie and Strand, "Canyon Cinema Program Handout" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, 1962).

including Chick Strand, how to use the equipment.[22] In their cramped studio space in Berkeley, the group experimented with techniques such as in-camera editing, solarization, superimposition, and optical printing. At the same time, they occasionally published instructions on how to build and use film equipment, such as an optical printer stand in *Canyon CinemaNews*.[23]

Two comprehensive anthological works, *Radical Light: Alternative Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-2000* and Scott MacDonald's *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor*, bring together documents such as interviews with the filmmakers, letters, and excerpts from the collective's regular newsletter *CanyonNews*.[24] Yet, these works do very little to interpret the significance of the collective and leave the task of analyzing the documents to the reader. MacDonald's research concentrates on the distribution function of Canyon and compares it to another major experimental film distributor, Filmmakers Co-Op in New York. The film production of the collective does not constitute a major concern for MacDonald's project. There exist a few reviews of the films by Canyon collective artists in the sixties and seventies issues of several film journals. Standard histories of experimental cinema mention the filmmakers and a couple of their films, yet these works remain insufficient to introduce a comprehensive survey of each filmmaker's whole corpus of work in particular and of the group as a

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[22] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 66. Strand notes that Baillie taught her how to use a camera.
[23] Loren Sears, "Canyon Cinema Research and Development Division: Optical Printer Stand," *Canyon CinemaNews* (July 1967), n.p.
[24] Anker, Geritz, and Seid, ed., *Radical Light* and MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema*.

collective body. Nor do these accounts provide an analysis of the importance of the collective to the socio-cultural scene of its historical context. In each chapter, I will concentrate on the scholarship on individual filmmakers. Here, I would like to focus on a general tendency in the experimental film scholarship of the late sixties and early seventies, which categorizes the production of most filmmakers active in the sixties, including Canyon filmmakers, under the rubric "film poem / lyrical film."

The scholarship on this category "film poem / lyrical film," is not homogeneous, featuring nuances in the way it defines the genre and its specific formal and thematic characteristics. Sheldon Renan, for instance, argues that we can classify most underground films as "film poem," yet he does not provide the reader with the definition of this category:

> One might call many underground works "film poems," but that is an uneasy category. It is uneasy because there really is not a satisfactory definition of poetry, let alone film poetry. Let it be said, though, that these films frequently instill in the viewer a sense of poetry. Certain works are directly related to the forms and rhythms of literary poetry.[25]

Other scholars such as Parker Tyler and P. Adams Sitney defined the category (while naming it differently) more clearly, yet these definitions still seem general and applicable to most experimental film production if we were to merely focus on the formal explorations. Parker Tyler defines "trance" film as those with a loopy and dream-like structure with some narrative elements, whereas P. Adams Sitney's "lyrical" film focuses on the formal aspects of the films such as slow rhythmic shots

[25] Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (New York: Dutton, 1967), 34.

and a flow of forms.[26] James Peterson suggests that the lyrical films of the American avant-garde cinema of the sixties blend the two strictly separated strains in the pre-World War II European experimental cinema, namely film poems ("concerned with the representation of subjectivity") and graphic cinema ("concerned with the manipulations of the plastics of the image") to the extent that it becomes impossible to tell which strain dominates the film.[27]

Despite their subtle differences, these definitions rely on the now classic linguistic distinction between poetry and prose theorized by Roman Jakobson.[28] Jakobson maps his distinction along the lines of the emphasis of text on either elements of form and metaphoric relations (poetry) or on elements of meaning and narrative or connective structures (prose).[29] We can trace the effects of such categorization in the assessments of American avant-garde film back to the "Poetry and the Film" symposium of 1953 at Cinema 16 in New York. Maya Deren, during her talk at this event, distinguished between experimental and mainstream film as a function of their vertical (intense moments of metaphorical associations) and horizontal (continuous unfolding of a plot) organizations, respectively.[30] The majority

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[26] Parker Tyler, *The Three Faces of the Film: The Art, The Dream, The Cult* (New York: Yoselhoff, 1960), 97 and P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 155-187.
[27] James Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 29.
[28] Roman Jakobson (with Morris Halle), "Two Aspects of Language," in *Language in Literature*, ed. K. Pomorska and S. Rudy (London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 111-112.
[29] For the first application of this distinction to cinema see Viktor Shklovsky, "Poetry and Prose in Cinema," in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, ed. Richard Tyler and Ian Christie (1927; repr., New York: Routledge, 1998), 176-177.
[30] Maya Deren, Arthur Miller, Dylan Thomas, Parker Tyler, Willard Maas and Amos Vogel, "Poetry and the Film: A Symposium," *Film Culture*, no. 29 (Summer 1963), reprinted in *Film Culture Reader*

of the historical surveys apply this axis of distinction to a supposedly precise dividing line between avant-garde and commercial cinemas, respectively. More specifically, the canon of "film poem / lyrical film" in experimental film scholarship of the early seventies dwells on this organizational difference, sometimes standing for the experimental film *per se*.[31] At the same time, this distinction specifies the role of the artist in the production of "lyrical film/ film poem." Based on a parallel with the figure of the Romantic poet who expresses his/her feelings through his/her verses, scholars assume that the formal explorations of film poems, such as solarization, abstraction, use of color filters, and optical printers, reflect the filmmaker's autonomous subjectivity. Because of this exclusive focus on formal experimentation, the socio-historical, cultural, and representational politics, ethics, and concerns of much experimental work remained unnoticed until recently. Within the last two decades, scholars such as Catherine Russell and Jeffrey Skoller concentrated on diverse instances from the history of experimental film to map the intersections of formal exploration and the representation of history, culture, and social relations in experimental cinema.[32] In my dissertation, I follow a similar methodology, yet my focus will remain on the West Coast film production in the sixties and seventies. By doing so, I will challenge both canonical interpretations that more-or-less influenced

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(New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 171-186. Also see Bill Nichols, "Introduction," in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 6-8.

[31] Sitney, *Visionary Film* and Parker Tyler, *The Three Faces of Film*.

[32] Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) and Jeffrey Skoller, *Shadows, Specters, Shards: Making History in Avant-Garde Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

the readings of this production, as well as the liminal position of West Coast art in relation to the supposed center of the avant-garde in New York.

Canyon Collective's aesthetic style stretches between the lyrical and poetry films of fifties and sixties and the conceptual and self-reflexive avant-garde of the seventies. At the same time, the film production of the collective stands between newsreel and ethnographic documentary forms and experimental tendencies toward abstraction, found footage, and collage animation. Appropriating various representational and thematic modes, its films address the ways in which culture, history, and reality can be represented in film without succumbing to fixed subject positions as manifest in the conventional cinematic genres and styles it adapted. A comprehensive study of the filmmakers of Canyon Collective should allow us to understand not only the stylistic shifts in experimental film from the late fifties into the early seventies but also the socio-cultural atmosphere of the West Coast Area in the sixties and seventies.

As Hayden White suggests, the modern project of history writing dwells on literary forms and structures to the extent that it registers history as a narrative of linear progression.[33] Hayden, in a 2009 talk, compares postmodern forms of history writing to modernist narratives of history:

> For postmodernists the "past"- irredeemably absent and accessible only by way of spoors, fragments, and traces - is the place of memory, reverie, and fantasy, and therefore of poetic inspiration, rather than a space of

[33] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

> past human actions that can be recovered and represented more or less accurately as [it] really [was] (as it is for scientifically oriented, modern professional historians).[34]

Hayden postulates that postmodern historiography emanates from both a suspicion of the possibility of objectivity and truth in representation, as well as from a more intimate (memory) and imaginative (fantasy) way of engaging with the past. Many scholars, such as Fredric Jameson, articulate these new ways of engaging with the past in predominantly negative terms. For Jameson, the postmodern turn to history signals a crisis in representation and the dissolution of the sign that points to an inability to concentrate on the current situation.[35] Yet, Hayden suggests that the postmodern forms of history necessarily entail an engagement with the past through the present moment. Hayden notes:

> What interests postmodernists is the past that continues to exist in the present, but less as heritage and tradition than as phantasm, memory, the "return of the repressed," ghost, enigma, threat, or burden.[36]

Such a concept of the past takes its cue from Walter Benjamin's reflexive methodology of interpreting fragments of the past through the lens of the present, yet it challenges the dialectical structure of Benjamin's history.[37] Postmodern

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[34] Hayden White, "Postmodernism and Historiography" (Keynote Speech at the Symposium "After Metahistory," Ritsumeikan University, November 12, 2009), accessed March 7, 2014, http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/acd/gr/gsce/news/200901022_repo_0-e.htm

[35] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *Studies in Culture: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (1988; reprinted, London: Arnold, 1997), 192-205.

[36] Hayden White, "Postmodernism and Historiography."

[37] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (1940; repr. New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 253-264 and *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (1927-40; repr., Boston: Harvard University Press, 1999).

historiography dissolves the Western myth of history as progress and constant development, a concept that also fueled the colonialist project. At the same time, it necessarily entails a democratic and inclusive way of thinking about history to the extent that it consists of minor histories, everyday experience, and artworks that engage with the past.

What transpires in Canyon filmmakers work is such an understanding of history and culture as memory, fantasy, and experience. Their self-reflexive search for historic and ethnographic "realities" through representation constantly questions the conventional methods, genres, and medium-specific elements of filmmaking by eliciting three primary concepts: allegory, performance, and indexicality. I will analyze the ways in which Canyon filmmakers approached the ethical, political, and cultural issues inherent in the representation of culture and history through the lens of these concepts. While each of the filmmakers appropriate these concepts, I will employ them in contexts that challenge the conventional understanding of the genres with which each filmmaker works (performance in Strand's ethnographies and found footage films, allegory in Baillie's newsreels, and indexicality in Jordan's animations).

In the first chapter, I explore the evocation of issues of sexuality, minority politics, and history in Bruce Baillie's films that build on his early explorations of the newsreel genre. Baillie adapts various other genres such as travelogues, essay and diary films, as well as structuralist approaches, literary works and mythologies. Yet, he contests these modes to embody a form of experimental ethnographic cinema in its continuous subversion of the fantasies of mastering the "Other" in the representation

of cultures and social forms. How do techniques such as fragmentation, appropriation, and reflexivity denaturalize the genre conventions that Baillie appropriates? What kind of power relations transpire between the audience, filmed subjects, and the filmmaker? Why does Baillie employ allegorical structures in his politically charged films?

My second chapter concentrates on Chick Strand's films in their entirety, comprising both found footage and documentary works, recognizing that they all display a preoccupation with the production of change in subject formations and positions. Using a diverse array of sources and models from cartoons, old Hollywood films, news and advertisement footage to scholarly anthropological and ethnographic references, and poetry, Strand's films resolve the tension of the sixties and seventies between male-centered formal and abstract experimental filmmaking and feminist cinema that shuns the visual pleasure and sensation altogether. In order to situate Strand's body of films within the context of sixties and seventies, I will focus on the relation of her filmmaking efforts to contemporary feminist theory and cinematic practice. What are the ramifications of methods such as an *aesthetics of the surface* and a *tactile humor* that Strand employs? What are the differences between her feminist politics and second-wave feminism in film theory and practice? Why does Strand use performance and re-enactments in a reflexive manner? I will explore the implications of Strand's citational, reflexive, and feminist approach to filmmaking, ethnography, and history to map the possible productive uses of pleasure and humor in experimental film.

Larry Jordan's animations and live-action films, which explore the dynamic tensions between still and moving imagery, visual and tactile sensations, and surrealist, lyrical and ethnographic modes of filmic expression, constitute the focus of the third chapter. Jordan appropriates a vast variety of still imagery that ranges from Victorian engravings and paintings to archival photographs in his experimental animation films, transforming them into moving imagery. How do Jordan's cut-out technique and his dense use of archival material in animations evoke an indexical relation to the outside world? Where does Jordan's work fall on the realism-surrealism spectrum, if we suppose that surrealist works reflect their authors' imagination and the unconscious? With these questions in mind, I will analyze the ways in which Jordan's films invite us to reconsider the definition of the cinematic medium by blurring the boundaries between animation and indexicality. Manipulating the notions of motion, time, and corporeality, Jordan, similar to other Canyon filmmakers, challenges the concept of history as a linear progression, instead invoking productive ways to engage with past, present, and future.

CHAPTER I

Allegories of Mobility: Bruce Baillie's Fragmented Travelogues

> In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.
> -Walter Benjamin[38]

> The images; the dead poet/hero in the street, no comfort for the dying, the motorcycle, mother, you might as well mourn, the old Indian men in the coffee shop, the sheep on the hill in golden light, the sea, the photo of Bruce in his little WWI pilot's hat, playing bear in the house by the ocean, the hands on the guitar, Tung on skates, the fat man walking in the red zone, the woman in the forest, the train, powerful, the poetic power, the marchers, Mr. Hayashi, the still of a man and his dog, the fountain of wild red roses over a fence, rebirth. I have watched them over and over during the past twenty-five years, alone in the projection room.
> -Chick Strand[39]

In 1968, in an open call to film programmers to show avant-garde and experimental films, Bruce Baillie offered these suggestions of what to include: "…formal films, abstract, dramatic, documentary. Informal material, as shot. Poems. Descriptions of the most minor events in yours or others' lives: eating toast in the morning... what Morris said while he was shouting from the crapper. News."[40] Baillie's list corresponds to the effort in his own film production to mesh different

[38] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1985), 178, originally published as *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Berlin: Ernst Rowohlt Verlag, 1928).
[39] Chick Strand, "Letter to San Francisco Cinematheque, April 2, 1995," in *Scrapbook: Bruce Baillie*, ed. Timoleon Wilkins (San Francisco: San Francisco Cinematheque, 1995), n.p.
[40] Bruce Baillie, "Letter: August, Beginning Of September," *CinemaNews* 68, no. 7 (1968): n.p.

styles, techniques and representational modes. The letter, at the same time, discloses Baillie's association of aspects of daily life with the political whereby "a deliberated act by the socially-politically conscious man" and "the socks you put on in the morning" mattered equally.[41] Beginning in 1961, Baillie's filmmaking career displayed a constant interest in minority politics, the effects of mass culture, and daily life, as well as questions concerning the representation of culture and history. These themes and questions repeatedly surface in three different registers in the majority of his films: movement and mobility; an interchange between documentary, experimental and narrative modes; and an emphasis on tactility and corporeality.

Born in 1931 in Aberdeen, South Dakota, Baillie developed an interest in theater and painting in high school.[42] While attending the University of Minnesota as an art major, he decided to become a filmmaker.[43] Between 1958 and 1959, he took classes at the London School of Film Technique before he decided to move to San Francisco to continue to learn filmmaking through practice.[44] He assisted Marvin Becker, who made education and travel films, to get acquainted with how to edit and develop sound films.[45] Beginning to shoot footage of San Francisco with a borrowed Bell and Howell camera, he soon switched to a 16 mm Bolex, with which he would

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[41] ibid.
[42] Harriett Polt, "The Films of Bruce Baillie," *Film Comment* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1964): 50 and Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 110-111.
[43] Harriett Polt, "The Films of Bruce Baillie," 50.
[44] Harriett Polt, "The Films of Bruce Baillie," 50, Richard Whitehall, "An Interview with Bruce Baillie," *Film Culture*, no. 47 (Summer 1969): 16, and Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 111.
[45] Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 111.

make the majority of his films.[46] Baillie made his first film *On Sundays*, a "document of a lovely friend and San Francisco, woven together in fiction form," in 1961.[47] At the same time, he decided that filmmaking and film exhibition activities had to go hand-in-hand and he bought a second-hand army surplus film projector to show films on a sheet hung in his backyard.[48] Within less than a year, he met Chick Strand and they turned Baillie's initiative into an official collective, Canyon Cinema.[49]

Almost all of Baillie's film production blends experimental forms of ethnography, documentary and narrative modes, several formal techniques and in-camera editions, as well as collages of found material such as photographs, old Hollywood films, and mass media news. The intersection of a variety of film genres and art forms destabilizes the conventional ethnographic and/or anthropological modes of inquiry into the Other. Films such as *Castro Street* of 1966, *Quixote* of 1964-65, and *To Parsifal* of 1963 focus on the themes of mobility and movement, along with the tension between still and moving imagery, not only through showing humans, animals and vehicles in motion but also by exploring the perceptions of moving subjects. Such a mobile vision, in turn, generates fluid subjectivities that blur clear-cut definitions of sexuality, gender, and race. This perception-on-the-move becomes the formal context for an exploration of themes such as gender and race, immigrant rights, Native American culture and mental disability in children. At the same time, Baillie

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[46] Harriett Polt, "The Films of Bruce Baillie," 53 and Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 112.
[47] Richard Corliss, "Bruce Baillie: An Interview," *Film Comment* 7, no. 1 (1971): 31.
[48] Harriett Polt, "The Films of Bruce Baillie," 52, Whitehall, "An Interview with Bruce Baillie," 16, and San Francisco Cinematheque, "A Welcome Return… After 12 Years…" in Wilkins, ed., *Scrapbook: Bruce Baillie*, n.p.
[49] Kitchen and Nelson, "Chick Strand's Recollections of Canyon Cinema's Early Beginnings," 10.

prevents the potential for the ethnographic gaze of the camera to objectify the Other in films such as *Mr. Hayashi* of 1961, *Here I Am* of 1962, *Termination* of 1966, and *Tung* of 1966 by invoking an embodied experience through an extensive use of close-ups and an emphasis on body parts. This corporeal quality of the films and the preeminence given to tactile qualities engenders an alternative politics of visuality. Baillie's films deconstruct the comfortable distance that seemingly provides the observer with a powerful position in conventional ethnography by establishing affective relations that imply the spectator's active participation in what goes on screen.

The existing literature on the films by Bruce Baillie remains insignificant and does little more than incorporate his work into master narratives on avant-garde cinema. *Film Comment*, *Film Quarterly*, and *Film Culture* magazines' several issues in the sixties and seventies published a handful of reviews of Baillie's films.[50] These reviews, however, do not suffice to introduce the corpus of Baillie's works inasmuch as they do not posses the socio-historical distance to analyze the films through a wider, critical lens that takes into account the cultural ramifications of the historical impulse in Baillie's films. Instead, much like the standard histories of experimental cinema that mention Baillie's name and a small number of films in passing, these reviews also follow the contemporary trend of equating experimental film with the category of

[50] Ernest Callenbach, "Review: Quick Billy," *Film Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1971): 58, Lucy Fischer, "Castro Street: The Sensibility of Style," *Film Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (April 1976): 14–22, Alan Williams, "The Structure of Lyric: Baillie's *To Parsifal*," *Film Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (April 1976): 22–30, and Deirdre Boyle, "Media Minded," *American Libraries* 8, no. 1 (January 1977): 39–40.

"visionary/lyrical film," as coined and popularized by P. Adams Sitney.[51] Even the few articles published in 2006 on the occasion of a retrospective of Baillie's films, "Bruce Baillie: City Films and the Canyon CinemaNews Years," further instantiate this tendency instead of offering a fresh perspective with regard to recent conceptual and analytical changes in the narratives of avant-garde cinema.[52]

Almost all these accounts conceive Baillie's film production as derived from that of Stan Brakhage, a common problem that also emerges in the literature on Larry Jordan. Establishing this framework, in the opening to his chapter on lyrical film, Sitney states: "In this chapter I shall retrace the history of the lyrical film through the early evolution of Brakhage's cinema and observe its influence where it has been most fruitful, in the films of Bruce Baillie."[53] Such a predisposition overlooks the differences of not merely the formal and technical aspects of Baillie's and Brakhage's films but more importantly of the social, historical, and cultural interests of each

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[51] See, for instance, Parker Tyler, *The Three Faces of Film*, 97, Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*, 112, David Curtis, *Experimental Cinema* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc.: 1971), 161-162, P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 180-187, P. Adams Sitney, "Bruce Baillie and Lyrical Film," in *New Forms in Film: Montreux, August 3/24, 1974*, ed. Annette Michelson (Montreux: Imprimerie Corbaz, 1974), 33-37, Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos,* 10; 30-32, Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History* (1969; repr., New York: De Capo Press, 1995), 188, Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Exploding Eye: A Re-Visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 16-17, A. L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 71.

[52] The retrospective was organized by San Francisco Cinematheque and took place at the Center for the Arts at Yerba Buena Gardens. Center for the Arts at Yerba Buena Gardens, "Life Amplified" (unpublished Program Notes, Pacific Film Archives, October, 2006), and Irina Leimbacher, "Bruce Baillie and the Canyon CinemaNews Years" (unpublished Program Notes of San Francisco Cinematheque, Pacific Film Archives, October 15, 2006), Reyhan Harmancı, "Strange Beauty," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 12, 2006, 32, Max Goldberg, "Light and Fog," *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*, October 11, 2006, 84; 86, Johnny Ray Huston, "Tuesday, Take Two: City Poet Bruce Baillie Returns," *SF360*, October 10, 2006, http://www.sf360.org/?pageid=5412.

[53] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 156.

filmmaker that inform these aspects. In more than one case, the forced categorization of the name of Baillie under the headings of film poem or lyrical film occurs due to this comparison with Brakhage.

While Brakhage's interest in experimental form emanates from a desire to entirely free the eye from cultural constraints,[54] Baillie's subversion of the representational codes of culture embeds itself in a representation of the very same socio-cultural context, thereby offering a critique from within via reflexive methods. Far from being concerned with establishing a "vision" of his own, Baillie appropriates and combines formats such as newsreels, advertisement, Hollywood narratives, home movies, and travelogues that populate the collective consciousness. The literature on Baillie does not sufficiently analyze the socio-historical concerns of his cinema or his inclination towards documentary modes of representation. Even when these surveys mention the earliest films of Bruce Baillie, which took the form of subjective "newsreels," they discern a clear-cut distinction between an early (often dubbed "naïve" and "amateur") production of documentaries and a later one of lyrical structure with formal experimentation. Owing to their conceptualization of history as a linear narrative along with an emphasis on form over content, these surveys sketch out a "progressive" development in the corpus of Baillie's films from social inquiry to formal experimentation (and in some cases a further "development" into structural film). The only exception here is David E. James's *Allegories of Cinema*, where he

[54] Stan Brakhage, "The Camera Eye," *Film Culture* 30 (Autumn 1963): n.p., repr. in *Stan Brakhage, Metaphors on Vision,* ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976), n.p.

briefly scrutinizes Baillie's work in relation to the socio-cultural frame of sixties America and gives prominent attention to the historical context in Baillie's films. Yet, James draws conclusions regarding the entire body of Baillie's cinema from the visual analysis of only one film, *Quixote*.[55] More importantly, James does not map out the involvement of Baillie's cinema in the newly-emerging minority politics, a task that concerned Baillie throughout his entire production and that is manifest in his recourse to an experimental ethnographic mode that actively engages mobility and movement, a congruence between nature and culture, and the sense of touch.

With these issues in mind, in the first section of this chapter, I will focus on the reflexive tendencies of Baillie's works that materialize in both early newsreels and later "structural" films. Using a diverse array of sources and influences without trying to connect them seamlessly, all of Baillie's films refer to their own socio-historical context while at the same time underlining their mediated nature. Accordingly, these works contest the invisibility of the ethnographic gaze of the camera that forms the allegedly observational, unobtrusive tradition of documentary modes. The majority of works on documentary and visual ethnography agree that the claims of conventional ethnographic documentaries to a privileged relation to "reality" and other cultures began to be challenged in late seventies and eighties via a reflexive attitude by the filmmakers such as Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Chris Marker, and Claude Lanzmann.[56] In my

[55] David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 159-164.
[56] See, for instance, James Clifford and George E. Marcus ed., *Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), Norman K.

analysis, however, I argue that Baillie's films, such as *The Gymnasts* of 1961, *Quick Billie* of 1970, *Here I Am* of 1962, *Mr. Hayashi* of 1961, and *Termination* of 1966 amount to a reflexive documentary mode that blurs the boundaries between public and private realms, visual and tactile registers, as well as mass culture and avant-garde practices. In doing so, Baillie also displays a constant effort to challenge the assumption of readily available information about the ethnographic subject.

The second section analyzes *Castro Street* of 1966, *To Parsifal* of 1963, *All My Life, Still Life,* and *Tung* of 1966, films that take their cue from travelogues and diary films as well as literary works and mythologies but contest these modes to embody a form of experimental ethnographic cinema in its continuous subversion of the fantasies of mastering the "Other" in the representation of cultures and social forms. I will investigate how and why these films concentrate on binary structures (of gender, nature and culture, self and other) inherent in mythology and build their structure on them to offer a critique from within. What are the outcomes of this critique in relation to the filmed subjects? Why does Baillie turn to these binary conventions while exploring the capabilities of the medium? I will attempt to answer these questions in relation to a recurring theme in Baillie's body of works, the possibility of transformation, and consider its implications for Baillie's approaches to the representation of race, culture, and gender.

Denzin, *Interpretative Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1996), and Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

The fragmentary nature of the films, in which various stylistic, thematic and referential modes exist side-by-side, appears to be central to the conceptualization of culture and history in Baillie's works. Such fragmentation, along with a reflexive mode, both expose the constructed nature of the films and denaturalize the reconstruction process of cultural representation whose fictive elements, authoritative voice and spectacular exploitations could otherwise go unnoticed. Significantly, Baillie's films, such as *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* of 1964 and *Quixote* of 1964-65, have an allegorical structure that can also be observed in many postmodern experimental ethnographic works. In their recent studies of postmodern and/or experimental ethnography, scholars Catherine Russell, James Clifford, Laura U. Marks and Jeffrey Skoller address the use of allegory and the ways in which cinema can configure and represent culture and history in general.[57] They conceive the representation of a particular culture or historical event in experimental ethnography in allegorical terms revealing the possibility, construction, and modus operandi of such representation in a reflexive manner. In the last section, I will consider how and what type of minority movement the allegories in Baillie's cinema engage, and their relation to his reflexive approach to ethnography and historiography.

[57] For further reading, see James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 98-121, Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, Laura U. Marks, *Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), and Skoller, *Shadows, Specters, Shards*.

I – Baillie or Billie? The Reflexive "I"

A review of the literature on Baillie's work raises two key questions: What reasons have led scholars to conceive his films as a development from attention to the outside world to reflexive exploration of the basic aspects of the film medium? And why does this scholarship almost completely omit the terms 'documentary' and 'ethnography' in their treatment of Baillie's films? The answers to these questions should provide us with a re-assessment of what has gone unnoticed in Baillie's films due to the shortcomings of his contemporary film theory. The seventies' turn to semiotics and psychoanalysis and the consequent apparatus theory had wide ramifications for the film scholarship and criticism concerning both mainstream and avant-garde cinemas. Conceptualized by scholars such as Christian Metz, Stephen Heath, and Jean-Louis Baudry, apparatus theory pointed to the ideological functions of the illusionism and verisimilitude of cinema (based on Renaissance perspective) that implied the projection and identification of the spectator with what goes on screen.[58] More recently, scholars have widely challenged the passive, universal, and ahistorical spectator implied in apparatus theory.[59] What primarily concerns me here is the

[58] Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinema Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1974 - 1975): 39-47, originally published as "Cinéma: effets idéologiques produits par l'appreil de base," *Cinéthique* 7-8 (1970): 1-8 and Jean-Louis Baudry, "Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 7th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 171–188, originally published as "Le *dispositif*: approches métapsychologiques de l'impression de réalité," *Communications* 23 (1975): 56-72.

[59] See, for instance, Noël Carroll, *Mystifying Movies: Fads & Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), David Norman Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,

implications of this theory for realist tendencies in the experimental film of the sixties and seventies.

While apparatus theory's criticism of cinematic illusion of movement in time coupled with recorded reality, epitomized by Heath's statement that the "crime of the good film is the film itself, its time and its performance,"[60] mainly implicated the mainstream narrative film, it proved influential on the conceptualization of experimental cinema as well. As David Rodowick suggested, the modernist project inherent in apparatus theory positioned mainstream and avant-garde cinemas as antithetical categories owing to the former's seeming investment in a deceptive realism as opposed to the reflexive attention to the medium of the latter.[61] Peter Wollen parallels such sweeping assessments in his definition of "two avant-gardes" to the extent that his classification depends on the degrees of engagement with the politics of the materiality of the medium in avant-garde cinema. Wollen distinguishes these two axes depending on whether they addressed the materiality of cinematic essences (medium-specificities) or social practices (including cinematic apparatus and spectatorship but extending beyond it).[62] The former group comprises the film production of the London Filmmakers' Co-op and the North American avant-garde

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1988), Vivian Carol Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), and James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[60] Stephen Heath, ''Film Performance,'' in Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, 113–14.

[61] Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, xiv.

[62] Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," *Studio International* 190, no. 978 (November - December, 1975): 171-175.

film, in general, while the cinema of Godard and Straub-Huillet constitutes the latter category. For Wollen, the films of Stan Brakhage definitely fall under the first category because of Brakhage's constant inquiry into the ways we represent and perceive.

Wollen's account remains problematic to the extent that he assumes all avant-garde cinemas necessarily dwell on the premise of the demystification of the illusionary realism of mainstream modes.[63] Such a deconstructive task concerning realism underscored much of the avant-garde film criticism of the seventies. Indeed, P. Adams Sitney's conception of avant-garde cinema as a modernist project of individual artists whose unique vision subverts the mainstream, for instance, demonstrates little difference than that of Wollen. Their nuance merely lies in whether they prioritize the alleged ontological or political poles. Not only do these polarizations downplay the attention to indexical re-tracings of the world at large in experimental film but also they offer a reductive analysis of how aesthetics and politics interacted in these cinemas. I believe a close analysis of Baillie's "medium-specific" films and newsreels side-by-side showcases the limitations of such paradigms.

In the introduction, I noted the gravitation of Canyon screenings toward mobility, variation, flexibility, and community building. These tendencies of the early Canyon Cinema days are perhaps best manifest in Bruce Baillie's "Canyon

[63] ibid. According to Wollen, political efficacy oscillates between two poles: ontology of cinema and its indexical ability to capture reality/materialism of social relations and ontology of the essence of cinema/materialism of the signifier without its semantic burden and ontology.

Newsreels," documentaries Baillie made to be screened at Canyon events. Baillie initially conceived these short films (usually not more than a few minutes) as an experimental play on early newsreels. Before the television came to occupy almost every household in the United States in the 1960s, early newsreels constituted a prevalent mode of short documentary. Theatres showed newsreels before the main feature film well into the sixties until the television became the principal form for the dissemination of news.

From the early years of his film production, Baillie continually referred to the significance of the potential of experimental film for collective exchanges of ideas, information, and news. Such exchange comprised not only what the filmic text communicated, but also how the audience received it. In an interview conducted in 1989 with Scott MacDonald, Baillie narrated an encounter that defined the aims of his film production:

> [In 1958 or 1959] I went down to Yugoslavia, where I remember seeing a sculpture by the best-known Yugoslavian sculptor: a relief depicting the cycle of life circling a traditional well in the Austro-Hungarian center of Zagreb, where people came for water and to meet each other and gossip. I thought, "This relief is at the source; it's an essential part of everyday life." I liked that, and decided I wanted to do something similar with film.[64]

What appears striking here is the emphasis on the relief's *documentation* of the cycle of life in allegorical form, which then itself becomes a part of the everyday life around the well in Zagreb. While the documentation of life, and especially its

[64]Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 111.

repetitive and the quotidian aspects, and its subsequent dissemination within a community clearly materializes in his Canyon Newsreels, this tendency remained a vital aspect of Baillie's cinema through the late sixties and into the seventies. In fact, in a letter addressed to the *Canyon Cinemanews* in 1968 (when the Canyon Cinema had already turned into an independent distribution channel that supported avant-garde film), Baillie, once again, emphasized the need to distribute widely the newsreel form and documentary modes of avant-garde film production:

> I wanted to suggest that the newsreels, via NY, be made available if possible through our cooperative distribution channels. So that there might be a continuing supply of immediate information - document, poem - flowing within the most effective channels available to us. Encouraging film programmers to ask for "the news," whatever newsreel might be at whichever co-op on the show date.[65]

Baillie's experimental newsreels challenge the conventional representational codes of newsreels, TV news and documentaries. His adaptation of this popular form of documentary film, which he and Strand dubbed "large quantities of terrible information films," in one Canyon brochure of 1962, challenges the network of information intended for masses. [66] These films, therefore, prefigure the subversive qualities of his later films in their confrontational engagement with the supposed boundaries between avant-garde and mass culture, fiction and non-fiction forms of representation, along with private and public realms. What is more, Baillie already

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[65] Baillie, "Letter, August, Beginning Of September," n.p.
[66] Bruce Baillie and Chick Strand, "Canyon Cinema Program Handout" (unpublished Program Notes, Pacific Film Archives, 1962).

demonstrates an inquiry into finding new forms for the representation of minorities in the Canyon Newsreels whose subject-matter varies from a local Japanese immigrant (*Mr. Hayashi*), or a Native American reservation (*Termination*), to a center for mentally disturbed children located in Oakland, California (*Here I Am*).

Within Baillie's body of work, then, the Canyon Newsreels occupy an important position through which he shared an experimental form of "local news" in an attempt to strengthen the ties within a local community, while at the same time challenging the conventional representational codes to political ends. However brief and simple, and at times funny and entertaining, these pieces seem, all of them feature several layers of meaning that address issues within and outside the medium. A five-minute black and white film about a local gym in the area, *The Gymnasts* of 1961, for instance, manifests Baillie's reflections on his subjectivity, position as a filmmaker, and sexuality in its mixture of narrative and documentary modes with formal experimentation. *The Gymnasts* starts by documenting the gym through the shot of a man entering the place, and then cuts to a series of close-ups of several parts of the gym. The man, who is none other than Baillie himself, then walks up to a small booth, where the camera focuses on the hands exchanging Baillie's personal items such as wallet and glasses with a towel. The beginning, therefore, gives the impression that the film would fulfill its premise of the "newsreel" genre while at the same time foreshadowing the turn the film would take to blend the documentation of a public space with personal fantasies. Baillie then walks up a staircase, a shot that suddenly cuts into a railway station through overexposure. Walking through the station he

discovers and pulls a cloth covering a portal and walks through it toward the camera. The shot then cuts back to a scene within the gym once again through superimposition. This scene in the station works on three simultaneous levels: first, it introduces a fictive element into Baillie's newsreel about the local gym. Second, the use of a portal suggests the foreignness of the world of the gym to Baillie. His walk through the portal finally points to a shift from the documentation of the gym to Baillie's reflections on his body image as well as his position as a filmmaker. A scene in this section in which Baillie walks toward the camera only to seemingly merge with it, along with the celluloid and the screen by extension, via overexposure, hints at the emphasis on his own corporeality. The film here draws an analogy between the body of Baillie and the materiality of the film. That the in-between-space of the railway station accommodates the shifts on these three levels demonstrates the extent to which movement and stepping across boundaries underlie the film.

In the following sequence, Baillie uses movement as a vehicle with which to trace the specific aspects and modes of the medium of film. Shots of several male gymnasts working on parallel bars and ropes and an observant Baillie compose the sequence, whereby the long shots of the work-out alternate with close-ups of the muscular bodies of the gymnasts and the face of Baillie watching the athletes. Repeatedly, Baillie emphasizes the body in motion through a variety of visual experiments. A double exposure of the body of an athlete with a shot of a window with blinds follows a slow motion scene of an athlete jumping, reminiscent of chronostudies and thus of early attempts to represent movement. Light coming from

the blinds dematerializes the body of the gymnast into an abstract form. The film then smoothly cuts to a close-up of Baillie's contemplative face contrasting the corporeality of the bodies and the immateriality of Baillie's thoughts.

Baillie, here, clearly opposes not only his self-image (a balding, short, unathletic man; features that he frequently exaggerates in his self-portraits) with those of the athletes, but also his seemingly static position as the filmmaker who observes the athletes' bodies in action. The emphasis on spectatorship and thus visuality contrasts with the tactility emanating from the close-up shots of hands and body parts. The recurring use of these close-ups and the camera movements that brush the skin of the bodies call attention to the sense of touch that challenges the visual limits of the medium. While outlining his role as an observer of motion, Baillie also begins to subvert the restrictions of such observation by introducing tactile sensations into the formula.

Baillie calls the observant mode into further question with a long tricky shot of him standing upside down on a machine in a hard-to-maintain position; this is a dream-like sequence in which no one else but Baillie occupies the room. This sequence creates a fantasy space within the film where Baillie projects his mental state onto the indexical documentation of the gym and also interrogates what constitutes the non-fiction elements of the documentary mode. Rather than portraying Baillie's unique vision of the outside world as Sitney would suggest, *The Gymnasts* raises the question of where the mental states fit within the documentary-fiction spectrum, therefore reflexively studying modes of representation with regard to the theme of

motion. At this point in the film, Baillie's portrayal of himself as the mere observer switches into a much more active role. The emphasis on action occurs both on a literal level, embodied in the stand of Baillie on the parallel bars, and on a reflexive one in his interruption of the merely observational documentary mode with a fantasy element.

Like the highly edited scenes of the film, this fantasy space within the film also exposes the constructed nature of the documentary mode. Reflexive modes of documentary, Bill Nichols argues in his classification of different forms of documentary film, address questions regarding codes of representation of "reality" even more than they represent the outside world wherein this reality supposedly lies.[67] Although Nichols believes that this type of documentary became prominent in the seventies and eighties (even though he acknowledges Dziga Vertov's cinema as an early precursor), I argue that a tendency towards meta-commentary can be observed in Baillie's cinema of the sixties. Baillie constantly tests the limits of representation and questions how the camera retraces the world through strange juxtapositions of fiction and non-fiction forms, visual and audio layers, and various camera angles and distances.

At the end of *The Gymnasts*, when Baillie cuts back to what opened the film, a more banal documentation of "a visit to the local gym," from his fantasy of masculinity and strength, he also invites the viewer to think of the same image in a different way. As Baillie walks down the staircase back to the booth, and repeats the

[67] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 56-75.

exchange of items, reversing the actions in the beginning, he suggests a parallel reverse on the level of representation. No longer an everyday space, Baillie's film transforms the gym into a space of fantasy. At the same time, Baillie reflexively and humorously comments on the transformative power the camera affords him. In its analysis of his position as a filmmaker in the world, this short, funny piece showcases how, from very early on, Baillie's body of work constantly questioned his mode of representation through recourse to the reflexive use of movement, corporeality, and the filmmaker's subjectivity.

But what exactly differentiated this reflexive documentary mode from the formal explorations of the avant-garde? And why did the politics of a reflexive documentary mode go unnoticed in the literature on Baillie? The fifty-minute color film, *Quick Billie* of 1970, for instance, demonstrates how Baillie explored the limits and politics of the documentation of everyday life through reflexive methods. Baillie organized *Quick Billie* into four separate parts: abstract imagery superimposed with highly edited views of natural landscapes and animals compose the first three parts; the last part features a pseudo-narrative in which Baillie plays the character Billie, a pseudonym derived from his surname **(Figure 1.1)**. Because of the abstract quality of the first three parts, scholars largely mistook *Quick Billie* for a mere formal experiment on the specific qualities of the medium, and too quickly classified the film as structural, arguing that the last section did not "fit" within the film in general.[68]

[68] Scott Nygren, "Mythic Vision: A Study of Bruce Baillie's Film 'Quick Billy'" (PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1982).

I would, however, argue against these interpretations since the film intercuts fiction and non-fiction in a highly reflexive way while responding to other media. Scholars have overlooked the fact that Baillie shot these sequences in a documentary mode within the boundaries of his house. The end of third section records the sexual encounter between Baillie and his partner through extreme close-ups accompanied by the sound of heavy breathing, highlighting the private, quotidian, and domestic affect of the film. This sequence begins with a medium shot of a naked woman's body on top of a man. Sex sounds accompany a series of extreme close-ups of hair, skin, and hands in which the texture of the skin becomes defamiliarized. Baillie shot these images so close that it is impossible to tell what belongs to whom. As such, the sexual encounter begins with two identifiable genders and transforms this binary into an in-between state where gender become imperceptible, a theme that I will return in the following section. This transformation also implies a shift between the sense of sight (the medium from a distance) and touch (close-ups brushing the skin like a stroking hand).

Because Baillie was sick while trying to make the majority of these three parts, he shot the images, objects, and furniture in his house, as well as photographs from magazines for the landscapes and animals:

> I had to get out of bed to make every one of those takes. I was really sick, with hepatitis. Tulley would come over, and I would tell him what part of the house I had to go to, and he would help me up. I'd tie a knot in a big beach towel and pull in my liver with it. He'd walk me over to say, the fish tank, and set the tripod up and load the camera. Then I'd do the take and

go back to bed.[69]

The filtered, abstracted, and overexposed documentation of Baillie's daily life constitutes a form of autoethnography of his domestic life. Baillie uses objects and imagery, including already mediated ones such as photos from magazines, that he encounters on a daily basis as documents of the quotidian. These formal experiments comment less on Baillie's unique vision opening up into the world at large than on the extent to which the medium can transform everyday reality and how it mediates objects and images. The last section of the film, unlike what other scholars argued, completes the first three sections of the film to the extent that it contemplates the meaning of cinema, representation, and being a filmmaker.

In this section, Baillie concentrates on questions regarding the politics of representation: can we really tell fact from fiction in several modes of cinematic representation varying from narrative films to documentaries and home movies? And what is the role of the filmmaker in relation to such construction and reception of this fact-fiction spectrum? The section begins when a small frame appears at the upper left part of the screen (recording of the sexual encounter) while the rest of the image gradually becomes more abstract, eventually turning black. This reflexive film-within-a-film composition creates the illusion of a separate movie projected on the film. The imagery has a home movie quality; Billie/Baillie engages in farmwork accompanied by a voice-over in which the fictional character Billie narrates his life on the farm.

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[69] MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 132. Baillie here refers to Paul Tulley, his friend who frequently assisted him in the making of films such as *Termination*, *Roslyn Romance: Is It Really True?*, and *Quick Billie*.

This generates the impression that Baillie projects the movie at his home while telling his audience about the footage reinforced by frequent amateurish-looking swishes of the position of the small frame as well as the projection speed reminiscent of 8mm home movies. Indeed, in a 1962 letter to Jonas Mekas to introduce him to Canyon Cinema, Baillie stated:

> I have just uncovered a term for the way I plan to exist and continue working: 'Home Movies." Some of us around the country will be creating for a time, perhaps the duration of our lives, home movies. Forced back to the most bare limitations of life and work, one can still work familiar streets, stand at the back door to watch the changes of sun.[70]

For Baillie, the home movie format represented not only the type of films that could be produced with the limited resources at hand but also the documentation of what is familiar and already available.

Although transferring the subject matter from the domestic to the outside, the last section of the film still retains the feel of domesticity in its reference to home movies. Through the fourth section, Billie/Baillie depicts himself as a cowboy with the staple properties: a hat and a horse. His public persona therefore melds into an image appropriated from popular culture and Western films. This tension between private and public, inside and outside, as well as abstract documentary and mainstream narrative, constitutes a reflexive layer to the extent that Baillie exposes the functions of different modes of representation associated with certain formal conventions. While

[70] Bruce Baillie, "Letters: San Francisco Scene: Letter to Jonas Mekas by Bruce Baillie, November 23, 1962," *Film Culture*, no. 29 (Summer 1963): 76, also printed in Wilkins, ed., *Scrapbook: Bruce Baillie*, n.p.

the abstract mode, traditionally not considered a documentary approach, reflexively documents the everyday reality, the home movie format, generally associated with the everyday reality, constructs a narrative. Baillie, therefore, challenges such formal, thematic, and representational associations by alternating their uses. At the same time, such reflexive juxtapositions along with Baillie/Billie's clumsy attitude and unathletic build deconstruct the heroic, masculine cowboy image in popular culture. In the middle of the last section, his reflexivity culminates when the frame in the upper right moves to the center of the screen and shows Billie/Baillie on a beach shooting a film with his camera. What remains unclear is whether the audience sees the fictional Billie or the filmmaker Baillie on the screen. For Baillie, the filmmaker's position exists somewhere between fact and fiction paralleling the work we see on screen.

Such an approach to ethnography which situates it somewhere between fact and fiction, along with a critical and reflexive conception of its modes of representation, constitutes an important aspect of Baillie's work. This reflexivity, at the same time, keeps ethnography's possible perils at bay, especially when practiced in the context of art. In his critique of the ethnographic interest in the art scene from the sixties onwards, Hal Foster warns against the probable franchising and institutionalization of ethnographic art, as well as the ethnographic self-fashioning of the artist by projection of self into the work.[71] Baillie's films, on the contrary, in their DIY, hands-on artisanal basis, remain outside the institutional and industrial contexts

[71] Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 171-204.

of film production and finance. In fact, these films display some similarities to the "imperfect cinema" of Julio Garcia Espinosa to the extent that both rely on limited resources for production resulting in an "imperfect" quality with a political prospect.[72]

Such limited resources, amounting to the low-quality look, become manifest in most avant-garde film of the sixties. What remains distinct is the political prospect in Baillie's (and other Canyon filmmakers') work that documents culture and history while at the same time constantly questioning the form that such documentation takes. Furthermore, Baillie disavows the potential for "ethnographic self-fashioning," in which the ethnographic artist projects him/herself onto the cultural Other through his reflexive attitude. Even when he turns his camera onto his own life, Baillie concerns himself less with constructing a vision unique to himself than with the politics of representation. On the other hand, in the newsreels on cultural subjects, in which Baillie's own image remains absent, he nevertheless frames himself and the Other as separate entities by constantly reminding us of the mediated nature of representation at work.

This careful separation of the self as the filmmaker and the Other as the filmed subject explicitly appears in Baillie's 1962 newsreel *Here I Am*. A short black and white documentary on East Bay Activities Center, a day program in Oakland for emotionally disturbed children, *Here I Am* opens with a tracking shot in which a slightly tilted camera records rooftops, telephone poles, and trees on the left side of a

[72] Julio Garcia Espinosa, "For An Imperfect Cinema ," in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (1969; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 287-297.

road. The credits provide the only textual/verbal information in the entire film, announcing the title of the piece, the name and function of the school, as well as the location and date. This shot alludes to Baillie's journey to another realm, his quest to culturally represent the Other. The foggy weather and the scenery give the shot an ethereal quality that Baillie further emphasizes by the cello music on the soundtrack, thus underscoring the elusiveness of the subject matter. The tilted camera angle, however, constitutes a perspective similar to that of a child seeing the world from a car window. From the very outset, the film therefore introduces two different and competing perspectives within the same shot: that of the intruding observer and the point of the view of the filmed subject.

A quick cut to the face of a little girl on a swing moving back and forth further emphasizes this elusiveness as the face of the girl constantly moves **(Figure 1.2)**. At the brief moments when the swing stops to change direction she remains either too close or too distant to the camera. Her movement becomes a physical, visual manifestation of capturing and presenting the "I" of the emotionally disturbed child, which the film promises to deliver. Through a series of shots around the swing, Baillie first introduces the school building behind the girl in the frame, shows that the girl stopped swinging in a profile shot, then focuses on her face for a brief moment before cutting to a view of sky from the swing. This switch between the close-up of the face and the sky repeats a few times; it not only shifts between the perspectives of the filmmaker and the filmed subject but also sets up an analogy between the child and sky; both seem impossible to fully register. Furthermore, this oscillation prevents the

viewer from comfortably assuming either point of view, as the girl's face dissolves in close-up and the sky remains too distant and sunny. Thus the quick cuts between the two shots become disorienting. These fast shifts between points of view disappoint the viewers' expectations of acquiring visual information about the subject of the film.

For a brief moment towards the end of this sequence, the camera on the left side of the girl shows her hitting herself with her right fist, but before it becomes possible to make sense of the scene (already partially obscured by the girl's figure as Baillie situates the camera on the left side of the girl), the film cuts to the inside of the school. This sequence observes the children from a distance, recording them playing in a room while the distant ambient sound of the room replaces the cello music. Yet, certain elements disrupt this mode: First, rather than showing the activities, the camera often focuses on the faces of the children highlighting their expressions and emotions instead of the events and situations that trigger these affects.

Second, for most of the scene, Baillie situates the camera below the eye level of an adult; it either looks upward to the children or remains at their eye level. Most of the time, the camera captures the teacher, the only visible adult in the room, only below the waistline. Baillie, at these moments, refuses to assume a powerful position in relation to the observed children. To the extent that brief shots from a conventional camera angle that records the children playing in the room from a distance alternate with these sequences, Baillie sets up a tension between the distant, observational mode of the camera and the viewpoint of the observed. Halfway through the film, the children move to the garden to play while the camera continues to follow the same

strategies it adopted inside. The film then cuts back to a rather brief moving shot of the foggy road accompanied by cello music before the scene fades into black. This time, however, the camera moves in the reverse direction with the trees and poles now on the right side of the frame. Following an elliptical and circular journey, as in the case of *The Gymnasts*, to the world of the mentally disturbed children, Baillie's documentary does not disclose as much about the observed as it does about its own modes of representation.

What is the underlying politics of these reflexive modes of representation in Baillie's films? *Mr. Hayashi* of 1961, the first finished Canyon Newsreel by Baillie, displays what is at stake in such reflexivity through an array of fiction, documentary, mock-advertisement and news formats.[73] Baillie titled the three-minute black and white film after the subject of the piece, Mr. Hayashi, an old Japanese immigrant who lived in the San Francisco Bay Area and made a living as an itinerant gardener. An exception among the "newsreels" of Baillie, the film has acquired some recognition in surveys of experimental cinema. Parker Tyler, for instance, describes this "newsreel" as a "haiku film" in passing. Although he does not explain why, most probably he refers to the short length and poetic qualities of the film.[74] P. Adams Sitney, in a similar vein, dubs the film a "cinematic haiku," in the tradition of Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage's works. For Sitney, the theme of the "reconciliation of nature and

[73]Baillie started making a newsreel titled *David Lynn's Sculpture* before *Mr. Hayashi* in 1961, yet this project was never completed. *David Lynn's Sculpture* was about the special log sculpture made by the sculptor David Lynn for the collective and this sculpture was displayed in the backyard of Bruce Baillie where the first screenings of Canyon took place. For more information, see Bruce Baillie interview in MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 116-117.
[74]Tyler, *Underground Film*, 188.

mind," a heroic subject and a nod to Japanese and eastern aesthetics in a poetic form, constitutes the basis of *Mr. Hayashi*.[75] The film, however, interweaves a mixture of lyrical forms and a documentary mode of representation along with a strong tendency toward reflexivity on the ways it represents culture and people within the filmic space **(Figure 1.3)**. Unlike what Sitney suggests, Hayashi does not appear as a regular hero, whose psychology, experiences and subjectivity become readily available to the viewers.

The film begins with a shot of bold, white letters on a black screen featuring the title of the film and an announcement that reads "Gardening Work $1.25 per hour, Contact Canyon Cinema." From the very beginning, the film sets out to function as a mock-ad with "an immediate basis in necessity," as Baillie puts it.[76] It also expands Canyon's role as a distributor in interesting ways, elaborating a link between gardening and filmmaking. Baillie then transforms this odd commercial-like beginning into an anthropological documentary, as the titles give way to a fast-cut image of a sculpture that seems to be of Japanese origin. From the first seconds, the film informs the viewers about the name and culture of its subject as Baillie superimposes the title onto the images of leaves of a tree, the sculpture, and a close-up of the face of Hayashi working in a garden.

Following a long shot of Hayashi in the garden with a shovel, the film cuts into a medium shot of Hayashi working, then a close-up of his hands doing gardening. The

[75]Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 180-181.
[76]MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 116-117.

immediate announcement of the name of the gardener along with the close-ups of his face and hands functions to link the identity (his name) with the body and the work, not unlike how Baillie portrays himself as a filmmaker in *Quick Billie*. Hayashi appears as an economic subject as the rate announced in the beginning of the film allows us to calculate exactly how much he makes out of his labor in the film. More importantly, to the extent that such juxtapositions emphasize the individual, *Mr. Hayashi* challenges a common tendency of many documentary films with anthropological or ethnographic interests: the homogenization of the subjects into "them" by erasing the differences within a cultural or ethnic group. As Johannes Fabian suggests, if the anthropological inquiry suggests a timeless present, any particular characteristics the subject might assume runs the risk of being perceived as instances of already existing traits or customs of a culture rather than as particular historical events.[77] This tendency not only reduces a heterogeneity into a unified and consumable image but also assigns an individual with the impossible task of representing that heterogeneity. On the other hand, the subject of the documentary, here, does not stand in for all of the Japanese immigrants in the San Francisco Bay Area. Hayashi does not directly signify a group of immigrants. Within the diegetic space of the film Hayashi's body remains, therefore, unconstrained by the "burden of representation." Approximately a minute into the film, the soundtrack begins, further

[77] For further discussion, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 33.

strengthening this sense of Hayashi's specificity, as we hear Hayashi's voice narrating his life story in broken English.

This emphasis on the individual qualities of Hayashi, however, does not result in an objectification of the film's subject by means of turning him into a target of inquiry. On the contrary, the film only tangentially introduces the viewer to Hayashi's lived experience. Baillie achieves this effect by maintaining a certain distance between the viewer and Mr. Hayashi through the use of specific formal elements especially the movement and angles of the camera, and the sound. For instance, following the close-up shot of Hayashi's face and around the same time as the soundtrack begins, the camera first shows a natural open land (in contrast to the garden where Hayashi worked before) and then starts to follow the gardener walking. Meanwhile, Baillie positions his hand-held camera at the left side of Hayashi, filming him from the back. As the walking speed of Hayashi and Baillie behind the camera do not match, what would otherwise look like a fly-on-the wall scene of mere observation acquires a reflexive aspect, whereby the film constantly reminds the viewers of the man behind the camera and the distance between him and Hayashi. The camera, just as it seems to catch up with Hayashi and to show his face in profile, turns away from him showing the land, clouds and the sun. Baillie further emphasizes this distance on the audio level. Despite the barely intelligible heavy accent of Hayashi, the film refuses to provide any subtitles. The soundtrack becomes alienating on another level, as the image of Hayashi does not talk and the things he says do not directly relate to his actions on screen. This mismatch points to the fact that Baillie did not record visual

and the audio layers simultaneously, but subsequently superimposed the audio track on the images. Baillie thus points to the constructed aspects of the persona of Hayashi, providing a challenge to the documentary form.

At one point, the shadowy profile of Hayashi - where he stops, looks at and leans onto the ground, and starts playing with the plants and the earth - interrupts the almost white scene of nature owing to the use of natural sunlight. The camera immediately focuses on the hands of Hayashi and their interaction with nature rather than showing the expression on his face. This movement of the camera further impedes the viewer's attempts to completely comprehend what Hayashi thinks and feels. The film then cuts to a close-up of Hayashi's face, but this time he looks away from the camera to something that does not appear within the frame of the camera, rendering his thoughts and feelings once more elusive. Despite the indexical details recorded by the camera, the film frustrates the quest for knowledge through a surplus of visual information featured in close-ups. The film constantly reminds the viewers of the impossibility of comprehending the reality of Mr. Hayashi that exists outside the limits of representation. A long shot of his body from the back walking away from the now static camera further underlines this impossibility. The film ends with a longer shot of Hayashi from a distance, walking towards the still static camera. Yet, he walks from the upper left part of the frame to the lower right, eventually walking outside the frame completely and disappearing.

Such a disappearance of the subject in the end, along with the shift between the long and medium shots of the movements of Hayashi function to block the curious

gaze of the camera as it seeks knowledge. Baillie does not attempt to erase the historical and cultural distance between the subject and the viewer, but, on the contrary, emphasizes them. This distance and elusiveness, however, by no means aim to further a cultural stereotype of enigma. Here, the elusiveness rather refers to the duration of the film in which Baillie allows the viewers less to learn about Hayashi, the subject, than to intimately witness a few random moments of Hayashi's lived experience. The film, therefore, constructs Hayashi's filmic subjectivity not as an enigma to solve than as a contingent encounter tied to Hayashi's and the viewer's own socio-historical contexts. At the same time, the reflexive nature of the film renders the representation itself, rather than Hayashi, as the source of this distance and elusiveness. As Roland Barthes notes in his essay "Change The Object Itself":

> …it is the sign itself which must be shaken; the problem is not to reveal the (latent) meaning of an utterance, of a trait, of a narrative, but to fissure the very representation of meaning, is not to change or purify the symbols, but to challenge the symbolic itself.[78]

In Mr. Hayashi, Baillie problematizes the act of representation itself in his production of an ethnographic subject tightly bound to a contingent, transient moment within the diegesis of the film, thus defying generalization. Baillie further emphasizes this contingent encounter between Hayashi and the viewers at the end when the film cuts to the images of leaves upon which he superimposes the title "The End," before it slowly fades into a white screen. In its return to the scene of leaves, *Mr. Hayashi*, as in

[78] Roland Barthes, "Change the Object Itself," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 167, originally published as "Le mythe aujourd'hui: Changer l'objet lui-même." *Esprit,* April 1971): 613-616.

the case of the other newsreels such as *The Gymnasts* and *Here I Am*, suggests that experienced time and history do not progress in a linear fashion. Thus, the viewer can return to, reconstruct, and re-experience the encounter with Hayashi afforded by the film rather than leaving it behind as a consumed product.

That the film does not reduce Hayashi to a unified subject to be interpreted and readily consumed gives an ironic twist to the commercial aspect presented in the very beginning. In other words, while questioning the indexical capabilities of capturing social realities in film, *Mr. Hayashi* directly addresses the viewers located in that social sphere. Hayashi needs a job outside the limits of representation and his help can be hired, yet the cinematic apparatus and, by extension, the viewers, cannot readily consume his image. In its search for an immediate effect outside the representational framework, i.e. by helping Hayashi find work, the film extends into a particular social and historical sphere, thereby warding off the impression of a timeless present. At the same time, *Mr. Hayashi* raises the question how a body could earn a living through labor without being exploited or consumed.

Underscoring the persistence of Baillie's interest in combining aesthetic experimentation with politically charged social issues, *Termination* of 1966, a much later Canyon Newsreel by Baillie, meshes documentary elements to contemplate a socio-political matter of immediate significance: the termination of a Native American reservation located near Laytonville, California. Like the rest of the Canyon Newsreels, *Termination* imitates the structure of the popular newsreel with its black and white imagery and short length (five-minutes). *Termination*, however, subverts the

standard newsreel in its political aims as well as its reflexive strategies. Focusing on a problem that needs attention within the local community whom the Canyon Newsreels first addressed, *Termination* had an evident aim of consciousness raising. Before making *Termination*, the assimilation of Native American culture had been a theme to which Baillie returned more than once in his experimental films such as *Mass for Dakota Sioux* of 1964 and *Quixote* of 1964-65 – films that I will analyze in detail in the last section. While *Termination*, at first glance, seems to differ from these more experimental films in its evident documentary form, all three films present a similar experimental approach to ethnographic inquiry.

The problem addressed in the film relates to the California Rancheria Termination Act passed by the Congress in 1958. Part of the United States' policy of termination of the sovereignty of Native American tribes, the act called for the distribution of the communal Rancheria lands and assets to the individual members of the tribes.[79] It had been well documented that the termination acts were unsuccessful, and even the documents of a State Senate Interim Committee investigation revealed that Indian reservations were not adequately prepared for termination.[80] Yet, in 1964

[79] "The Indians who hold formal or informal assignments on each reservation or rancheria, or the Indians of such reservation or rancheria, or the Secretary of the Interior after consultation with such Indians, shall prepare a plan for distributing to individual Indians the assets of the reservation or rancheria, including the assigned and the unassigned lands, or for selling such assets and distributing the proceeds of sale, or for conveying such assets to a corporation or other legal entity organized or designated by the group, or for conveying such assets to the group as tenants in common. The Secretary shall provide such assistance to the Indians as is necessary to organize a corporation or other legal entity for the purposes of this Act." *Public Law 85-671 of August 18, 1958*, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* VI (Washington: Government Printing Office), 831, accessed February 20, 2014, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/KAPPLER/vol6/html_files/v6p0831.html.

[80] For further discussion, see Charles F. Wilkinson and Eric R. Biggs, "Evolution of Termination Policy," *American Indian Law Review* 5, no. 1 (1977): 139-184, Christopher K. Riggs, "American

the U.S. congress passed an amendment to the initial Termination Act that initiated termination of more Rancheria including the reservation that is the subject of Baillie's film. *Termination* differs from *Mr. Hayashi* in its focus on an entire community. It thus shifts the ethnographic approach from an individual subject to a group of subjects. Given the main concern of the film, a native American community that has been subject to assimilation, *Termination* at first glance seems to exemplify "salvage ethnography." This type of ethnographic project seeks to record the characteristics of native cultures before they vanish forever. What remains problematic in such an approach is the assumption that the history constitutes a linear progression whereby the ethnographer conceives civilizations to be more developed versions of "primitive" cultures.[81] In its presumption of a progressive history, salvage ethnography attempts to capture the "native," the "primitive" in its "pure" state and to record a certain moment in history as if it represents a timeless and authentic image of the unchanging culture. At the same time, the salvage ethnographer bases his/her conceptualization of culture on a conventional understanding of history whereby the past does not bear an immediate relation to the present, but becomes a readily available entity to be

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Indians, Economic Development, and Self-Determination in the 1960s," *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 3 (August 2000): 431–463, Todd J. Kosmerick, "Exploring New Territory: The History of Native Americans as Revealed Through Congressional Papers at the Carl Albert Center Part II," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (Winter, 1999): 499-508, David Beck, *The Struggle for Self-Determination: History of the Menominee Indians since 1854* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005) and Roberta Ulrich, *American Indian Nations from Termination to Restoration, 1953-2006* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

[81] For further discussion see Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 1983, Mary Louise Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 127, Marcus Banks and Howard Murphy, eds., *Rethinking Visual Anthropology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) and Alison Griffiths, "'To the World the World We Show': Early Travelogues as Filmed Ethnography," *Film History* 11, no. 3, Early Cinema (1999): 289.

recorded, consumed, and left behind. The film, however, does not easily fall into the obvious traps of such an approach. On the contrary, *Termination* not only takes issue with representing a problem that a Native American community faces, but it also questions the formal aspects of such an attempt at representation.

The film develops as a fast-cut mesh of shots taken inside a house in the Rancheria and the outside, documenting the poor conditions of the reservation. The shots taken inside the house begin with a series of close-ups: the face of a man and his hands. Baillie superimposes over these images an interview with a man about the poor conditions of the reservation, health-care and education problems and the Native Americans' opposition to the plans of termination. Here, Baillie utilizes the same alienation effect evident in *Mr. Hayashi* of five years earlier whereby the shots of the man and the interview do not match each other even though at times the man in *Termination* (unlike Hayashi) appears to be talking. At several points, the film cuts to shots of the outside of the house showing the poor conditions and almost run down log houses, then to close-ups within the house showing the face of a woman, then a framed picture of a girl. Yet, we cannot definitely assume these people to be the talking man's wife and child as the film provides no extra information. Once again Baillie provides a surplus of indexical information that only frustrates and highlights the viewers' desire to gain knowledge. Another series of shots show a river running next to a graveyard and some ranch animals. Because of the fast cutting of this series of close-up images, they appear to be still images. To that extent, the film reflexively refers to the salvation claims of ethnography, yet the effect becomes ironic as the poor

conditions of the Rancheria offer nothing close to a romantic, timeless image to be frozen and preserved. The audio layer, meanwhile, refers to a particular problem underlining the historical contingency of the moment rather than an ahistorical representation of a vanishing culture. Although the reservation faces termination and thus assimilation of their culture, what the people actually need remains health care, education, and rights to self-determination.

This effect culminates in the final shot of the film. The camera focuses on the visage of a child upon which Baillie superimposes a text that explains the threat of termination. The face then turns to a still image, taken out of its context and frozen as in salvage ethnography. Yet, through the superimposed text, Baillie couples this self-reflexive mode of the film with the recontextualization of the face of the child within a contingent historical moment that has ramifications in the immediate present, i.e. the need for change. The shift between stillness and movement, as well as salvation and transformation, once again informs the film's formal structure and representational concerns, generating an "experience of aesthetic ambivalence in visual representation," as Kobena Mercer would put it.[82] With its referral to a matter of dire importance outside the filmic space, *Termination* problematizes the simplistic polarity between a formally reflexive avant-garde and an experimental political cinema.[83] At the same time, the tension between salvation and transformation parallels the

[82] Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," in *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video,* ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 169–210.
[83] Cahto tribe owns the reservation at Laytonville. The tribe acquired its rights to self-determination and regained its federal recognition as a tribe in 1967 within a year after the film was made and they ratified a tribal constitution designed to maintain access to federal benefits such as health care and education.

nature/culture binary that Baillie challenges in films such as *To Parsifal*, *Castro Street*, and *On Sundays*.

II- Mapping Mythical Geographies

Baillie uses an aesthetic ambivalence informing the shift between stillness and movement in several of his films to subvert a series of conventional binaries such as nature and culture, fact and fiction, and male and female. *To Parsifal* of 1963, for instance, provides a challenging analysis of the binary structures inherent in mythology. Baillie loosely based *To Parsifal* on the myth of Parsifal and Wagner's opera on the same story in which the eponymous Arthurian knight embarks on a quest for the Holy Grail. Existing reviews and scholarly analyses of the film focus on the similarities between its structure and the myth, concluding that the film dwells upon the binary between nature and culture/technology and associates women with the former and men with the latter.[84] A closer visual analysis, however, demonstrates that Baillie's engagement with the traditional binary structure of the myth amounts to a much more complex exploration than it initially appears. Baillie composed *To Parsifal* in two main parts. The film differentiates between them using a title that reads Part I at the very beginning and by a black leader to separate the two. The locations constitute the main difference between the two parts, Baillie shot the first sequence on a

[84] Curtis, *Experimental Cinema*, 161, Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 180-186, Williams, "The Structure of Lyric," 22-30, Scott Nygren, "Myth and Bruce Baillie's *To Parsifal*," *Field of Vision*, no. 13 (Spring 1985): 3-4, Nygren, "Mythic Vision," 34-36, Norris J. Lacy, "Arthurian Film And The Tyranny Of Tradition," *Arthurian Interpretations* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 82 and Kevin J. Harty, "Appendix: The Grail on Film," in *The Grail, The Quest and the World of Arthur*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 206.

motorboat travelling on the sea, while the second takes place on land as mainly seen from a train. The theme of moving vehicles and the emphasis on the perception of a moving subject become the major constant denominators of both parts.

Continuing his tendency to mesh narrative and non-fiction modes of representation, Baillie mixes a documentation of the San Francisco environment with a loose narrative line. The boat ride shows the sea and land from the moving vehicle as well as caught and cut up fish. It thus pertains to the part of the Parsifal myth where the knight encounters Fisher King and his wound, but despite this allusion, it also functions to capture mobile perceptions of the San Francisco sea and the coastline. Using documentary footage of San Francisco, Baillie re-contextualizes the Parsifal myth and challenges its claims to a universal and timeless message. The use of technology further locates the myth within a certain time period. Radio sounds featuring weather report as well as Wagner's Parsifal opera as heard on the radio form the soundtrack of this sequence. In the beginning of the film, both the boat and the radio act as technological intrusions within nature implying a certain movement in the opposite direction of the sea waves: the boat and the sound waves travelling from the land to the open sea. The protagonist's position within and perception of nature becomes technologically equipped and dynamic.

The second part of the film collages various shots of the moving train from outside, railway workers laying rails, insects, weeds, water, views of nature filmed from a moving train, as well as close-ups of a naked woman in water. The ethnographic mode of the film that observes the everyday life of fishermen on the sea

and the railway workers on land subverts the narrative elements, emphasizing the everyday over myth. At the same time, use of a handheld, shaky camera and shots from moving vehicles highlight a reflexive and subjective form of documentary mode. In this section, ambient sounds of nature and the moving train alternate with sections of the Parsifal opera on the radio. The seemingly diegetic sound of the radio from the first section thus becomes non-diegetic in the second part. This shift in the context of the sound, regardless of its unchanging form generates an alienating, denaturalizing effect referring to the constructed, fictional nature of the film.

Both Nygren and Williams assume that technology in the film functions as a "manifestation of the hero." [85] Furthermore, Williams argues that *To Parsifal* not only depicts this unseen, supposedly male hero of the film (based on the hero of the Parsifal myth) as an unstoppable active force but also that it laments the way the hero/technology pervades nature and the passive female form.[86] Glossing over the gender associations, MacDonald also briefly analyzes *To Parsifal* to conclude that despite the romantic use of the image of the train, in the film's final section Baillie suggests "that the industrial development represented by the train is endangering the spirit of American place."[87] Yet, the film's celebration of the ordinary life of laborers in the area, the ways in which it portrays nature and technology, its reflexive mode, as

[85] Williams, "The Structure of Lyric," 29-30, Nygren, "Mythic Vision," 34-36, and Nygren, "Myth and Bruce Baillie's *To Parsifal*," 3-4.
[86] Williams, "The Structure of Lyric," 29-30. Ernest Callenbach argues that Williams' assessment is correct yet it needs to be analyzed not in relation to a conventional understanding of gender opposition but with regard to Baillie's interest in Eastern philosophy. Callenbach, *Bruce Baillie*, 3-4.
[87] Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine : A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 191.

well as its peculiar ending that MacDonald cites, suggest a more complicated relation between nature and technology. Technology pervades the everyday life of the workers both at sea and on land and Baillie seems to celebrate this technology-ridden labor through the use of rhythmic, energetic editing and vibrant colors in these scenes. Technology, here, intrudes upon nature but it also equals a source of income for the workers. Baillie's position in relation to technology thus becomes more ambivalent than it initially appears. Furthermore, through the reflexive use of sound editing and camera movements, Baillie acknowledges his own reliance on technology and assumes a postmodern position in relation to nature.

In his essay on how allegory functions within the alleged dichotomy between nature and culture, Craig Owens questions Leo Steinberg's famous paradigm that defines postmodernism as a "shift from nature to culture."[88] For Owens, inasmuch as the postmodern representation of nature presupposes culture through emphasis on its own means, it becomes impossible to conceive them as opposites. He states "while this does indeed suggest a shift from nature to culture, what it in fact demonstrates is the impossibility of accepting their opposition."[89] By implicating reflexively his own technological/cultural position in the film's representation of both nature and culture, Baillie registers his allegorical re-articulation of the Parsifal myth as postmodern ambivalence. As Owens suggests, the allegorist "lays claim to the culturally

[88] Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 55–91.
[89] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part 2," *October* 13 (Summer 1980): 65.

significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other."[90] The postmodern use of allegory is akin to a meta-commentary to the extent that it functions as a palimpsest that builds on other texts only to subvert their original meanings. In a similar vein, Baillie dwells on the Parsifal myth only to challenge its nature/culture binary.

Not only does *To Parsifal* have an ambivalent position in its depiction of the supposed opposition between nature and culture, but also the film does not necessarily portray the former as passive and latter as active forces, as Nygren and Williams suggest. To the extent that perspective of the unseen protagonist of the film coincides with that of the camera, Baillie most certainly associates this hero with technology. At the same time, the vehicles seem to control this mobile perspective strengthening the association between technology and the hero. Yet, for the very same reason, this hero seems less active than passive as his movement entirely depends on the technological apparatus.

The film seems to link the figure of the woman to natural landscape that she inhabits in a stereotypical way. Due to the rather dynamic shots of the moving insects, weeds blowing in the wind, and the storming sea, Baillie depicts neither nature nor the woman as passive forms. In a sequence toward the end, the film fast cuts between the close-ups of the woman and the train as the shots get shorter each time. At the end of the sequence, a close-up of the woman cuts to the view of nature from inside the train

[90] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part 1," *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 69.

thereby suggesting that the woman now travels on the train. This final move implies a combination of natural and cultural dynamisms and a blurring of the alleged boundaries between the two. *To Parsifal*, in this respect, partly subverts the conventional opposites in an attempt to reverse the structure of mythology. Its attitude toward gender relations may have stereotypical points of departure (imitating the binaries of the myth), but in the end the film suggests at least some dissolution of traditional associations. This move from fixed positions to fluid forms parallels the shift between the fictive universal myth to the socio-culturally situated ethnographic documentary mode. The intersections between fact and fiction, movement and stillness in *To Parsifal* thus point to the socio-cultural constructions of gender as well.

Baillie's endeavor to find alternative representations of his filmed culminates in *Castro Street* of 1966 **(Figure 1.4)**. In the guise of a mere formal and technical experiment on the cinematic documentation of an industrial land, *Castro Street* brings together elements of Baillie's constant interest in self-reflexivity, formal experimentation, and documentary modes to question and subvert conventional dichotomies. Unlike what the title might initially suggest, Baillie shot the film in Richmond, California on the film's eponymous street that houses factories and refineries and not in the famous gay neighborhood in Eureka Valley of San Francisco.[91] Perhaps because the National Film Registry selected *Castro Street* for

[91] According to Randy Shilts, in the mid-sixties, Castro Street of San Francisco already became a gay neighborhood following the influx of military servicemen offloaded in San Francisco after their military discharge from the army due to homosexuality. At the time of making the film, Baillie thus must have been well aware of the implications of the title. This accords well with his exploration of gender in the

preservation in 1981, it became a better-known and more studied film in comparison to most other films by Baillie.

In her close visual analysis of the film, Lucy Fischer addresses how it signals a shift in Baillie's visual and technical style from superimpositions suggesting opposition and conflict into matte and dissolve effects. Fischer argues that in *Castro Street*, through the use of the latter techniques, the opposition between nature and culture comes to a still so that neither register gains prominence.[92] In a similar vein, MacDonald argues that Baillie romanticized industry in the film (harkening back to the avant-garde of the earlier twentieth century) while also keeping environmental concerns at bay. That *Castro Street* "transforms an "ugly" space into a stunning one" through its formal explorations attests to Baillie's alleged romantic perspective on technology. For MacDonald, *Castro Street* represents a human spirit (culture) emulating a divine spirit (nature). This relation between nature and culture parallels the position Baillie occupies in relation to the film technology: acknowledging it as a source and mastering it.[93] Other scholars such as Sitney, Camper, and Shatnoff, on the other hand, argue that Baillie once again lamented the invasion of nature by technology.[94] Fischer, in fact, participates in other arguments to the extent that her reading still affirms that Baillie assumes a nature-culture opposition in the film. I

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film. Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street : The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 51.

[92] Fischer. "Castro Street," 14-22.

[93] MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine*, 192-196.

[94] See, for instance, Judith Shatnoff. "Report from New York," *Film Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (Summer 1967): 73-76, Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 184-187, and Fred Camper, "1966-1967," in *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema: A Film Exhibition*, ed. American Federation of Arts (New York: The Federation, 1976), 124–128.

would argue that the self-reflexive qualities of the film, whereby Baillie acknowledges his own position as a male filmmaker using technology complicates this opposition. The film parallels this ambiguity by an exploration of the boundaries of subjectivity and gender through an emphasis on mobility and tactility.

From the very beginning, *Castro Street* reveals its reflexive tendency in the representation of an industrial street that gives the film its title. A black screen in a reverse iris shot gradually turns into a round shape that appears to be the lens of the camera. The ten-minute film employs formal experimentation with bright colors mixed with black and white imagery, dissolves, and overexposed shots. Baillie also uses a matte to cover certain areas of the lens and re-shoots this time over the previously covered areas by rewinding the film. The film adopts these experiments with form to document the industrial and natural landscapes of the street, while the focus of the film remains a train. The majority of the film comprises views taken from the moving train and shots of the moving train from outside combined with panning shots of the street through matting. This mobile perspective mixed with shots of the moving vehicle recalls *To Parsifal*'s second part; yet, Baillie transfers the context that the train traverses from a natural landscape to an industrial street in *Castro Street*. Nature, however, remains present in the form of untouched areas on the street where trees, flowers, and weeds freely grow just as the railway tracks of To Parsifal imply the co-existence of nature and technology.

The film's tendency towards self-reflexivity in terms of the use of technology culminates in the middle section when a lens-like round structure appears on the train,

harkening back to the opening scene. Drawing a comparison between the camera and the train, Baillie once again acknowledges his own position while dealing with the nature versus culture theme. This comparison reaches its apogee when a shot of the fast moving train becomes more and more abstract, turning into a structural study of the film strip itself as it runs through the projector flickering. Baillie's position whereby he identifies with the camera, however, does not amount to a purely formal exploration. While *Castro Street* analyzes the capabilities and the limits of the medium, it simultaneously compares the medium to the technologies of the outside world and the perceptions emanating from other technologies.

The second half of the film juxtaposes a still image of a flower followed by a natural landscape on an overexposed black and white shot of a moving train. The overexposition of the images of the train throughout the film bestows it with an abstract quality that aligns it with the abstract concept of culture. Once matted on the images of nature, this abstract quality begins to underline the culturally mediated nature of the representation of nature. Although such a shot at first glance seem to support Fischer's argument that the opposites come to a standstill in the film, the next shot proves otherwise. Baillie uses an iris shot that stops mid-stride framing the shot of nature in the shape of the camera lens, reminding viewers that what they see in the film is always seen through the camera and by extension through a cultural perspective. The film thus poses questions about the validity of such oppositions in the first place.

As in the case of his former films, the formal experimentation in *Castro Street* allegorizes issues that exist outside the limits of the medium, challenging its categorization under structural film. The film specifically destabilizes the boundaries of gender, a subject that Baillie also tackles elsewhere albeit in a simple fashion when compared to his treatment of minority issues. In a catalogue entry on *Castro Street* for Canyon Co-Op, Baillie states:

> Castro Street running by the Standard Oil Refinery in Richmond, California … switch engines on one side and refinery tanks, stacks, and buildings on the other – the street and the film ending at a red lumber company. All visual and sound elements from the street, progressing from the beginning to the end of the street, one side is black-and-white (secondary) and one side is color – like male and female elements. The emergence of a long switch engine shot (black-and-white solo) is to the film-maker the essential of *consciousness*.[95]

The statement here allows us to read the film in an alternative light in terms of gender difference. Although a theory such as Fischer's would argue that the two different sides of the street, analogous to the opposite sexes, exist side by side and come to a still in the film, the situation is actually more complex. The black-and-white shots of the train represent the consciousness or the subjectivity of the male filmmaker, as in the case of *To Parsifal*, equating train and, by extension, technology with the male character. Baillie presents these shots of the train in fragmented and mobile form moving towards the "female" side of the street in color, thereby evoking a transformation. While Baillie begins with fixed identities and definitions of gender

[95] Bruce Baillie, "Castro Street," in *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalog* 5 (New York: New American Cinema Group, 1971), 23-24.

and assumes a position as male, the film itself allegorizes the state in-between, a transitional state that undermines a fixed identity, subject, and gender. This transitional state also challenges MacDonald's hermetic assumption of essential divine and human spirits inherent in nature and culture, respectively.

if the opening scene refers to the limits of the medium of film in visual terms, the end of the film subverts this visuality by the introducing a tactile sensibility. In the final sequence, a close-up shot of the red lumber company building reveals the textual qualities of the façade as the camera almost brushes against its surface. A shot of the sign Castro St. 800 enters from the right and exits the frame, stating the exact location of the film in the end and referring back to the title of the film in the beginning. Matching such circularity, Baillie concludes the film with a curvilinear form that emerges from the texture of the building as if it pushes toward the boundaries of the film/screen to emerge into the third dimension. Such tactility points to and challenges the beginning where Baillie draws the limits of the medium by showing the shape and structure of the lens of the camera.

The co-existence of two different senses gains more significance when considered within a gendered paradigm. Especially through juxtapositions of haptic close-up shots of the train and colorful views of the street from a distance, the film mixes the supposed oppositions on two levels. The shots blur conventional attributes of male and female: because of the overexposure, the train that represents male identity meshes with the sense of touch attributed to the female side of the street, while the long shots of the street that represents female identity emphasize sight in

their visual documentation of the street from a distance. The combination of these two kinds of shots turns distinct senses and gender definitions into a continuum where clear-cut definitions fail to cohere. The film, in this respect, references a multi-sensory (touch and sight) experience of a fluid state between male and female identities. While it does not entirely do away with fixed definitions of either gender, or of self and other, *Castro Street* by no means represents these binaries as existing side by side peacefully or as one invading the other. Instead, the film combines them in an exploration of new possibilities.

Baillie frequently reveals this dissolution of conventional binaries as a function of motion. At first glance, this might seem a self-congratulatory act on the filmmaker's part to the extent that such motion manifests itself as an inherent quality of the cinematic medium itself. Baillie's interest in self-reflexivity, however, emanates less from an exploration of medium-specific qualities than from an investigation of the limits of representation. Baillie's films incorporate other mediums such as literature, painting, and photography, surveying the medial interrelations. Both made in 1966, *All My Life* and *Still Life*, for instance, seem to follow the structuralist tradition at first glance owing to their minimalist qualities in terms of subject matter, length, and technique. A three-minute color film, *All My Life* presents a simple and slow panning shot of a ragged, wooden fence covered by rose bushes at a few points **(Figure 1.5)**. The film explores aspects of the medium – the panning shot, as well as the color range of the film. Furthermore, Baillie based the length of the film on the length of the Bolex camera reel. A closer look at the relation between the soundtrack and the visuals,

however, reveals that the movement of the camera dwells upon another medium: music. Baillie set the film exactly to the length of the Ella Fitzgerald song that also gives the film its title, "All My Life." As the camera starts panning the fence in the beginning of the film, the score commences as well. After approximately two and a half minutes, the camera stops panning horizontally and begins to pan vertically, even though the fence does not end at this point and seems to stretch outside the frame to an unknown distance. Despite the seeming randomness of the end of the horizontal pan, the switch to the vertical pan in fact coincides with the point in the song when Fitzgerald stops singing, thus signaling the approaching end of the song. Following this, the camera pans upwards for a while showing the clear blue sky and stays still for a single second before fading to black at the exact point where the song ends. Before shooting the film, Baillie listened to the song over and over at his friend, Paul Tulley's cabin in Casper, California.[96] As he filmed the fence in one take he asked another friend to time him so that he would know the exact point to switch from horizontal to vertical panning.[97] The film, here, registers its two vital aspects, duration and movement, as an interplay between two media, cinema and music, respectively.

In a similar vein, *Still Life*, a two-minute still shot of a vase with flowers on a table, establishes ties between the mediums of film and painting, as its title suggests. On one hand, the still shot explores the basic properties of the film medium, including the texture of the film strip and its flicker along with unmoving imagery that the

[96] MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 121.
[97] ibid, 121.

medium animates as many other structuralist films do. The subject matter of the film, on the other hand, searches for connections between the film and painting, therefore pointing to how the cinematic medium resonates with not only indexical recording but also with hand marking. Baillie's film raises questions that relate to digital era studies that relocate the definition of the cinema in moving images of any kind.[98] I will return to this theme in the chapter on Larry Jordan. For now, I would suggest that Baillie's reading of the medium as animation of still imagery does not seem to be merely formal or structural. These formal aspects play a vital role in the experimentation with ethnographic documentary mode in his other films.

Baillie implicates the interplay between different media, along with the relations of motion, stillness, and duration, as a function of the limits of representation in ethnographic inquiry. *Tung* (titled after the name of its subject) of 1966, for instance, seeks to represent its filmic subject in the intersection between poetry and experimental film. Baillie composed this five-minute, silent film by superimposing an overexposed image of a skating woman in sepia tones onto colorful, abstract images. Toward the end of the film a short poem written by Baillie appears on the screen line by line: "Seeing her bright shadow/ I thought she was someone / I you we had known." The film establishes a clear connection between the line "her bright shadow"

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[98] See, for instance, Angela Dalle Vacche, *Cinema and Painting : How Art Is Used in Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!: Bazin's Quest and Its Charge* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), Lev Manovich, "What is Digital Cinema?" in *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White with Meta Mazaj (1995; repr., Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011), 1060-1070 and *Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), and Tom Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality," in "Indexicality: Trace and Sign," ed. Mary Ann Doane, special issue, *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* 18, no. 1 (2007): 29-52.

and the overexposed shadowy image of the woman. In an interview of 1989, Baillie suggested that he wrote the poem before conceiving the film.[99] *Tung* then appears to be a study in giving material form to poetry through the exploration of the capabilities of the medium of film.

Abstract imagery opens the film, followed by a close-up shot of the hair of the woman. This shot then zooms out to reveal her face and torso. The figure of the woman moves through the diegetic space of the frame facing right and the camera follows her with a panning shot, while the abstract imagery in the background continues to move and change. A clear emphasis on the sense of touch, which often overshadows its visuality, becomes manifest in the film. The overexposed shot of the figure turns the image into an unclear silhouette while bestowing it with a haptic quality as the figure brushes against the screen becoming one with the material surface of the film. This engagement with the surface of the film and her image not only underlines their materiality but also points to her subjectivity as a construction defined by cinematic limits. Baillie further emphasizes tactility by the close-ups of her head and face. These shots highlight the texture of the hair and skin owing to the contrast of black and whites that emanate from overexposure. The visually unclear state of the woman's image and her constant movement in the space of the frame renders her identity as an Asian woman unintelligible at times. At other points, the image becomes less blurry, reconstituting her identity. This elusive nature of the image that de- and reconstructs the physical features of the woman constitutes the subjectivity of the

[99] MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 131.

woman/the subject of the film as a fragmentary one while at the same time defying the objectification of the Other in the form of a visually consumable image. It is this fragmentation to which the last line of the poem defining her as someone "we" had known relates. The space of the frame becomes a representation of memory, yet the knowledge function of this memory does not claim any transparent link to indexical reality. In its close ties to the sense of touch rather than visuality, the memory space of *Tung* challenges the Eurocentric knowledge based on visuality.

As I have noted before, Baillie's works function on a postmodern allegorical level. I have demonstrated so far how the elusiveness of the incomplete representation of the subjects, along with the localization of such representation at a transient moment in history, emerge as an effect of Baillie's reflexive appropriation of existing cinematic modes as well as aspects of other media. Owens defines incompleteness, fragmentation, hybridization (of media and techniques), self-reflexivity, locality (or site-specificity), appropriation (of the culturally and historically specific), and impermanence as the main elements of postmodern allegory. In the following section I will question to impact of such a postmodern allegory in Baillie's work. What is the significance of this allegory in relation to the representation of minority politics that appears to concern Baillie throughout his filmmaking career?

III- Warding off the Ghosts

The fragmentary perceptions of a mobile subject depicted in *To Parsifal* and *Castro Street* become a key aspect of Baillie's experimental travelogue films, such as

Mass for the Dakota Sioux and *Quixote*, made between 1962 and 1966. Such fragmentation deconstructs the naturalization processes that narrativize and fix history and culture as whole, homogeneous entities. As in the case of *All My Life*, *Tung*, and *Still Life*, these films draw inspiration from a variety of sources outside cinema such as music, literary works and mythologies. The films mobilize these sources to give voice to a minority politics that challenges the power relations of race and culture. *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* of 1964, for instance, allegorically deals with the Wounded Knee incident of 1890 in which by the U.S. Seventh Calvary killed approximately 150 Lakota Sioux men, women, and children at a camp near Wounded Knee Creek.[100] Baillie focuses on this subject through the themes of technology (especially of transportation and filmmaking), alienation, and death. The massacre of 1890 remains only on an allegorical level as no representations of Native Americans appear in the film except for the textual ones. *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*, having won the Grand Prize at the Ann Arbor Film Festival in 1964, received some recognition among critics and scholars. All of these studies describe the film as depicting a dichotomy between nature and civilization (as well as spirituality and materialism), celebrating the former over the latter.[101] I would, however, like to suggest that the modes of representation, the techniques used in the film such as overexposure, filters, and collage of found

[100] For further discussion on Wounded Knee incident see Conger Beasley, Jr., *We Are a People in this World: the Lakota Sioux and the Massacre at Wounded Knee* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Robert M. Utley, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

[101] See, for instance, Curtis, *Experimental Cinema*, 161, Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 180-183, and Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*, 32.

footage, along with the mobile protagonist of the film, suggest less a simple dichotomy of nature and culture than a much more complicated engagement with the minority movements.

The film begins with a quotation on a black screen: "No chance for me to live, Mother, you might as well mourn. Sitting Bull, Chief, Hunkpapa Sioux 1837-1890." This is the only direct, albeit subtle, reference in the entire film to the incident of 1890. Baillie superimposes the sound of applause with a close-up shot of five clapping hands onto this opening text before it slowly fades away. While such layering functions as a sign of respect to and commemoration of the Dakota Sioux (as the title of the film also suggests), Baillie also addresses the hypocrisy of contemporary attempts to attend to the situation of Native Americans with a strong sense of irony. In an interview, Baillie reveals his position when he calls *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* a "tribute to the American aborigine, the original people who were considered by the celebrants of the Holy Mass as unholy savages."[102] This ironic approach becomes clear when the shot of clapping hands cuts to a scene where a dying man lies face down on a sidewalk trying to get up to no avail. The sound of applause still continues during the scene in which an indifferent man passes by and does not pay attention to him while the camera slowly zooms toward the man and finally focuses on his hand. This moment constitutes a contrast between the still hand and the sound coming from clapping hands as well as between the applause and death. The clapping hands allegorize the context of sixties America where in order to "right" the wrongs of the past and fully

[102]MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 125.

integrate Native Americans into American society, Congress passed termination acts. The dead man thus warns against the termination policies that put the Native American culture at the risk of assimilation. Through this ironic juxtaposition, Baillie points to how the respect and celebration posed by the clapping hands mean death for the Native American culture. In an attempt to emphasize the point, Baillie cuts from the dying man to a black screen followed by the view of an American flag on a pole.

The film switches to a long, highly fragmented and hazy collage of images of San Francisco. The camera moves downward to expose a series of buildings and a busy road superimposed with scenes from an industrial landscape. This long sequence continues as a series of images of industrial buildings, a ship, cars, walking people, trains, bridges, a helicopter and an army barrack (often superimposed on each other or with scenes of clouds or waves). Baillie edited this entire sequence in camera whereby he shot a scene rewound it and filmed another scene on top of the previous shot to create the superimpositions. For the hazy appearance, not only did he use a green filter in the summer sun to achieve an effect of light exposition but he also diffused parts of the sequence by spreading petroleum jelly on a clear filter. But why did Baillie put so much effort into generating dissolved and fragmented cityscape imagery? The film discloses the reason once this sequence cuts to a long tracking shot. First the camera captures a view of the bridge from a moving vehicle followed by one that shows the motorcyclist from his back crossing the San Francisco Bridge **(Figure 1.6)**. By means of both starting the soundtrack of the Gregorian chant, recorded at the Trappist

Monastery in Vina, California[103] at the moment when the tracking shot of the bridge begins, and by introducing the title of the film on the shot of the motorcyclist, Baillie registers the motorcyclist as the protagonist of the film. The point of view of the film into the modernized city and its inhabitants thus belongs to a subject who resides in this habitat, who moves through it on a motorcycle. This sequence also signals a shift from a fiction with a dead man lying on the street at its center to a more documentary-oriented mode with ambient sounds. The editing of the section gets faster as the length of collaged shots (showing workers carrying bananas on a loading dock, the San Francisco cityscape with thousands of rooftops, the American flag this time seen through barbed wire, a car junkyard, and a wedding ceremony followed by footage shot directly off television of a parade, some television commercials, films and news) gets shorter. In the middle of the sequence, the motorcyclist passing the bridge reappears to remind the viewers that this fragmented and hazy imagery corresponds to his perspective.

Dwelling upon the evident protagonist in Baillie's three films, namely *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*, *Quixote* and *To Parsifal*, P. Adams Sitney argues that they gave form to "heroic personae."[104] In a similar vein, MacDonald discerns a "spiritual errand-knight" in these films with whom Baillie himself supposedly identifies.[105] Baillie's protagonists, however, do not present a romanticized image of a hero who

[103] Bruce Baillie, "Mass for the Dakota Sioux," in *Canyon Cinema Cooperative Catalog* 3 (Sausalito: Canyon Cinema Cooperative, 1972), 19.
[104] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 180-181.
[105] MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 110.

remains at odds with civilization as Sitney suggests. On the contrary, they offer fragmentary perspectives onto the modern societies they inhabit, not only exposing their own position as participants within their culture but also making the fragmented nature of history manifest. The structure of *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* denies an opposition between nature and culture: while it laments the destruction of nature by civilization, it acknowledges and exposes its own role in that civilization. The film reveals that the filmmaker himself owes his means of representation to technology in some shots of the fragmented and lightly exposed imagery preceding the sequence with the motorcyclist. In this sequence, the films shows a series of faces including that of Baillie superimposed onto the images of buildings and vehicles. Baillie's face dissolves into an industrial landscape followed by a shot of a movie camera. The camera lies on the ground and a rope tied to it moves the machinery around **(Figure 1.7)**. Hayashi's face appears in the next shot appropriated from Baillie's own newsreel. Not only does the protagonist of the film appear to be equipped with technology (motorcycle) but so does Baillie.

Footage from Baillie's older film *Mr. Hayashi* both refers to filmmaking practice in a self-referential manner and at the same time establishes a parallel between the ethnographic representation of immigrants and Native Americans. The appropriated image of Hayashi becomes doubly mediated within the context of *Mass*, thereby extending the gap between the filmed subject and the viewers. Likewise, the absence of Native Americans on screen points to the impossibility of a complete and homogeneous representation of the Other. In an attempt to decentralize the protagonist

and the author-function, Baillie uses a similar method to underline the mediated nature of the construction of a "hero." A humorous scene of a man driving a big black sedan that comes after the collage of fragmented footage attests to this attempt. Baillie shows four people applauding accompanied by the soundtrack of applause also heard in the beginning of the film. A car sequence taken from the 1963 horror/sci-fi flick *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* shot right off of a television screen follows this. Through this reframing of the television screen, Baillie satirizes the image of the hero, who appears not only fictive but also only available to the viewers (including his own protagonist in the diegesis of the film) in mediated form through a screen.

This layering of screen shots establishes a certain historical distance between Baillie's film and the image of the hero as an object circulated in visual culture. Baillie emphasizes a similar distance between the fragmented imagery of the city and the protagonist as well as the viewers, by extension. Once the film deemphasizes and decenters the hero of the film, the constructed nature of his mobile perception of the culture surrounding him displays how a reflexive ethnography can be constructed from fragments of representation. Through a display of specific technology and the views of the city at a certain point in history, Baillie's film refers to a certain socio-historical context in the sixties. Yet, by connecting this context with the past through the title and the dedication in the beginning, he rewrites the relation of the past and the present as resonating fragments rather than a line of progress.

Through the help of the gaps they form in representation, such splintered accounts of history, as argued by Jeffrey Skoller, make the viewer realize aspects of

history (or of a particular culture) that more seamless narratives gloss over and negate.[106] I would suggest that the fragmentary structures of Baillie's films simultaneously point to the constructed and fictive nature of representation while also giving voice to otherwise neglected histories. Given the mutual focus on culture and modes of representation in such a mode of ethnography and in postmodernism generally, I believe that the role allegory plays in both becomes much clearer. As I have already noted, in his study of the turn to allegory in postmodernism, Craig Owens suggests that allegory makes meaning out of history and culture through methods such as fragmentation, hybridization and appropriation.[107] In most accounts of how allegory becomes instrumental in postmodern modes of representation, scholars (including Owens) concentrate on the ways in which allegory constructs and denotes culture and history as its main subject.[108] I would, however, argue that allegory also functions on a second level in Baillie's films whereby the fragmentation formed through the perspectives of mobile subjects and their elusiveness, hybrid use of media and sources, along with technical inconsistencies and imperfections, allegorize the minority movements that were beginning to mobilize.

Such an allegory of mobilization fully emerges in the final sequence of the *Mass*. After the car scene fades to black, some lights appear on the screen initially suggesting a reference to the Mass (the procession of lights[109]) and the spiritual realm.

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[106] Skoller, *Shadows, Specters, Shards*, xiv-xxi.
[107] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 67-86 and "The Allegorical Impulse, Part 2," 58-80.
[108] See, for instance, ibid, Russell, Experimental Ethnography, 3-25, James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in Clifford and Marcus, ed., *Writing Culture*, 98-121, Skoller, *Shadows, Specters, Shards*.
[109] MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 110.

However, after a few seconds the lights turn out to belong to cars moving in the city at night, followed by shots of well-lit shop windows, neon signs and city lights, reminding the viewer once again of the impossibility of maintaining a clear dichotomy between nature and culture, or between material and spiritual realms. The film shows the street at the beginning of a scene where passersby do not pay attention to the man lying on the sidewalk. The nightlife of the city continues as before once an ambulance arrives and takes the dead body away. At the end of the film, we see the motorcyclist again, this time from the front until he leaves the frame and the ambulance follows his motorcycle on the highway. The film then cuts to his point of view on nature, to the sea and the cityscape as seen from the highway. There is a paradoxical structure here: just as the Mass celebrates life in its commemoration of death, the uses the analogy of Mass and resurrection in an anticipation of the full-blown minority movements of late sixties (including The American Indian Movement). Baillie suggests a hope for the political mobilization of the Native Americans, the signs of which were already emerging in the context of the production of the film.[110] In 1973, members of the American Indian Movement occupied Wounded Knee, South Dakota to reconstruct their history through references to the past; this is a strategy that parallels how, in *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*, Baillie reads his own context through an allegorization of

[110]The American Indian Movement was officially founded in 1968. For further information, see Rex Weyler, *Blood of the Land: The Government and Corporate War against the American Indian Movement* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), Michaly D. Segal, "The American Indian Movement : The Potential of a Counter Narrative" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2000), Dennis Banks, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), and Archives Unbound, *The American Indian Movement and Native American Radicalism* (Farmington Hills: Gale, A Part of Cengage Learning, 2010).

the fragments of history.

That the film never shows the native American subject functions to subvert ethnographic conventions. The lack of the ethnographic subject, as well as the constant fragmentation, abstractions, and the movement of the imagery, frustrate the viewers' desire to look, to contemplate. *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*, in this respect, stands as the antithesis of films such as Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* of 1982. As Catherine Russell argues, *Koyaanisqatsi* fulfills such desires through the creation of a spectacle of how technology invades the Third World. While lamenting this invasion, the film assumes the salvage ethnography's strategy to situate the Third World as a primitive step within a progressive history culminating in the cultural/technological achievements of the First World.[111] At the same time, Reggio completely hides his own means of representation embedded in such technology. Instead he adopts an all-perceiving, God-like perspective that spectacularizes its subject in the guise of preserving it in representation. Baillie's film, by contrast, challenges the privileged gaze of the camera and the spectator of conventional visual ethnography, not only in its refusal to allow the spectator pleasurable contemplation of the ethnographic subject; but also by acknowledging the position from which it speaks. Baillie couples the fragmented nature of the protagonist's perspective with an absence of the representation of the history of the Wounded Knee incident and Native American culture suggested in the title and dedication. The fissures between the fragmented structure of the film and the absent subject point to the trauma of the loss and the

[111] Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 61.

horrors of the past that, while unspeakable due to their shocking nature, still weigh upon the present moment. By its combination of a mobile perspective (the motorcycle and the ambulance), the theme of resurrection, and the dead subject allegorizing Dakota Sioux in the end, the film alludes to the ever-growing mobilization of the Native American civil rights movements. Although one level of the allegory reflects on the difficulty of representation, on another level it thus connects the past of the Dakota Sioux to the future of American Indian Movement.

But, how does Baillie articulate the civil rights movement without turning it into spectacle or salvage ethnography when the subjects are actually present in the film? Baillie's *Quixote* of 1964-65 (he finished the final editing in 1967) uses this mobile perspective to explore the subjects of the cultural geography and history of United States in the form of a travelogue. Experimenting with modes of documentary, ethnographic, and narrative modes, Baillie depicts a journey from north to the south and back, then from west to the east.[112] The film has twelve main sequences that follow a repetitive pattern that alternates between six longer documentary sections and six fast-cut collages of found and original footage. A road trip narrative subtends these alternating modes. As the film's title suggests, Baillie drew partial inspiration from the structure of Miguel de Cervantes's novel Don Quixote in connecting "very unique,

[112] MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 126 and Whitehall, "An Interview with Bruce Baillie," 19. Baillie also sent regular letters to *CanyonNews* while on the road trip and the chronology of the places from which he sent the letters correspond to the route he describes in later interviews. Bruce Baillie, "Letters from Bruce Baillie, 10-12-64 and 10-19-64," *Canyon CinemaNews* (April 1965) and "Report from on the Road Filming…" *Canyon CinemaNews* (May 1965).

disparate materials that had to fit together."[113] Paul Arthur's analysis of Quixote provides an excellent analysis of the similarities between the film's rhythmic patterns and the composition of Cervantes' book as well as Beatnik novels.[114] Arthur's study thus provides significant clues into the inter-media connections Baillie explored. I should also note that Baillie "studied John Cage's notes and his music" while arranging the disparate parts in repetitive rhythmic patterns.[115] Providing a genealogy for the road trip travelogue, Arthur simultaneously locates Baillie's films within the Beat culture of the sixties. Since his analysis maps out how Baillie engaged in a dialogue with the cultural context of the sixties, I will only concentrate on the socio-historical context *Quixote* partakes in and depicts. As I mentioned in the beginning, David James, in his close visual analysis, also scrutinizes Quixote in relation to the social atmosphere of the sixties.[116] My own reading of the film, however, diverges from that of James to the extent that I believe the mobile perspective of the protagonist, along with the dynamic pattern of the film, alludes to engagement rather than alienation.

Baillie offers an ethnographic study of a minority group or community in each documentary section: a farmer/smuggler in New Mexico, Mexican crop-pickers and loaders, a high school basketball game, a circus, a Native America reservation, and Selma demonstrations, respectively. Baillie does not provide any textual or voice-over

[113]MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 126.
[114] Paul Arthur, "'Quixote' And Its Contexts," *Film Culture*, nos. 67, 68, 69 (1979): 32-56.
[115]MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*, 126.
[116]James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 159-164

information about the subjects, location, or time in these sections. Yet, fragmentary audio-visual details, such as Mexican tunes accompanying crop-pickers, road signs locating the reservation somewhere in Montana, extracts from a campaign speech by Barry Goldwater on the soundtrack and footage of Vietnam protests, disclose the time frame and some of the locations. The film duplicates such uncertainty on the level of visual experimentation. Akin to Baillie's approach in *Mr. Hayashi* and *Termination*, these ethnographic sequences do not allow the viewer to assume an informed position. Baillie composes his interview with the New Mexican farmer, for instance, of extreme close-ups of his face and hat, and the camera occasionally wanders off to film the cornfields behind him.[117] Furthermore, the title of the film entering the frame, along with the sound of an airplane Baillie superimposes on the audio track, frustrates viewers' expectations for knowledge. The man talks briefly about crossing borders and an exchange of fire with the law, yet the details of the event remain unclear. Baillie uses extreme close-ups to film the crop-pickers and the Native Americans as well, a mode that seems less concerned with mastery of facts than recording the subtle details, textures, and sounds of labor and daily life of a community. The section on the marches from Selma to Montgomery mixes close-up and solarized long shots of policemen, people walking arm-in-arm, singing and dancing. Beginning as a simple long shot recording, both the basketball game and the circus show quickly switch to a more experimental mode through fast plays, distortions, superimpositions and

[117] Baillie identifies the farmer as Archie Jewell Cradick of Deming, New Mexico in an interview. Corliss, "Bruce Baillie," 26.

dissolutions. Although the majority of these long sections remain slow-paced and at times observational, each explores the rhythms and movements of the groups and communities through a surplus of indexical details. While under production, Baillie, in fact, called *Quixote*, "a living museum of gesture, textures, etc., Andre Malraux's museum, in film."[118]

This ethnography of textures, surfaces, and rhythms of everyday life surfaces also in *Quick Billie* in which Baillie turns the camera to himself, as well as Baillie's 1967 film, *Valentin de las Sierras*. Shot in Jalisco, Mexico, also called Chapala, the five-minute color film comprises short and minimal close-up shots of the buildings, landscape and inhabitants of the small town **(Figure 1.8)**. Baillie used a telephoto lens with a very limited focal plane of merely a few inches. This method emphasizes the effect of the close-ups, rendering the depicted surfaces vibrant. This dynamic effect multiplies as Baillie filmed the majority of the shots from a moving horse and, at times, from a carriage. Furthermore, the short and fragmentary composition of the film, the extensive use of shallow focus and close-ups, along with the mobile perspective, become strategies to destabilize the ready access to the ethnographic subject. Instead, the film depicts the town in its textures, colors and motions accompanied by a local song performed by Valentin of the title. As I will argue in the following chapters, Chick Strand employed very similar strategies in some of her experimental ethnographic films, especially in *Anselmo* that she finished the same year

[118] Gordon Hitchens, "Survey Among Unsuccessful Applicants for the Ford Foundation Film Grants," *Film Comment* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1964): 12.

as *Valentin de las Sierras* and Larry Jordan fabricated a history of texture, rhythm, and color through animating documents of the past. Canyon members frequently emphasize the textural qualities of surfaces in fragmented and pulsating patterns to document without totalizing and homogenizing.

In *Quixote*, between these long ethnographic sections of gesture and textures, Baillie intersperses shorter, rather fast-paced montages of footage that directly or indirectly relate to the documentary sections preceding them. Inasmuch as these parts also comprise shots of the road, vehicles, and scenery filmed from a moving car, the fast and fragmentary editing appears to correspond to the point of view of the protagonist on the road trip. Unlike the ambiguous appearance of the ethnographic parts, each collage voices a reference to the socio-historical context through the use of associational montage. The interview in the beginning, for instance, cuts to an accelerated sequence of advertisement billboards (food, politicians, motels) on the highway along with a few shots of a windmill from different angles, all captured from a moving car. Here, the film associates Don Quixote's windmills with mass media and commercialism.

The billboards viewed from a car bear a striking resemblance to Ed Ruscha's work from the sixties. Through a close visual analysis of Ruscha's paintings and photo-albums, Ken D. Allan suggests that Ruscha materialized a phenomenological form of spectatorship that dominated the discourse of avant-garde art in the sixties and

early seventies.[119] Such phenomenological relations between filmed objects and subjects, the audience, and the filmmaker is also manifest in Baillie's films. Because he shot the billboards from a speeding car and fast cut them, these objects seem to hit the camera/windshield/screen as they approach. Yet, what distinguishes Baillie's work from the "phenomenological turn" of the sixties[120] is his clear critical message emanating from his associational montage techniques.

The next scene further clarifies one of the targets of Baillie's criticism: a series of shots of a billboard from the 1964 presidency campaign of Barry Goldwater. The persistent airplane roar that began in the interview sequence and continued into this part begins to resonate with Goldwater's dominant role in the United States Air Force. This implication gains prominence in the next shot where the camera initially focuses on Goldwater's hand pointing upwards in the campaign ad and then slowly turns upwards to a match-cut of a crop-duster plane. At this point, Goldwater's speech accompanied by cheering sounds of a crowd can be heard: "Only the strong can remain free and only the strong can keep the peace," while the plane gets closer to land. This kind of a clear analogy between shots that are connected via fast-cutting and/or superimposition remains manifest throughout the entire film, while more complex interconnections exist between the repetitive patterns of fast-paced and steady sequences. The airplane roar that connects the two sequences blocks what the

[119] Ken D. Allan, "Ed Ruscha, Pop Art, and Spectatorship in 1960s Los Angeles," *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 3 (September 2010): 231-249.
[120] Alex Potts, "The Phenomenological Turn," in *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 207-24.

farmer says while Goldwater advocates the ongoing war through his investment in the air force. The editing simultaneously interrelates the illegal border crossing with the activities of the air force questioning what constitutes a crime. Baillie's subversion of the conventions of ethnography to deny the viewer information simultaneously and paradoxically points to where the politician's interest does not lie.

Baillie continues his criticism of Goldwater in the second collage section following Mexican crop-pickers, yet this time he also decentralizes his own protagonist and his perspective. The section juxtaposes found footage shots of an office interior with computers, a man laying cards on a table, a control panel, a button that says ready, an airplane wing, bomber airplanes, a slot machine, and a flying superhero, with a soundtrack of voices from Hollywood films: "We are about to put our ray-gun into action" "Do you have an atomic bomb strong enough?" followed by Goldwater's infamous speech: "Extremism in the defense of liberty…" (the original speech continues: "…is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.") In this part, Baillie makes connections between Goldwater's policies and war and sci-fi superheroes, satirizing the image of a hero as in the case of *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*.

The film brackets this montage section, which connects Goldwater to nuclear war paranoia, between a billboard that reads "Oasis" and images of workers building a bridge, superimposed collages of ads, several family photos, a fashion model, and the flying superhero again. The figure of the hero emerges as a construct of mass media by association and Baillie opposes this singular motif to the community of workers. At

the same time, through the juxtaposition of Goldwater's speech with the superhero film footage, Baillie highlights how mass media and news may incorporate such an image of the superhero into the discourse of a politician. This montage becomes reflexive to the extent that Baillie criticizes the functions of mass media through the excessive use of similar methods (not unlike Roy Lichtenstein's contemporary appropriation of comic strip heroes albeit in a much more colorful and glossy fashion). A similar theme, akin to *To Parsifal* and *Mass*, also surfaces in the third collage section of moving vehicles on the open road, moving animals in the desert, a martial arts practice, a supermarket, and a comic book page with a flying superhero. Baillie's mocked hero appears to exist in the intersection of nature and culture, and he is technologically equipped. Such reflexivity and the mockery of the "hero" figure deconstructs Quixote's protagonist whose claims to observational power the film puts into question. However much mocked, this reflexive attitude simultaneously generates an author-function identified with the protagonist, yet, the fragmented, multi-layered, and mobile perspective attempts to dissolve the power relation implied in his observations of the ethnographic subjects.

The connections between war, mass media and commercialism appear again in the fifth collage following the Selma documentary. Baillie raises the issue of racism in relation to these connections by juxtaposing images of the face of a woman in pain, policemen putting on gasmasks superimposed on the naked back of a person, a stereotypical statue of an African American stable boy, the close-up face of an African American child, a cartoon Superman, a demonstration in negative, Vietcong footage,

people shopping, a city view from moving car, close ups of faces, a photograph of Vietnamese women crying, a bank, Stock Exchange, the flying superhero superimposed on a woman's face, the Secretary of Defense MacNamara, war footage, photos of dead bodies, a film poster, Popeye, and anti-war demonstration superimposed on a shop window mannequin, views of the city from a vehicle, footage from old films, a Selma demonstration, people singing, superimposed images of a Vietcong and American family, Vietnamese soldiers, a freeze frame of demonstrators' hands in the air superimposed on a red filtered woman's face in orgasm. This final collage appears more densely packed and cut into accelerated sequences than the previous ones, as the flow of the shots I listed above takes a few minutes. The juxtapositions of this section point to the connections between imperialism and consumerism through the lens of the mass media. Baillie's mixture of the coverage of Selma demonstrations with mass media news items and commercials functions once again as a critique that questions the validity of official histories mediated through mass culture, as well as a reflexive tool that exposes its own means of ethnographic representation. In its constant shift between the private memories of the protagonist on his trip and the mass-mediated official histories, regimes of truth are contested to the extent that the myths of ethnography and history themselves begin to appear as fiction.

In the fourth collage sequence, which follows the documentation of a Native American reservation, Baillie reveals the potential dangers of power relations assumed by conventional anthropology that he attempts to challenge through the entire film.

This section brings together long shots of two old Native American men in a diner talking and smoking, an antelope, a bison, old photographs, a newspaper clipping with an ad that reads: "an Indian outbreak is a dreadful thing – outbreaks and crimes are never possible among people who use Kirk's American family soap;" old "science" book pages comparing native American and European brains; an old anthropology book about the inferiority of the native Americans (breadth of brain, physiology, etc.). This constitutes one of the places in *Quixote* where the film becomes highly self-reflexive in its juxtaposition of these latter images after the ones shot in the diner in the observational documentary mode. The criticism of the racism of old ads and anthropological studies simultaneously resonates with the subversion of conventional modes of documentary representation of ethnographic subjects. From the images that address the potential of racism in anthropology and ethnography, Baillie cuts to a photograph of a Native American child in a book. The page turns around to switch to Baillie's footage of a close-up shot of the face of an Indian child smiling, then joining other kids playing and sledding in the snow. Here, between stillness and motion, Baillie exposes the problem of freezing history within a book that conceives past and present as separate entities.

As I have mentioned in my analysis of *Termination*, this conceptualization of history reduces the past (and in ethnography the culture) into an object of consumption that can be left behind, as it bears no immediate relation to the present. Baillie addresses this problematic understanding of history and other cultures only to connect it to a contingent moment in the present, and in doing so he animates it. This idea of

animation also emerges in the beginning of this section when abstracted, red and blue filtered images of a construction site with moving trucks and machines follow close-up, near-abstract shots of the documentary on the Native American reservation. This shared abstraction establishes seemingly unlikely connections between the rhythms of the reservation and the machinery. Baillie once again subverts the paradigm of salvage ethnography by challenging the conventional binary of nature and culture. Rather than conceive technology as threatening to indigenous cultures, imagined as preserved in a perfect moment; the film points to a possibility of mobilization of civil rights. At the same time, it implicates technology (and filmmaking, by extension), as a possible source for such mobility.

The film returns to the tension between stasis and motion at the very end of the film. Baillie concludes the fast-paced imagery with a highly edited scene of a close-up of a woman's face in an ecstatic mode that by association recalls motion and an intensely emotional state. Although brief, the stillness of the final shot synthesizes the energy of the previous movements into one still moment of pleasure. As demonstrated above, the collage parts evoke the road trip in their depiction of the moving vehicles, people, and animals, as well as the perceptions of the protagonist on a moving vehicle. The documentary parts, in contrast, constitute the stops on the traversed paths that mostly concentrate on minority groups such as immigrant crop-pickers, Native Americans, and African American demonstrators at Selma. While the shots register stationary points within the journey of the protagonist, the inner

structure of these scenes become dynamic not only through energetic and rhythmic editing and camera movements but also through filming subjects in motion and action.

This dynamism of the documentary parts in *Quixote* begins to function as an allegory for the minorities' political mobilization. Baillie sets this in comparison to the mobility of the protagonist. Ironically, the superhero figure is not the one who saves the groups visited and observed. The meaning of the film thus does not reside in the traveler's supposedly static and hermetic subjectivity and consciousness. Rather, the fragmentary and dynamic structure of the film dissolves the subjectivity of the traveler in relation to the interactions on his path. Unlike what James suggests, the subject here opens up into what he encounters and transforms accordingly instead of alienating himself from the context. As Baillie himself stated in a 1971 interview:

> My question is can I do that work and remain unattached to the environment passing through that world in which I will inevitably find myself. All adventures seem for us to have a way in and a way out? (…) I want to stay in transit. Not lost like a ghost. Ghosts are those who have lived, who have had form, who are familiar with having a place, being somewhere (…) But I don't mean like a lost soul. I mean the contrary, like a permanent infinite kind, always here, just here. No matter where.[121]

Warding off the specters Baillie addresses, *Quixote* does not bring its protagonist's dissolution to an extreme point of utopianism in which subject/object relations entirely disband. Given the self-reflexive structure of the documentary sections as well as the dense editing of the footage, the subject still assumes an

[121] Corliss, "Bruce Baillie," 26

identifiable position, but it remains open to change. Despite the lamentable state of events, Baillie definitely assumes an optimistic stand in *Quixote*, as in *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*, through his celebration of minority movements. While any shot that ends a film could imply an interruption of movement, the stasis in the final shot of *Quixote* alludes to a momentary immobility of intense pleasure that becomes open-ended. The allegory does not block the possibility of further movement and, by extension, the political mobilization of the civil rights and minorities. Like all postmodern allegories, Baillie's film is meta-textual and palimpsest-like, exposing its own sources, means, and methods while excavating new meanings from the historic grounds.

CHAPTER II

Performing Histories: Chick Strand's Corporeal Ethnographies

> …the bodily habitus constitutes a tacit form of performativity, a citational claim lived and believed at the level of the body. (…) The body, however, is not simply the sedimentation of speech-acts by which it is constituted. If that constitution fails, a resistance meets interpellation at the moment it exerts its demand; then something exceeds the interpellation and this excess is lived as the outside of intelligibility. This becomes clear in the way the body exceeds the speech act it also performs.
> - Judith Butler[122]

In a 1998 questionnaire published by the journal *Film Quarterly*, several experimental filmmakers, including Chris Marker, Yvonne Rainer, Jon Jost, George Kuchar, Barbara Hammer, and James Benning, retrospectively commented on their styles, techniques and approaches to cinema.[123] Among the long list of famous filmmakers was the much less-known Chick Strand who contributed to the issue with an account of "her first movie crush one Saturday afternoon on a beautiful young man in a cowboy suit." She went on to describe in detail her corporeal involvement in the experience of watching: "The way he moved his body with unconscious grace made my cheeks burn. The film was in silvery black and white with lots of horses and trouble and endless horizons (…) Meanwhile, in Texas, James Dean is covered with pungent black oil, his shirt a thin slippery sheath and it's the only thing separating

[122] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), 155.
[123] "Filmic Memories," *Film Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (Autumn 1998): 54-71.

us."[124] Strand's brief remarks provide us with important clues to her films: a body of work invested in the politics of corporeality, desire, humor, and embodied spectatorship. Bringing together a good amount of old as well as contemporary found footage, sound and text, and responding to ethnographic, abstract, and feminist filmmaking practices, Strand's cinematic voice simultaneously remains distinctive, revealing her particular understanding of humor and performance as transformative forces.

Born in San Francisco in 1931 and raised in Berkeley, California, Strand received her undergraduate degree in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley.[125] After she and Bruce Baillie co-founded Canyon Cinema and rented a small studio to edit footage, Baillie, who already had some experience in filmmaking techniques, taught Strand how to use the equipment.[126] These experiments with shooting and editing in the early days of Canyon Cinema shaped the filmmaking career of Strand in notable ways. In her words: "The main way [Baillie] influenced me was the way of shooting, which I've always really liked; up close, intimate, details that most people don't think of."[127] Even after she moved to Los Angeles in the late sixties to attend the graduate program in Ethnographic Film at the University of California in

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[124] Chick Strand, "Chick Strand; Filmmaker," *Film Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (Autumn 1998): 69. Also see another article by Strand where she recounts the first films she saw as a child and as a teenager using a vocabulary that evokes corporeality and sensuality: Chick Strand, "On Romance," *New Magazine* (May 1977): 6-8.

[125] Irina Leimbacher, "Chick Strand: Seeing in Between" (unpublished Exhibition Brochure, Pacific Film Archives, 1994), Irina Leimbacher, "Chick Strand," *Wide Angle* 20, no. 1 (1998): 138-143, and Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 2; 32.

[126] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 65-66.

[127] "Interview: Chick Strand, February 4, 1976, Berkeley" (unpublished Interview, Pacific Film Archives, 1976), 1.

Los Angeles, Strand preserved her ties with the collective through exchange of ideas via letters as well as by occasionally publishing her writings and interviews in *Canyon CinemaNews*.[128] After finishing graduate school in 1971, Strand taught film production at the California Institute of the Arts and experimental film history at Parsons School of Art and Design for a while.[129] In the late seventies, she and film scholar and producer Marsha Kinder co-founded the Film Program (later transformed to the Media Arts and Culture Program) at Occidental College where Strand began teaching full-time, with classes such as History of Documentary Film, Experimental Film, and Third World Cinema.[130] At the same time, she shot footage during her travels every summer, especially in Mexico, editing and finalizing the films back at home.[131]

Strand's film production engages both newsreel and ethnographic documentary forms and experimental tendencies toward abstraction, hand-made alterations on film stock, and the use of found footage. Switching between various techniques, concepts, and modes of filmmaking, Chick Strand gave equal voice to diverse subjects in both

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[128] See for instance, Strand, "Letter," (1972): n.p., Kitchen and Nelson, "Chick Strand's Recollections of Canyon Cinema's Early Beginnings," 10, Chick Strand, "Letter, September 18, 1980," *Canyon CinemaNews* 80, no. 6 / 81, no. 1 (1980 / 1981), Chick Strand, "Chick Strand at the Cinematheque," *CinemaNews* 80, nos. 3, 4, 5 (1980): 10–17, and Gunvor Nelson, "Conversation with Chick Strand," *CinemaNews* 80, nos. 3, 4, 5 (1980): 17-22.

[129] "Interview: Chick Strand, February 4, 1976, Berkeley" (unpublished Interview, Pacific Film Archives, 1976), 2-3 and Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 153.

[130] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 152-153. Also see the official webpage of Media Arts and Culture program at Occidental College in which they summarize Strand's and Kinder's roles in the foundation of the program, accessed December 15, 2013, http://www.oxy.edu/art-history-visual-arts/media-arts-culture.

[131] Holly Willis, "Canyon Lady," *LA Weekly* (November 22, 2006), accessed October 16, 2013, http://www.laweekly.com/2006-11-23/film-tv/canyon-lady/ and Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 153.

collage and experimental ethnographic films. Doing so, she subverted the authorial voice of conventional documentary and ethnographic films along with the hermetic subjectivity of the experimental films of the sixties. Through recourse to repetition, fragmentation, and re-enactment, her films emphasized the mutable aspects of subject formation in performance. Significantly, Strand's filmography participated in the full-blown minority movements of the seventies that questioned and challenged fixed identities and essentialist subjectivities. At the same time, her film practice displayed an interest in culturally specific forms of feminisms, and in the pluralities of women's needs, even though the contemporary feminist film scholarship and criticism almost entirely excluded her work. Strand's body of films point to what forms of feminist film practice existed on the peripheries of the mainstream feminist film theory in the sixties and seventies.

The literature on the works by Chick Strand remains scarce, even in comparison to the scholarship on Baillie and Jordan. Several sixties and seventies issues of the *Millennium Film Journal* and *Film Quarterly* journals, as well as a few newspapers, published a handful of reviews of Strand's films.[132] These works, however, due to their length and scope, do not suffice to introduce a comprehensive

[132] See, for instance, Ernest Callenbach, "Film Review: *Mosori Monika*," *Film Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1971 / 1972): 57, Peter T. Furst, "Mosori Monika by Chick Strand," *American Anthropologist* 73, no. 6 (December 1971): 1476-1477, Anthony Reveaux, "Film: Chick Strand," *Artweek* (January 24, 1976): 13, Richard Eder, "The Screen: Cultural Intrusion," *New York Times* (December 10, 1976): 10, Jake Gaffrey, "Off the Beaten Tracks with Chick Strand," *Village Voice* (December 27, 1976): 47, Vicki Z. Peterson, "Two Films by Chick Strand," *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1978): 110, Noël Carroll, "Sympathetic Cinema: Chick Strand," *Soho Weekly News* (February 23, 1978), Marsha Kinder, "Film Review: Soft Fiction," *Film Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (Spring 1980): 50-57, and Manohla Dargis, "Chick Strand," *L.A. Weekly* (April 25 - May 1, 1997): 62.

survey of Strand's films in relation to either the socio-political atmosphere or feminist film theories. Among all the standard histories of experimental cinema, only those by James Peterson, and David Curtis mention Strand's name in passing under the categories of "film poem," "trance film," or "found footage film," associated with prominent male figures such as Stan Brakhage (film poem, lyrical film) and Bruce Conner (found footage film). [133] As in the cases of Baillie and Jordan, the inclusion of Strand's name among others thus serves to demonstrate how much the "masters" of the said genres influenced their contemporaries. Strand certainly borrowed certain techniques from experimental filmmakers that came before her. She first saw Bruce Conner's *A Movie* at a Canyon screening in the early sixties and immediately realized how much potential using already existing material carried.[134] As I will argue in this chapter, however, rather than borrowing, she appropriated these techniques, which yielded very different outcomes especially in terms of her approach to culture, history, and visuality.

Furthermore, the neglect of Strand's work in many histories that incorporate Baillie and Jordan (especially that of Sitney who makes claims to a comprehensive history) seems to emanate from a more general exclusion of feminist, queer, and racial minority films in such standard literature up to late seventies. Such a neglect on the part of film historians appears to stem less from a conscious prejudice than a disregard

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[133] Curtis, *Experimental Cinema*, 163-64 and Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*, 161-163.
[134] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 61-62. Also see Chick Strand, "Brakhage Package," in *Stan Brakhage: Filmmaker*, ed. David E. James (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 150-152 in which Strand describes some of Brakhage's imagery she appreciates in a poetic style.

of experimental documentary modes that gave voice to minority filmmaking especially in the seventies. When one of the most influential figures of avant-garde film in the sixties and seventies, Jonas Mekas, reviewed the Strand retrospective of 1976 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York,[135] he disclosed the standards of the mainstream avant-garde film against which Mekas (and many other contemporary critics and scholars) measured her work. In his essay in *Soho Weekly News*, Mekas finds Strand's films "not that good at all."[136] In an attempt to ward off any criticism of East Coast provincialism on his side, Mekas also insists that he really wanted to like her films since she comes from San Francisco. He concludes his review as follows:

> For me to praise Chick Strand's work today or like her work would mean to betray the standards and achievements of the Avantgarde film of the last 30 years and lower my taste polished by such West Coast filmmakers as Bruce Conner, James Broughton, Bruce Baillie, Jordan Belson, Larry Jordan, Robert Nelson, Sidney Peterson, John and James Whitney, and other extraordinary filmmakers that the West Coast has produced. Their work has a degree of sensitivity, intensity, subtlety, and formal intelligence against which I have to measure all the other work no matter where it comes from, East, West, North or South.[137]

First of all, Mekas's review points to an existing East Coast favoritism in the avant-garde film world (also paralleled in the contemporary art world) that he unsuccessfully tries to avoid in his conclusion. To the extent that he questions why Strand shows a

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[135] The program at the Museum of Modern Art included *Anselmo*, *Cosas Se Mi Vida*, *Guacamole*, *Elasticity*, and *Mujer de Milfuegos*. See Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film, "An Evening with Chick Strand" (unpublished Program Notes, Museum of Modern Art in New York, October 1976), 1-3.
[136] Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *Soho Weekly News* (October 28, 1976): 32; 41.
[137] ibid, 41.

documentary sensibility, it appears that he derives the standards he sets from the East Coast filmmakers he supports and their inclination toward "pure" formal experiments. In fact, in his award statement honoring Brakhage on the occasion of his reception of the Film Culture's Fourth Independent Film Award, Mekas noted that Brakhage has given "to cinema an intelligence and subtlety that is usually the province of the older arts," using the exact same terminology of the Chick Strand review.[138] More importantly, his list of important West Coast filmmakers attests to how Mekas constructs a narrative of avant-garde film history around male figures as he does not mention one single female filmmaker, such as Barbara Hammer, Gunvor Nelson, Dorothy Wiley, Anne Severson, and Freude Bartlett, all active in the West Coast area around the time he published his review. His attitude reflects the general tendency in many of the standard histories of avant-garde film from the sixties and seventies, even though some of these scholars, such as P. Adams Sitney, subsequently re-visited their work to add small sections on films by sexual, cultural, and racial minorities. It thus becomes hardly surprising that Strand received less attention than Baillie or Jordan in these histories of experimental film.

The majority of the existing recent literature on Strand tends to associate her filmmaking with two allegedly distinct modes of filmmaking: documentary and assemblage. Scholars such as Curtis, Peterson, and David James have divided Strand's work into two threads, according to which she separately experimented with

[138] Jonas Mekas, "Fourth Independent Film Award," *Film Culture*, no. 24 (Spring 1962): 5.

ethnography and found footage genres.[139] Scholars writing on either her documentary-oriented films, such as Marsha Kinder, Paula Rabinovitz, and Jane Chapman, or found footage assemblages, including William Wees, Michael Atkinson, and Steve Anderson, mostly concentrate on the films that they may easily categorize under their topic of interest while ignoring the ones that belong to the other mode of production.[140] As I will argue in the following pages, however, these two seemingly disconnected methods of filmmaking in Strand's oeuvre relate closely to one another. Her ethnographic and found footage films display similarities in form, technique, and narration. More importantly, they defy both an essentialist and hermetic subjectivity (associated with the lyrical films of sixties, especially those of Stan Brakhage) as well as the authoritative voice of conventional documentaries. Strand's films remain significant to the extent that they manage to subvert these conventional approaches to subjectivity and voice without having to submit to an ironic distance manifest in most other found footage films of the sixties, especially those of Bruce Conner.

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[139] Curtis, *Experimental Cinema*, 163-164, Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*, 161-163, James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 143, and David James, *The Most Typical Avant-garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 353-367.

[140] See, for instance, Sharon Smith, "Chick Strand," in *Women Who Make Movies* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1975), 206-207, Karl G. Heider, *Ethnographic Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 108, Kinder, "Soft Fiction," 50-57, Paula Rabinovitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (London, New York: Verso, 1994), 157-175, Jane Chapman, *Issues in Contemporary Documentary* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 118, and Kathryn Ramey, "Productive Dissonance and Sensuous Image-Making: Visual Anthropology and Experimental Film," in *Made to be Seen: Perspectives on the History of Visual Anthropology*, ed. Marcus Banks and Jay Ruby (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 256-287 on the documentary mode and William C. Wees, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993), Michael Atkinson, *Ghosts in the Machine: Speculating on the Dark Heart of Pop Cinema* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), 106, Steve Anderson, *Technologies of History: Visual Media and the Eccentricity of the Past* (Dartmouth: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), 68-87, and Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis, *Film: A Critical Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2011), 300 for the found footage films.

Two relatively recent short essays by Irina Leimbacher and Maria Pramaggiore on Chick Strand offer noteworthy insights on the various stylistic sources of Strand's cinema. Yet, in their assessment of these sources, they gloss over the evocation of the West Coast socio-political scene, and especially the emerging minority politics in the area, as well as the impact of Strand's dialogue with the other artists involved in the collective.[141] Furthermore, Leimbacher defines Strand's works as documentaries "exploring female sensuality," evoking an essentialist approach to women even though she recognizes the fluidity of identities that open up in the intersections of sources Strand uses.[142] Despite her careful, in-depth visual analysis and valuable commentary, Pramaggiore falls into the trap of associating an ironic distance with Strand's films. Pramaggiore bases this distance not only on Strand's extensive use of found footage and the influence of filmmakers such as Luis Buñuel and Bruce Conner but also on her alleged detachment from the filmed subjects in documentaries such as *Mosori Monika* and *Soft Fiction*.[143]

In contrast, David E. James briefly scrutinizes Chick Strand's work in relation the socio-cultural frame of the sixties and seventies America. James sees a prominent effort in her films to challenge the essentialist, authoritative, and dominantly male

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[141] Irina Leimbacher, "Chick Strand: Seeing in Between" (unpublished exhibition brochure, Pacific Film Archives, 1994), Leimbacher, "Chick Strand," 138-143, and Maria Pramaggiore, "Chick Strand's Experimental Ethnography," in *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 188-210.
[142] Leimbacher, "Chick Strand," 139; 143.
[143] Pramaggiore, "Chick Strand's Experimental Ethnography," in Blaetz, ed. *Women's Experimental Cinema*, 188-210.

subjectivity of the experimentalist film production in the sixties.[144] At the same time, both James and Rabinovitz discern the fluid subjects of Strand's works and how this would cause her work to be excluded from feminist film theory of the time. There exist, however, major drawbacks in both analyses of Chick Strand. James paradoxically observes a "feminine sensibility" throughout her body of work that appears to inherently dwell upon an essentialist binary opposition between the categories of "male" and "female." The ever-transforming and fluid aspects of both the subjects of the films as well as that of the filmmaker, argues James, embody the different personas of a female subject. He, thereby, traces the roots of Strand's practice back to Maya Deren's psycho-trance films produced in the forties. James fails to map out the significance of Strand's cinema to the then newly-emerging third wave feminism and minority politics, to the extent that he associates her cinema with an essentialist understanding of feminism. Rabinovitz, on the contrary, associates this fluidity with a post-feminist, post-subjectivity tendency registering the intimate portrayals of the human body in Strand's films as ironic parodies of mainstream representations of the female figure.

In an attempt to address these limitations in the existing scholarship, my project seeks to explore Chick Strand's films in their entirety, comprising both found footage and documentary in recognition of the fact that all of her works display a preoccupation with the production of change in subject formations and positions.

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[144] David James, "Light and Lost Bells: the Films of Chick Strand," *Journal: Southern California Art Magazine*, no. 29 (Summer 1981): 55-58, James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 143 and James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, 353-367.

Strand achieves this through an emphasis on surfaces and a sense of touch, humor, and performance in the intersections of a variety of themes, styles and techniques. Appropriating a diverse array of sources and paradigms - including cartoons, old Hollywood films, news and advertisement footage, scholarly anthropological and ethnographic references, and poetry without trying to connect them seamlessly - Strand's films subvert binaries such as male-female and subject-object. Her works thus contest the authoritarian voice and the dominant gaze that tend to go unchallenged in conventional visual ethnographic works of the sixties.

In order to situate Strand's cinema within the context of experimental history and ethnographic films, I will focus on the following questions: What are some common formal and thematic aspects of the found footage assemblage and documentary-oriented films that make it possible to analyze Strand's work as a whole? How do these similarities in audio-visual aspects, subject-matter and techniques across the body of work by Strand address the issues of essentialist/male-oriented/romanticized subjectivities in experimental filmmaking of the sixties and ethical problems of documentary and ethnographic cinema of the period? In what ways does Canyon Cinema programming play a significant role in Strand's filmmaking process? What does Chick Strand's approach to issues such as subjectivity, humor, performativity and tactility say about the place of her films within the contexts of experimental filmmaking, found footage films, historiographic films, and ethnographic films of the sixties and seventies?

In the first section of this chapter, I will focus on the relation of Strand's filmmaking efforts to contemporary feminist theory and cinematic practice, especially as it emerged on the West Coast, since Strand actively partook in that scene. The chapter will especially focus on the exclusion of Strand's films from the influential feminist film journal *Camera Obscura*. In an attempt to map out the differences between Strand's methods of representation of women and contemporary feminist theory, I will inquire into the reasons that underlined this lack of attention. I will consider how an *aesthetics of the surface*, manifest in the audio-visual, thematic, and technical features of the entire body of Strand's work, separates her feminist politics in both found footage films such as *Cartoon Le Mousse* of 1979 and ethnographic films such as *Mosori Monika* of 1969 from her contemporaries.

How then does Strand's emphasis on surfaces, tactility, and materiality differ from that of other films made in the period with seemingly similar motives by the male-centered underground cinema? I will attempt to answer this question in the second section by scrutinizing the relations between this aesthetic and the subject positions of both the filmmaker and the protagonists of Strand's cinema. In both her found footage and experimental ethnographic films such as *Anselmo* of 1967, *Mujer de Milfuegos* of 1976, and *Soft Fiction* of 1979, reconstruction and reenactments play a prominent role, producing constantly changing subjects through repetitive performances. Through recourse to repetition, re-enactment, performance and speech-acts in both collage works and ethnographic experiments, bodies and voices become agents of transformation. The aesthetics of the surface gains prominence as the

performers of the films themselves transform into facades with no essential or fixed identities. Yet these surfaces do not embody denuded signifiers to the extent that they appear to be richly saturated with bodily senses and desires. I will analyze where this *aesthetics of the surface* in Strand's films falls between male-centered formal and abstract experimental filmmaking and feminist cinema that shuns the visual pleasure and sensation altogether.

In the last section of the chapter, I will situate Strand's work within the larger context of postmodern historiographic cinemas. When analyzed in relation to the notions of performance, *embodied humor*, and tactility, the dialogue of her films such as *Loose Ends* of 1979 and *Kristallnacht* of 1979 with postmodern forms of history writing becomes visible. In this section, I will argue that Strand's fragmentary, self-reflexive, and citational approach to filmmaking, ethnography, and history become instrumental in opening up a space of counter-memory, as Michel Foucault would put it.

I - Feminist (Corpo)realities

Throughout her career, Chick Strand gave voice to a rich variety of women from different backgrounds, histories, and cultures in both her collage works and ethnographic documentaries including *Loose Ends*, *Anselmo and the Women*, *Fake Fruit Factory*, *Guacamole*, *Mujer de Milfuegos*, *Soft Fiction*, and *Mosori Monika*. Strand's constant interest in the lives, experiences, and problems of women becomes particularly noteworthy when we consider that prominent publications of feminist

critics, scholars, and journalists alike in the sixties and seventies paid little to no attention to her work. A closer inspection of Strand's films in relation to the California-based feminist filmmaking of this period raises important questions. Feminist politics of the period largely dwelled on the assumption of gender difference and consistent subject positions owing to the urgent need to update the first wave feminist demands for equal rights. In this section, I will examine how two prominent aspects of Chick Strand's films, namely an *aesthetics of the surface* and an *embodied humor*, distinguished the specific feminist politics of her work from the feminist identity politics of the period. These prominent features bridge a seeming gap between her collage works and ethnographic documentaries, as well as link her decentered feminist politics to experimental film aesthetics, and expression of visual and bodily pleasures.

In the late sixties and seventies, feminist filmmakers such as Gunvor Nelson, Dorothy Wiley and Barbara Hammer, and scholars (especially the *Camera Obscura* collective in Berkeley) residing on the West Coast, applied psychoanalytic and semiotic frameworks to reveal and criticize the close ties between patriarchal structures, visual experience, and representation. These films and studies opened up important sites to criticize the representations of women that populate the visual culture. However, as I will argue in relation to the films of Gunvor Nelson, the feminist politics of the journal *Camera Obscura*, and the writings of Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston, this critique of the patriarchal structure of visual representation often overlooked the possibility of unstable subject positions that Strand's films took

as their departure point. In this section, I would like to explore the tensions at work in the relationship between Chick Strand's films and West Coast filmmaking, film theory, and criticism invested in second wave feminist politics.

One of the most noteworthy hubs for feminist politics in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the West Coast at large, in the late seventies was (and has been to-date) the Berkeley-based journal *Camera Obscura*. Founded in 1976, *Camera Obscura* aimed to introduce continental film theories to the United States through "a feminist and socialist perspective."[145] In the seventies, the contributions to the journal mainly comprised analyses of misogynist imagery in mainstream film production, an approach that also largely defined feminist film studies of the period. The editorial board's selections of essays simultaneously reflected its interest in applications of apparatus theory, psychoanalysis, and structuralist methods to scrutinize images of women in film. This attention to the construction of ideology in the mainstream cinema clearly demonstrated the influence of feminist film theory from the other side of the Atlantic, exemplified in the writings of Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston, and Pam Cook and the politics of another seminal cinema journal, *Screen*. At the same time, *Camera Obscura* presented contemporary female filmmakers, most of whom were working in North America.

Given this effort to make films by women visible and the close geographical proximity of their bases of production, why did Chick Strand's films almost never

[145] Camera Obscura editorial board, "Feminism and Film: Critical Approaches," *Camera Obscura* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1976): 3.

make it into the pages of *Camera Obscura*? Throughout the seventies and eighties, the journal mentioned her name only twice and each time indirectly. Once, in 1979, Canyon Cinema submitted a still from her film *Mujer de Milfuegos (Woman of a Thousand Fires)* to accompany its response to a questionnaire on alternative film distribution. Another time, in a 1983 interview with Linda Reisman, Marjorie Keller explicitly pointed to Strand's significant influence on her own filmmaking.[146] That all four of the members of the editorial board formerly worked for the Los Angeles based *Women and Film*, a journal that published its first seven issues between 1972 and 1975, further attests to their familiarity with Strand's work.[147] The seventh volume of *Women and Film* featured a lengthy article on Strand's films in progress, authored by the director herself.[148]

This information provides insight into the clear indifference to Strand's works in *Camera Obscura*. The editors of the journal, Janet Bergstrom, Sandy Flitterman, Elisabeth Lyon, and Constance Penley had left *Women and Film* because they felt that the journal did not provide a satisfactory venue for exploring their interest in continental film theory. Indeed, most of the female filmmakers whose work appeared

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[146] "C*amera Obscura* Questionnaire on Alternative Film Distribution," *Camera Obscura* 1, 2, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 157-175 and Linda Reisman, "Interview with Marjorie Keller," *Camera Obscura* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1983): 72-85. This interview itself bears an almost hostile attitude towards Keller in which Reisman dismisses any possibility that Keller's works could have a feminist agenda due to Keller's close association with male-dominated New York underground circles as well as her disinterest in feminist film theory. For further discussion of the interview in relation to Keller's involvement in feminist politics, see Robin Blaetz, "Amnesis Time: The Films of Marjorie Keller," in *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 211-238.

[147] Amelie Hastie, Lynne Joyrich, Patricia White, and Sharon Willis, "(Re)Inventing *Camera Obscura*," in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 298-318.

[148] Chick Strand, "Works in Progress," *Women and Film* 2, no. 7 (Summer 1975): 86-87.

in the first few issues of *Camera Obscura*, including Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman, and Marguerite Duras, produced films invested in continental philosophy, psychoanalytical theory, and structuralism. Chick Strand, on the other hand, in several interviews over the course of her career, disassociated herself from theoretical approaches to the medium and instead emphasized a more improvised practice of shooting and editing:

> There's a lot of stuff I shoot that's dumb and stupid and I never use, and doesn't relate. But somehow, funny things happen, or appear. I just know not to put it off, but to follow the feeling I have about it at the moment. And I guess it's sort of a zen attitude. Not to push too much. It'll come. (…) I get all of my material together and look at it over and over and over and then I pick out the things I think I might use. And then I just start. I usually edit... I almost do a fine cut right away and lay three tracks at the same time, and it just falls. I don't know why, it just works that way. Then I take things out, change them around later. If I knew what I was going to do beforehand I'd be bored. To me it's a new adventure every time.[149]

As Irina Leimbacher suggests, such an intuitive approach to filmmaking defies notions of objectivity and challenges pre-given structures such as narrative and plot.[150] I would

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[149] Strand, "Chick Strand at the Cinematheque," 14. Also see Chick Strand, "Woman as Ethnographic Filmmaker," *Journal of the University Film Association* 26, nos. 1, 2 (Spring 1974): 16, in which she argues: "Too much preparation for an artist limits the eye, tires the mind, puts boundaries on perception and worst of all diminishes the possibility to be open to new and different revelation," Kate Haug, "An Interview with Chick Strand," *Wide Angle* 20, no. 1 (January 1998): 106-137, in which Strand once again states, "So there was nothing in my mind there except that I liked it. I mean it's not that it's random stuff at all, it's just whatever I happen to have on hand. And somehow it relates or says something to me, but I never question it, I just do it. It feels right. If the meaning is too obvious, I won't do it," and "You wouldn't want to make a film knowing what it was about, what it was doing. If you knew beforehand there would be no adventure to it," in Irina Leimbacher, "An Interview with Chick Strand (May 1997)," *Discourse: Berkeley Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 20, nos. 1, 2 (Winter 1998): 140-151.

[150] Leimbacher, "Chick Strand," 142.

also suggest that Strand materializes this attitude through a phenomenological understanding of not only filmmaking but also the film experience whereby the corporeality and sensuality of the body gain prominence. In this respect, the neglect of her work in the feminist circles of the West Coast issues less from Strand's indifference to theory than from her emphasis on the body as a terrain of pain, pleasure, and most prominently humor, as well as her effort to transmit bodily and tactile sensations through the medium of film.

When analyzed in their entirety, the audio-visual, thematic, and technical features of Strand's films manifest what I would like to call an *aesthetics of the surface*. Strand makes the materiality of the film stock visible and prominent in almost all of her works to the extent that she utilizes in-camera editing as well as hands-on editing techniques directly on the film footage. Furthermore, extensive use of close-ups shot with hand-held telephoto lenses, back-lighting techniques, superimpositions, and solarizations often conceal depth-of-field, thereby emphasizing the textures and surfaces of the objects in the foreground. Strand's prominent focus on the themes of mobility and movement by fluid camera movements, as well as her thematic explorations of humans, water, animals, and vehicles in motion also contribute to this tactile aesthetics as the swish pans and the moving objects in the foreground seem to scan the surface of the screen highlighting the foreground.

At first glance, this aesthetics of the surface may seem to recall the experimental film style of the sixties, exemplified most famously in the films of Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, and Robert Breer. Chick Strand, however, utilized such

aesthetics for her own ends in the production of an alternative politics of feminism, ethnography and historiography. The feminist undercurrents of her films distinguish them from the majority of the male-dominated underground films of the period. Across her body of work, she gives voice to a sense of humor that goes hand-in-hand with the sense of touch. This separates her aesthetics from many contemporary feminist films, while at the same time providing an alternative solution to the representation of the "other."

At the very center of the formation of the feminist discourse of the seventies were the problems posed by the representation of the female body and an appeal to the sense of touch in various media. Theorists such as Laura Mulvey, Pamela Cook, and Claire Johnston noted how the dominant patriarchal gaze shaped the ways in which popular media and mainstream films represented women. In relation to cinema, Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" of 1975, in particular, condemned the visual pleasure that supposedly defined the relation between a voyeuristic male gaze and the female body on screen, thoroughly influencing the feminist film theory of the following decade.[151] At the same time, such an approach introduced the immense problem and indispensable question of whether it would ever be possible to represent the female body without, even inadvertently, participating in the misogynistic, sexist, and exploitative structures of patriarchy. Contemporary feminist filmmaking responded to these problems of representation in several ways,

[151] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

from dispensing with the female body altogether or stripping the body of eroticism and emotion, as exemplified in the works of Yvonne Rainer, Laura Mulvey, and Chantal Akerman, to an ironic use of the found footage that features female bodies in order to deconstruct the patriarchal discourse at work in such visual material. In the section on the performative aspects of her films, I will return to how Strand's peculiar methods of overcoming the problems of representation differ from the former approaches. I will analyze how Rainer, for instance, described emotions as a function of language rather than the body in *Lives of Performers* of 1972 and Mulvey assumed a didactic position in *Riddles of the Sphinx* of 1977 to challenge the dominant male gaze directed to the female body. For now, I would like to situate Strand's films in relation to the strategies in feminist filmmaking of late sixties and seventies that employed use of found footage in an ironic vein.

While we can trace the origins of the assemblage films made entirely out of found footage back to Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* of 1936, the most influential film that helped establish collage cinema as a genre in its own right remains Bruce Conner's *A Movie* of 1958. The ironic implications of Conner's techniques of quotation and reflexivity and the surrealist tendencies in the emotional and psychic investment that underlay Cornell's *Rose Hobart* seem very different at first glance. However, what unites them and many other found footage artists and filmmakers to come, such as Abigail Child, Gunvor Nelson, Craig Baldwin, and Arthur Lipsett, is a constant emphasis on how visuality functions. The majority of these filmmakers seek to defy the absorbing effects of visual representation in mass media, and this task finds

its expression in the distanciating effects established between the medium, filmmaker and the audience.

In Joseph Cornell's 1936 film, for instance, the voyeuristic obsession with b-movie starlet Rose Hobart drives the splices that distance the figure of Hobart with each edition of found footage. Bruce Conner amplifies the implicit distance in such visual fixation in the detached irony of his works insofar as his reflexive strategies make explicit the issues of voyeurism, spectacle and surveillance inherent in mass media without, however, offering any alternative form of representation. As Kevin Hatch argues in his close analysis of Bruce Conner's found footage films, they build on the tension between private desires and the public realm of mass media and mainstream films.[152] I would like to add that this tension never functions to erase Conner's ironic distance from the filmic imagery and the audience. One of the better-known sequences in *A Movie* that directly focuses on the issue of visual representation splices together a submarine captain looking through a periscope and a shot of a half-naked woman. An array of footage of the captain firing a torpedo, the shot of a nuclear explosion, and surfboarders riding through enormous waves follows this section. While the metaphor in the associative montage clearly points to sexual activity, what remains ambiguous here is Conner's own disposition in relation to the issue of representation. Just as the voyeuristic climax of the submarine captain remains detached from its object of desire, Conner's aesthetics of assemblage pre-emptively dodges any direct responsibility for the problematic nature of representation. Hatch

[152] Kevin Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2012), 111-192.

notes how despite the fact that the caustic humor in this section is emblematic of Conner's style, the sequence stands out in its clear associations. He then turns his attention to the opening sequence. Conner, here, places a very short footage from an old erotic film in which a blonde woman slowly undresses after titles that announce: A Movie by Bruce Conner and a countdown from 10 to 4. Once the erotic clip of a few seconds is over, the countdown resumes to 1 to switch to a title: The End. As Hatch suggests, the short sequence functions as a meta-film on the functions of representation.[153] Yet, as in the case of the torpedo sequence, Conner does not disclose his own position in relation to this meta-film that supposedly refers to any and every film. Conner's assemblage films retain a distance between the filmmaker, his material, and the audience via recourse to an ambiguity in Conner's critical position.

The potential for a reflexive critique deriving from techniques of juxtaposition, combined with the possibility of directly dealing with the representations of women in popular cinema and media, made working with found footage an enticing operation for many feminist filmmakers from the late sixties well into the eighties. Several feminist filmmakers used found footage from a broad array of sources, from ethnographic documentaries (Joyce Wieland's *Handtinting* of 1967-68, Leslie Thornton's *Adynata* of 1983), old films (Abigail Child's *Mayhem* of 1987), educational films (Joyce Wieland's *Barbara's Blindness* of 1967) and news footage (Leslie Thornton's *Peggy and Fred in Hell* of 1985, Carolee Schneemann's *Viet-Flakes* of 1965), to home movies (Abigail Child's *Covert Action* of 1984). Their films display in an ironic

[153] Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner*, 111-112.

fashion how patriarchal and colonialist discourses of power employ mass media to fantasize, construct and disseminate images of the 'other,' especially women. Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley's *Schmeerguntz* exemplifies this practice. Made in the Bay Area in 1965, *Schmeerguntz* sets found footage representations of women against footage shot by Nelson and Wiley in their own domestic environments. The humor in this film issues from the stark contrast between myth and reality, the erotic and the abject, as well as the public and private spheres. The film generates such tensions by interweaving appropriated clips from advertisements, the Miss America pageant, and fitness programming on TV, with shots of a pregnant Wiley vomiting, changing dirty diapers, struggling to put on her clothes, and cleaning a toilet bowl. Even though the film's display of the filmmakers' own bodies brilliantly negates the detached critique of most other contemporary found footage films with feminist undertones, the film nevertheless shuns any possibility of eroticism in representation by associating the female bodies in the original footage solely with the abject. *Schmeerguntz*'s demonstration of the patriarchal discourse at play in representations of women against the hidden backdrop of domestic abjection accords perfectly with the feminist politics of the sixties and seventies in its disavowal not only of visual but also of corporeal pleasure in representation.

Chick Strand's filmmaking, encompassing both found footage and documentary works, by contrast, emphasizes tactility in order to counter and efface the otherwise distanciating effects of quotation and other reflexive techniques. Perhaps owing to the dominance of a detached irony within the tradition of found footage

filmmaking, scholars such as Maria Pramaggiore and William C. Wees associate a similar ironic distance with Strand's films.[154] A closer inspection of a film such as *Cartoon Le Mousse* of 1979 in comparison to contemporary collage filmmaking, however, reveals the nuances of Strand's aspirations in the political representation of the body. In *Cartoon Le Mousse*, as in the case of Nelson and Wiley's *Schmeerguntz*, Strand brings together original footage that she shot with appropriated material from thirties' educational films and cartoons she found in the film archives of Occidental College.[155] *Cartoon Le Mousse* opens with a brief introductory shot in which a woman in a dance hall costume steps out from behind a curtain **(Figure 2.1)**. She appears to be the narrator of the story as she announces in both English and French that she is proud to present "a re-enactment of defective facsimiles and counterfeits." The title of the film and the shot of a woman sitting at a table reading a book follow this introduction. A close-up shot from another film shows the cover of a book about magic. Strand appropriated the succeeding sequence, which features a subtitle that reads, "rituals involving the meditation of pure light trapped in a ridiculous image," from Annette Michelson's essay on Michael Snow's *Wavelength* of 1976.[156] What follows is a fragmentary series of shots from educational films about various proto-cinematic representations of movement such as animal locomotion studies, Muybridge's experiments with horses, and optical devices such as the zoetrope. From

[154] Pramaggiore, "Chick Strand's Experimental Ethnography," in Blaetz, ed. *Women's Experimental Cinema*, 188-210 and Wees, *Recycled Images*, 11-15; 32-48.
[155] Strand, "Chick Strand at the Cinematheque," 14 and Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 340.
[156] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 351.

the very beginning, then, Strand reflexively contemplates the textual and the staged aspects of the medium in relation to a female body who appears to be performer, narrator, and the programmer all at the same time. These roles that the female body assumes link to Strand's own position within Canyon Collective as a filmmaker and programmer, as well as a performer since she often appeared in costumes at the screenings to collect donations.[157]

That Strand juxtaposes the quotation from Michelson's essay with these images of early cinema is significant. In her essay, Michelson argues that *Wavelength* duplicates the process of seeing, and by extension consciousness, through the function of the zooming camera, while simultaneously pointing to how spatio-temporal viewing shapes such perception.[158] Strand counters such a structuralist attitude concerned with the functions of the apparatus and visuality by underlining the deceptive nature of the image both in the introductory speech and by presenting the scientific analysis of the beginnings of cinema as magic (paralleled by Jordan's approach to medium-specificity). Strand's skeptical attitude toward how science employs visual evidence reaches its climax once the footage of circular optical toys, and a circle drawn on a human torso from a film on photography cuts to another educational piece on a concept called "circle of confusion." The term relates to the degree to which the reflection on a lens determines the sharpness of the image. Strand thus creates a

[157] Leimbacher, "Chick Strand," 141 and Geritz, "Interview with Ernest Callenbach," in Anker, Geritz, and Seid, ed. *Radical Light*, 115.
[158]Annette Michelson, "Toward Snow, Part 1," *Artforum* 9, no. 10 (June 1971): 30-37 reprinted in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 172-183.

tension between the lens of the camera and the human heart, as well as between the scientific techniques of photography and film and the ways in which the body resists these technologies' attempts at containment.

At this point, Strand switches from the live action mode into animation, shifting the focus from the body as the object of scientific study and visual scrutiny to the body as the locus of humor and sensation. Strand appropriated the title *Cartoon Le Mousse* itself from a French Mickey Mouse film, and played with it to evoke the word mousse (thereby relating it to the senses of taste and touch).[159] She composed the middle section of the film, following the educational film sequence, entirely of footage from old cartoons. Sound plays an important role in this section, which begins with a female rabbit on a swing singing "Someday My Prince Will Come" (a song made popular by the animated Disney film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* of 1937). The song accompanies the rest of the animated collage where slapstick comedy prevails in the movements of several cartoon animals in dangerous situations. As the lyrics of the song begin to talk of the wedding bells, a sudden explosion tears apart the image; cartoon skeletons and ghostly figures subsequently occupy a gothic mansion. Rather than a distant irony, the bodily humor in slapstick comedy encounters the patriarchal discourse prevalent in the fairy tale elements of the cartoons. This sequence ends with everything in the house beginning to move, the skeletons falling down the staircase, the house catching fire, and a dark leader. The explosion, the house crumbling, and the fire generate shock effects in the audience in accordance with the slapstick comedy's

[159] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 313.

emphasis on the body. This shock effect also emanates from the sudden interruption of the flow of juxtaposed imagery with the image of fire that consumes everything to turn to black leader. Scholars such as Jaimie Baron, Catherine Russell, and Michael Atkinson have compared the fragmentary yet flowing structure of found footage films to TV programming.[160] In her essay on the constant flux of televisual information, Mary Ann Doane suggests that the only information that ruptures this process becomes the images or the anticipation of catastrophe.[161] The catastrophe in Strand's *Cartoon Le Mousse* implies an end to the representation itself, generating a momentary shock effect that implicates the bodies of the audience.

The rest of the film modifies this anticipation of catastrophe to offer an alternative form of representation. Following the black leader, the film switches back to live action in which Strand superimposes a subtitle that reads "variations on a bourgeois living room in which the shadow woman hangs herself" upon the footage of a man reading a book in bed, a letter being pushed under a door, and a woman's feet walking to the letter and her hands picking it up. As in the case of the previous section, Strand implies that the house catches fire by juxtaposing a fireplace and a close-up of curtains slightly moving, then the curtains on fire. This time, instead of the black leader, Strand replaces the destroyed house by her own footage of a dark, shadowy interior in which fragmentary, almost-abstract shots depict two women

[160] Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 238-272, Atkinson, *Ghost in the Machine*, 103-114, Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[161] Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 222-239.

undressing and caressing each other. The end of both sections point to bodily sensations of shock and of pleasure, respectively. In the latter, rather than the household itself, Strand targets the representational hegemony of patriarchal, heteronormative household in order to make space for other modes of relationality instead of doing away with representation altogether.

The element of fire in *Cartoon Le Mousse* echoes its presence in another found footage film Strand made the same year: *Loose Ends*. This film also features footage that reflexively focuses on the history of cinema, challenging the dichotomy between the visual and corporeal via imagery Strand appropriated from the Lumière Brothers, shots showing an audience hypnotically watching a film, and several images of film reels and film footage. Close-up shots of hands engaging in several activities borrowed from several old films from the thirties and forties emphasize the sense of touch. One of these scenes Strand appropriated from a scientific Russian film juxtaposes cones of vision at the fingertips of a woman, thereby connecting the senses of touch and seeing. At the end of the film, Strand's reflexive use of the visual and tactile elements of footage takes a feminist turn; a scene from an old fire safety education film shows a housewife ironing clothes, getting distracted, leaving the iron on the clothes and rushing out of the room.[162] In the following scene, a fire consumes the entire house: an effect that Strand amateurishly creates by superimposing flames upon the shot of a house and figures within the house. It is possible to interpret this as an intentional move on Strand's part since this superimposition very explicitly looks fake. In the next

[162] For the source of the film, see Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 317.

scene things take an even more fantastical turn when a panning shot shows acres of fields on fire until finally the film roll itself seems to catch fire and starts melting from the corners of the image and the screen by extension. As in the case of the end of the first section in *Cartoon le Mousse*, the fire in *Loose Ends* also directly addresses the audience's bodies in its shock effect while targeting visual representation in its destruction of the image. At the same time, on a metaphorical level, emphasis on the body leads to *embodied humor*; the simple act of forgetfulness has comically ridiculous ramifications for the body where a bourgeois housewife who cannot properly perform a routine domestic task causes a fire that disrupts the order of the world and visual representation. Strand implies that the criticism she directs at the patriarchal hegemony has direct corporeal ramifications for the film roll itself, as well as for the subjects in the film. Through recourse to strategies of slapstick comedy via cartoon bodies, as well as fragmentation and abstraction in Strand's own footage of erotic intercourse between two women, the representation of corporeal pleasures resists the realm of visual mastery, objectification, and control.

Unlike the case of Bruce Conner's *A Movie*, explosions and the fire in the house do not produce visual spectacles to the extent that they metaphorically destroy the bourgeois household along with the film imagery itself. The fire signifies tactile sensations inasmuch as it consumes everything that is visible within the scene and subsequently the very medium of the representation itself, leaving the audience to contemplate the corporeal (and threatening) sensations it offers. Such an understanding of visuality simultaneously challenges the distancing and dissociative

impulses of the found footage films of the sixties and seventies (initiated by Bruce Conner's *A Movie*) via recourse to the comical aspects harbored in the body. At the same time, Strand's found footage cinema stands apart from the strategies of contemporary feminist theory; if Strand gives agency to the female body as the reader, narrator, and performer of the filmic text in the introduction of *Cartoon Le Mousse*, at the end of the film she also implicates that body as a generator of humor and erotic pleasures. We cannot easily align such a conceptualization of feminist politics with contemporary feminist cinema, from *Schmeerguntz*, to Joyce Wieland's *Handtinting* (1967-68) and Laura Mulvey's *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). The difference most clearly appears in the contrast between the beginning and end sections of *Cartoon Le Mousse*. In the concluding part, Strand replaces the body initially depicted as the center of visual and scientific attention by her own emphasis on the body as a site where desire becomes manifest. The film replaces scientific objectivity and analytic distance by corporeal sensations and pleasures that envelop the bodies of the audience and the filmic subjects, an attitude that also defines Strand's approach to experimental ethnography.

Strand's investment in an experimental ethnographic mode plays a significant role in determining her position in relation to the contemporary feminist politics. As a recent editorial introduction to *Camera Obscura* acknowledges, several scholars (most prominently Tania Modleski and Theresa de Lauretis) critiqued the journal and the feminist theory of the seventies at large as a consequence of the "sexual difference"

paradigm with its basis in heteronormative, ahistorical, and Eurocentric discourse.[163] As Ella Shohat argues, inasmuch as the psychoanalytical and structural conceptualizations of feminism dwell on ahistorical concepts such as fetishism, castration, and the male gaze, such "Eurocentric feminisms" introduce a massive problem in their universalizing assumption of "womanhood" as a homogeneous entity, mainly a white, middle-class, and heterosexual one.[164] Such homogeneity also constitutes the pitfall of David James' analysis of Strand's cinema. While James acknowledges the stylistic differences of Strand's films that separate her practice from contemporary feminist theory and filmmaking, he insists on referring to a "female sensibility" and "humanist essentialism" in her aesthetics; an argument that runs the risk of making the otherwise fluid and diverse subjectivities in her films seem uniform.[165] An aesthetics deeply based on the body and tactile experience certainly has the potential to evoke an essentialist understanding of gender and subjectivity. For instance, Strand's contemporary Carolee Schneemann's performance art and films such as *Fuses* of 1967, jeopardizes its feminist aims by contributing to a fixed notion of the female. This is because Schneemann's highly personal works leaves very little space for the kind of reflexivity that contemplates the potential problems of the representation of the body. Through her reflexive collage techniques combined with the phenomenological implications of the aesthetics of the surface, Strand, on the

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[163] Hastie, et al, "(Re)Inventing Camera Obscura," 314-15.
[164] Ella Shohat, "Post Third-Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation, and the Cinema," in *Rethinking Third Cinema*, ed. Anthony R. Gunerathne and Wimal Dissanayake (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 51-78.
[165] James, "Light and Lost Bells," 55-58 and James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, 358-59.

other hand, manages to demonstrate the culturally specific exploitations of different women as early as 1970 in her film *Mosori Monika* **(Figure 2.2)**. In Strand's words: "For us to try and push our idea of what being a woman is on other women from other cultures is the height of foolishness."[166] In *Mosori Monika*, Strand thus gives voice to the different and at times contrasting needs and desires of multiple women from different cultures without mastering or controlling them visually "to construct *other* objects and subjects of vision," as De Lauretis would put it.[167]

Among the twenty films she completed during her lifetime, *Mosori Monika* remains Chick Strand's most cited one, albeit in passing and often in comparison to Luis Buñuel's surrealist ethnographic film *Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan (Land Without Bread)* of 1933.[168] That *Mosori Monika*, at first glance, gives the impression of a conventional documentary with its voice-over narration and original in-situ footage likely attracted the attention of several scholars of visual ethnography. However, the studies of *Mosori Monika* widely overlook the hybridization of the ethnographic genre with a style Strand appropriated from her own approach to found footage filmmaking. Furthermore, I should note her reflexive emphasis on the role performance and testimony play in the generation of various subjectivities in the film. In 1969, while

[166] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 145.
[167] Theresa De Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory," *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985): 154-175.
[168] See, for instance, Furst, "Mosori Monika by Chick Strand," 1476-77, Callenbach, "Mosori Monika," 57, Marsha Kinder and Beverle Houston, *Close-Up: A Critical Perspective on Film* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1972), 100-115, Jeanne Betancourt, *Women in Focus* (Dayton: Pflaum Publishing, 1974), 104-105, Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, 108, Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Filming California: Re-Imagining the Nation," in *Art, Women, California 1950-2000: Parallels and Intersections,* ed. Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 262-263, and Ramey, "Productive Dissonance and Sensuous Image-Making," in *Made to be Seen*, ed. Banks and Ruby, 267-268.

she was a graduate student, the Ethnographic Film Department at University of California, Los Angeles awarded Strand a fellowship as part of an ongoing project of documenting the Warao Indians living by the swamps of Orinoco River in Venezuela.[169] Upon arrival at the site, Strand focused her attention on the interactions between the Spanish Franciscan missionaries who came to the site in 1945 and the Waraos who had little to no interaction with the outside world before the missionaries' appearance. She concentrated on the competing realities and subjectivities of two women living in the area: a Franciscan nun, Sister Isabel, and an old Warao woman, Carmelita. At the same time, Strand made her own subjectivity explicit through the reflexive techniques she employed throughout the documentary.

The comparisons between Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* and Strand's *Mosori Monika* largely focus on the shocking content of the voice-over narrations by an unknown voice in the former and by the Franciscan nun in the latter. Through the use of an anonymous, detached, and disinterested voice-over, Buñuel's film ironically instantiates the Western anthropological discourse and gaze. Buñuel strategically juxtaposes this anthropological narration with images of extreme poverty in the region of Las Hurdes in Spain. As Catherine Russell suggests, not only does the voice-over generate an ironic layer in Buñuel's jarring juxtaposition of its uninvolved tone with the fragmentary imagery of poor living conditions of the region, but it also narrativizes the fragmentary imagery that would otherwise resist a unified representation of the

[169] Leimbacher, "An Interview with Chick Strand," 140-151 and Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 94-95.

culture as well as the creation of a diegetic space for the voyeuristic desires.[170] The film thus reflexively points to how the voice-over functions in the documentary mode of representation owing to the disturbing nature of the narration. The earliest version of the film was silent and Buñuel narrated the film during its screenings in the manner of a travelogue film, a proto-ethnographic genre of Western exoticism. He delivered the lecture accompanying *Las Hurdes* from the projection booth rather than a podium, parodying in anticipation the documentary voice-over in its disembodied, meaning-making, discursive power.[171] The later dubbed versions of *Las Hurdes* simulate the newly developing documentary genre and its God-like, all-seeing narrations. These appropriations of the voice-over, as they structure the travelogue and emerging documentary genre, attest to *Las Hurdes*' function as a parody of colonial discourse. While Strand's film demonstrates the exploits of the colonial discourse as well, scholars have overlooked the extent to which the two films differ in the testimonial functions of the voice-overs as well as in the ways Strand shot and juxtaposed the footage with these narrations.

Mosori Monika opens with the voice-over of the nun describing images of herself in her own quarters. Outside shots depicting the life in the village follow. "Before we came here, they didn't have anything, it was pure jungle," says the nun in an accented English and continues, "they lived like animals, they didn't work, they didn't do anything." The Franciscan nun's disturbing words accompany the fast-cut

[170] Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 30-34.
[171] E. Rubinstein, "Visit to a Familiar Planet: Buñuel Among the Hurdanos," *Cinema Journal* 22, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 8 and Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 30.

images of Waraos going about their daily life, sleeping on a hammock, eating, canoeing and fishing on the river. Sister Isabel's illusion of grandeur reaches its climax with the words, "We civilized them. We taught them how to live the human life, the life of men." At this point, Strand cuts to the image of a naked boy sitting on a train track with a laceless and giant shoe on one of his feet, while the nun begins to speak for the Waraos, "They want to be more civilized, like a Spaniard, not an Indian."

Referring to seemingly similar ironic juxtapositions in Buñuel's film, Pramaggiore suggests that they make the imagery "be at home in *Las Hurdes*." I would like to argue that in *Mosori Monika*, the camera's appeal to the sense of touch separates Strand's humor from the more distant irony in *Las Hurdes*. The camera shows the body of the child in close-up, starting from the shoe and then panning gradually upward to reveal the rest of his body. Such a strategy has multiple functions: in part, Strand strives to reproduce a "normal" and intimate rather than conventionally distant ethnographic gaze as she describes in an article of 1978:

> "No close-ups please," they say. "It is not the normal way of seeing." But it is normal for an infant to be close to the face of the mother, normal for a lover to be close to the body of the beloved, normal to face a friend eye-to-eye a foot away and talk intimately and normal for that person to see only the face of the friend and not his or her own face. "No fragments of movement," they say. But it is normal for a child sitting beside women grinding corn to see only their hand movements, normal to catch fragments of the costume of the person dancing next to you out of the corner of your eye, normal to see only the flank of a cow when you are milking her.

> Maybe it is normal for the anthropologist to be so far removed, but not for the people living in the culture.[172]

Here, the close-up and fragmented movement serve as subversive tools that transgress the perceptive limits of the objectifying and removed gaze of traditional visual anthropology. For Strand, her use of close-up, as well as fluid, hand-held camera movements, also separate her from the Brakhage tradition that is based upon a tabula rasa, non-cultured way of seeing akin to the vision of a child:

> [Stan] Brakhage used to say that he tried to shoot his films through the eyes of a child, but what I tried to do was the use of camera close-up. I like movement, I like to hold the camera next to my body when I'm shooting. The flow … the flow … that's what gets me.[173]

For Strand, her techniques not only implicate her subjects' bodies through extensive close-ups but also her own body in the filming process. Such an intimate understanding of representation also defines the audience as part of the interaction. The close-up pans of the child in *Mosori Monika*, contrasting the voice-over, thus humorously function as a phenomenological invitation to the audience to put themselves in the depicted child's shoe. In this respect, Strand substitutes an embodied humor and an interest in showing the corporeal patterns of inter-culturally common experiences for the distant gaze of irony. The film also emphasizes this phenomenological implication by the dispersed close-up shots of both the nun's and

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[172] Chick Strand, "Notes on Ethnographic Film by a Film Artist," *Wide Angle* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1978): 44-51.
[173] Willis, "Canyon Lady."

Carmelita's hands engaging in different activities -such as reading, cooking, performing housework, and so on - that appear throughout the film.

Such investment in bodily experience becomes far from essentialist, however, to the extent that Strand makes a constant effort in the film to show that the portrayed subjectivities emerge as not only functions of the cultural context but also as testimonial constructions of the documentary film. She structures the film through constant shifts between the narration of Sister Isabel and the old Warao lady, Carmelita. Their perspectives into their own lives exist side by side, displaying the positions, needs and problems of two women belonging to entirely different cultures. I argue that Strand bases the switches between the voices and subjectivities of these two women upon the same aesthetic style she employs in her found footage filmmaking, in which meaning emerges from the montage of shots from different sources. In the latter mode, Strand constructs her juxtapositions with direct allusions to the corporeality and the subjectivity of the filmmaker as opposed to a distanced, ironic, and analytical gaze, a strategy that she repeats in *Mosori Monika*.

At the very beginning of the film the nun declares that she didn't want to have any children and that constitutes the reason why she had to become a nun. Once her narration ends and Carmelita's starts, again in an accented English, she begins to count her children, "a daughter, then a son, then another daughter," stating that she has ten children in total. Carmelita says that growing up she could do whatever she wanted; she continues to tell the audience that she met her husband and married him after getting her father's permission. The film, then, cuts to the inside of a church where a

marriage ceremony of two Waraos, dressed up in Western style wedding costumes, takes place. During this section, the narration of the two women suddenly stops and we only hear the priest saying: "Husbands make the wives obey you. You are their Master like Christ is the master of the church." Strand gives the audience glimpses of how two patriarchal orders function in two different cultures, then how the western patriarchy colonizes the Warao culture altogether. The colonization transforms their clothes and rituals, and it establishes its own patriarchal rules over those of the Waraos as revealed by Carmelita's reminiscence of her mother, echoing her father's instructions, telling her "to obey the husband."

Strand noted both in an interview and in her essay "Woman as Ethnographic Filmmaker," that *Mosori Monika* is "about three women," including her own subjectivity along with that of the nun and the old Indian woman, because "it's absolutely impossible to slice yourself away from your own culture."[174] Strand underlined the impossibility of objectivity in ethnographic documentary arguing that even without her usual, intimate, close-up cinematic technique, the film would still reflect her subjectivity:

> I made a film about two women of different cultures in an acculturation situation. I knew that no matter how careful I was, there was no way for me to keep myself out of it. If I set up the camera and merely pushed the trigger until I ran out of film, it was still subjective. When, during twenty-four hours, or a week, or a year should one push the trigger? All is arbitrary, all is random, all is culturally defined. So one can be left with very little to go on. There is no way at all for

[174] Leimbacher, "An Interview with Chick Strand," 140-151.

> ethnographic films to be objective. There merely are degrees of subjectivity.[175]

Instead of naturalizing or concealing her presence, Strand chooses to make her own intervention visible in her hand-held camerawork that comprises very fast swishing pans, close-ups, fragmented and sometimes near-abstract imagery, as well as editing that shifts between fast-cut sections of village life and long takes of close-ups focusing on faces and hands of people. More importantly, throughout the entire film, there exists a slightly off-putting, estrangement effect: both the nun and Carmelita speak in English. Once the film ends and the titles appear, it is revealed that those speaking English narrated their texts in the post-production process. Strand interviewed both women, then composed the text of the voice-overs and made two other women read out the texts in English. That Strand chose speakers who have an accent in English implies that she wanted the audience to initially think that the voices belonged to the two women only to reveal the constructed nature of the testimonies in the very end.

Such a layered voice-over practice became a strategy that Strand would use in her later filmmaking career. In films such as *Cosas de mi Vida* of 1976, Strand translated the accounts of the documentary's subjects (Strand's friend Anselmo, his wife, and his mistress) from Mexican Spanish to English and asked the subjects (who do not speak English) to read out the English text. This reading constitutes the voice-over soundtrack of *Cosas de mi Vida*, once again demonstrating the construction and deconstruction of subjectivity in performance. Strand's reflexive strategy points to

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[175] Strand, "Woman as Ethnographic Filmmaker," 16.

how the audience can only access the subjectivities of the protagonists in the film as mediated through the filmmaker's own culture. It also reveals that the filmed testimony itself constitutes an act of performance that is layered and open to transformation and nuance. While underlining the multiple voices in *Mosori Monika*, David James cites Barbara Myerhoff on what filmmakers should seek, "a third voice – an amalgam of the maker's voice and the voice of the subject, blended in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern which voice dominates the work (…) films where outsider and insider visions coalesced into a new perspective," arguing that Strand's mediated and multiple voices materialize such a third voice.[176] However, Strand pays extra attention to not combine the various perspectives (including hers) to transcend the culture and leaves the differences intact. As I argued in the chapter on Baillie, such a blending of perspectives runs the risk of allowing the filmmaker to project her own subjectivity onto the "Other, in an "ethnographic self-fashioning," as Hal Foster would note. Instead, Strand points to the gaps between cultural subjects, while at the same time demonstrating how these subjects emerge in performance (within the culture, and for the cameras).

I would, however, suggest that the film instantiates a fourth subjectivity that operates in the gap between languages and cultures. This subjectivity does not belong to a voice but emanates from bodily experience that can be shared cross-culturally,

[176] David James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, 360-361 and Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). James's text dates the text to 1986 when the correct date is 1982 (Myerhoff passed away in 1985). For a comprehensive critique of Myerhoff's theory of "Third Voice," and the colonialist risks it carries, see Marc Kaminsky, "Myerhoff's "Third Voice": Ideology and Genre in Ethnographic Narrative," *Social Text*, no. 33 (1992): 124-144.

including that of the audience of the film. Such cross-cultural appeal becomes significant given that following the film's release in the seventies, it reached a wide audience including viewers with a variety of backgrounds in film, gender studies, and anthropology. Its several showcases included the Cinémathèque, as Ernest Callenbach's review of the film suggests,[177] as well as the San Francisco International Film Festival, the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar, the American Anthropology Meetings in New York, and the Women's Film Festival in New York.[178] The film brings into view a tension between the body and language, as well as between experiences that can be shared cross-culturally and voice-overs reflecting the various conflicting subjectivities constructed in the film. While Strand's own position is more critical of the nun, she still gives both characters equal screen time to eliminate the possibility of emphasizing one subject over the other. At the same time, her emphasis on the performance of filmic subjects and the staged aspects of the documentary testimonials reveals the politics, as well as the limits, of documentarian claims to "truth" and objectivity. To make this point clear, in the next section I will analyze the role of performance and performativity in Strand's work by focusing on two of her films: *Anselmo* and *Soft Fiction*.

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[177] Callenbach, "Mosori Monika," 57.
[178] "Mosori Monika," in *Canyon Cinema Catalog* 6 (San Francisco: Canyon Cinema, 1988), 221 and "Canyon Cinema Catalog," accessed November 20, 2012, http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=2272

II - Performance and Performativity

In 1967, Strand made her first short experimental documentary, *Anselmo*, in which for the first time she used original footage along with a collage of found imagery. She had composed *Eric and the Monsters* (1964) and *Angel Blue Sweet Wings* (1967), the two films preceding *Anselmo*, entirely of appropriated footage. According to Strand, we can categorize *Anselmo* as a documentary insofar as it depicts "a symbolic reenactment of a real event."[179] The "real event" to which Strand refers here is her smuggling a tuba across the border to avoid paying the pricey custom taxes and giving it as a gift to her Mexican Indian friend, Anselmo **(Figure 2.3)**.[180] He appears as the subject of three documentaries Strand made over a span of twenty years: *Anselmo*, *Cosas de mi Vida* of 1976, and *Anselmo and the Women* of 1986:

> I asked a Mexican Indian friend what he would like most in the world. His answer was, "A double E flat tuba." I thought it would be easy to find one at the Goodwill very cheap. This wasn't so, but a sympathetic man in a music store found a cheap but beautiful brass wrap-around tuba. I bought it, smuggled it into Mexico and gave it to my friend in the desert. The film is a poetic interpretation of this event in celebration of wishes and tubas.[181]

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[179] Chick Strand, "Anselmo," in *Canyon Cinema Catalog* 6 (San Francisco: Canyon Cinema, 1988), 221 "Canyon Cinema Catalog," accessed November 30, 2012, http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=2259 and Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film, "An Evening with Chick Strand," 2.

[180] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 122. In the interview, Strand also mentions that at the time they would serve a sentence if they got caught smuggling to Mexico.

[181] Chick Strand, "Anselmo," 221, and in "Canyon Cinema Catalog," accessed November 30, 2012, http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=2259, and Irina Leimbacher, "March 1: Mexican Visions" (unpublished Program Notes for the "Chick Strand: Seeing in Between" retrospective at the Pacific Film Archives, Pacific Film Archives, March 1994).

In accordance with Strand's poetic approach, *Anselmo* features no dialogue but only music performed by La Banda Aguascalientes that accompanies the fragmented pieces of fast-cut footage.

The majority of the found footage appears at the very beginning and end of the film. The film opens with the footage of a plane flying over the Mexican desert, followed by images of flocks of birds flying in the sky. Other archival footage of a native man wearing a mask intercuts this section, ending with superimposed images of flocks of birds, solarized images of horses running in slow-motion, and the plane. The migratory birds, flying between north and south en masse without any interruption at the borders, constitute an especially sharp contrast with the plane, whose passengers lack this possibility. Strand, here, briefly maps out the traditional ethnographic documentaries' binary oppositions between nature and culture, animality and technology, implying a divide between the colonized and the colonizer as well as between East and West (and South and North, in this case). Yet, the superimposition of images at the end of this section, a technique that Strand uses throughout the film as a subversive strategy, foreshadows her emphasis on the layered construction of cultural subjectivities based on performance. On a formal level, the movement of the birds, horses, and plane close to the surface of the screen along with the use of solarizations and superimposition, reduce the depth-of-field. This tends to foreground the surfaces of the objects and by extension, the screen. As I have argued, this aesthetics of the surface collapses the illusionary space of the film and underlines the materiality of the objects by appealing to the sense of touch. As I will demonstrate in

the following pages, in *Anselmo*, such an aesthetic style parallels and discloses the quotational aspects of the activity of gift-giving in particular and of ethnography and the ethnographic documentary generally.

The middle section of the film mainly features examples from Strand's own footage superimposed over each other, mixing the 'before' and 'after' of the crucial moment of gift giving. Fragmentary images show Anselmo in the desert approaching a woman with a tuba in her hand and then leaving with the tuba in his hand. On top of this scene, Strand superimposes a view of Anselmo playing the tuba in the desert. As the image of Anselmo leaving fades, the film juxtaposes an image in negative of the woman wearing a scarf around her head (Strand herself), now dancing, on that of Anselmo playing the tuba. Then Anselmo's image switches to negative, while the dancing woman appears in positive. The final section of the film begins with layered images of abstract spirals and light particles swirling around followed by horses running in slow-motion on the negative image of the plane flying. A shot of Anselmo walking away surfaces on the negative image of Anselmo playing the tuba. In the final scene of the film, the solarized element dissolves, leaving just an image of Anselmo, off to the left of the camera. Through the contrasts between solarized and original, negative and positive imagery, Strand differentiates between herself and Anselmo (and their respective cultures), as well as between Anselmo before and after receiving the tuba; yet these contrasting images exist side by side as fragments within the same shots. One function of such fragmentary and layered imagery, which defies linear narrative, becomes the subversion of a conventional understanding of history and

historiography as progress, a subject to which I will return in the last section. Another equally significant issue is the role of fluidity as well as performance in cross-cultural interactions. While, at first glance, the act of the Western party giving a gift to the native Mexican seems to be a statement of power, in reality, both the way Strand montages the section and the self-reflexive way in which the subjects perform the gift-giving activities render the issue of power relations more complicated.

In his seminal essay on gift exchange, sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss argues that gift giving necessarily creates a social bond between the parties of the exchange to the extent that the gift implies, and indeed compels, reciprocation.[182] For Mauss, the expected future reciprocation of the receiver makes it possible for the joint attachment between the giver and receiver to extend in time and space beyond the moment of the exchange. Building on Mauss' theorization of the gift, Chris Gregory suggests that the social bond created between exchangers explains why gifts and commodities are entirely different.[183] According to Gregory, sold commodities become alienated from their owners inasmuch as the ownership rights pass on to the new owner. Gifts, on the other hand, remain inalienated, retaining the identity of the giver to some degree owing to the interdependence between the giver and receiver.

Strand's film *Anselmo* underscores this created social relation between the exchanging parties that Mauss highlights. Strand, however, intervenes into the

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[182] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1922; repr., London: Routledge, 1990).
[183] C. A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London, New York: Academic Press, 1982) and C. A. Gregory, *Savage Money: The Anthropology and Politics of Commodity Exchange* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997).

structure of ethnographic gift giving in *Anselmo* insofar as she emphasizes the significant role that performance, reenactment, and the materiality of the objects play in this social interdependency. As I have stated above, the film presents a re-enactment of the gift exchange that took place in an unspecified time. Strand asked Anselmo to go back to the desert so that she could film him and herself repeating the exchange of the tuba. In this respect, the filming itself constitutes the reciprocal action on the part of the receiver, Anselmo, whom Strand asked to do the favor of getting in front of her camera. This gesture becomes Anselmo's gift to Strand. The reenactment in *Anselmo* functions on two levels. First, it deconstructs the ethnographic documentary genre to demonstrate the layers of performance involved within the process of filmmaking. Second, the staged aspects of the re-enactment imply a fluidity of cultural roles as well as subjectivities: Strand appears both as the Western gift-giver as well as the dancer wearing a head scarf, whereas Anselmo performs the role of the receiver who appropriates the Western instrument to play his own music (as heard in the score of the film). At the same time, this appropriation emphasizes Anselmo's active role in the exchange inasmuch as Strand did not choose what gift to give but responded to Anselmo's desire for a tuba. Through recourse to performance (dance and music), the bodies of the subjects become agents of transformation defining subjectivity as a fluid form rather than a fixed and essential identity.

The aesthetics of the surface gains prominence at this point as the surfaces of the depicted objects are richly saturated with bodily senses and desires. In fact, throughout *Anselmo*, the close-up shots and the solarized images of the tuba bring its

specific material qualities to the fore. This emphasis on the body of the instrument points to the social interactions and intercultural meanings embedded in the tuba as gift over its commodity status as part of an abstract capital flow. Strand's description of the story of the film points to the meanings associated with the tuba by Strand and Anselmo respectively: the tuba, on one hand, represents what Anselmo wants the most in the world; for Strand, on the other hand, it is a purchased object (in the end she had to use part of her student loan to buy it as she could not find a cheap one she could afford at the flea market).[184] As an inalienated gift, the tuba retains both qualities and meanings embodied in the film that re-enacts and reciprocates the previous gift exchange. Strand emphasizes the film itself as an object of exchange through the aesthetics of surface. At the same time, the solarized images used in the film construct a tension between such materiality and mere visuality to remind the viewer of the film's ability to work as a dematerializing, negative force. By destabilizing igure-ground relations, these solarized images point to the idea of reversal as such. The interdependence between the bodies of objects and subjects in the film suggests a corporeal intersubjective meaning-making process between the gift-giver and receiver as well as among the filmmaker, the film, and the audience. Indeed, in an interview with Irina Leimbacher, Strand makes an analogy between the processes of gift-exchange and meaning making by the audience:

[184] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 121 and Sheldon Film Theater, "The Films of Chick Strand" (unpublished Program Notes for a Chick Strand Retrospective at the Sheldon Theater in San Francisco, Pacific Film Archives, Winter / Spring 1980).

> Strand: …But it's not my message to you, it's the message you get out of it.
> Leimbacher: So giving the responsibility to. .
> Strand: The viewer. Or giving the gift to the viewer.[185]

I would like to suggest at this point that the important role performance plays in Strand's films depends on both her early interest in found footage filmmaking as well as her background in anthropology and ethnography. At the same time, what separates her work from the found footage tradition of filmmakers, such as Bruce Conner, Ken Jacobs, and Craig Baldwin, is a performance strategy that foregrounds the ecstatic and fleshly rather than the recessive body. The theoretical and practical implications of the term "performance" as it widely circulates in gender studies, poststructuralism, and art theory and history since the seventies, initially emerged in ethnographic studies and anthropology in the fifties and sixties – the period when Strand received both her undergraduate degree in anthropology and her graduate degree in ethnographic film. Scholars such as Georges Gurvitch, Richard Schechner, and Victor Turner have focused not only on the performative aspects of the formation and the continuity of a culture but also on the role of performance in challenging what they deemed conventional and traditional in a specific culture. Their nuances in terminology and case studies aside, the majority of these studies explored the idea of repetition in behavior as a form of performance based on an ideal model. Yet, this model carries a subversive potential inasmuch as the variations in repetitive performances tend to emphasize the process of change, and the alterations that occur

[185] Leimbacher, "An Interview with Chick Strand," 148.

within each new context. Richard Schechner's seminal text of 1985, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, which summarizes performance theories in anthropology up to its time, also introduces a new area of comparison between performance and anthropology, namely found footage film. Schechner coins the term "strip of behavior" to describe the mechanism of performance in the citation of previous acts that nevertheless adapt themselves to new contexts and experiences (this, in turn, alters the conceptualization of the myth of the "ideal" model each time).[186] Schechner borrows the term "strip" from filmmaking practices making an analogy between the repetitive performance of acts, rituals and behaviors and a found footage filmmaker's use of a filmstrip as raw material only to alter it within the new context.

Another seminal text on the issue of citation in performance that influenced subsequent theories of performance remains Jacques Derrida's 1977, "Signature, Event, Context." In this essay, Derrida theorizes a vital convergence between the performative and performance that other scholars had overlooked until that point. A performative corresponds to a speech act through which words do not merely make a statement but act, perform at the same time (as in the case of simple phrases such as "I bet," or "I apologize").[187] According to Derrida, all performance is a form of citation to the extent that it depends upon a repetition of previous acts that makes it recognizable as a performance. It is the same with performatives, since it is necessary

[186] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35.
[187] Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 223.

for them to be based on previous utterances to be identifiable.[188] What distinguishes Derrida's argument from previous structuralist approaches to performativity is their concept of the model upon which the subsequent repetitions are founded. Whereas structuralism suggests that all citations derive from ideal iterable models, Derrida argues that this "ideal" (as articulated within the tradition of Western metaphysics) presupposes a primary grounding in reality. For Derrida, such a myth of primary reality is itself constructed upon and conditioned by other "primary" structures of repetition, rendering all positions negotiable, fluid and relative.[189] In this respect, Derrida believes that every act of citation carries a subversive potential to open a space for change, insofar as the instability and contextuality of the performative act comes into view.

Although we can apply this citation theory to any found footage film that uses new contexts to subversive ends, what differentiates Strand's films becomes her specific recourse to corporeality as revealed within this citational process. In fact, Judith Butler, in her analysis of Derrida's arguments concerning performance and citationality, points to a crucial aspect that Derrida's argument lacks: "a tacit form of performativity, a citational chain lived and believed at the level of the body."[190] For Butler, certain performances are subversive precisely because the body cannot be contained by the performative or citational that produces both "an excess and an

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[188] Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," *Glyph* 1, no. 7 *(*1977): 172-197.
[189] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), 97-192.

[190] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 155.

absence."[191] The bodies of the depicted subjects as well as the film strip itself in Strand's performative cinema constitute such an excess that calls attention to the intersubjective and embodied perceptions inherent in the process of making and viewing the films.

Strand's film, *Mujer de Milfuegos (Women of A Thousand Fires)* of 1976, deals with the repetitive aspects of performative rituals and acts in which the body as excess appears once again to have subversive potential. Strand describes the subject matter of *Mujer de Milfuegos* in the Canyon catalog as follows:

> …Not a personal portrait so much as an evocation of the consciousness of women in rural parts of such countries as Spain, Greece and Mexico; women who wear black from the age 15 and spend their entire lives giving birth, preparing food and tending to household and farm responsibilities. MUJER DE MILFUEGOS depicts in poetic, almost abstract terms, their daily repetitive tasks as a form of obsessive ritual.[192]

The film addresses the notion of performance as subversive repetition on more than one level. Strand suggests that the film derives from the stories of two different people she knew, a young American and an older Mexican woman **(Figure 2.4)**. Another woman re-enacts these characters for the camera.[193] *Mujer de Milfuegos*, as Strand asserted in a 1980 article in the Los Angeles journal *Dreamworks*, also features

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[191] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 170-71.

[192] Chick Strand, "Mujer de Milfuegos," in *Canyon Cinema Catalog* 6 (San Francisco: Canyon Cinema, 1988), 222-223 and "Canyon Cinema Catalog," accessed November 30, 2012, http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=2273.

[193] Strand, "Works in Progress," 86. Also see Museum of Modern Art in New York, Department of Film, "An Evening with Chick Strand," 3 and Sheldon Film Theater, "The Films of Chick Strand," in which Strand suggests three subjectivities, that of young American woman's, herself, and the actress, surface in the film.

elements that function as re-enactments of a dream that Strand claims to have had prior to making the film.[194] In this respect, the film incorporates the subjectivities of four different women performed through the agency of a single actress. Shots of a woman dressed in black, performing housework and walking in the Mexican desert accompanied by cryptic subtitles (collaged from poems and film dialogues by Jean Cocteau) constitute the skeleton of the film. As in the case of *Mosori Monika*, close-up shots of her hands performing tasks frequently appear, culminating at the end of the film in a sequence where the woman first kills a rooster, followed by a scene in which she caresses herself. Finally the film cuts to close-up shots of her hands disemboweling the rooster and chopping its meat into pieces. The ecstatic moans and screams of a woman reaching a climax constitute the soundtrack of this section of the film, while the visual imagery finally switches to her wearing a painted mask and dancing on a mountaintop. Strand implies a subversive potential in the fleshly aspects of the everyday performative tasks (allegorized by the violence against the animal as part of the household tasks), but at the same time, points to the ritual performance's (underscored by the dance and the mask) part in the subversive and joyous exit from the conventional construction of gendered behavior. That Strand chose a rooster and not a chicken as the target of violence further implies an attack on patriarchal power.

[194] Chick Strand, "Dream Report," *Dreamworks* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 26-31. In her interview with Jane Collings, Strand explains that she based the section in which the woman in the film carries stones on her dream. She also insists that she never used such a method in another film again, as she rarely ever remembers her dreams. Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 206-207; 221.

In picturing a trance-like state, which draws parallels between violence and sexual ecstasy, the film, as argued by scholars such as James and Pramaggiore, also evokes and re-enacts the mythopoetic (or psycho-trance) films of the forties, especially those of Maya Deren, but to different ends. David James sees *Mujer de Milfuegos* as a direct derivation of Deren's cinema in its depiction of the "sensibilities of women," a theory that he once again bases on a misconception of the construction of gender in Strand's films as essentialist. In contrast, Pramaggiore believes that Strand challenges the implied identification of Deren's own subjectivity with *Meshes of The Afternoon* of 1944 via the distanciating effects of irony. I, however, argue that while *Meshes of the Afternoon* employs dreams, and by extension psychoanalysis, to depict the inner dynamics of the female mind (elements such as the multiplication of Deren's body and broken mirrors present a fractured but not fluid identity), Strand engages the ritualistic behavior of gender as performance. Unlike what Pramaggiore suggests, Strand does not display a distanced perspective on such surreal rituals, which would separate the audience from the filmic world of the woman and frame the character's deeds as absurd. On the contrary, the fleshly and ecstatic nature of the actions on screen establishes a corporeal tie between the audience and the film. To the extent that Strand constructs gender as a performative ritual in *Mujer de Milfuegos*, she also challenges an essentialist understanding of gender, instead portraying the body as the excess of repetitive performance.

This emphasis on corporeal performance in Strand's films, made as early as the mid-sixties, differentiates her work from both the underground cinema of the time

(such as the films of Stan Brakhage that foreground a romantic view of the artist as a visionary for whom it becomes possible to transmit his subjectivity through the medium), as well as contemporary feminist film-making. Even when feminist filmmakers such as Yvonne Rainer and Sally Potter utilized performance and the corporeal movements of the body in their films of the seventies, they aimed to strip the performing body of certain emotion-laden tasks and of eroticism. In films such as *Lives of Performers* (1972) and *Film About a Woman Who* (1974), Yvonne Rainer explored the generic structures of emotions and their connection to language and verbal expression rather than to the body and affect. In fact, as Noël Carroll suggests, Rainer's move from performance to the medium of film implies a desire on her part to distance the body in representation even further from the audience.[195] In this respect, Strand's film *Soft Fiction* of 1979 provides us with an excellent comparison with Rainer's films, as well as with Strand's contemporary male-subject-centered underground films **(Figure 2.5)**.

Strand organizes *Soft Fiction* around the stories and performances of eight women whom she had encountered at various points in her life. Film scholar Beverle Houston narrates the first story in which she describes her desire to become a metal banister at an exhibition opening. A handwriting analyst reads the second story from a letter that Strand claims to have received from a woman whose identity remains hidden. The letter describes its anonymous writer's visit to a rodeo where she had

[195] Noël Carroll, "Moving and Moving: From Minimalism to Lives of Performers," in *Women's Experimental Cinema*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Duke University Press: Durham & London, 2007), 89-102.

sexual encounters with several cowboys while photographing them. In the third section of the film, experimental filmmaker Melissa Lou Guido (Strand's student from Occidental College) recounts in a voice-over how her grandfather sexually abused her when she was a child. In the meantime, the visuals show her nakedly preparing breakfast and eating it in her kitchen. The fourth story belongs to the filmmaker Johanna Demetrekas, who explains how she intentionally got herself addicted to heroine in order to be able to grow out of an abusive relationship and then eventually got rid of all addictions altogether. Actress Hedy Sontag tells the fifth and final story in which as a child, she has to flirt with a Nazi soldier to distract him so that she and her family can escape during the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1941. Strand intercuts these stories with three sections: another filmmaker, Amy Halpern, travels on a train, arrives at a house (Strand's own house in Los Angeles), and leaves the place with a suitcase; dancer Simone Gad dances naked in the dark; and a singer, Cathy Freeman, sings Franz Schubert's lied *Death and The Maiden*.

Close-up shots of Halpern's face against the train's window, juxtaposed with the fast-cut views from the train, suggest a link between the journey, mobility, and the way these women continually reconstruct their subject and gender roles in *Soft Fiction*. Indeed, Strand, in an interview with Marsha Kinder, revealed that her use of the train in *Soft Fiction* implies a challenge to a conventional metaphor of experimental filmmaking:

> Trains can be symbolically linked with men, but the idea of riding on a train is somehow linked to women, perhaps because on a train you see everything in between.[196]

As I argued in the first chapter, in Bruce Baillie's film *To Parsifal* (1963), a seemingly conventional binary structures relations between a train and nature, as well as male and female figures. *To Parsifal*'s perspective on gender relations relies on fixed points even though in the end Baillie gestures toward the dissolution of traditional associations. In contrast, in *Soft Fiction*, Strand completely reverses this convention of male-centered experimental film by associating the woman with a train, and by extension culture, technology, and mobility. This association also allegorizes the mobility and fluidity of the subject and gender formations, a theme that is at work throughout the entire film.

Despite this emphasis on mobility, in *Soft Fiction*, unlike in her other films, Strand uses documentary-style talking head interviews for four stories, (except for Guido's, where her voice-over accompanies her scene in the kitchen), in which the subject narrates her story while looking directly into a stationary camera. As I have explained, Strand's signature style consists of the use of a hand-held camera marked by its shakiness, fast movements, and swish pans. Although this fluid camerawork constantly reminds the audience of the camera's and the filmmaker's presence, it also matches and underscores the transformative processes of performative subjects. Strand explained in a talk at the Cinémathèque that she used a stationary camera in *Soft*

[196] Kinder, "Soft Fiction," 52.

Fiction so as to directly address the speakers and "to encourage them by [her] facial expressions so they could speak to [her] rather than just the camera."[197] In the film, Strand treats the role of speaking as a form of "doing," thereby presenting the testimonial performance of each women as a performative that constructs and transforms subjectivity and gender.

Transformation emerges as one of the key notions of the film and in fact, Strand initially began making a film solely about Beverle Houston's desire to transform herself into a metal banister.[198] She titled the film with the transformative aspects of memory and storytelling in mind, blurring the line between "reality" and "fiction":

> …I chose *Soft Fiction* because the film is dealing with memory, and memory does change.., becomes soft around the edges... The reality then is changed. And too, true, the line between fiction and reality is soft... the more media we get, the less we know where it is.[199]

Dwelling on this notion of the capabilities of media to soften the divide between fact and fiction, Laura Rabinovitz, in her careful and comprehensive analysis of Chick Strand's film within the context of feminist film theory of seventies, rightly points to the central role of performance in *Soft Fiction*. In her critique of psychoanalytical feminist film theory and its reading of "the effects of the cinematic apparatus through

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[197] Chick Strand, "Chick Strand at the Cinémathèque," *Cinema News* 80, nos. 3, 4, 5 (1980), 10-17.
[198] Kinder, "Soft Fiction," 52-53. Strand told Kinder in an interview: "Beverle Houston and I were at an art opening. We walked down stairs and saw a nice banister. Beverle started telling about that other piece she had seen at the Pasadena Museum. I found out something about Bev I didn't know-that she was a sensuous person. I told other people that I was making a film, using this story, and they would tell me other stories. That's how the film grew." Also see Sheldon Film Theater, "The Films of Chick Strand."
[199] Strand, "Chick Strand at the Cinémathèque," 10-17.

the subject's unconscious responses to the imaginary," Rabinovitz calls attention to "just how constructed and how performative even that primal scene is," to the extent that such a scene is a "symbolic performance," in itself. For Rabinovitz, *Soft Fiction* points to that constructedness by underlining the performances of the documentary subjects and objects. Postulating that the film oscillates between the clichés of the female figure as spectacle (she believes, for instance, that the close-ups Strand frequently uses tend to restrict women's bodies, turning them into spectacle) and the intimacy of shared secrets, Rabinovitz concludes that the performance aspect of the stories undercuts and transgresses these clichés to render them ironic. I agree with Rabinovitz that the performances render Strand's film layered and reflexive and that this challenges the documentary "truth" as well as the testimonial documentaries of the feminist tradition. Rabinovitz correctly points to how the constructed nature of subjectivity in *Soft Fiction* made the film a target for many feminist theorists and film critics whose concept of feminism relied on identity politics.[200] I, however, want to intervene in her argument at the levels of the construction of the subject, the role of the speech-acts, and the female body.

First, I do not agree that Strand's representation of the female body, as well as her use of intimate secrets (which, for Rabinovitz, refers to female adolescence), consciously refer to soft-core spectacles of the female body in various media.[201] In

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[200] Paula Rabinovitz, "Ethnographies of Women: Soft Fiction and Feminist Theory," in *They Must Be Represented*, 157-175 reprinted as "Soft Fiction and Intimate Documents: Can Feminism be Posthuman?" in *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Indiana and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 97-112.
[201] ibid.

Soft Fiction, Strand uses her signature stylistic techniques such as close-ups, swish pans, and back-lighting. The only exception here remains the talking-head style, but Strand interrupts this mode occasionally with zooms onto faces and swish pans. Here, Strand establishes an intimate relation between her camera, herself, the filmed subjects, and the audience through these techniques. Contrary to Rabinovitz, I believe that this is subversive, not because the performance transgresses and exposes this constructed intimacy, but because of the intimacy *per se*. This intimacy challenges the voyeuristic space as opposed to constructing it, as Rabinovitz suggests.

For Rabinovitz, the issue of intimacy ties to how the film constructs its subjects. The subjects of the film emerge as masochistic because they tell intimate stories of empowerment through victimization. Perceiving this masochism as a Western concept, Rabinovitz argues that Strand tries to homogenize women's experience. She continues: "the straightforward presentation of women's voices, coupled with the ecstatic images of female sensuality appear as 'unsophisticated' representations of desire. These distortions reveal the fault lines of, because, they stem from, Strand's investment in a universalized vision of women's culture."[202] I have already argued that Strand strives to give voice to the varying subjectivities of women in relation to their social, historical, and cultural contexts in her other films. In *Soft Fiction*, she constructs her subjects as historically and culturally specific through the use of performatives. Although Rabinovitz argues that the narration of empowerment

[202] Rabinovitz, "*Soft Fiction* and Intimate Documents," in *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, 175.

becomes a performance in the film that adds a reflexive layer, she does not attend to how performative speech fixes the film's subjects at a certain place and time.

Rabinovitz's neglect of this aspect may derive from the theoretical separation of performance and performativity until the mid-nineties when Judith Butler (in her re-reading of Derrida) articulated the close ties between the two terms. The former distinction stemmed from an understanding of performance as a re-iteration of an ideal model (as in an actor performing a theatrical role) in which the body of the performer serves as a vessel rendering his/her subjectivity blank. The speech-acts or performatives, on the other hand, seem to express, at least to some extent, the subjectivity of the speaker. As we have seen, Derrida had called attention to the citational quality of speech-acts as well as the relationality of ideal models and the transformative aspects of re-iterative performance.

In *Soft Fiction*, it is not just the reflexive underlining of performance-acts that challenges documentary "truth," but also *what* the subjects say and *what* their speech *does*. As Rabinovitz also acknowledges, with the exception of Beverle Houston's story, which functions as a transformative catalyst in the film, each testimonial recounts survival after a traumatic experience. In a sequence where Strand films a dog sitting on an armchair and its struggle to stand up, she emphasizes this theme of surviving trauma. When it manages to stand, Strand reveals that the animal is missing one leg, and accompanies this disclosure by a soundtrack of cheering and applause. In fact, in each testimony, the women succumb to the desires of the others because that is what was expected of women - the role they had to play. However, as each woman

remembers and re-tells her testimony in performance, she suggests some form of intentionality: Houston desires to become a metal object; the photographer assumes control of the photographs she took at the rodeo and emphasizes that she wanted to participate in the group sex; Demetrekas consciously chose to get addicted to first her relationship and then to heroine; and even Sontag and Guido, both victims of child abuse, claim that they were somewhat in control to the extent that they were aware of what was being done to them and had to accept it owing to the circumstances, thereby assuming a more active role in their rendition of their story than what probably happened in actuality. As Strand suggests in an interview with Kate Haug:

> *CS:* It is a film about women who win. It is not about women who were victims or who had survived. It is about women who win. You've got a frown.
> *KH:* For me, the stories had this bittersweet edge to them. They all seemed very complex. Somehow it doesn't seem as easy as winning.
> *CS:* What I mean by winning is that they don't become victims, and they don't become survivors. They carry on. They take the responsibility for having had the experience and carrying it off and dealing with it and carrying on and becoming more potent, more powerful, more of themselves.[203]

This constant tension between survival and trauma, the "I" of their stories and the circumstances that forced to behave them in a certain way, parallels their citational performance. They repeat the traumatic act in re-telling, but as Derrida argues, the subversive potential of the citational process appears in their claim to some form of free will and subjectivity in this re-telling in the new context of a documentary film.

[203] Haug, "An Interview with Chick Strand," 116.

What Rabinovitz does not analyze remains how their testimonials constitute historically specific performatives by introducing the index "I" into their stories of subordination through speech. As an indexical function, this "I" is not an essentialist one as it points to a subject who gradually changes while it speaks in front of the audience (a process also materialized in Amy Halpern's journey). In its emphasis on the act of speech itself as a form of transformative performance, the testimonial sequences of *Soft Fiction* point to the subject formation "now and here," culturally and historically specifying such construction, re-construction, and the de-construction of subjectivities. Accordingly, unlike what Rabinovitz suggest, *Soft Fiction* does not try to formulate a universal humanist paradigm for feminism. In its underlining of the overlooked connection between performance and performative, doing and speaking, and more importantly, between the body and the language, however, the film connects to its audience on an intimate, bodily level.

As each woman speaks, Strand introduces tactility and corporeality by zooming in on her hands, face, details of the fabric of her clothing (or in the case of Guido, details of her naked body) and Demetrekas's cat. Through the help of Strand's camerawork, both the speaking "I" and the bodies become the excess of each woman's performance: even if language is always citational, the bodies in question cannot entirely be contained within this process. Such excess is, perhaps, most obvious in the case of the handwriting analyst who reads someone else's letter. As she utters the racy and titillating details of the letter, she keeps smiling and giggling - stopping at points and then continuing again. Here, humor becomes the surplus of citational

performance; it is a byproduct of the performing body and subverts the meaning structured by and limited to language. Contrary to what Rabinovitz suggests, the testimonies do not subvert the clichéd representations of the female body, but the corporeal aspects of the film transgress the meaning embedded in language as well as voyeuristic witnessing. While this establishes a phenomenological link between the film and the audience, the film also underlines the cultural and cinematic construction of the filmic subjects at a certain place and time. Rather than generating a "narcissism masquerading as ethnography,"[204] Strand concentrates on a particular context, culture, and subject that embodies a sense of multi-vocality. Within and across the films, she simultaneously underlines the historical and contextual construction and re-constructions of subjectivity and gender performance. With this in mind, I will engage the notion of history and history writing in Strand's films, *Loose Ends* and *Kristallnacht*, in the following section.

III - Cine-Histories

As I have argued in the chapter on Bruce Baillie, the experimental ethnographies of Canyon filmmakers posed a major challenge to "salvage ethnography." In its ready presumption of a progressive history, salvage ethnography refuses to acknowledge "others" as modern subjects in a shared world with those representing them. Such a conceptualization of culture, at the same time, registers history as progress. To the extent that the past (and the "primitive" cultures) do not

[204] Rabinovitz, *They Must Be Represented*, 175.

bear an immediate relation to the reality of the present, history becomes a linear narrative through which the past can be recorded, consumed, and left behind. Furthermore, this discourse of vanishing entirely obfuscates histories of violent repression and eradication by casting colonial subjects as excluded from historical progress and modernization.

Strand's films, however, in their challenge to the objectivizing tendency in conventional ethnographic documentary films that turn cultures and subjects into consumable and timeless/ahistorical entities, do not erase the historical and cultural contexts of the subjects. *Mosori Monika* makes clear that the arrival of Spanish missionaries in Carmelita's village defines her context. In the case of *Anselmo*, the archival footage of the plane flying over the desert contextualizes gift exchange in the industrial era, implying a tension between pre-industrial and capitalist economies. *Soft Fiction* focuses on women belonging to a specific artistic community in Los Angeles at a particular moment in women's history: in the seventies. Moreover, the phenomenological implications of Strand's films connect the "there and then" of the represented to the "here and now" of the viewing experience, thereby establishing connections between the past and present, self and other, yet without eradicating the contextual differences.

Through the phenomenological implications of the humorous and performative aspects of her films, Strand subverted the authoritative voice of conventional ethnographic works in their claims to a privileged relation to "reality while also challenging the illusionary distance of the filmmaker from the subjects of the film as

well as from the audience. Such a desire to challenge the objecthood of the ethnographic subjects also manifests itself in the "shared anthropology" films of Jean Rouch in the fifties, which reflexively questioned the flaws of representation and encouraged ethnographic subjects to participate in the filmmaking process. Rouch's cinema nevertheless partakes in the mission of salvage ethnography to the extent that he addresses modernism and its assimilative effects on the colonial subject in his films on Africa, especially *Les Maîtres Fous (The Mad Masters)*. This film concentrates on how the Hauka movement of Niger subversively incorporated their British colonial administrators into their trance ritual as god-like figures of possession. In his brilliant film, *Rouch in Reverse* of 1995, Manthia Diawara suggests that Rouch's salvage ethnography draws attention away from the real problem of the violent, paternalist, and racist discourse of colonialism. Since salvage ethnography seeks to preserve the "primitive," as the nostalgic return to the childhood of humanity, Diawara jokingly refers to this as Rouch's projection of the undeveloped child inside him onto Africa. As an alternative, Diawara introduces his counter-ethnography generated by interviewing metropolitan Africans. In a similar vein, *Mosori Monika*, rather than lamenting the disappearance of a culture due to modernity, exposes the colonial voice while exploring the multiple experiences within the now cross-cultural space. Furthermore, Strand's works differ from those of Rouch in their constant effort to display 'subjects' themselves as historical effects of performance and performativity. The elements of desire, humor, tactility and performativity in works such as *Mosori*

Monika (1970) and *Soft Fiction* (1979) counterbalance the reflexivity and doubt in representation.

Through the use of these elements, Strand's films denaturalize the reconstruction process of culture and history, embodying a postmodern concept of history. Such a reflexive understanding of history as a *product* of representation transpires in Strand's *Loose Ends* of 1979. A found footage film, *Loose Ends*, brings together the history of cinema (via imagery appropriated from the Lumière Brothers to shots showing an audience hypnotically watching a film and several images of film reels) and footage from historiographic documentaries and newsreels (including Georges Franju's 1949 documentary *Blood of the Beasts*, imagery of agriculture, World War II refugees, and third world poverty*)*; an educational film from the forties made for teachers on how to handle troubled children called *Learning to Understand Children: Part I – A Diagnostic Approach*; and subtitles from Alain Resnais's 1961 film *Last Year at Marienbad*.[205]

On a reflexive level, Strand comments on the ties between representation and violence, not only in terms of how film represents violence but also how it violates through representation. Strand juxtaposes imagery of stocks of film reels piled up on top of each other and scenes where film strips are cut and edited with the infamous shots from *Blood of the Beasts* that depict farmers killing and skinning a horse. To the extent that the flesh of the horse and the filmstrip become the raw material for each process in the associational montage, Strand seems to address the functions of

[205] Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 321-322; 335-342.

representation as violent rather than the films themselves. By interpolating the subtitles from *Last Year at Marienbad*, which point to the tensions between past and present, fact and fiction in the construction and re-construction of memory, *Loose Ends*' treatment of film edition, history and viewing links history, memory, and representation insofar as they narrativize their raw material. In Strand's film the violence associated with the functions of representation thus becomes an allegory of such narrativization. The fragmentary nature of both *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Loose Ends* resists such linear re-telling that naturalizes the authorial voice as well as the fictive elements of memory and history. Freely interwoven historical, fictional, and documentary material expose the constructed nature of history writing, inextricably linking it to specific modes of representation. Strand contrasts an understanding of history and memory as something coherent and securely in the past with the fragmentary and archival nature of her own form of representation. The title of the film itself comments on and challenges the linear concept of time and history.

The film concludes with images of third world poverty juxtaposed with subtitles from *Last Year at Marienbad*: "…from this intricate frieze of grotesque boughs and wreaths, like ancient foliage, the whole story came to an end. In a few moments it will harden forever in a marble past buried in a frozen garden of soothing formality, with clipped shrubs and ordered paths." The hardened, marble past criticized in *Last Year in Marienbad* contrasts with Strand's view of time. Strand leaves ends loose, connecting different points in history with the "here and now" of the audience through the corporeality of the filmic material and representation. The

fragmentary and dynamic structure of *Loose Ends* also implies the experience of a history by a subject in constant flow of change and transformation - a subject constructed and reconstructed as a performance in relation to the history itself. This is also a theme that Strand thoroughly explores in *Kristallnacht*, which she made the same year.

Strand shot two films, *Kristallnacht* and *Fever Dream*, both in black and white, around the same time. A seven-minute long film, *Fever Dream* depicts two women making love although the lighting and level of abstraction renders the two figures unrecognizable, floating figures in the dark. In this respect, *Fever Dream* deals with issues of desire, corporeality and sensation while depicting its subjects as fluid forms in performance for the camera. The dedication of *Kristallnacht* to the memory of Anne Frank makes the seemingly politically-neutral film interesting. Strand has emphasized in several interviews that the film focuses on the Holocaust as its title also suggests.[206] A simple film that by no means directly refers to the Holocaust, *Kristallnacht*, however, has a similar aesthetics to *Fever Dream*. For almost the entirety of the film, two women facing each other swim in a lake at night. Owing to the back lighting Strand uses, prominent reflections constantly waver on the surface of water, while the faces of the women remain vague. Throughout the end of the film, among the nature sounds and the laughter of women, a train whistle blows. Clearly an

[206]ibid, 309.

allusion to the Nazi regime's transfer of the Jewish population to camps by trains,[207] the train whistle and the ensuing sound of a moving train transform the imagery on screen so that the images of women fade and the wavering, fluid light crystallizes into abstract shapes that no longer belong to the realm of water but become solidified forms **(Figure 2.5)**. When analyzed in relation to the subject formation in *Fever Dream*, *Kristallnacht* clearly functions as an allegory of a historical point where fascism rendered the existence of fluid subjectivities impossible. At the same time, the change in the meaning of the allegory of the train from *Soft Fiction* to *Kristallnacht* exposes how allegory itself emerges and makes meaning in relation to a certain historical context. While travel by train points to a mobile perception and being "in-between" in the context of seventies Los Angeles, it becomes the Nazi threat in the context of World War II[208]

Between motion and stillness, fluid and crystal forms, Strand simultaneously exposes the problems of freezing history within a textual space whereby the past and present are conceived as separate entities. Such a concept of history reduces the past (and in ethnography, a culture) into an object of consumption that can be abandoned as it bears no immediate relation to the present. Strand's films address this problematic understanding of history and of other cultures in order to connect a past historical event to a contingent moment in the present of the film, thereby demonstrating the

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[207]ibid, 309-310, Haug, "An Interview with Chick Strand," 125, and Strand, "Chick Strand at the Cinematheque," 10–17.

[208]Strand, in fact, originally conceived *Soft Fiction*, *Cartoon Le Mousse*, *Loose Ends*, *Kristallnacht*, and *Fever Dream* as one longer film but decided to separate them to simplify the project. See Strand and Collings, *Out of the Seventies*, 228.

lack of a definite ending. Her films' unique approach lies in their revelation of the threats to the fluid constructions of subjectivity both in visual representation as well as in history. Across the tapestry of her tightly interwoven films, two strands, one belonging to an ecstatic shock, and the other to subversive humor intermingle to directly address the bodies of the audience.

CHAPTER III

Across the Traces: Larry Jordan's Animated Documents

> ... a symbol, in itself, is a mere dream; it does not show what it is talking about. It needs to be connected with its object. For that purpose, an *index* is indispensable. No other kind of sign will answer the purpose. That a word cannot in strictness of speech be an index is evident from this, that a word is general - it occurs often, and every time it occurs, it is the same word, and if it has any meaning *as a word*, it has the same meaning every time it occurs; while an index is essentially an affair of here and now, its office being to bring the thought to a particular experience, or series of experiences connected by dynamical relations. A meaning is the associations of a word with images, its dream exciting power. An index has nothing to do with meanings; it has to bring the hearer to share the experience of the speaker by *showing* what he is talking about.
>
> - Charles Sanders Peirce[209]

In 1978, Larry Jordan came across footage he had shot some twenty years earlier within his collection of thousands of Victorian steel engravings, old photographs, and hundreds of film reels. Deciding to resurrect this project, Jordan titled it *Visions of A City*, and without making too many alterations, reprinted it for public distribution. For Jordan, the appeal of the film resided in a quality he "deplored the scarcity of: documents of how it really looked in a certain place in a certain year."[210] While this statement seemingly contrasts with what shapes his long

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[209] Charles Sanders Peirce, "The Essence of Reason" *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 3, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958), 56.
[210] Larry Jordan, "Program Notes for the Films of Larry Jordan" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, c. 1978), 1.

filmmaking career of "surrealist animation," certain issues, such as documentation, recycling, and contingency of time and place, in fact manifest themselves over and over in both his animated and live action films. The cut-out technique of his animations appropriated from obsessively-collected ephemera as well as the content and cinematography of his live action films define subjectivity as a fluid form whereby the bodies and voices of the subjects become agents of transformation. Such fluid forms of subjectivity seem to emerge from the tensions between still and moving imagery, indexicality and animation, as well as surrealist, historiographic and ethnographic modes of filmic expression. In this chapter, I will concentrate on these tensions to map out how Jordan generates a surreal form of historiography that dwells on the animation of old documents. How does Jordan approach the modes of documentary and animation? What kind of productive sites open up in his combination of animation with indexical traces of history and culture? What are the overlooked interconnections between Jordan's cinema and those of Strand and Baillie, especially along the lines of the functions of allegory, performance, and indexicality?

Jordan was born and raised in Denver, Colorado where he attended South Denver High School with the experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage. Their common interest in art and film from an early age gave birth to a life-long friendship as well as to a student art club called Gadflies (named after Socrates' "gadfly ethics," as described in Plato's *Apology*). The club became a hub for extracurricular intellectual activities such as renting and showing a diversity of films by D. W. Griffith, Carl

Dreyer, and Maya Deren from the from Museum of Modern Art in New York.[211] Some other members of the group comprised the musicians James Tenney and Romero Cortez.[212] In 1952, after graduating from high school, Jordan attended Harvard with the initial plan to acquire a degree in medicine. There, in the university film club, he not only saw for the first time films by Sergei Eisenstein, Jean Cocteau, and early French and German experimental filmmakers but also acquired the chance to experiment with filmmaking.[213] Yet, at the end of his first year Jordan suffered a serious mental breakdown and moved back to his hometown to reunite with other Gadflies members.[214]

In 1954, in search of a more vivid avant-garde culture, Jordan moved to San Francisco, following his friend Stan Brakhage. Unlike Brakhage, however, Jordan was deeply impressed with the art scene and alternative culture of the place and settled there. He quickly became friends with poets and artists Michael McClure, Jess Collins, and Robert Duncan and experimental filmmakers Jordan Belson and Bruce Conner.[215] These acquaintances exposed Jordan to collage and assemblage art for the first time. In 1961, Jess Collins introduced him to dada, surrealism and especially the artist Max Ernst by giving him two of Ernst's novels: *La Femme 100 têtes* (1929) and *Une*

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[211] Scott MacDonald, "Nathaniel Dorsky and Larry Jordan on Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren, Joseph Cornell, and Bruce Conner," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24, no. 1 (2007): 2.
[212] Paul Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Larry Jordan, December 19, 1995 - July 30, 1996, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution," accessed March 27, 2013, http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-larry-jordan-12216.
[213] G. T. Collins, "Larry Jordan's Underworld (interview with Larry Jordan)," *Animation Journal* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 63.
[214] Paul Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Larry Jordan."
[215] ibid.

Semaine de bonté (1933).[216] Impressed by the rich imagery of Ernst's collage-novels and having no funds to purchase the books for himself, Jordan photographed each page with a Roloflex camera and in the process detected a potential in these collages to be transformed into 'moving images." Jordan recounts this realization as a discovery in a half-awake, half-dream state:

> … I woke up from a nap one afternoon and I thought "I've been seeing a movie in extreme slow motion, one image after another," and I thought I could go buy some engravings and I'd know what to do with them, I could make [them] move.[217]

Under the influence of these encounters, Jordan began collecting Victorian engravings that could be purchased for fifty cents per book at the time and experimenting with cut-out animation along with live action film.[218] Adopting what he describes as a "post-Dadaist" aesthetics, Jordan brought together Dada's subversive anti-establishment politics[219] and surrealist allusions to the collective unconscious.[220] In 1956, he went to New York for a few months to work with Maya Deren and Stan

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[216] Michael Duncan and Christopher Wagstaff, ed., *An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle* (Portland: Pomegranate Communications, 2013), 234-35.
[217] Patricia Kavanaugh, "Interview with Lawrence Jordan," *Animatrix: A Journal of the UCLA Animation Workshop*, no. 15 (2007): 32. On Jordan's comments on Max Ernst's collage-novels, also see Kevin B. Lee, "An Evening with Lawrence Jordan, Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago, November 2012, Fandor Keyframe Video Essay," accessed May 31, 2013, http://www.fandor.com/keyframe/video-an-evening-with-lawrence-jordan.
[218] See Kavanaugh, "Interview with Lawrence Jordan," 32 and Kevin B. Lee, "An Evening with Lawrence Jordan."
[219] Lawrence Jordan, "Survival in the Independent - Non-Commercial –Avant-Garde – Experimental – Personal – Expressionistic Film Market of 1979," *Cinemanews* 79, nos. 2, 3, 4 (1979), n.p., reprinted in MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema*, 329-38.
[220] Larry Jordan, "Notes on the Visible Compendium," (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, c. 1990), 1-2 and Collins, "Larry Jordan's Underworld," 61.

Brakhage, assisting Deren in filming a Haitian wedding.[221] In Deren's apartment, he was also introduced to Joseph Cornell, whose assemblage boxes and collage films influenced Jordan's own filmmaking.[222] Once back in San Francisco, Jordan co-founded the Camera Obscura Film Society with Bruce Conner in 1957.[223] In a small church on Washington Street near Van Ness, they showcased experimental films by James Broughton, Maya Deren, and Kenneth Anger as well as earlier European ones by Man Ray, Rene Clair, and Jean Epstein for a year and a half.[224]

Jordan met Baillie when the latter reached out to him to do a retrospective of Jordan's films as part of the Canyon screening series. Jordan began attending some of the screenings and soon became a member of the collective. His exposure to the films made by the other members of Canyon Cinema shaped Jordan's filmmaking career in notable ways. Both his animations and live action films already displayed aspects that distinguish his production from that of the romantic tradition generally associated with Stan Brakhage in terms of approaches to questions of subjectivity, the conceptualization of time, and an emphasis on culture and history. Yet, from the point when he became associated with Canyon Collective onwards, these differences emerged much more prominently, eventually turning into tools for giving voice to a postmodern understanding of history, a representational concern shared by the members of the group. Jordan's body of animation as well as live footage films

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[221] Lawrence Jordan, "My Travels with Stan," *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 41 (Fall 2003): 76.
[222] MacDonald, "Nathaniel Dorsky and Larry Jordan," 6-7.
[223] Paul Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Larry Jordan."
[224] Geritz, "The Venue Vanguard: Artists as Exhibitors, 1955-1965 (An Interview with Lawrence Jordan)," in *Radical Light*, ed. Anker, Geritz, and Seid, 79-83.

explores the concepts of time, mobility, and transformation while bridging the seeming gap between the lyric and poetry films of the fifties and the conceptual and self-reflexive avant-garde of the seventies. At the same time, in his transformation of still memorabilia and ephemera, Jordan blurs the boundaries between the realms of the visual and tactile as well as the past, present, and future tenses. Jordan's animations open up a space of resistance in the still imagery within which the discourses of history, nostalgia, and hermetic subjectivities remain at work.

In comparison to the number of film reviews of Bruce Baillie and Chick Strand in scholarly journals, the attention Jordan garnered from film critics upon the release of his films appears insignificant. While Baillie and Strand's films received a handful of reviews in the sixties and seventies issues of the *Millennium Film Journal* and *Film Quarterly* magazines, only one commentary on one of his films, *Hildur and the Magician* of 1970, found its way onto the pages of a cinema journal.[225] A few other reviews of Jordan's films appeared in newspapers such as *The Village Voice*, *The New York Times*, and *San Francisco Chronicle* on the occasion of showcases of his films in venues varying from the San Francisco Cinematheque to the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[226] Several standard

[225] Ernest Callenbach, "Film Review: *Hildur and the Magician*," *Film Quarterly* 23, No. 4 (Summer 1970): 60.
[226] Richard Eder, "Film: 'Apparition' a Dream – Haunting but also Dull," *The New York Times*, December 15, 1976, Richard McGuinness, "Film: The Malady of Repetition," *The Village Voice*, December 30, 1971, and Howard Thompson, "'Hildur and the Magician' at the Whitney," *The New York Times*, December 24, 1971, Thomas Albright, "Jordan's Magic is Bizarre Surrealistic Combinations," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 14, 1976, 15. For later reviews also see Kelvin Ahlgren, "A Master of Experimental Short Subjects," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 25, 1983

histories of experimental cinema, such as those by David E. James, Sheldon E. Renan, David Curtis, and A. L. Rees, mention Jordan's name in passing under the categories of "film poem," "lyrical film," "surrealist film," or "collage animation," yet due to their scope and introductory purposes, these works do not provide the readers with a survey of his films in relation to the social, cultural, and historical atmosphere within which Jordan worked.[227] Instead, as in the case of Baillie and Strand, these accounts incorporate Jordan's name into already existing categories associated with figures that they deem the "master" of certain genres such as Stan Brakhage (film poem, lyrical film), Joseph Cornell (surrealist collage film), and Bruce Conner (found footage film). I will address this issue throughout this chapter, arguing that Jordan's interest in the concepts of time, history, and culture challenges both these categories and the paradigm of direct influences.

The literature on Jordan, and particularly P. Adams Sitney's work, classifies Jordan among other "visionary artists" whose work supposedly reflects their unique perspectives and artistic visions.[228] Such a categorization could happen partly because of the surreal atmosphere of Jordan's films, which critics and historians have associated with a personal style and immaculate technique, but without considering

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and Karl Cohen, "Larry Jordan Headlines Animation Show at Cinematheque," *Film/Tape World* (March 1991).

[227] See, for instance, Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground*, 153-55, Curtis, *Experimental Cinema*, 79, James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 119, Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*, 37-38; 149-151, Dixon, *The Exploding Eye*, 86-87, Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, 74.

[228] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 293-294; 307-14, P. Adams Sitney, *Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 98; 297-98, and P. Adams Sitney, "Moments of Illumination," *Artforum International* 47, no. 8 (April, 2009): 162-69.

the ample historical appropriations and cultural references in his oeuvre. For instance, Jonas Mekas, whose extremely harsh criticism of Chick Strand culminated in his questioning the formal "intelligence," sensitivity, and tastefulness of her work,[229] celebrated Jordan's films in the late sixties:

> If I'd have to name one dozen really creative artists in the independent (avant-garde) film area, I'd name Larry Jordan as one. His animated (collage) films are among the most beautiful short films made today. They are surrounded with love and poetry. His content is subtle, his technique is perfect, his personal style unmistakable.[230]

Mekas could more easily incorporate Jordan's figure than he could Strand into the contemporary master narratives of experimental film, in which a romanticized male artist materializes his personal perspective in cinematic formal explorations, even though both artists extensively use found material, animation, and collage as a way to reflexively mediate culture and history. Such critical narratives compare experimental films of especially the fifties and sixties to romanticism, and romantic poetry in particular, in terms of allegedly universal allusions to a sense of flow, rhythm and pattern, along with careful composition, as methods of surfacing the artist's personal emotions embedded in his consciousness. In a much more recent article, Richard Deming furthers this portrayal of Jordan as the romantic visionary artist whose works transcend history and aspire to ubiquitous and all-inclusive meaning by analyzing

[229] Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," 32.
[230] Jonas Mekas, "Program Notes for the Larry Jordan Retrospective at San Francisco Museum of Art, Pacific Film Archives, and Canyon Cinematheque" (unpublished Program Notes, Pacific Film Archives, 1976). After its initial release in the program notes, several subsequent program notes and biographies of Jordan included Mekas's remarks.

undercurrents of Jordan's films that allegedly link him with the tradition of romantic poetry, an argument I will challenge in the last section of this chapter.[231]

Another common tendency of these categorizations of Larry Jordan in the histories of experimental cinema as well as experimental animation such as those by P. Adams Sitney, Sheldon Renan, and Robert Russett and Cecile Starr, appears to be the absence of his live action films and their importance to a comprehensive analysis of his animated works.[232] As I have noted, we can observe a similar approach that separates ethnographic and found footage films in the accounts on Strand. The two seemingly exclusive methods of filmmaking Jordan uses, animation and live action, closely interact with each other displaying similarities in terms of form, technique, and narration. Furthermore, the live action films of Jordan showcase the major differences of his conceptualization of subjectivity at an early stage of his filmmaking career from the other films categorized under "lyrical film." James Peterson remains the only scholar who focuses on films by Jordan from both categories, yet he places these two assessments in different chapters of his book that address entirely different approaches to filmmaking. This structure thus inhibits Peterson from drawing comparisons between Jordan's two modes of production even though he analyzes each mode on separate occasions.[233]

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[231] Richard Deming, " A Cinematic Alchemy: Lawrence Jordan and the Palimpsest of Cinema," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 53, no. 2 (2013): 360-379.
[232] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 293-94, 307-14, Sitney, "Moments of Illumination," 162-69, Sitney, *Eyes Upside Down*, 297-98, Renan, *American Underground Film*, 153-55, and Robert Russett and Cecile Starr, eds., *Experimental Animation: Origins of a New Art* (New York: De Capo Press, 1988), 14-18.
[233] Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*, 37-38; 149-151.

This chapter analyzes Larry Jordan's films as a corpus comprising both live action and animated works and recognizes the links between his work and the rest of the production by Canyon artists. These shared concerns reveal themselves in a constant preoccupation with the production of change in the subject formations and positions as well as a postmodern conceptualization of time and history. Jordan considers history not as a linear progress but as a fragmentary construction open to alteration, re-reading, and reconfiguration. In this model, Jordan challenges the concept of past as a stable entity securely fixed in its historical context. Instead, Jordan emphasizes the connection between the past and the present by the use of time-images (a term that I will describe in detail later), as well as underlining the texture and rhythm of recycled archival material. In order to situate Jordan's body of films in its entirety within the context of experimental, animated, and historiographic films, I will concentrate on the following questions: What are some common formal and thematic aspects shared by the animated assemblage and live action films that make it possible to analyze Jordan's work as a whole? Do these similarities in audio-visual aspects, subject-matter and techniques materialize an essentialist/male-oriented/romanticized subjectivity across the body of work by Jordan? In what ways does Canyon Cinema programming play a significant role in Jordan's filmmaking process? What does Larry Jordan's approach to issues such as subjectivity, time, history, surrealism, assemblage, and tactility say about the place of his films within the contexts of experimental filmmaking, collage, historiographic, and animated films of the sixties and seventies, respectively?

In the first section of this chapter, I will focus on the relation of Jordan's filmmaking efforts to the film-poem or lyrical film tradition, especially as Stan Brakhage exercised it, since Jordan worked closely with Brakhage on several occasions. I will address how an interest in the representation of multiple levels of perception and the transformation of subject positions manifests in the audio-visual, thematic and technical features of the entire body of Jordan's work distinguished his approach to subjectivity in films such as *Visions of a City* (1957/1978), *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway* (1964) and *Our Lady of the Sphere* (1969) from his contemporaries. As scholars often cite surrealists as a direct influence on Jordan's animations, in the second part of the chapter I will address how Jordan's emphasis on subjectivity and materiality differ from surrealism by scrutinizing the relations between the films' conceptualization of time and the subject positions of both the filmmaker and the subjects depicted in the films.

In both his live footage and animated films such as *Orb* (1973), *Once Upon a Time* (1974), and *Cornell, 1965* (1978), time-images and transformation play a prominent role. Jordan portrays the subjects in constant change by visually activating the tension between still and moving imagery. In this chapter I will question to what extent and why Jordan defines time as a fluid form that constantly implies the presence of the past in the "here and now" of the processes of both filmmaking and spectatorship. How does almost obsessively recycling ephemera of the past in his animations contribute to a form of indexicality that points to both the original context and the present moment? And what are the ramifications of the tension emerging

between such indexicality and animation? With these questions in mind, I will also map out the ways in which Jordan's films distinguish themselves from those of Cornell.

In the last section of the chapter, with respect to this shared conceptualization of time in the work of Canyon Cinema artists, I will scrutinize Jordan's work in relation to the larger context of historiographic and ethnographic cinemas that began to emerge in the seventies, cinemas which used allegory, reflexivity, appropriation, and fragmentation as methods to challenge the dominance of linear narratives. Considering the use of repetition, transformation, layering, and materiality that dominates films such as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1977), and *The Centennial Exposition* (1964), I will question whether and to what extent it becomes possible to resist official histories tied to dominant power structures by revealing alternative paths, multiple voices, and cyclical repetitions of histories.

I- Perception and Magic: Ways of Looking

Annette Michelson, in her 1973 essay "Camera Lucida / Camera Obscura," on Sergei Eisenstein and Stan Brakhage to their contemporary film culture noted:

> …filmmaking and the theory and criticism of film must, in their most intensive and significant instances, ultimately situate themselves in relation to the work and thinking of these two artists [Eisenstein and Brakhage], and I will infer correlatively, that failure to do so may be seen most indulgently as provincialism, must more exactly be termed unseriousness.[234]

[234] Annette Michelson, "Camera Lucida / Camera Obscura," *Artforum* 11, no. 5 (January 1973b): 31.

Michelson's bold statement discloses a general tendency in the standard histories of experimental cinema from the seventies, especially that of Sitney, whose two chapters almost entirely dedicated to Brakhage form the backbone of *Visionary Film*. While Michelson's essay mainly points to the significance of Brakhage (and Eisenstein) in defining the counter-culture aspects of avant-garde film, scholars such as Curtis, Renan, Sitney, and Peterson analyzed the majority of the experimental film production of the sixties, including that of Jordan, under the headings "film poem / lyrical film," terms whose defining characteristics such as abstract imagery, fast cutting, and a mobile camera they derived from the oeuvre of Brakhage. Yet, while we can observe some formal and technical similarities in these "film poems / lyrical films," these critical reviews overlook key differences in the socio-historical undercurrents of various productions. As opposed to most other film artists working around the same time, Brakhage tried to (and to some extent managed to) control the conceptualization of his own cinema largely by publishing the aims and stakes of his working methods and aesthetics. In part as a consequence of this, scholars began to delineate what a "film poem / lyrical film" is along the lines of Brakhage's own philosophies and theories, in turn assigning them to other filmmakers who use more-or-less similar formal and technical methods.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, this Brakhage-dominated frame also appears in the literature on Baillie, partially due to a selective reading of only a few films out of a vast body of work. In the case of Baillie, however, the difference from

Brakhage becomes more legible because of Baillie's political agenda concerning minority movements and his interest in the newsreel format. Such concerns reveal themselves in Baillie's experimental documentary mode, which always refers to and records the outside world no matter how visually altered that world appears. The difference between Jordan's films and those of Brakhage appears to be subtler. The technique and surrealist affinities in Jordan's animated work has led many scholars to disregard its direct references to the outside world. I would like to challenge these conceptions by pointing to his use of visual and material culture, such as recycled engravings, prints, and paintings, and by exploring the concept of "magic" that appears repeatedly in the literature on Jordan. For now, I will focus on the three major features that make Jordan's practice incompatible with that of Brakhage, namely the ways in which Jordan's films conceptualize the perception of the outside world, subjectivity, and visuality.

Brakhage's interest in experimental form emanates from a desire entirely to free the eye from cultural constraints[235] and explore the act of perception as it manifests itself in the individual's mind (which is Brakhage's mind in his films):

> …I began to feel that all history, all life, all that I would have as material with which to work, would have to come from inside of me out rather than as some form imposed from the outside in. I had the concept of everything radiating out of me, and that the more personal or egocentric I would become, the deeper I

[235] Brakhage, "The Camera Eye," n.p.

> would reach and the more I could touch those universal concerns that would involve all man.[236]

Such a perspective on perception assumes an autonomous subjectivity that materializes on the tangible surface of the film through technical methods of solarization, overexposure, and creative uses of colored filters and distorting camera lenses. Dwelling on Brakhage's writings as well as films, David James, in a 2005 essay, carefully discerns the principles of his filmmaking:

> His vision of an uncompromised *art* of film understood art as in a Romantic idealized form. It was supposed to proceed from a source that was simultaneously somatic and divine that he named, "the muse": it entailed the complete primacy and autonomy of the visual sense and re-creation in film of seeing in all its physiological and psychological forms, from the impulses of the brain cells to the sightings of cosmic events. It equally entailed the rejection of the narrative forms of the industrial feature film and indeed all visualizations apart from the assertively first person.[237]

These principles combined with the autobiographical subject matter that dominates the majority of Brakhage's films supposedly reflect the registers of the inner mind rather than the outside world. It seems not coincidental that the most well-known and celebrated film of Brakhage remains the *Dog Star Man* series of 1961-1964, which explores aspects of his isolated life in a cabin in Colorado. The use of superimpositions and color filters in the series abstract the recordings of Brakhage's daily life to such an extent that the film becomes the case study and emblem of

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[236] P. Adams Sitney, "An Interview with Stan Brakhage," *Film Culture*, no. 30 (Fall 1963): n.p., reprinted in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970): 229.
[237] James, "Introduction: Stan Brakhage, The Activity of His Nature," in James, ed., *Stan Brakhage: Filmmaker*, 2-3.

scholarship that insists on seeing all contemporary experimental film production as "lyrical."[238]

In Brakhage's films, not only do the technical methods alter the indexical trace of the outside world on the film roll, culminating in abstract forms of expression, but they also emphasize visuality over other senses. Brakhage considers this emphasis as a vital element of the experimental film mode in his 1963 essay "Metaphors on Vision":

> To see is to retain – to behold. Elimination of all fear is in sight – which must be aimed for. Once vision may have been given – that which seems inherent in the infant's eye, an eye which reflects the loss of innocence more eloquently than any other human feature, an eye which soon learns to classify sights, an eye which mirrors the movement of the individual towards death by its increasing inability to see (…) Yet I suggest that there is a pursuit of knowledge foreign to language and founded upon visual communication, demanding a development of the optical mind, and dependent upon perception in the original and deepest sense of the word.[239]

In this kind of visual communication that speaks the language of the direct, non-conceptual perception, Brakhage suggests, the camera becomes an extension of the mind's eye inasmuch as the filmmaker puts to use the techniques that would modify the mechanical reproduction of the outside world.[240]

Such an attention to visual perception prevails so prominently in Brakhage's films that Brakhage eliminates any material with the potential to appeal more to the

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[238] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 135-36; 189-205 and Tyler, *Underground Film*, 220.
[239] Stan Brakhage "Metaphors on Vision," *Film Culture*, no. 30 (Autumn 1963): n.p., reprinted in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Brady, fourth edition (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 71.
[240] ibid, 72-73.

senses of hearing and touch as much as possible. His more than three hundred and fifty works comprise only twenty-seven sound films.[241] Jordan, on the other hand, highlights the prominence of sound in his films in several interviews.[242] As in the case of his collaged imagery, Jordan records "found sounds" at several locations and assembles these with music carefully to compose his soundtracks. In fact, in his film *The Visual Compendium* of 1990, Jordan experimented with composing the soundtrack first and only then turned to developing the cut-out animation that would accompany it[243] – a gesture that attests to the need to distinguish his work from Brakhage's near-obsession with visuality. Furthermore, Jordan's interest in the combined use of sound and visual material to create affective and immersive environments recently culminated in a collaborative project in which he and the musician John Davis stage performances of live animation and music in search of an expanded cinema.[244]

In an earlier film, *Wedlock House: An Intercourse* of 1959, Brakhage reflects on how he perceives his marriage through "inner vision," whereby the techniques of solarization, superimposition and extensive use of distorting lenses and close-ups visually modify his documentation of the first few months of the life of the newly-

[241] Eric Smigel, "Metaphors on Vision: James Tenney and Stan Brakhage, 1951-1964," *American Music* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 61-100 and William C. Wees, "Words and Images in Stan Brakhage's *23rd Psalm Branch*," *Cinema Journal* 27, no. 2 (Winter, 1988): 40-49.
[242] Paul Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Larry Jordan," Collins, "Larry Jordan's Underworld," 54-69, Robert Russett, "Interview with Larry Jordan," in Russett and Starr, ed., *Experimental Animation*, 54-59, Patricia Kavanaugh, "Interview with Lawrence Jordan," 25-37.
[243] Larry Jordan, "Notes on the Visible Compendium" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, c. 1990), 1-2 and Kevin B. Lee, "An Evening with Lawrence Jordan."

[244] For further information on the performance project, see their official website, www.noiseforlight.com, last accessed January 10, 1014.

weds. Even though Brakhage recorded their sexual intercourse as part of their daily life, he solarized the close-up shots of himself and his wife making love. This solarization transforms the bodies into abstract, black and white facades with little volume so that they no longer portray a sensuality that appeals primarily to the sense of vision. The surfaces in the film carry a potential of tactile perception, as in Chick Strand's films, which are filled with richly saturated surfaces of color and texture that break down the three dimensional illusionistic space between the viewer and the screen. In Brakhage's case, however, the use of black and white tones produces an abstraction that erases textural qualities as well as the glimmers of light on the surfaces. While any film that focuses on the body, especially the texture of the skin, may carry the potential for an embodied experience that address the other senses than visuality, I would argue that Brakhage prioritizes the visual realm over the others, even though he does not completely do away with them. Jordan's technique of cut-out animation, on the other hand, brings the tactile sensations to the fore to the extent that Jordan highlights scissor cuts around the figures, the layering of several cut-out figures and engravings on top of each other, along with the rich textures of the archival ephemera, rather than concealing them.

The centrality of visual perception in Brakhage's films and film theory seem to go hand in hand with the materialization of a subjective way of looking within the diegesis of film. In his writings, he occasionally uses the word "eye" to refer to both the organ of vision and the mind:

> My eye, tuning toward the imaginary, will go to any wave-lengths for its sights. I'm writing of cognizance, mind's eye awareness of all addressing vibrations. What rays pass through this retina still unretained by mind?[245]

Even in films such as *Pittsburgh Trilogy*, in which Brakhage seemingly turns his attention to the outside world (namely a Pittsburgh hospital, police station, and a morgue), thereby diverging from his normative philosophy of individualistic vision for a "documentary premise,"[246] the extensive use of close-ups and unusual camera angles signals his insistence on a subjective perspective. According to Annette Michelson, such an introverted attitude corresponds to Brakhage's own way of rebellion:

> It is a tragedy of our time (that tragedy is not, by any means, exclusively, but rather, like so much else, *hyperbolically* American) that Brakhage should see his social function as defensive in the Self's last-ditch stand against the mass, against the claims of any possible class, political process, or structure, assuming its inevitable assault upon the sovereignty of the Self, positing the imaginative consciousness as inherently apolitical.[247]

This apolitical approach becomes especially significant when we consider the subject matter of *Pittsburgh Trilogy*, that is the institutional contexts that control and discipline the individual, as Michel Foucault would put it.[248]

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[245] Stan Brakhage, "My Eye," *Film Culture*, no. 30 (Autumn 1963): n.p.
[246] John Pruitt, "Stan Brakhage and the Long Reach of Maya Deren's Poetics of Film," *Chicago Review* 47, no. 4 / 48, no. 1 (Winter 2001 / Spring 2002): 116-132.
[247] Michelson, "Camera Lucida / Camera Obscura," 31.
[248] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, Inc., 1995), originally published as *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la Prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

Pittsburgh Trilogy contains *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* of 1971, which, at first glance, appears to be unusual in relation to other Brakhage films inasmuch as he focuses on the human body so closely and without any effects of solarization and superimposition that would otherwise abstract and erase the effect of tactile sensation. Yet, the bodies that become the subject of Brakhage's inspection happen to be dead and thus devoid of any possible reciprocal sensations. What is more, Brakhage's use of close-ups nears abjection in many instances; the film incites the viewers to look away from the screen and thereby solidifies the distance between them and the filmic material. It is worth noting here that in their feminist documentary *Schmeerguntz*, Nelson and Wiley used abjection as a method to shun visual and tactile pleasure from their depiction of the female bodies. While the reasons underlying such defiance of tactility and corporeality vary, it becomes evident that only certain types of documentary treatments of physical surfaces highlight the sense of touch. I believe such an emphasis stems from a phenomenological understanding of film experience that attempts to establish an intimate relation between the audience and the filmed subjects. In the case of Canyon filmmakers, a recognition and reflexive exposition of the different spatio-temporal (and also cultural and historical) contexts of these subjects accompanies this intimacy: their films draw the audience close to the filmic space and subjects while simultaneously reminding them of the gap.

The tension between intimacy and distance manifests itself in Jordan's engagement with the socio-historical context of the archival material through the recycling and animation of old still imagery. In his animations, the phenomenological

implications of both the rich texture of cut-out ephemera, along with their direct address to the viewer, accompany allusions to their original context, thereby offering a critical historiographic perspective. This engagement with the past already appears in an earlier live action film, *Visions of A City* that Jordan shot in 1955 and edited in 1978 upon finding the long discarded footage and deciding to re-source it. Only six minutes long and photographed in sepia tones, *Visions of A City* documents the streets of San Francisco - a project that other Canyon filmmakers time and again explored with diverse outcomes in films such as Bruce Baillie's *On Sundays* of 1961-62 and Robert Nelson's *Oh Dem Watermelons* of 1965. What drastically separates the conceptualization of perception in *Visions of A City* from that of Brakhage films, including the ones that supposedly have a documentary agenda, is Jordan's insistent positioning of consciousness as a product of the outside world. In order to do so, Jordan filmed the streets of the city entirely as they register on reflective surfaces, such as shop, house, car, and tram windows, mirrors, and even a bottle that lies on the street. He therefore displaces the initial locus of perception from the inner mind to the outside world and its objects. Even when the utmost distortion of the outside world takes place on the reflective surface of a bottle, Jordan, instead of using an ambiguous close-up that would veil the source of this view, contains the bottle as a whole within the shot to make sure that the viewers perceive this modification as an effect of the outside world.

Jordan's phenomenological approach to perception assumes that the subject is a continuous part of his/her environment, as opposed to autonomous as in the case of

Brakhage. This approach manifests itself further in the ways he depicts movement in the film. Motion and mobility transpire as remarkable focal points of the film inasmuch as Jordan represents San Francisco as a city that never rests, conceptualizing this sense of mobility as residing within the city itself rather than in the movements of the camera. The first half of the film entirely concentrates on still surfaces, including shop and house windows as well as mirrors on which Jordan's camera catches glimpses of the movements of walking people and passing vehicles. In the second half, Jordan switches the focus to mobile surfaces such as the windows of cars and trams that, in turn, reflect the buildings and people they pass. In either case, the camera remains still within an individual shot and Jordan implies its movement only through editing that cuts between scenes of different locations and surfaces. A very similar approach underscores another early live action film Jordan shot in 1957, *Waterlight*. This film documents Jordan's travels up a river to Saigon in a Merchant Marine ship.[249] Even though the subject matter of *Waterlight* becomes the very movement of Jordan (and his camera) up a river, his camera remains insistently still while recording the movements of the ship, other boats passing by, waves of the river, people on the ship and even the wavering of the ship through a storm. Both of Jordan's films, in this respect, diverge from those of Brakhage in which he depicts movement as an effect of the fast swishes of a mobile camera, which supposedly functions as an extension of Brakhage's mind, thereby depicting his own perception of motion as the production of motion. The two become the same thing, threatening to collapse the distance between

[249] Paul Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Larry Jordan."

perception and the perceived. Jordan noted such collapse in his description of Brakhage's filming method as "trance";

> [Brakhage] has a very large, bombastic personality, but when he takes up the camera, his outer personality turns off completely. You don't notice him; you don't look at him. He's disappeared down the barrel of the viewfinder of the camera. He's in a trance, and it's a trance of seeing. That's what makes his films centrally different from other film-makers that have tried to emulate him. He honestly is in a trance with what he sees in the viewfinder, and that's what I think of the trance film.

As Brakhage's writings on his philosophy of film suggest, the mediation of the functions and visions of his inner mind constitutes the main objective of his experimental cinema. Brakhage's films repeatedly emphasize the individual whose supposedly autonomous subjectivity reveals itself through the medium of film. In *Wedlock House: An Intercourse*, for instance, Brakhage concentrates solely on his own perception of the shared experience of marriage and domestic life as a couple. In order to highlight the fact that the film registers only his own perspective, Brakhage extensively uses shots featuring his wife, and whenever he appears in the shots they record his reflection on mirrors, underlining that the person holding the camera remains Brakhage, rather than his wife, whose point of view continues to be invisible.

In Jordan's *Visions of A City*, on the other hand, what the viewer seems to encounter is a shared experience of the city and a collective perception that constitutes the subjectivities of various people. To some extent, Jordan achieves this effect by highlighting the role of the reflective surfaces that render the point of view of the film

ambiguous. Moreover, some scenes capture Jordan's friend, the poet Michael McClure, walking towards or away from the reflective surfaces or standing still and staring at them.[250] This further challenges Jordan's authority as the sole source of consciousness and creativity within the film. Without the appearance of McClure, it would still be possible to speak of Jordan's sole presence behind the camera recording the images reflected on surfaces. McClure's contribution complicates this schema inasmuch as his absence in a scene renders it impossible to discern whether the shot reflects his perspective or that of Jordan. What is more, Jordan frequently films pedestrians passing by and staring at their own image on the mirroring surfaces. To the extent that the target of the gaze of the passersby remains the reflective surface rather than the camera, their stare at the surface conflates the view of the camera's objects with that of the camera itself. In other words, the film implies many different perspectives from which the surfaces could be viewed. This effect switches the pedestrian's role from objects seen by the camera to subjects identified with the perspective of the camera. *Visions of A City*, therefore, combines the subjectivities of Jordan, McClure, and the anonymous dwellers of the city underscoring a collective perception of the outside world. The use of the plural of the word "vision" in the title signifies less the multiple locations in the city than the plurality of the points of view.

The animated short *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway* of 1964 extends this issue of interfused subjectivities to map out the role of spectatorship in the

[250] Larry Jordan, "Program Notes for the Films of Larry Jordan" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, c. 1978). On page 1, Jordan identifies the actor in Visions of A City as Michael McClure. The film itself does not feature actor credits.

shared experience of cinema **(Figure 3.1)**. Jordan organized this cut-out animation in black and white by laying out smaller animated figures around the center of a static one-point perspective scene. A Victorian steel engraving of a pregnant woman leaning her back on the frame of an open door and contemplating, along with a dog standing to her left, the scenery of a lake surrounded by the woods constitutes the fixed backdrop. Jordan interrupts the stillness of the natural scenery by introducing rapidly changing and moving drawings of animals, classical sculptures, eggs, balloons, and a canvas on which multiple figures appear, move around, and disappear. At the same time, the scene that lies underneath the animated figures becomes the foreground of the picture plane as Jordan situates the animated figures only around the scenery depicted as the background of the engraving. Such alteration of the Victorian engraving works on two levels: First, the points of view and subjectivities within and outside the film become multi-layered, paralleling the stratified structure of the cut-out animation. Second, the animation of otherwise motionless drawings reflexively comments on the specific capacity of film as a medium to bring still imagery to life. Jordan's addition of drawings of wings to animals, such as elephants and lions, as well as to eggs, makes them defy gravity and float around the scenery. This bestows surreal qualities upon the imagery.

But, how does these surreal qualities relate to Jordan's reference to the outside world in *Visions of A City* and *Waterlight*? Jordan continues his engagement with the outside world and phenomenology in *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway* on three levels: the indexicality of the ephemera he appropriates through photography,

the ways in which he defines the medium, and how he defines the limits of his own subjectivity. First, in their outmoded style and technique, the collaged ephemera from Victorian engravings in his animations begin to function as indexes of their original Victorian context and its printing process inasmuch as an index constitutes a trace of an object and bears an existential relation to it, as Charles Sanders Peirce would put it.[251]

The found imagery and objects in any collage or assemblage work do not necessarily point to their original contingency strongly enough to become an index of their background. Rather, the textual and semantic associations between elements within the collages often cut the umbilical cord between the image and the original context. Yet, certain aspects of Jordan's style and technique make this indexical relation between the past (Victorian culture, in particular) and the presence of the films inevitable. The recurring use of these engravings and their cut-out figures (ten minutes of a Jordan animation equals the use of hundreds of instances of such collected imagery) render the association unmistakable. In fact, Jordan's prioritization of the texture, density, and rhythmic pattern of his compositions over visuality points to an excessiveness inherent in such use:

> I don't know what the film is going to look like at first. But I have a sense of whether it will be fast or slow, soft or hard… have a feeling for the texture of what is going to happen.[252]

[251] Charles Sanders Peirce, "Division of Signs," in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (1897; reprinted, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).
[252] Kevin B. Lee, "An Evening with Lawrence Jordan."

This richness of the imagery simultaneously accounts for Jordan's animated and live action films' resistance to narrative. A quick look at the criticism in the newspaper reviews of Jordan's two films that more-or-less construct a narrative, an ambiguous plotline, *Hildur and the Magician* of 1969 and *The Apparition* of 1976, attests to such resistance. Critics described these films in the following terms - "ponderous,"[253] "extensive and repetitive,"[254] "30 minutes too much,"[255] and "has fatal longueurs,"[256] thus underlining a slow, non-developmental temporality. This appears as a consequence of the "endless indulgence" of the film in small details that do not directly link to the narrative, a cinematic approach to which the world of mainstream cinema remains unaccustomed.[257] As Gunning argues, narrative functions only as a constructed discourse in film inasmuch as the indexical quality of the photographic image - that tends to show but not tell - requires a "narrativization" process.[258] Dwelling on Roland Barthes' concept of the "third meaning" Kristin Thompson, likewise, postulates that the indexical nature of photography bestows the film with an "excess" that can hardly be contained by narrative.[259] This excessive force of the index

[253] Eder, "Film: 'Apparition' a Dream – Haunting but also Dull."
[254] McGuinness, "Film: The Malady of Repetition."
[255] Thompson, "'Hildur and the Magician' at the Whitney."
[256] Callenbach, "Film Review: *Hildur and the Magician*," 60.
[257] McGuinness, "Film: The Malady of Repetition."
[258] Tom Gunning, "Theory and History: Narrative Discourse and the Narrator System," in *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 10-30.
[259] Kristin Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 513-524. Also see Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Several Eisenstein Stills," in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation, t*rans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 41-62, originally published as "Le troisieme sens: Notes de recherche sur quelques photogrammes de S. M. Eisenstein," in *Cahiers du cinema* 222 (1970).

materializes not only in Jordan's live action films but also, albeit differently, in his densely collaged animations.

Furthermore, in *Patricia*, Jordan defines the specific aspects of cinema in relation to the concept of "magic," registering the surreal elements as an effect of the medium itself rather than his own imagination. The wings Jordan adds to animals and objects allegorize one of the most fundamental aspects of the medium, i.e. the capability to depict movement. Jordan highlights this reflexive commentary by using several drawings of sculptural figures and making them flicker as well as float around the view from the doorway, thereby, contrasting the still media of drawing and sculpture with that of cinema. Midway through the animation, Jordan introduces a cut-out engraving of a canvas on a stand by the other end of the lake. This renders his emphasis on motion as the foundation of cinema even clearer. Not only do the images depicted on the canvas rapidly change, but also each briefly appearing image seems to be in motion: the birds on the branch of a tree begin flapping their wings, a flower in a field wavers back and forth in the wind, a woman's face in profile blinks as she stares at the lake, bees fly around a penguin staring at a beehive.

As Sitney insightfully points out in *Visionary Film*, such animation of still imagery transforms the canvas into a film screen that establishes a film-within-a-film structure.[260] It becomes hard to mistake the comparison that Jordan draws between the canvas and the film screen inasmuch as Jordan situates a drawing of a projector on the canvas in the final seconds of the animation. The still image of the projector comes to

[260] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 135-36.

life for a few seconds only to stumble and fall down from the screen into the nearby lake. Following this, the screen/canvas disappears, and is replaced by the drawings of four sculptures that begin to flicker before the scene turns black, ending the film. For Sitney, the flickering of the images on the canvas establishes "pure light" as the foundation of cinema, an argument that allows him to situate Jordan within the poetic tradition in the American experimental cinema he formulates.

As the constant tension between stillness and movement in the animation attests, however, Jordan's reflexive approach points to motion rather than light as a foundational element of the medium. The movement manifest in the film, however, differs from live action motion inasmuch as it is not recorded but manually generated. In a painstaking process, Jordan moves the cut-out imagery by millimeters only to record it for a few frames with a still camera placed horizontally upon his desk. Yet, he simultaneously tries to register the movement as a function of the cinematic apparatus rather than himself. The motion of the figures seems rather fluid than jerky (Jordan moves them very little and records the scene as such for only a few frames), strengthening the illusion. Furthermore Jordan downplays his role as the author as the figures on the canvas appear, move, and disappear on their own, as if in an automated manner. This goes against many self-reflexive scenes in popular cartoons, which, as

noted by both Donald Crafton and Norman Klein, show a drawing hand or the animator creating the animation.[261]

This shift in the creator from author to cinematic apparatus parallels Jordan's use of Victorian imagery. As Tom Gunning suggests, the early cinema and proto-cinematic optical devices, such as the zoetrope, thaumatrope, phenakistoscope, and magic lantern, which provided entertainment to Victorian audiences, share a fascination with illusionary movement as a source of wonder.[262] To the extent that *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream* constructs a history of resonating moments of wonder, its surreal imagery begins to suggest the almost magical qualities attributed to cinema in its early days, not only by the audiences but also by film theorists from Béla Balázs to the French Impressionists and even the major supporter of realist cinema, André Bazin.[263] Jordan acknowledges Georges Méliès, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century illusionist and filmmaker who adapted magical trickery into his

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[261] Norman Klein, *Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon* (London, New York: Verso, 1993) and Donald Crafton, *Shadow of A Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[262] Tom:, "The Play between Still and Moving Images: Nineteenth Century 'Philosophical Toys' and Their Discourse," in *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms*, ed. Eivind Røssaak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 27-44 and "The Transforming Image: the Roots of Animation in Metamorphosis and Motion," in *Pervasive Animation*, ed. Suzanne Buchan (New York, Routledge, 2013), 52-69. In the latter essay, the two examples Gunning particularly addresses are the flipbook and the blow book.

[263] See, for instance, Béla Balázs, *The Theory of Film: The Character and Growth of a New Art* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1953), Jean Epstein, "Photogenie and the Imponderable," in *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1929-1939*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Abel (1935; repr., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988), 189-190, Germaine Dulac, "Visual and Anti-Visual Films," in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, trans. Robert Lamberton and ed. P. Adams Sitney (1928; repr., New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1987), 32, and André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Hugh Gray (1945; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14.

practice of cinematography and editing, as his most significant influence, rather than Max Ernst or Joseph Cornell:

> …[A]ctually in the overall I was probably more influenced by Méliès [than Max Ernst and Joseph Cornell], who is not an animator but his films might as well be animation. They are in most cases so tightly structured and they move in this other archaic world of a magic happening.[264]

As Gunning suggests elsewhere, in the early days of cinema the entertainment industry exhibited film equipment itself to the curious audiences as an attraction,[265] and Jordan points to the pre-figuration of the cinematic apparatus in Victorian engravings by placing the film projector image on the canvas/screen at the end of the animation. Even though, thematically, *Patricia* is a surreal film, its dreamlike elements index not Jordan but the outside world, that is the magical qualities of the cinema in its early days, as their source.

Jordan, thus, invites us to reconsider the relations between the indexicality of cinema, the illusion of movement, and medium-specificity by shifting the focus from the photographic qualities of the medium (defined by the light that Sitney emphasizes) to the terrain of the moving images, and thereby, to animation. This shift also figures in recent film theory on the "post-medium condition" that the emergence of digital imagery initiated. Inasmuch as the digital imagery bear no existential link to their

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[264] Patricia Kavanaugh, "Interview with Lawrence Jordan," 32.
[265] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3, 4 (Fall 1986), reprinted in *Early Cinema: Space - Frame – Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56-62.

referent (codes rather than chemical processes between light and the celluloid form their basis), many scholars, such as Lev Manovich, Gunning, and Mary Ann Doane, reassess the definition of the index and whether it constitutes the foundation of cinema.[266] Manovich, for instance, argues that the digital revolution brings about a necessary revision of the history of cinema, which until very lately considered animation as a subcategory. Flipping this hierarchy upside down, Manovich suggests that digital imagery allows us to understand cinema as moving images rather than mechanical reproduction, thereby making live action films merely a part of cinema, now defined as animation.[267] Jordan's animations attempt to defy these hierarchies altogether by blending index with illusion. Through his production of surreal imagery out of indexical documents that refer to the past as well as by situating the source of this in the "magical" cinematic apparatus, Jordan blurs the boundaries between the material and the imaginary.

Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream simultaneously comments on the positions of the viewer and the author within this cinematic experience, another significant aspect of the animation that gets lost if the critical focus remains solely on the film's poetic qualities in its alleged depiction of light as the foundation of all things, including cinema. At the beginning of his description of the film, Sitney mentions the woman contemplating the scene but never analyzes what this figure might mean in terms of the subjectivities depicted in the film. This becomes particularly significant when even

[266] See, for instance, Manovich, "What is Digital Cinema?" 1060-1070 and *Language of New Media* and Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index," 29-52.
[267] Manovich, "What is Digital Cinema?" 1060-1070.

the title of the film underlines the role of the figure of the woman in the animation. Once the canvas in the scene transforms into a film screen, Patricia, by extension, becomes not only its spectator but also its creator as the title suggests.

Jordan establishes a connection between the viewers of *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream* and Patricia in the film, thereby implying the existence of the viewers within the film and their active role in its perception and creation. At the same time, he mobilizes and decenters the points of view within and outside the animation as the direction of the gaze constantly shifts among the filmmaker, the spectator, the figures of Patricia and the dog in the foreground, as well as the figures on the screen who occasionally stare back at Patricia or the viewers. The bees that first appear on canvas and cross multiple thresholds of the canvas, of the door by which Patricia stands, and finally of the surface between the animation and the spectators, point to these unanchored or mobile subject positions of looking and highlight the multi-directionality of the gazes mapped by the film. Once the bees reach the boundary between Patricia and the spectators that constitutes the surface of the film roll, and by extension, the screen, the distinction between the space of the viewers of the film and that of Patricia dismantles for a split second before the bees disappear into thin air.

Patricia's (a direct reference to Jordan's then-pregnant-wife Patricia Jordan) perspective – her "dream" - and Jordan's subjectivities interrelate to each other inasmuch as it seems to be of little importance whether Jordan re-presents what Patricia sees or Patricia watching what Jordan constructs on screen. A statement from his own notes on his films goes against the idea of animation as less contingent than

automatically recorded films, as a space over which the filmmaker has complete control:

> …I prefer the viewer to discover meanings and to interact with the images and incidents, bringing the viewer's own predispositions into play, forming personal stories, personal meanings from the symbols and signs presented.
>
> In this way the film is not a record of what happened in some past time; but, seen ideally, the film comes to life in present time for the viewer. (…) The film should be a first-hand experience for the viewer, not an after-the-fact rendition of what the filmmaker once experienced.[268]

This also explains why the figures in Jordan's animations occasionally stare back at the viewer addressing "the present time of the viewer." As indices, they not only point in a certain direction but also fuse the "here and now" with the "there and then," albeit in a dream state, as Peirce argues.[269] In his essay "Rhetoric of the Image," Barthes asserts that the indexicality of the photograph constitutes a "message without a code" unless an anchorage such as a narrative, a myth, or a caption fixes "the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs (…) it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance."[270] For Barthes, the anchorage identifies the denoted message, on one hand, while controlling the interpretation of the

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[268] Larry Jordan, "Notes on the Visible Compendium" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, c. 1990), 1-2. The underlines are Jordan's own.
[269] Peirce, "The Essence of Reason," 56.
[270] Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of Image," in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 32-51, originally published as "Rhetorique de Fimage." *Communications* 4 (1964).

connoted messages to prevent their proliferation, on the other.[271] When the indexical trace lacks the explanatory cues, it bears the potential to become surreal as in the case of Jordan's magical dreamscapes.

Such a configuration, however, by no means fits well within the Brakhage-oriented narratives of experimental cinema, whereby the focus remains on the autonomous figure of the filmmaker and his vision. This emphasis becomes particularly noteworthy when we consider the fact that Jordan made *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream* right around the time he began watching films by other Canyon filmmakers and exchanging ideas with them.[272] Jordan reminisces the Canyon screenings as follows:

> There were a lot of people there, a lot of people. Films came on with a rush and a bang. People were left to make of it what they could or would. In those days there was incredible electric excitement about these showings. [273]

Yet, Sitney neglects to mention Jordan's dialogue with Canyon Collective. Nor does he consider the influence of other Canyon/Bay Area filmmakers on Jordan's

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[271] Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of Image," 39. Also see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 226, originally published as "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5, no. 1 (1936). While Barthes mainly focuses on photography and briefly mentions that any text or dialogue in film functions as anchorage, Benjamin argues that in the case of cinema, it is the sequentiality of the filmic plot that prescribes the individual meaning of each image.

[272] Larry Jordan, "The Films of Larry Jordan: Biography and Complete Program Notes" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, c. 1978). On page 2 of the file, Jordan dates his first involvement with Canyon to 1962.

[273] Kathy Geritz, "An Interview with Lawrence Jordan: The Venue Vanguard – Artists as Exhibitors, 1955-1965," in Anker, Geritz, and Seid, ed., *Radical Light*, 79-83.

filmmaking in relation to this shared experience among the filmmaker, film, and the spectators.

II- Time and Index

In a good number of his films such as *Orb*, *Once Upon A Time*, and *Cornell, 1965*, Jordan explores the fluidity and transformative limits of subjectivity as conveyed by multiple layers of perception and the contingencies of space and time. *Our Lady of the Sphere* of 1969, for instance, depicts the transformation of a subject as s/he travels through various places and time periods **(Figure 3.2)**. Jordan used a much more complex cut-out technique in *Our Lady of the Sphere* than he did in *Patricia Gives Birth to A Dream*. Several fixed backdrops and mobile figures and objects from Victorian steel engravings, as well as Jordan's own cut-out figures compose the nine-minutes long color animation. At the same time, Jordan plays with the notion of depth within the two dimensional backdrops by scanning the surface of the engravings and zooming in and out of certain details within them.

The animation begins with a fast-cut series of scenes filtered in bright red, green, blue, and red respectively: a Victorian engraving shows a couple at a lakeside, a hand carries an egg and drops it down off the screen. Next, the egg rolls and turns into a metal egg-shaped container. The camera zooms in on the image of a little boy screaming. Finally, a figure in a Victorian dress with a ball-like sphere instead of a head emits light rays flickering on a red-filtered screen accompanied by a jarring buzzing sound. These introductory images familiarize the audience with the figures

and objects that repeatedly appear throughout the rest of the animation. The intermittent appearance of oval and round objects as well as jarring sounds mark the intervals between various sequences of the main figure's (the young boy, then the lady in the Victorian dress) travels through the film. Jordan ends the introductory section with a title card that reads "Et toi Colette et toi la belle Genevieve," a line from Guillaume Apollinaire's poem *Le Musicien de Saint-Merry* that describes a musician walking through the streets of Paris with his admirers in his tail.[274] The Apollinaire quotation becomes hardly surprising given Jordan's interest in surrealism. What is more, both the poem and Jordan's animation feature a figure whose journey along a path allows both artists to reevaluate their conceptions of time – a point I will consider in detail in the following pages.

A blue-filtered engraving of the earth as seen from the surface of the moon sets the following sequence in outer space. Here, Jordan's frequent use of the cut-out image of an egg becomes most prominent as a hand touching an egg converts it into a light-emitting bulb, followed by another hand dropping an egg into one of the moon craters from which a flower suddenly springs. The images of eggs render transformation visible, thereby enacting an analogy that already inheres in the reproductive associations of the egg even apart from the context of *Our Lady of the Sphere*. In the following scene, a series of luggage pieces populate the atmosphere of the moon, each one advancing toward and brushing the surface of the film/screen only

[274] Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Self-Dismembered Man: Selected Later Poems of Guillaume Apollinaire*, trans. and ed. Donald Revell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 36.

to disappear once it gets too close. As soon as the first suitcase appears, the blue-tinted background converts into green. Jordan thus links the concept of transformation to travel and movement; symbolized by the very foreign land of the moon along with the suitcases.

Our Lady of the Sphere's postulation of travel, and, by extension, movement as transformative forces becomes more apparent as the animation progresses. A series of engravings of different lands and places tinted in blue, green, or red and the figure of the young boy first appears during the introductory section, forms the basic structure of the next few minutes of the animation. While this sequence of *Our Lady of the Sphere* primarily narrates the boy's travels through distant lands, a rich variety of animated imagery, such as animals, Victorian era machinery, planets and planet maps, balloons, clocks and clock towers, eggs, and an Atlas figure carrying the earth and sitting on a suitcase frequently permeate this journey, endowing it with a surreal tone. Once the boy leaves this domestic interior and embarks on his journey, his cut-out figure retains the startled and scared expression on his face.

Jordan allegorizes the frightening aspects of the adventurous path through a scene in which the boy stands in front of a cave from which a roaring lion emerges. The boy, while running away from the lion, falls through a series of images of several places until he lands at the feet of a circus clown. The music, at this point, changes from a threatening tune into a festive melody and a long section of circus performance constructed with several engravings of circus scenes along with Jordan's own cut-out acrobat figures jumping and turning around in the air. Once again, various associative

imagery, such as flying air balloons, zeppelins, and a man flying with gigantic wing-apparatus, saturate the basic skeleton of the sequence. Circus performance is a recurring motif in the experimental cinema of the sixties and seventies in films such as Bruce Baillie's *Quixote* (1964-65) and Jonas Mekas's *Walden: Diaries, Sketches, and Notebooks* (1969). In all three films, the nomadic lifestyle of the circus performers explicitly allegorizes travel and motion, themes that underlie these films.

In a 1979 essay titled "Survival in the Independent - Non-Commercial –Avant-Garde – Experimental – Personal – Expressionistic Film Market of 1979," Jordan makes an analogy between experimental film exhibition and a travelling circus.[275] At the same time, in *Our Lady of the Sphere*, Jordan alludes to a liminal and transformative subjectivity inasmuch as the figure of the circus performer symbolizes the outcast of the society who does not abide by societal norms but adapts to new contexts as s/he travels. This constitutes a remarkable throw-back to late nineteenth and early twentieth century paintings by Pablo Picasso and George Seurat among others, whose images of circus performers represented the alter egos of the artists. Jordan, who demonstrates a particular interest in early twentieth century artists in his essays and interviews, thus refers to concepts and images of the past through the circus sequence. The subject materialized in the figure of the circus performer attests to the difference between how subjectivity manifests itself in Brakhage and Jordan's work. While Jordan's filmic subject (with whom he seems to identify) embeds him/herself in

[275] Jordan, "Survival in the Independent - Non-Commercial –Avant-Garde – Experimental – Personal – Expressionistic Film Market of 1979," reprinted in MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema*, 329-38.

the outside world s/he traverses, the majority of the films Brakhage made in the sixties including *Dog Star Man* (1961-64), *Songs* (1964-69), and *Scenes from under Childhood* (1967-70) series invariably take place in his cabin and its immediate surroundings in Colorado. In these films, even though Brakhage's camera, supposedly one with his own vision, was mobile, he limited this mobility to one single space. Conversely, Jordan addresses the issue of isolation and artist's own vision in an interview:

> I definitely am doing an interactive thing and going in the direction of imagery that people respond to. I wouldn't make art if I were on a desert island by myself. I'd make practical things like chairs and tables. I don't do this just for myself. I don't do this just to explore my own vision.[276]

Jordan registers his ever-adapting subject as a corporeal one connected to the outside world. Sergei Eisenstein, who, in his 1941 text on Disney cartoons, remarks that the "plasmatic" animated figures and circus performers share qualities of "changeability, fluidity, suddenness of formations."[277] Likewise, Jordan's animation draws a parallel between the elasticity of the performers' bodies and the continuous transformation of animated subjects, thereby conceptualizing a corporeal form of subjectivity. Despite the temporal gap between them, the connection between Eisenstein's concepts and Jordan's animations is not far-fetched given their mutual interest in the relation

[276] Paul Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Larry Jordan"
[277] Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (London: Methuen Books, 1988), 21.

between the motion and plasticity in cinema along with Jordan's appreciation of Eisenstein's films and texts from an early age onward.[278]

Jordan further emphasizes the connection between the circus and the transformation of the subject in later scenes as the lady in the Victorian dress with a ball instead of a head substitutes for the little boy and now walks instead of him where the various backdrops of different places are once again rich with imagery such as clocks, stars, machinery, eggs, balls, balloons, mushrooms, luggage, sea creatures, and the diver figure. Close to the end of the animation, Jordan assembles another reflexive scene reminiscent of the film-within-a-film structure of *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream*. The backdrop engraving depicts a meadow in which two horses and two sheep stare at a canvas on a stand next to which a lady stands. On the canvas, initially a similar meadow scene appears only to be replaced by animated images of a balloon that flies into the meadow, a bird that moves his beak and sings, a ball, and luggage that flies off the canvas/screen. Following this, the lady multiplies into two women who hold hands as they traverse rapidly changing lands together. The women transform into the little boy again at the end of the animation. This time, however, the little boy has a cheerful expression on his face and the ball that the lady carried upon her torso soon replaces his head. In the animation, the figures of both eggs and balls represent the possibility of transformation in the subject. This becomes especially clear when Jordan substitutes faces with balls, which implies limitless potential as to

[278] Paul Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Larry Jordan" and Collins, "Larry Jordan's Underworld," 63.

what the subject might become. This transformation emerges as an effect of the subject's mobility. Significantly, the circus (which Jordan likens to experimental film in his essay) and the animated canvas sequences occur in the intervals between major transformations in the subject of the animation. Jordan thus points to the capability of animation, and cinema to spur such transformation.

More importantly, because Jordan interchangeably uses images of clocks as well as balls, balloons, planets, and other round objects between sections of transition or transformation, he simultaneously underlines the prominence of the concept of time in these processes. How Jordan uses these round shapes as equivalents becomes especially clear in another animation, *Orb* of 1973. In the beginning of this four-minute short in color, the sun up in the sky flickers and transforms into a clock, a balloon, a ball, the planet Saturn, and back to the sun again. These objects frequently re-appear in the animation witnessing the course of a love affair between two sculptures that come to life and travel across various lands. This allegorization of time passing clearly reflects the medium of animation to the extent that the very movement of images takes place in time. Yet, a strong sense of time and history also infuses Jordan's entire body of work whereby the past, present, and future no longer follow each other in a linear fashion but become entangled in unexpected combinations. As the account in the beginning of this chapter suggests, such a conception of time most clearly manifests itself both in Jordan's interest in documents that point to particular contingencies ("in a certain place in a certain year") and in his constant use of found imagery from the past. This interest also explains why he defined his practice as a

"poetic extension of the documentary as practiced by Robert Flaherty," a statement that no scholar has mentioned.[279] At the same time, Jordan's approach to time, history, and culture constitutes the bridge between his live-action documentaries and animated films.

In Jordan's animations, the main task that the indexical quality of the rich memorabilia performs is to bring together the past contingency to which they point with the presence of the film experience. Most evidently, by virtue of the transformative force of animation, they overcome their frozen state inasmuch as the cut-out figures move around, transform into other figures, and acquire new meanings within the context of the collage. For Jordan, however, this by no means suffices alone, and he constantly reminds the viewer of the relations, detachments, and reconnections between what once existed and what still does. A figure in an old-fashioned diver suit who frequently appears in engraved backdrops in *Our Lady of the Sphere* attests to Jordan's concern with a sense of time. The diver first appears on the moon along with fish and other sea creatures. On the surface of the moon, he resembles an astronaut - an association that seems possible only with this juxtaposition and its time, post-dating space journeys. In the next scene, the diver as well as a strange buzzing sound interrupt a red-tinted Victorian domestic tea-party scene featuring a young boy. The guests of the party seem to stare at the diver with startled expressions on their faces. When analyzed in relation to the previous imagery of the moon and suitcases, this humorous scene signifies a contrast between the domestic

[279] Larry Jordan, "Notes on *The Black Oud*" (unpublished file, Pacific Film Archives, c. 1991).

interior and the spaces traversed by travel. These associative combinations not only make the viewer aware of their own time and the time to which the drawing originally belongs but also link these temporalities. At the end of the animation, the women transform into the little boy again by the hand of the same diver/astronaut. The film depicts change (and how we perceive it) as a function of fragmented temporalities.

The graphics and drawings of Victorian machinery dancing around, functioning, and circling across the meadows, woods, and lakesides of pastoral scenery become a theme that Jordan obsessively repeats in almost all of his animations, reflecting the medium of cinema as a technological apparatus. Jordan himself defines his cinematic magic as "manipulating old imagery with new technology as part of [his] alchemy."[280] Yet, at the same time, the inclusions of machines that have survived until today, as well as those that have been discarded and forgotten, discredits the idea of history as progress. Rather, Jordan's eclectic selection points to the contingency of technology and highlights the random ways in which audiences celebrate one invention over the others.

Both Jordan's live-action and animated films embody an experimental documentary form that bridges past and present, as well as indexical documents and animation without succumbing to realism. Jordan's constant attempts to establish non-linear connections between the past and present and to animate past contingencies, granting them new significance, constitutes the difference between his art and that of most other "neo-avant-garde" collage artists. The latter include Joseph Cornell,

[280] Collins, "Larry Jordan's Underworld," 62.

Wallace Berman, Bruce Conner, and Jess Collins whom Jordan befriended, and with whom exchanged ideas and collaborated on several projects through his career. Yet, their work either completely decontextualizes the old documents or amplifies the significance of their past in a nostalgic approach.

Among the filmmakers associated with Canyon Cinema, Jordan stands out owing to his involvement in the visual culture of the sixties and seventies at large. His essay "Survival in the Independent - Non-Commercial –Avant-Garde – Experimental – Personal – Expressionistic Film Market of 1979," attests to his attempt to integrate the separately functioning experimental film and contemporary art scenes including their institutional and commercial frameworks.[281] Such concerns make his work even more significant to the extent that he aimed to integrate the formal explorations of avant-garde artists and the ethnographic/historiographic, and formal explorations of Canyon filmmakers – a task that still seems to occupy many artists active from the last two decades, such as Tacita Dean, Gabriel Orozco, Thomas Hirschhorn, Pierre Huyghe, and Mark Dion.[282] Here, I would like to focus on the liminal status Jordan occupies, especially in relation to the tradition of surreal collages that Joseph Cornell's artworks and films produced.

Many scholars to date have addressed the subject matter of Cornell's collages and box constructions, which were informed by a vast history of mass culture displays

[281] Jordan, "Survival in the Independent - Non-Commercial –Avant-Garde – Experimental – Personal – Expressionistic Film Market of 1979," reprinted in MacDonald, *Canyon Cinema*, 329-38.
[282] For further discussion, see Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," in Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 171-204.

such as dioramas, Wunderkammern, and peep shows, as well as the visual vocabularies of romanticism and surrealism.[283] The difference between the animated collages of Jordan, which literally bring ephemera to life, and Cornell's boxes, which freeze memorabilia in a perfect moment amalgamating desire, fantasy, and nostalgia, seems to be self-evident. Yet, Jordan also constructed assemblage boxes and Cornell made several found footage films (the majority of which Jordan conserved and reprinted himself). Their cross-media explorations render the difference between the projects less clear, inviting viewers to think across than within these categories.

Cornell's *Sand Fountain* series, in which he produces hourglasses out of cardboard, sand, and broken glasses, embodies a crystallization of time. Most of these boxes feature a cardboard fountain with sand fixed in place, seemingly stopped in the midst of pouring onto a broken glass below and overflowing onto the bottom of the box. Evidently, the stillness of the boxes serves to freeze an image of time while the broken glass adds a pessimistic tone to the assemblage, lamenting the passage of time and its effects. While assisting Cornell in his studio in the summer of 1965, Jordan started filming his studio and artworks. Cornell allowed Jordan to turn the footage into a film, a rare permission that Cornell granted to people asking to film him. As if trying to map out the differences between Cornell and himself, Larry Jordan's 1978

[283] See, for instance, Kynaston McShine, ed., *Joseph Cornell* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980), Christine Hennessey, "Joseph Cornell: A Balletomane," *Archives of American Art Journal* 23, no. 3 (1983): 6-12, Dickran Tashijan, *Joseph Cornell: Gifts of Desire* (Miami Beach: Grassfield Press, 1992), Peter Virgilio, "Dreamobile Joseph Cornell," *Ploughshares* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1994/1995): 180, Diane Waldman, *Joseph Cornell: Master of Dreams* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), Kirsten A. Hoving, "The Surreal Science of Soap: Joseph Cornell's First Soap Bubble Set," *American Art* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 14-35, and Charles Simic, *Dime Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell* (New York: New York Review Books, 2006).

documentary, titled *Cornell, 1965*, opens with a close-up of one of the *Sand Fountain* boxes. Jordan, however, placed sand in one of the newly constructed fountains and shot the cascade in motion. As the release date suggests, Jordan finished editing the film in 1978 after Cornell passed away and included the year in which the footage was shot in the title. At the beginning of the film, the voice-over of Jordan reiterates the time lag between the shooting and the editing of the film, with the close-up image of the cascading sand in the hourglass on screen. Jordan thus parallels the passing of time within the boxes with the time experienced in the outside world. He underlines the passage of time both during the process of making the film as well as during the interval between experience and memory, and extends it to the realm of the viewer's experience of the film.

Midway through the film, Jordan shows a collage of Cornell (*Untitled*, n.d.) that features silhouettes of two girls jumping rope against a sunset. Zooming in on one of the girls, Jordan montages this image with a sequence of a silhouette of another girl jumping rope, thereby animating Cornell's collage and pointing to the conceptual differences between his and Cornell's body of work. Indeed, Jordan's explorations in still media manifest an insistence on bringing historical images to life by linking them to the present moment inasmuch as he often animated these still collages by recycling them in several films or reconstructing the scenes of films in the form of boxes with mobile parts. All of Jordan's own assemblage boxes, which he began to construct later in his career, such as *Sophie's Bird* of 1996 and *Moon Box: Palanaise Pathetique* of

1996, feature moving parts that Jordan appropriated from Victorian ephemera. As Jordan noted:

> I decided to put some of the scenes into little boxes. Literally abstract a scene from one of the cutout animation films, into the box where the background would be the same background that was in the film, and then the moving parts in the foreground would be the cutouts and they would be hung on watch springs so they could bounce back and forth and give some approximation of that animated scene. So that's when I started using watch springs. And most of my boxes now have that kinetic element. I'm very interested in variable composition and some of the pieces in my boxes move. Cornell occasionally used a watch spring without anything attached to it, in the boxes, a visual element. He never used springs to animate parts of the box, so far as I know.[284]

Thus, these movable parts invite the viewer to participate by starting the motions of automaton-like figures tied to springs and machinic mechanisms. These boxes index both the historical moment to which their parts belong and the moment in which the interaction take place.

In contrast to Jordan, Cornell further explores the crystallization of time in the unlikely medium of cinema. In the second chapter on Chick Strand, I addressed the similarities and differences between Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* of 1936 and Bruce Conner's *A Movie* of 1958 in terms of the voyeuristic gaze and visual fixation. In his 1936 film, Cornell's psychic and voyeuristic obsession with the b-movie starlet Rose Hobart fixes and distances the figure of Hobart with each instance of editing the

[284] Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Larry Jordan."

footage. Regarded as the first found footage experimental film in standard histories of cinema, *Rose Hobart* is a nineteen-minute collage film that Cornell constructed entirely out of a 16mm print of a 1931 b-type adventure film starring Hobart, *East of Borneo*, and set to a soundtrack of Nestor Amaral's album *Holiday in Brazil*.[285] The majority of the sequences Cornell selected for use in his film feature close-up shots of Hobart's facial expressions and of her speech, as well as medium and long shots whose focus remains the starlet. Spliced between the images of Hobart are shots of still objects and landscapes Cornell also appropriated from *East of Borneo*. These sequences include an establishing shot of a tent, a close-up of a candle, the moon in the sky, and a section that Cornell plays forwards and backwards in which a stone drops into water and creates a ripple. These sections manifest what Gilles Deleuze calls time-images, that is images serving to make the notion of time visible in the film. Deleuze suggests that the use of these images in cinema underlines the medium's capability to capture, condense, and materialize time within the bounds of representation. As Mike Kelley suggests, what Cornell does in *Rose Hobart* is to appropriate this capability of the medium to "further condense this condensation into stillness, into an uncanny frozen movement."[286] In order to explore this switch from movement to time to freeze it in a perfect moment, I would like to summarize what Deleuze postulates on such adjustment of emphasis in cinema.

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[285] Cornell found both the 16mm print and the Amaral album in junkshops. See Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997).
[286] Mike Kelley, " Hollywood Filmic Language, Stuttered: *Caltiki the Immortal Monster* and *Rose Hobart*," in *Foul Language: Essays and Criticism*, ed. John C. Weichman (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 45.

Deleuze distinguishes between the classical cinema of the period before World War II and modern cinema of the period afterwards owing to their different degrees of emphasis on movement and time respectively. While the movement-images of the pre-1945 cinema show the motion of characters and objects in the form of action, perception, and reaction, the post-1945 cinema showcases direct images of time, and by extension, its passage. This effect often emerges when the camera focuses on a still object or person for a while, making the spectator feel the time passing both diegetically and non-diegetically.[287] Here, diegetic time refers to the time manifest within the construct of the film while the non-diegetic addresses the real time of the audience. In other words, the stillness of the frame, for Deleuze, not only becomes a tool to make the shift between two scenes belong to different temporalities (even if the gap here is very short), but it also renders the passage of real time intelligible. The still image becomes a direct image of time itself, or, as Deleuze puts it, "unchanging form in which the change is produced," to the extent that an unchanging scene connects changing scenes while guiding the audience's experience. In *Rose Hobart*, however, the placement of time-images as such never interrupts a narrative progression. On the contrary, Cornell interpolates these time-images between the images of Hobart that focus on her facial expressions, thereby strengthening their timeless, distant quality.

[287] Deleuze's example for this phenomenon is a scene in Yasujiro Ozu's 1949 film *Late Spring*. During the scene, the camera initially shows the face of the daughter reclining in bed with a half smile. Following this, we are shown a still image of a vase for a minute or so. The pursuing image is that of the daughter's face again, but this time crying. The vase, therefore, constitutes a direct image of time. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 16-17, originally published as as *Cinéma II: L'image-temps* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

In his book, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Deleuze asserts that three types of movement images dominate the classical cinema of pre-World War II. He names these categories perception-images, affection-images and action-images, arguing that they follow each other in the classical editing of sequences.[288] When the camera of the classical cinema focuses on the movement-images of a certain subject or a character, the subject becomes a "center of indetermination" with two-facets. One side of the facet receives and, in turn, forms perception images. The affection images, which depict close-ups of faces, convey the feelings and thoughts of a character in response to what the character experiences. Following the perception images come the action images of reaction that constitute the other side of the facet.[289] Deleuze, here, draws upon Béla Balázs's theories of the close-up and the expressive qualities of the face. For Balázs, the close-up of a face in film always decontextualizes the face by conveying emotions that exist outside time and space.[290] Balázs's theory on the function of close-up thus assumes the universality of emotions and the expression of them regardless of their context. Dwelling on Balázs, Deleuze suggests that the sequentiality of perception, affection, and action images contextualizes the expressive close-up of the character, which would otherwise become timeless and abstract. According to Deleuze, after World War II filmmakers began questioning the necessity of such a three-faceted structure. This resulted in the wide use of pure optical-sound

[288] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 64-65, originally published as *Cinéma I: L'image-mouvement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983).
[289] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 64-65.
[290] Balázs, *The Theory of Film*.

images, which eliminate the two-faceted structure, culminating in the birth of the modern cinema.[291]

A pure optical-sound image shows a character in the process of perceiving (seeing and hearing) objects, situations, and states, yet not reacting to them. In *Rose Hobart*, Cornell deconstructs the three-faceted structure of classical cinema to accentuate the pure images of affection. Even the close-up shots of Hobart speaking become affection-images to the extent that Cornell decontextualizes them by omitting the original soundtrack. This deconstruction remains significant to the extent that it predates Deleuze's schematic history of cinema that locates such subversions in the modern cinema. Cornell switches the emphasis of cinema from movement to the concept of time, only to materialize and fix it in a flawless, abstract instant. His films do not fit well within either the classical or modern cinemas of Deleuze inasmuch as Cornell appropriates cinema to challenge its basic properties. The alternating sequences of time and affection function to freeze Hobart's image in an unhinged moment that becomes ahistorical. Cornell's obsession with this notion of abstract, fixed time figures in his other films such as *Angel* of 1957 and *Carousel – Animal Opera* of 1940s and in his boxes, especially the *Sand Fountain* series. Cornell simply composed *Angel* out of short still sequences of a sculpture of an angel and the pond beside it filmed from different points of view. *Carousel – Animal Opera* recycles old footage of zoo animals and brings together close-ups of various animals that could potentially belong to *any* time, thereby once again dwelling on a certain ahistoricity.

[291] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 197-215.

This goes against the sense of history manifest in Jordan's films achieved by the dense use of archival material. As I have argued, Jordan uses images of clocks, balls, sun, and moon to suggest the ties between time and transformation. These correspond to Deleuze's images of time to the extent that they are unchanging cut-out figures that produce change around them. Cornell's found footage films adopt the time and affection images to pause the time from within the only medium that is able to record/give the illusion of passage of time. Jordan, on the contrary, emphasizes the medium's capabilities in order to consider the ways in which the gaps between different temporalities may be engaged productively. With this in mind, in the following section, I will consider how Jordan's films manifest history as a palimpsest composed of interrelated layers. Jordan does this in a reflexive manner emphasizing the representational status of his films. His films constitute a cut through the strata of historical instances to expose them while it is possible to carve through the same layers in many other ways revealing alternative paths, cycles, and connections.

III- One Cut Among the Others

As I argued in the chapters on Bruce Baillie and Chick Strand, the experimental ethnographies of Canyon filmmakers posed a major challenge to the concept of history as a linear progression in which the past does not bear an immediate relation to the present but transpires merely as an entity available to be recorded, consumed, and left behind. Jordan's films embody a postmodern understanding of history that challenges such a tendency to embalm the past. I have also demonstrated

how Strand and Baillie's films employ reflexive experimental ethnographic methods that establish allegorical parallels between the formation of a particular culture or historical event and the possibility, construction, and modus operandi of representation. In a similar vein, Jordan's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* of 1977 and *The Centennial Exposition* of 1964 demonstrate a reflexive understanding of history as a *product* of representation and perception.

Jordan made his forty-minute long color animation *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* over a period of ten years **(Figure 3.3)**. The film brings together multiple layers of authorship and diverse media consisting of Gustave Doré's wood-engraved illustrations that accompanied the 1870 edition of the poem as well as Jordan's own alterations, such as reprinting, the addition of cut-out figures, and the color filtering of Doré engravings used as backgrounds in red, orange, purple, and green hues. The soundtrack follows a similar strategy, mixing Orson Welles reciting the classic Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem of the same title first published in 1798; Mark Ellinger's synthesizer score with Gothic and Baroque influences; and found sounds of underwater, chippering birds, ticking clocks, chiming bells, and storm effects. Animating the illustrations by panning and zooming in on Dore's illustrations, shaking the camera to give the impression of a storm, and adding some of his usual cut-out figures such as clocks, balls, sun and the moon, butterflies, and sea creatures, Jordan highlights themes that exist in the original poem, such as tension between stillness and motion, between the passage of time and change.

Coleridge's poem narrates the story of a mariner in the form of flashbacks in which, while on the open seas, the mariner shoots an albatross that had been guiding the ship. This violent act brings punishment upon the entire crew and they get stranded in the midst of the ocean owing to a lack of breeze and everyone but the mariner dies. The fixed stares of the dead bodies torment the mariner and he describes in detail the contrast between the stillness of the bodies, the ship, and the ocean as opposed to the living and moving sea creatures. Only when the mariner learns to appreciate the sea animals does the curse lift and allow him to return to land, if only to wander endlessly telling his story to strangers. The majority of the poem, in fact, unfolds as the mariner's narration of his past to a young wedding guest on his way to the ceremony. The guest reluctantly stops to listen, yet regularly interrupts the mariner with his reactions of disgust, unconcern, fear, and finally bewilderment. The poem ends by stating that the wedding guest wakes up the next morning " a sadder and a wiser man."[292]

The multiple layers belonging to different temporalities (the poem, illustrations, Welles's voice-over, and Jordan's animation) in his film, therefore, parallels the constant shift in the poem between the past of the flashbacks and the present of the narration. Such shifts also exist between the stillness and motion in the poem, whereby the mariner's salvation initially lies in the movement of the ship; motion turns into his punishment in the present of the text when he can only rest by

[292] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1834; repr., New York: Heritage Press, 1945).

stopping and telling his story. Not only does Jordan repeat this thematic tension in his animation of the illustrations, but he also materializes the theme of change (of the mariner and his listeners) in his use of the cut-out balls, clocks, the lady who carries a ball upon her torso, and the man in the diver suit once again to allegorize the transformation. Two articles that mention Jordan's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Nancy Isenberg and Richard Deming, respectively, both argue that Jordan's additions alleviate the horror of the story and add a surreal dimension to the poem.[293]

Yet, Jordan only highlights the already surreal atmosphere of the poem filled with the hallucinations of the mariner, ghosts of the dead, and personifications of Death and Death-in-Life. In addition to allegorizing the passage of time and change, these cut-out figures also connect the past and present in the poem as they appear in both dimensions. Deming, in line with his analysis of Jordan as "visionary poet," further argues that the animation transcends time and space by its layering of different temporalities. Jordan, however, maps his work as a process with each appropriated element contributing to the conception of time and history. In accordance with the mythical implications of surrealism's found objects, Jordan repeatedly told a story of the contingency of coming across the first edition of the poem that features Doré's engravings around 1968:[294]

> …Years ago I was standing in the bank in
> Anselmo filling out a slip and looking out the window. I

[293] Nancy Isenberg, "Repurposing the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in the Postmodern Age," in *Literary Intermediality: The Transit of Literature through the Media Circuit*, ed. Maddalena Pennacchia Punzi (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2007), 183-200 and Deming, "A Cinematic Alchemy," 360-379.
[294] Jordan states that he met Orson Welles seven years after he acquired the book and that Welles was granted The Lifetime Achievement Award by the Board of Trustees of American Film Institute in 1975.

> saw these two men come up outside and one of them opened this great big book, and I was looking at it upside down. I had no idea what it was except I could see they were very large, gorgeous engravings. I had been tuned into engraved materials for the films for quite awhile. I tore up the slip and ran out of the bank and I didn't know what to do so I just came up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Do you want to sell that book?" I have no idea where this came from because I didn't know whether he'd think I was crazy or what! He turned and looked at me with this strange look and says, "Yeah, I was looking for somebody to sell it to." I said, "I'll give you forty dollars." That was about all I had in the bank at that time, he said "OK" so I went back and got the money and gave him $40 before I *really* knew what it was. It was marked $150 on the front.[295]

Jordan, on several occasions, also underlined how this random encounter with the book turned into a process of working on the engravings for a decade. Orson Welles became a part of the project in 1975 when Jordan was serving as a member of the Board of Trustees of American Film Institute that granted Welles a "Lifetime Achievement Award."[296] Welles accepted Jordan's offer and began recording himself reciting each individual line of the poem over and over until he felt satisfied. Jordan eventually received six hours of audio recordings from Welles and collaged them with the score and found sounds to produce the final soundtrack. [297]As in the case of its construction, Jordan conceived the animation itself as a process that stretched over

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[295] Kavanaugh, "Interview with Lawrence Jordan," 27. Italics are Jordan's own emphasis. Also see Isenberg, "Repurposing The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," in Punzi, ed., *Literary Intermediality*, 191, Isenberg cites an online interview with Jordan which is no longer accessible: Ray Privett, "Interview with Larry Jordan," *Facets Multimedia*, late 2000, http://www.facets.org/features/directors/LarryJordan
[296] Kavanaugh, "Interview with Lawrence Jordan," 28-29.
[297] ibid, 29.

historical time rather than transcending it, as Deming argues. In fact, Jordan's making of the film coincided with the horrors of the Vietnam War and its affect on him:

> …After Kennedy was assassinated and Lyndon Johnson went on with the Vietnam War, I was extremely affected by all that. The first thing I did, for three years I would not read a newspaper or look at television. I would not live in the world of Lyndon Johnson. Then I started giving speeches at the beginning at every one of my film showings about the death and destruction in Vietnam. Believe it or not, for two years my audiences didn't know what I was talking about. Vietnam? Where is Vietnam? What? We have soldiers that -– Americans did not know that we had soldiers killing people in Vietnam. And when I would talk about it, they wouldn't know what I was talking about.[298]

It is telling that Jordan explains his rationale for avoiding mass media for three years by referring to the ideological construction of the news: they reflect "the world of Lyndon Johnson." Initially turning away from the traumatic imagery of war, Jordan's escapism eventually turns into a repetitive action of telling, not unlike the mariner who re-tells his story at his each encounter. Every time he refers to the Vietnam War in his interviews, Jordan also mentions he served as a Merchant Marine travelling up the Saigon River in the late fifties and the ship must have carried war material unbeknownst to him. It is through this particular historical position of trauma and guilt that Jordan re-constructs the allegorical representation of violence and history in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The animation by no means transcends time but it re-purposes the past while reflecting on the contemporary atrocities In Vietnam. At the same time, the tension between the stillness of the engravings and the

[298] Karlstrom, "Oral History Interview with Larry Jordan."

motion of the cut-out figures and the camera underscores the mediated nature of representation and history.

For Jordan, art and film possess the capability of materializing the connections between resonating instances in history. Often exhibited back-to-back with *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway* under the common title *Duo Concertantes*, *The Centennial Exposition* of 1964, for instance, reflexively sketches the early beginnings of cinema in relation to a Victorian era World Fair **(Figure 3.4)**. Jordan based the animation on the engravings from a book that illustrated the first World Fair in America. The exposition took place in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park in 1876, exhibiting to curious audiences not only inventions such as the typewriter, telephone, sewing machine, and electric dynamo for the first time but also reconstructions of objects from the colonial past, including a colonial kitchen with a spinning wheel.[299] It is hardly surprising that Jordan wanted make a film out of the documents of an exposition that brought together re-enactments of the past with the newest technologies of the present, implying the future in its commodity/display form. In *The Centennial Exposition*, one of Jordan's main concerns is to transform these display items, literally in the changes he makes within the cut-out animation and also allegorically by bestowing new meanings upon them.

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[299] Linda P. Gross and Theresa R. Snyder, *Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exhibition* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), Nicholas Wainwright, Russell Weigley, and Edwin Wolf, *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1982), J. S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition Described and Illustrated* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros, 1876), and the Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection, accessed Feb 1, 2014, http://libwww.library.phila.gov/cencol/.

The four-minute black-and-white animation begins with an establishing shot, an engraving that shows the fairgrounds constructed for the exposition. Through the first half of the film, we follow a man holding a guidebook in his hand and wandering through the exhibits. Jordan thus parallels our viewing of the film with that of the audience of the exposition, implying a link between this Victorian form of mass entertainment and cinematic experience and spectatorship. This parallel bears a resemblance to the structure of *Patricia* in which Jordan constructed a film-within-film to reflect on the early beginnings of cinema. As the man strolls around shifting his stare between the guidebook and the objects of display, including stuffed birds, hundreds of pieces of colonial furniture stacked on top of each other, and strange-looking machinery, the items come to life and begin to dance around the space and their audience. The stuffed birds recall Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* that predates *The Centennial Exposition* by four years. If in *Psycho*, Hitchcock symbolizes the embalmed sexual desire of his main character by including a collection of stuffed birds, Jordan seems to refocus the desire in the realm of commodity display. Commodities seem frozen in the engraved displays as if to challenge their fate of being soon discarded (due to their surplus status, deterioration, or becoming outmoded).

Jordan's animation of these lifeless objects becomes particularly significant when the man stands in front of a glass case in which a machinic assemblage, strikingly similar to the 'Bachelors' section of Marcel Duchamp's infamous *Large Glass: The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (*1915-23), starts to function

and whirl around. Jordan, an avid follower of the Dada and Surrealist artists including Duchamp,[300] knew of *Large Glass* and its home in Philadelphia Museum of Art, which was constructed on the site of the Memorial Hall of the Centennial Exposition in 1877.[301] Connecting the technological inventions of the exposition and Dada's ironic machinic assemblages invested in desire, Jordan maps a history of the site that is anything but linear. As in the case of the Dada artists, Jordan makes a connection between desire and technology. What is more, he exposes the history of the site, which exhibited contemporary technological inventions as well as *Large Glass* whose ironic approach exposed the desire relations in such display. The disclosure of these two moments invites the audience to reconsider the role of desire in any exhibition practice, of technology, art, and film, alike.

This reference to Duchamp becomes even more significant when we consider the indexical qualities of his artworks, which Rosalind Krauss argued in her essay "Notes on the Index."[302] Krauss compares the *Large Glass* to a photograph based on Duchamp's interest in "marking of the surfaces with instances of index [accumulation of dust, cracks, and shots] and the suspension of the images [cut-out imagery of the Bride and the Bachelors] as physical substances within the field of the picture [the

[300] In his assessment of the relation between avant-garde art and experimental film, Jordan quotes Duchamp at large. See Jordan, "Survival in the Independent - Non-Commercial –Avant-Garde – Experimental – Personal – Expressionistic Film Market of 1979."
[301] Jordan lived on the East Coast, and especially in New York periodically in the early sixties before making *The Centennial Exposition* and *The Large Glass* has been on display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 1952.
[302] Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, part 1," *October* 3 (Spring 1977): 68-81 and "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, part 2," *October* 4 (Autumn 1977): 58-67.

glass encasing].”[303] Jordan animates this index, connecting it not only to the history of Philadelphia but also to the history of cinema. In fact, in the second half of the film, Jordan transports the man to a moonscape from which he films the earth with a giant camera that collects reflections of light rays from the planet. This scene recalls Méliès’s *Voyage dans la Lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*) of 1902 and prefigures Google earth and satellite images. Inasmuch as Jordan constructs a fragmentary portrayal of the connections between Victorian curiosities, mass entertainment displays, fairs, museums, and histories of photography and cinema, he gives voice to a Benjaminian sense of history as that which “seizes hold of a memory as it flashes up.”[304] As Walter Benjamin observed in *The Arcades Project*, the fragments of kaleidoscopic ephemera in the nineteenth century displays offered a refracted view into history while signaling the shift to modernism and commodification.[305] Jordan adds a decisively reflexive postmodern dimension to such a collage-like concept of history in his acknowledgment of cinema’s role in re-constructing multiple histories of its own and of the world at large. This is a historiography that is indexical and surreal at the same time.

[303] Krauss, “Notes on the Index, part 1,” 77.
[304] Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 253-264.
[305] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*.

CONCLUSION

> Memory is an awareness of the past, in which the data is continually re-organised and sorted, according to new priorities and thus also new categories. In the case of an individual, memory is the locus of personhood, assuring a sense of identity across the discontinuity of lived moments in time. By contrast, collective or public memory has always been a contested territory of rival claims. There, not only the narratives of history are re-written to suit the present. Power-relations, too, are being re-negotiated, continually raising questions of appropriation and expropriation around the stakes of recognition and legitimacy. To slightly vary a line from Walter Benjamin: if history is indeed written by the victors, collective memory has often been regarded—notably also by Foucault—as necessary acts of resistance to this history.
>
> - Thomas Elsaesser[306]

Taking their cue from the Western myth of history as progress and constant development, standard histories of experimental cinema narrate a sharp shift from the film poems of the sixties into the conceptual and self-reflexive avant-garde of the seventies. An ethnographic and historiographic turn, however, also marked the avant-garde film scene of the late sixties and early seventies, exploring the ways in which experimental techniques can be merged with a documentary interest in the representation of culture and history. Among the filmmakers who explored alternative possibilities for avant-garde cinema were Bruce Baillie, Chick Strand, and Larry Jordan whose reflexive strategies, such as appropriation, performance and re-

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[306] Thomas Elsaesser, "The New Film History as Media Archaeology," *Cinémas: revue d'études cinématographiques / Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies* 14, no. 2-3 (2004): 75- 117.

enactment, and fragmentation subverted not only the modernist canon of experimental film but also the modernist understanding of historiography and ethnography. In this dissertation, I focused on the Canyon filmmakers film production between 1961 and 1979 to explore the experimental ethnographic and historiographic perspectives they employed.

My project investigates how culture and history constituted focal points for the Canyon filmmakers who explored the ways in which they could merge experimental film techniques with historiography and ethnography. While these filmmakers have been incorporated to the canon of experimental film with its emphasis on an autonomous subject and his/her formal explorations, I argue that we should analyze these films with respect to postmodern forms of historic and cultural representation. As Hayden White suggests, postmodern historiography emanates from both a suspicion of the possibility of objectivity and truth in representation, as well as from a more intimate (memory) and imaginative (fantasy) way of engaging with the past. Such postmodern forms of history combined with methods of appropriation, fragmentation, and reflexivity necessarily entail an engagement with the past through the present moment. Postmodern historiography and ethnography dissolve the Western myth of history as progress and constant development, a sense of history and development that also fueled the colonialist project. What transpires in Canyon filmmakers' work is an understanding of history and culture as memory, fantasy, and experience. While problematic in its utopianism, such concerns make the collective's work significant for the present moment in that they aimed to integrate the formal

exploration of avant-garde art and the ethnographic/historiographic inquiry – a task that still seems to occupy many artists active within the last two decades, such as Tacita Dean, Gabriel Orozco, Thomas Hirschhorn, Pierre Huyghe, and Mark Dion.

Canyon collective filmmakers open up productive spaces for the disciplines of Art History and Cinema Studies to reconsider the approaches to issues such as globalization, expanded cinema, digital revolution, as well as the ethnographic turn in art. These issues have been influential in redefining the focus and the scope of both disciplines. As I have argued throughout this project, finding alternative ways to engage with production, distribution, and exhibition of experimental cinemas occupied the Canyon collective filmmakers' enterprise. Their projects explore the definition of cinema itself within an intercultural context extending these concerns outside the limits of the text into the spaces of production and exhibition. To the extent that these interests can be traced back to the sixties, Canyon collective challenges genealogical approaches to not only the concepts of history and culture at large but also to the ways in which we tend to conceptualize cinema as an ever-developing phenomenon that begin to develop into a global and expanded medium only in the late eighties. Instead, an archeology of media, as Thomas Elsaesser suggests, allows us to see the parallels, cyclical patterns, as well as unruly paths within the history of the cinema.

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Figure 1.1: Still from *Quick Billie*

Figure 1.2: Still from *Here I Am*

Figure 1.3: Still from *Mr. Hayashi*

Figure 1.4: Still from *Castro Street*

Figure 1.5: Still from *All My Life*

Figure 1.6: Still from *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*

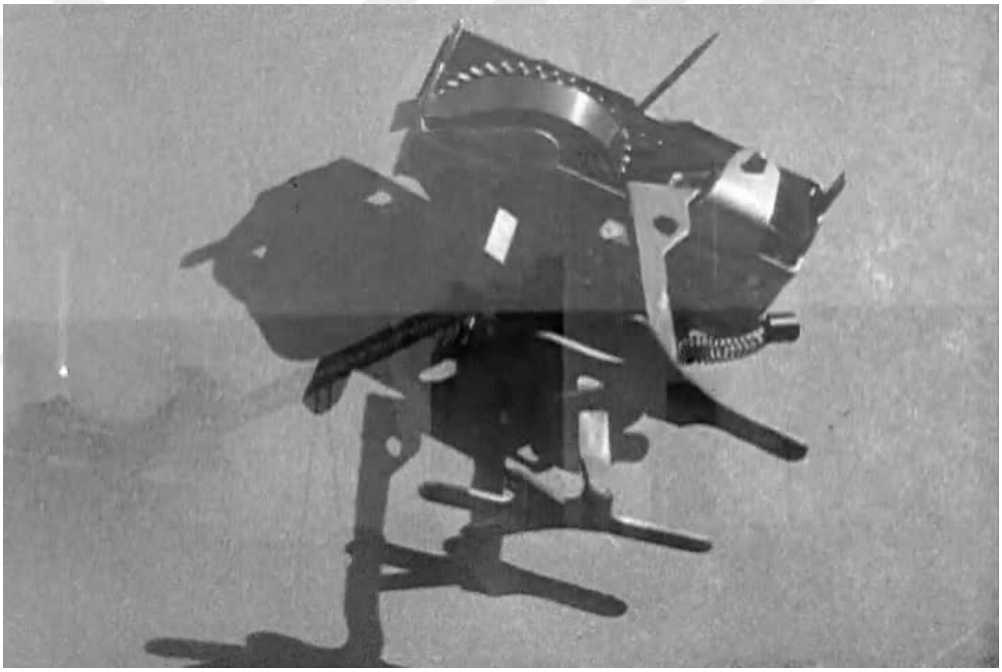

Figure 1.7: Still from *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*

Figure 1.8: Still from *Valentin de las Sierras*

Figure 2.1: Stills from *Cartoon le Mousse*

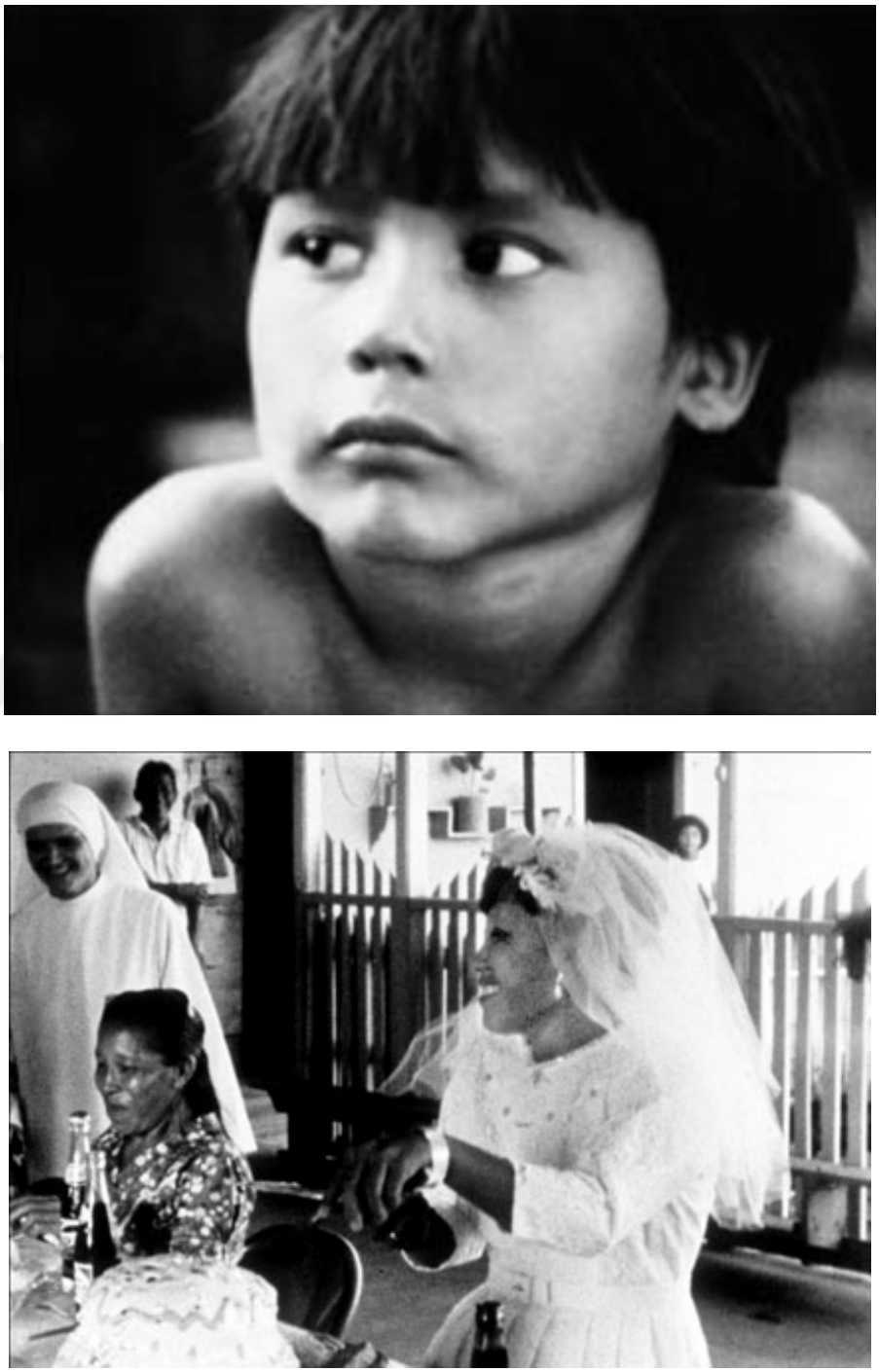

Figure 2.2: Stills from *Mosori Monika*

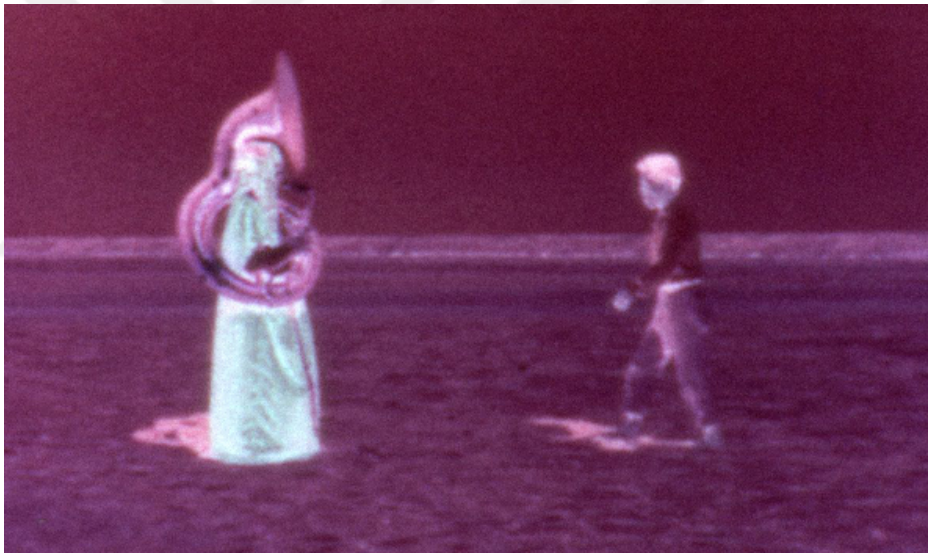

Figure 2.3: Still from *Anselmo*

Figure 2.4: Still from *Mujer de Milfuegos*

Figure 2.5: Still from *Soft Fiction*

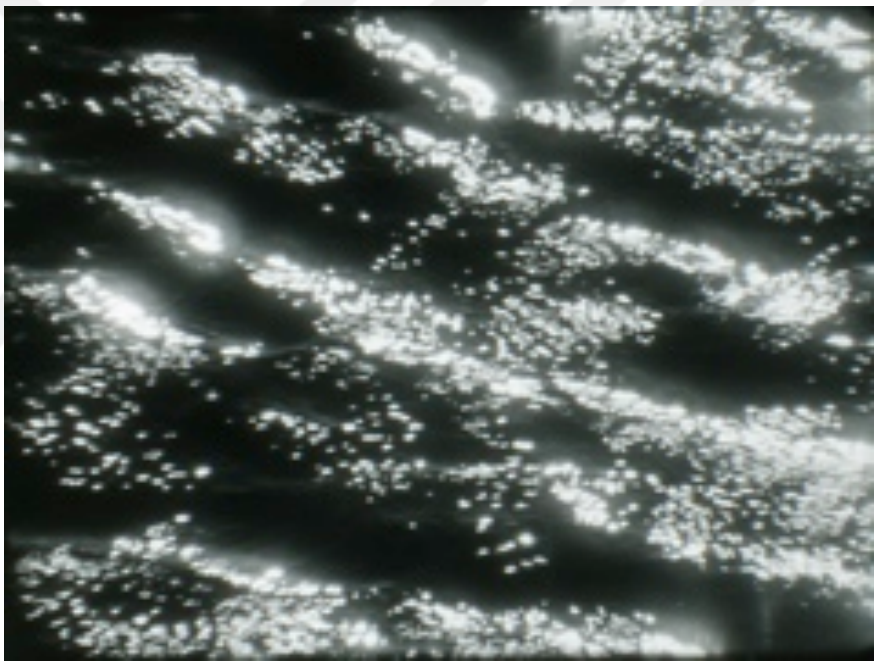

Figure 2.6: Still from *Kristallnacht*

Figure 3.1: Still from *Patricia Gives Birth to a Dream by the Doorway*

Figure 3.2: Still from *Our Lady of the Sphere*

Figure 3.3: Still from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

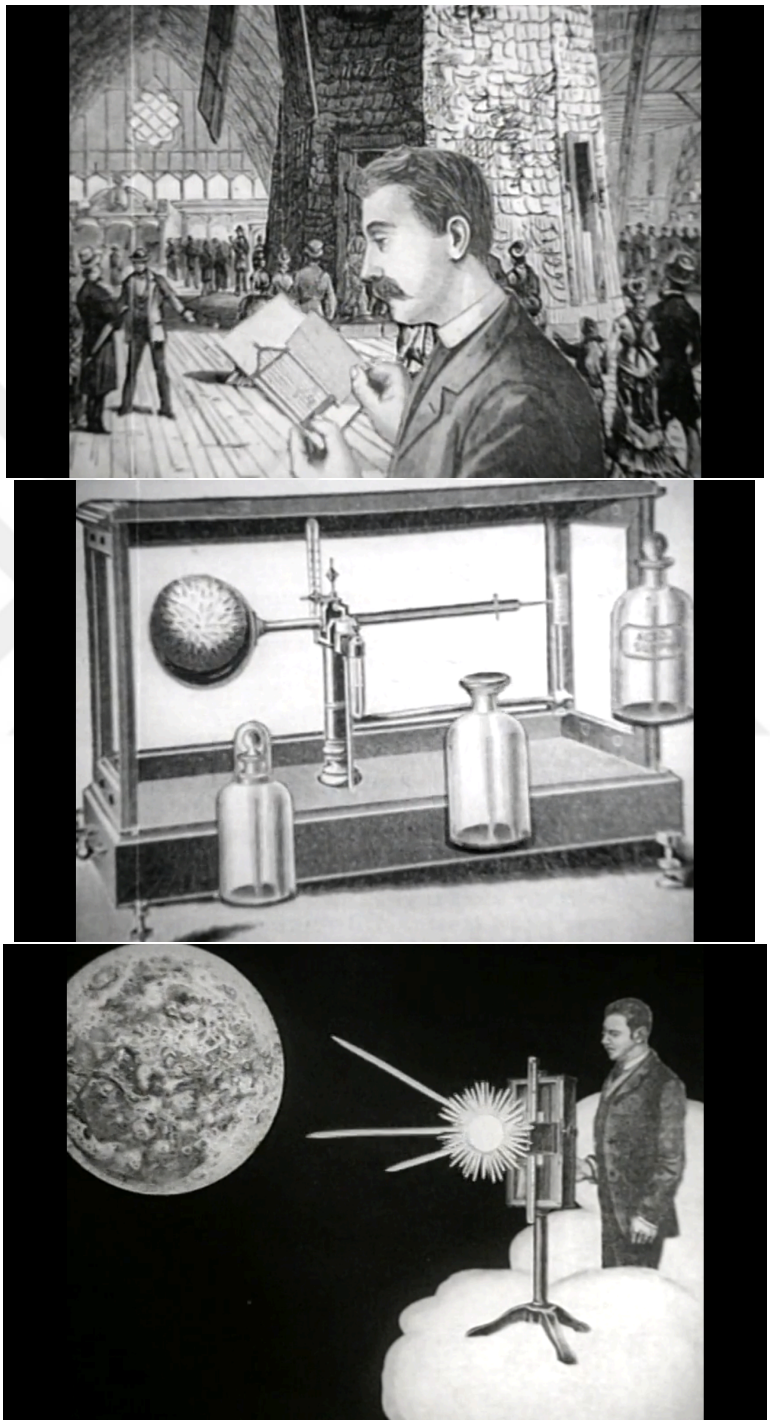

Figure 3.4: Stills from *The Centennial Exposition*