

**STEEL CITY CINEMA: INDEPENDENT AND EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKING IN
THE RUST BELT**

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Benjamin Ogrodnik, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2019

This dissertation considers the filmmakers and film organizations that transformed the rust-belt city of Pittsburgh into a global center of avant-garde, experimental and independent cinema during the 1970s and 1980s. The first part of the study offers an in-depth exploration of the new institutional resources in the early 1970s that supported filmmaking, namely the Film Section (1970-2003) based in the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, led by the pioneering curator Sally Dixon. Dixon not only provided an expanded range of viewing options to a local public hungry for new kinds of images, but she founded the equipment bank that became the Pittsburgh Filmmakers media arts center (1971-2018), which served as the base of operations for local artists making vital work and setting trends in progressive politics and radical aesthetics. The second part explores the careers of seven independent filmmakers who made work in the form of “film portraiture,” including Stan Brakhage, Tony Buba, Sharon Green, Stephanie Beroes, Steffi Domike, Roger Jacoby, and Peggy Ahwesh. Their film portraits, though short, fragmentary, and oftentimes made on a shoe-string budget, reveal aspects of a city emblematic of the nationwide crisis of deindustrialization. More positively, I argue that these film portraits also depict struggles and subjectivities unique to the independent film community. Many portraits were made by women, gay men, and working-class artists, and they highlight a range of important social issues including nonnormative sexuality, industrial labor, and sexism in the entertainment industry. This

dissertation centers the activities and accomplishments of Pittsburgh's film community in the wider media field. In this way, the dissertation challenges the assumption that filmmaking in these years was limited to coastal cities, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles or New York. Instead, it shows how a handful of passionate individuals remade an economically depressed locale into a hub of avant-garde art. It also offers an expanded definition of filmic portraiture, by considering issues of temporality, regionalism and marginalized social identity, which mark the Pittsburgh portraits. Finally, the dissertation reflects on the commitment that Dixon's Film Section demonstrated to advancing the work and financial resources of local and visiting filmmakers.

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PREFACE

Every dissertation results from the work of numerous individuals. In this vein, my project owes its existence to the assistance of many mentors, artists, arts organizations, and supportive colleagues who helped me pull it through to completion.

My thinking and writing about film was enhanced, at every step, by the advice and incisive critique offered by my research advisor, Terry Smith, and the faculty members of my dissertation committee: Lucy Fischer, Randall Halle, Barbara McCloskey, and Josh Ellenbogen. I appreciate most of all Professor Smith's willingness to take a risk on this project and for trusting me to develop it into a full-fledged study.

In countless ways, historians who write about experimental and independent film must often rely on the generosity of strangers. In my case, I had to rely on artists, curators, archivists, and arts administrators who lived and worked in the city of Pittsburgh during the eras I write about. At times, it took considerable effort and legwork to track them down for interviews. However, their personal memories and testimonies about the period provided invaluable data, without which the dissertation would not have been feasible.

Along these lines, I must give a special thanks to Bill Judson and Robert Haller. Judson and Haller led the city's major arts organizations--the Carnegie Museum of Art Film and Video Department, and the Pittsburgh Filmmakers, respectively--in the 1970s and 1980s. In recreating a sense of what it was like to live in the nation's "third coast" of independent film production during

those years, I relied heavily on their personal accounts of local filmmaking and film exhibitions in those decades. They spoke evocatively of a Pittsburgh rich with possibility. Their words provide the most complete and authoritative record of what occurred, when, where, and why.

I also want to thank several other interview subjects whose contributions were no less important to the realization of the project: Peggy Ahwesh, Steffi Domike, Stephanie Beroes, Bob Gaylor, Margie Strosser, Brady Lewis, Charles Glassmire, Kenneth Love, Tony Buba, Jean Rowlands Tarbox, Sharon Green, Maria Paul Kyros Menniti, Rick Pioto, Gary Kaboly, Carol O’Sullivan, Jesse McLean, Jim Hubbard, Susan Chainey, Greg Gans, Victor Grauer, and Paul Glabicki. Even if their words were not always directly cited, their voices greatly enriched the expanded portrait of Pittsburgh’s film scene that I crafted.

Emily Davis and Kate Barbera processed the Film and Video Department Archives at the Carnegie Museum of Art, making a treasure trove of research documents available to the public and the independent researcher. These materials were crucial in helping me understand the role played by Sally Dixon and her museum film program.

Several key individuals I spoke with were not located in Pittsburgh, but still part of the media arts field: John Hanhardt (formerly the film curator of the Whitney Museum of Art and the Walker Arts Center), Larry Kardish (former curator of Museum of Modern Art’s Cineprobe Series), Sheryl Mousley (senior curator of Film/Video at the Walker Art Center), and J. Ronald Green (scholar of film and advocate of media arts centers in the 1970s and 1980s). Professor Green was my mentor during my Master’s Degree program at Ohio State University. It brought me great joy to connect with him again, years later, in discussing his vital writings and contributions to the theorization of media arts centers in the 1970s. Green generously shared with me a cache of old documents, records, and archival materials from the “old days” that helped me flesh out the pre-

history of Pittsburgh's film scene, and helped me identify the key thinkers for the media arts field as a whole. For this, and much more, thanks, Ron.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was in a state of economic depression and social/cultural chaos. Like other industrial cities in the US, the predominant material base was being dismantled while working class, ordinary people suffered in the process. Deindustrialization was the name of the phenomenon.¹ The steel factories that were once powerfully wedded to the city were being closed down and replaced with business parks, shopping malls, or left behind to become “desolate moonscapes.”² One of the common images in the popular culture at this time was nightly news broadcasts showing mills and manufacturing plants getting blown up, repeated over and over; this imagery entered local people’s minds and conversations in a powerful way.

During this period there was a great deal of confusion and debate around what to make of the shift from an industrial economy to a new, postindustrial one based on medicine, technology, and the service professions. Some people celebrated great benefits to the business community, as an advancement; while others, notably the workers whose lives were directly affected, demanded better paying jobs and support for their families in need.³

¹ According to Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, the first use of “deindustrialization” was the Allies’ policy toward Germany after World War II, in “an active process of victors stripping a vanquished nation of its industrial power.” The term reappears in the 1970s and then receives the first extended treatment in Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). See Cowie and Heathcott, “Introduction: The Meanings of Deindustrialization,” *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003): 1.

² In a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* editorial, Bill Toland recalls the city’s painful transformation in 1983: “The working factories were gone, becoming overnight relics. And during this time, the relics were gone too, knocked down to make way for new shopping centers, new housing, new business parks, new river parks and new city.” Toland, “In desperate 1983, there was nowhere for Pittsburgh’s economy to go but up,” *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* December 23, 2012, <http://www.post-gazette.com/business/businessnews/2012/12/23/In-desperate-1983-there-was-nowhere-for-Pittsburgh-s-economy-to-go-but-up/stories/201212230258>.

³ The public responses to deindustrialization in Pittsburgh, from citizens to business elites, is examined in Dale A. Hathaway’s *Can Workers Have a Voice? The Politics of Deindustrialization in Pittsburgh* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

Pittsburgh was not unique in these respects. It was, however, emblematic of a wider process of economic reconfiguration. The term “Rust Belt” caught on in the late 1970s and early 1980s, referring to US states such as Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and regions such as northern Illinois, eastern Iowa, and southeastern Wisconsin. The Rust Belt was a harsh phrase that referenced many things: the flight of white residents to the suburbs; the rise of poverty, homelessness and crime; the decline and shrinkage of cities which formerly thrived on an industrial basis. But besides these and other structural shifts, the term Rust Belt designated above all a temporal experience, one of loss, slowing down, stoppage, and decay. From 1970 to 2006, cities such as Cleveland, Detroit, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh lost about 45% of their population; median household incomes fell; and negative growth became the defining characteristic of the region.

Representations of working class identity and the deindustrial landscape were rich and numerous. Most obviously, George Romero, born in the Bronx of Hispanic heritage and raised in Pittsburgh, gave the widespread atmosphere of collapse powerful expression in his highly successful zombie films. In the words of Tony Williams, the Southwestern Pennsylvania seen in George Romero’s films is “an expressionistically rendered living dead environment, draining its inhabitants of all vitality and rendering their lives both futile and wasted.”⁴

Local filmmakers found themselves in the midst of these changes. For the first time in the city’s history, independent artists had tremendous freedom and material resources to make films in relation to what was going on around them. The Pittsburgh Filmmakers, a local media arts organization, was a base of operations where they met, discussed, and created films.⁵ There was

⁴ Tony Williams, *The Cinema of George A. Romero: Knight of the Living Dead* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2003): 75.

⁵ Before 1973, the organization was called Pittsburgh Film-Makers Association, or PFM. Between 1973 and 1979, it became Pittsburgh Film-Makers Incorporated, PFMI. Since the 1990s it has been called Pittsburgh Filmmakers, without the hyphen, or PF.

an undeniable effect of this socioeconomic context on the artistic production: Whether one was a gritty social-realist, an abstract painter, an experimental animator, or a photographer, the reality of deindustrialization provided the motor, the backdrop, for whatever project one was doing. As a result, a regional voice came to be associated with individuals working and practicing film in Rust Belt settings.

Many artists in Pittsburgh lived in or had been raised in communities that had been stricken by economic hardship, and their films feature images of work and working people. Through this commitment artists were able to manifest what one filmmaker called “an indigenous perspective” against official media representations of the deindustrial city and its inhabitants.⁶ This resulted in films concerned with documenting the effects of urban change in architectural, social, and temporal terms. Many claimed the image of the steel mill and its workers as a barometer for the health of not just the city but also the nation.

Because of its concern for local history and working class subject matter, a defining feature of Pittsburgh cinema is its outsider – or “sub-national” – status in relation to the film activity in the “cinematic capitals” such as New York and Los Angeles.⁷ US film criticism in the 1970s and 1980s was largely unable to conceptualize the significance of space and place, preferring to theorize film in a vacuum, as if moving by its own aesthetic and ontological laws, rather than putting it in relation to the technological, social, and economic changes that were reshaping American’s cities, towns, and suburbs.⁸ As a result, local filmmakers such as Tony Buba

⁶ See Don Hopey, “Roll ‘em: Films set here capture milltowns’ plight,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, March 24, 1985, A1, A30-31; and Cathy D. Miller, “Braddock’s Skag: Film Maker Tony Buba,” *Pittsburgh New Sun*, February 21, 1980, 2.

⁷ Alex Marlow-Mann cites the sub-national as a defining feature of regional cinema, in “Regional Cinema: Micro-mapping and glocalisation,” *The Routledge Companion to World Cinema*, eds. Rob Stone, Paul Cooke, Stephanie Dennison, and Alex Marlow-Mann (New York: Routledge, 2017): 325.

⁸ In his study of 1970s-era depictions of cities and urban crisis in New Hollywood and European films, Lawrence Webb observes that academic film studies in the 1970s was dominated by critical approaches of Althusserian

complained of feeling ghettoized and marginalized under the label of “regionalist” artist. One of the features of this cinema then is the constant pressure to leave the “provincial” confines of the Rust Belt, lest one’s own career be “ruined,” resulting in what one filmmaker aptly described as a “Pittsburgh diaspora.”⁹

The work of local artists brought forth an image of socialized consciousness, a stream of countermemory that pushed back against delusions of capitalist progress. Pittsburgh films obsessively mourned a rapidly vanishing social world, almost in a spirit of salvage anthropology.¹⁰ The films also predicted the coming triumph of neoliberal conservatism. But the image of the postindustrial city was not always negative, it was also potentially liberatory, and the ideal of ruin was re-imagined as an opportunity for articulating alternative social identities. If, as Jefferson Cowie argues, the mass media at this time was fixated on a white male working class subject fading away¹¹, then in the independent media sphere there arose, in its place, visions of intersectional feminism, emerging coalitions of queer and African American populations. These images complicated a white-washed and conservative picture of national identity. The film medium was

Marxism, structural semiotics, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, associated with the influential journal, *Screen*. These approaches, though valuable, tended to focus on textual and ideological analysis, without reference to nuances of geographic context and neglecting the dense interplay of the local, national and international within particular filmmaking communities and screen cultures. According to Webb, “cultural approaches to cinema, space and cities would not emerge until the 1980s,” with the appearance of historical studies on early-twentieth-century modernity (as in the Walter Benjamin-inflected work of Miriam Hansen) and Frederic Jameson’s foregrounding of urban space as a central aspect of “postmodernity.” See Webb, *The Cinema of Urban Crisis: Seventies Film and the Reinvention of the City* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014): 21-23.

⁹ Personal interview with Robert Gaylor (filmmaker, visual artist, and former executive director of Pittsburgh Filmmakers), October 4, 2016.

¹⁰ James Clifford defines the salvage paradigm and its problematic assumption that “the other society is weak and ‘needs’ to be represented by an outsider (and that what matters in its life is its past, not present or future).” Clifford, “On ethnographic allegory,” *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986): 113.

¹¹ Cowie examines a series of national newspaper profiles in the mid 1970s detailing the white working class Everyman, and this generic figure’s turn away from progressivism to Reaganite conservatism. See the first chapter of his book *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

reconfigured into a visual and temporal record of the traumatic gaps, discontinuities and complexities of the Rust Belt.

1.1 THE FILMMAKERS

Local filmmakers in the city operated at three levels, making images that confronted a changing world. First, in production terms the filmmakers adhered to a “mode of film practice”¹² that was economically precarious: they all identified as independent artists who worked outside the commercial industry and were forced to screen films on the nontheatrical circuit with limited financial return. This position gave them a critical stance on the media and the economic system in which they worked. Second, they produced gritty, socially realistic content, recording images of abandoned mill towns, unemployed workers and the extreme poverty that had befallen America’s industrial centers. Third, in stylistic terms, they all pursued remarkable projects of “ruined aesthetics,” John David Rhode’s designation for art and filmmaking that visualize time and modernity in terms of “what is left of what was,” borrowing the formal traits of architectural ruins, such as narrative incompleteness, fragmented space, and physical sites unmade by time.¹³

Regardless of chosen genre, all the artists based here were linked by an interest in death, loss, and decomposition. They made films with gritty subject matter, pointing to the economic

¹² David Bordwell defines mode of film practice as the technical and institutional arrangements that facilitate film production, exhibition, and distribution, in “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice,” *Film Criticism* 4, 1 (Fall 1979): 56–64. Jonathan Walley repositions this phrase to discuss independent filmmaking and artistic approaches to film in “The Material of Film and the Idea of Cinema: Contrasting Practices in Sixties and Seventies Avant-Garde Film,” *October* 103 (2003): 15–30.

¹³ The concept of ruined aesthetics is explored in Rhodes’ analysis of collage-based films by Peggy Ahwesh, in “Ruin to Ritual,” *Screen* 55:4 (Winter 2014): 495.

devastation hitting the wider region known as the Rust Belt. Pittsburgh filmmakers were unique in that they told stories of a place transitioning, painfully, from heavy industry to a new, flexible economy based on service, health, and tech. Traces of this trauma are ever-present in their films. And their films – though not always commercially successful or widely seen – offer us compelling representations of urban change, working class politics, and radical expansions of film form.

The dissertation is organized into chapters on seven important Pittsburgh-based filmmakers that epitomize key characteristics of the region's independent cinema, as it existed in those decades. The first chapter sets the stage by retracing the formation of critical film institutions in the early 1970s. The Film Section, Carnegie Museum of Art, founded in 1970, and Pittsburgh Filmmakers media arts center, launched in 1971, gave platforms to independent filmmakers for making images about the changes going on around them. Pittsburgh would soon become a central node in a growing network of major media centers in cities like New York and Boston, supporting film tours, hosting visiting artists, and sustaining a wider ecosystem of independent media making. Building on the work of scholars who chronicle the rise of the not-for-profit media system (Green, O'Grady, Renan), I show how this material infrastructure increased participation by democratizing access to expensive film equipment.¹⁴ I also show that the newly created independent channels of distribution, exhibition and reception—in and outside the city—both made Pittsburgh cinema possible and constrained its mode of address.

The remaining body of the dissertation examines working-class filmmakers who rallied around Pittsburgh Filmmakers, contextualizing their novel filmic investigations of loss, death and

¹⁴ See J. Ronald Green, "Film and Not-For-Profit Media Institutions," *Film/Culture Explorations of Film in its Social Context*, ed. Seri Thomas (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1982): 37-59; Sheldon Renan, "The Concept of Regional Film Centers," *Sight Lines* Vol. 7 No. 3 (1973-75): 7-10; and Gerald O'Grady, "Structure," a paper prepared for the National Committee on Film and Television Resources and Services, date unknown, 1-6.

urban decay. I consider the case of Tony Buba (b.1944--), an Italian American steelworker who made film portraits about dispossessed inhabitants of his hometown Braddock, Pennsylvania, the site of the first American steel mill. Buba made home movies of Braddock residents with a striking sense of intimacy and child-like reverence toward his subjects. He framed the experience of deindustrialization on a granular, personal level, drawing on the power of nostalgia and familial recognition, in marked contrast to other social documentarians of the era who often neglected the voices of ordinary people in favor of broad, sweeping critiques of global capital.

Another key figure is gay liberation activist and painter-filmmaker, Roger Jacoby (1944-1984). Perpetually unemployed, and yet widely known for processing film by hand in his darkened bathtub, Jacoby explored notions of ruin/ruination more formally. The toxic chemicals with which he treated his films created shocking and abstract reconfigurations of the human form, suggesting incipient transgender subjectivity. His novel response to the realities of deindustrialization was to harness processes of decay in the filmic material itself, making “original film prints” without duplicate prints that broke down and gradually disintegrated over time. Jacoby’s varied work, though often neglected by scholars, offers a model of how the radical denial of optical clarity and filmic reproducibility can transform aesthetic-technical problems of contingency, instability, randomness, and destruction into temporal ideas suited for a chaotic age.

Several women filmmakers explored the gender, class, and racial ramifications of deindustrialization. A key filmmaker is Steffi Domike (b.1946--) who founded a media nonprofit organization, Mon Valley Media, and made women-centric documentaries, with all-women-led crews, about steelworkers who are single mothers. Representative of her interest in working-class social reproduction is Domike’s *Women of Steel*, which generates a timely sense of intersectional feminism. Her filmography traces how black and white women steelworkers formed alliances in

resisting sexism in the workplace, and how, when the steel mills closed, they supported each other, adopting new roles as community organizers while they forged communal “family” structures for their own survival.

I analyze two other women filmmakers, Peggy Ahwesh (b.1954--) and Stephanie Beroes (b.1954--) who made “small-town ethnographic” films.¹⁵ These films portrayed the difficulties of being an artist, and offer slice-of-life portraits of transgender people, people of color, and working-class women living in Pittsburgh’s downtrodden neighborhoods. Sensitive to how women especially are often seen but not heard in official media, Beroes and Ahwesh emphasized sound design in their films as a way to prioritize women’s voices. With both artists having deep ties to the punk music scene, and sharing a fascination with pioneering ethnographic filmmakers such as Ray Birdwhistell and Margaret Mead, I show the ways that they created a “multi-voiced” auditory cinema for archiving the diverse, raucous sounds of the postindustrial city. Through a punk-inflected, anarchic approach to the ruined urban environment around them, Beroes and Ahwesh staged the deindustrial city as a utopian counter-public, swelling with possibility, even as it undergoes traumatic economic change.

Filmmaker Stan Brakhage visited Pittsburgh in 1971. The footage he gathered led to one of the landmark works of documentary film, *The Pittsburgh Documents* or *Pittsburgh Trilogy*, a series of institutional portraits depicting the city police, the West Penn hospital, and the morgue. With the exception of the morgue film, *The Act of Seeing with One’s Own Eyes*, this Trilogy has been overlooked in his oeuvre.¹⁶ Brakhage’s work is usually celebrated for his visionary and

¹⁵ Peggy Ahwesh uses this term in her interview with Steve Reinke, “Peggy Ahwesh 2007: An Interview,” *Video Data Bank*, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/peggy-ahwesh-2007-interview>

¹⁶ To my knowledge, only David James focuses on the *Trilogy* as a complete unit, providing a short, dismissive critique in *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 50-52.

inward looking personal style, in which he utilizes film as a medium for cosmic self-exploration. *The Pittsburgh Trilogy* destabilized this trajectory and its surrounding critical narrative by expanding his range of subject matter and approaches to film as art. Though Brakhage was not a native Pittsburgher, his cinematic vision of postindustrial Pittsburgh, oriented as it was around depictions of death, dissected corpses, beating hearts, and petty criminals on the streets, operates as a critical document of a city in transition. His work subsequently became the source of a rich, intertextual dialogue with feminist artists, particularly Peggy Ahwesh (whose own *Pittsburgh Trilogy* is the focal point of a chapter devoted to her work). Without implying that Brakhage single-handedly jump-started the independent film scene, his inclusion is warranted for the influential treatment of issues germane to Rust Belt filmic portraiture, centered on aspects of time, labor, participant-observation, and subjectivity. Brakhage's approach is taken up and transformed in the work of the local artists.

Sharon Green's *Self Portrait of a Nude Model Turned Cinematographer* lies at an unformed or invisible intersection between feminist politics and incipient "cinefeminism," colliding its critique of male-authored images of women with autobiographical filmmaking. Green has been largely overlooked because of the poor reception of her work in the local scene, and because of a persistently reductive framing of her film as mere homage to male artists, such as Stan Brakhage, for whom Green was a nude model. In her chapter I perform a "microhistory" that reclaims Green's film as a hybrid of "erotic self-portraiture"¹⁷ and social critique. I identify her connections to local film organizations, avant-garde artists such as Yvonne Rainer and Carolee

¹⁷ The term "erotic self-portraiture" refers to self-shot films by women, featuring the female body as the locus of pleasure and self-understanding, and stylistically marked by the use of hand-processing or other experimental techniques. For more on the term, see Shana MacDonald, "Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* as Erotic Self-Portraiture," *Cineaction* 2007: 68.

Schneemann, and her prefiguration of topics that later dominated mid-1970s feminist film theory, such as the male gaze and female objectification in art. Despite ongoing neglect and misclassification of her work, Green's *Self Portrait* remains a potent visual archive that glimpses a new formulation of film style and social representation that typifies Pittsburgh cinema in its break with a high-modernist framework that preoccupied stalwarts of the 1970s old guard.

1.2 RUST BELT FILMIC PORTRAITURE

Intentionally or not, the Pittsburgh filmmakers utilized film in counterintuitive ways, and they testified to (and, in some cases, resisted) processes of change and capitalistic “creative destruction” in an era of deindustrialization. They utilized cheap or even obsolete technology, such as the Auricon 16mm camera or the amateur and small-sized Super8mm camera, as their tools for recording stories about their lives and communities that were allegedly in the process of becoming “obsolete.” They told “little stories,” micro-histories and attended to minor characters. They trained their cameras on vulnerable populations who suffered from chronic underemployment. As a consequence, their films looked unlike the work being generated in the nation’s cinematic capitals: Pittsburgh’s cinema was smaller, personal and intimate, defined by a poverty of means. Yet, even for local practitioners and curators, it was hard to categorize and define.¹⁸ This pattern

¹⁸ In the “Pittsburgh Film-Makers: 1982 Traveling Film Program”, curated by Bruce Posner, the show’s purpose was to ask “whether Pittsburgh, during more than a decade of active filmmaking at PFMI [Pittsburgh Filmmakers Inc], has its own ‘developed’ school with a particular style and ideology.” In response to this question, Pittsburgh-based curator Bill Judson (who authored the introductory essay for the Traveling Film Program) declines to identify any unifying traits or characteristics of Pittsburgh cinema. This refusal of self-definition, in my view, was a tremendous

of regional filmmaking in the postwar period bucked the two cresting stylistic movements of US independent/experimental film that were once dominant yet fast becoming residual– the inward looking Brakhage visionary cinema and the hypercalculated and high-modernist Structural/materialist film.¹⁹

Largely avoiding these two stylistic currents, Pittsburgh filmmakers harked back to the archaic cinematic mode of filmic portraiture. This cinematic mode, rarely discussed in scholarly literature with a few important exceptions²⁰, is notoriously difficult to define, and serious critical investigation into it is long overdue. The film portrait can be long or short in duration; politically radical or conservative; oriented to the fantastical or to actuality. The turn of the twentieth century was marked by the ubiquity of early film portraits by the Lumières and other pioneers, who depicted prosaic images of family, such as a child drinking a bottle of milk, and in so doing demonstrated the indexical power of film technology. Documentarians such as Robert Flaherty generated influential film portraits of the “Other,” such as *Nanook of the North* (1922). However, since that time, filmic portraiture went underground, rarely exhibited in public until it reappeared after a long hiatus in the 1960s, when new modes of exhibition and production were formed to support its creation and circulation, and made popular once more through Andy Warhol’s films, such as the *Screen Tests*.²¹

missed opportunity in the historiography of this period. See Bill Judson, “The Pittsburgh Film-Makers: 1982 Traveling Film Program,” 2.

¹⁹ See Tom Gunning, “Towards a Minor Cinema: Fonoroff, Herwitz, Ahwesh, Lapore, Klahr and Solomon,” *Motion Picture* Vol 3, Nos. 1–2 (Winter 1989–90): 2-5.

²⁰ For more on film as a portrait medium, see for instance David Curtis, “Portrait,” *A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain* (London: BFI Press, 2007): 103-112.

²¹ The *Screen Tests* are a series of short, silent, black-and-white film portraits by Andy Warhol, made between 1964 and 1966, generally showing their subjects from the neck up against plain backdrops. They feature Silver Factory celebrities, such as John Cale, Edie Sedgwick, Nico, Yoko Ono, and more. Callie Angell offers a comprehensive inventory in *Andy Warhol Screen Tests: The Films of Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Abrams, 2006).

Portraiture in film has similar stylistic attributes and social functions as in painting or photography. Visually, the film portrait “favor[s] frontal midrange compositions in which a subject’s face and hands are privileged bearers of expression.”²² The filmmaker’s intent is to display the likeness, personality and mood of the person; to capture something of who they are. As Sarah Neely observes, this goal of referentiality can be attained in a variety of ways: “A film portrait can be intensely personal with the artist capturing the intimate moments shared with someone very close to them, or, they can also be distant in their treatment of their subject, dealing only with aspects which serve as a springboard to service a wider thematic concern in their work.”²³ An example of both tendencies would be Hollis Frampton’s 1966 film, *Manual of Arms*, which consists of short, black-and-white sequences depicting 14 of his personal friends. Shown sitting on a wooden stool in his studio, each individual featured from the 1960s New York art scene is free to do as they please, while Frampton patiently records them with his camera. Some smoke, some drink coffee. Others dance and beckon the camera forth; while others shyly avoid Frampton’s probing gaze. While the overall tone of the piece alternates from intimacy to distance, playfulness to seriousness, Frampton manages to capture unique attributes of each individual who engages (or disengages) with his camera-eye. While such portraits are by definition incomplete depictions, in that they disclose only a brief moment in the subject’s life span, they often aspire to a grander sense of temporal unity and a depth of insight about the depicted person. As Richard Brilliant’s classic study of the painted portrait argues, “the portrait image [is] a general, and often generous statement, summing up ‘a life.’”²⁴ Brilliant goes on to claim that the portrait image,

²² Paul Arthur, “Identity in/as Moving Image,” *A Line of Sight: American Avant-garde Film Since 1965* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005): 25.

²³ Sarah Neely, *Between Categories: The Films of Margaret Tait: Portraits, Poetry, Sound and Place* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017): 45.

²⁴ Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991/2008), 10.

through its close observation of details, gestures, clothing, micro-expressions, and props, conveys something of the person's inner character and "collapses the disparate stages of human existence, making possible a holistic conception of one's life."²⁵ This project of summing-up-a-life is manifested in a range of filmic portraits, such as Shirley Clarke's *Portrait of Jason* (1967); Marie Menken's *Andy Warhol* (1965); Gregory Markopoulos *Galaxie* (1966); or even Jonas Mekas's own self-portrait, *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches (Walden)* (1969). Along these lines, my study considers and elaborates the temporal paradoxes and the search for identity that characterizes portraiture practiced in a rust-belt community of filmmakers, while also highlighting how directors mobilize film's indexical properties and its inherent capacity to re-order, prolong, condense, or even stop time, to get at the authentic core of the individuals or groups shown on screen.

In narrative terms, portraits generally resist dramatic development or story conventions; and in terms of subject matter, portraits focus on the filmmaker's friends, family members or fellow artists placed in domestic, authentic settings to give "an impression of particularized identity grounded in corporeal fullness and immediacy."²⁶ In the case of Pittsburgh's regional cinema, film portraiture produced an informal and intimate mode of address that allowed filmmakers to make the personal political, and enabled them to connect the social crises in multiple spheres to formal questions of temporality, space/place, and personal expression that had interested them as artists. Filmic portraiture was closely allied with what Roland Barthes calls photography's impulse to commemorate "what-has-been"²⁷, and thus was a way of cherishing the past, and of honoring, concretizing familial- and friendship-based bonds in an unstable world.

²⁵ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 12.

²⁶ Paul Arthur provides a stylistic overview of the postwar 1960s genre of filmic portraiture, delineating this category from the home-movie and cinema verité documentary. See Arthur, "Identity in/as Moving Image," *A Line of Sight: American Avant-garde Film Since 1965*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005): 24-44.

²⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980): 76.

Apropos of the form, critics observing this work often used descriptors like “intimate”, “informal,” “artless,” amateur,” “small,” “provincial,” or “anti-stylistic.” However, in the process, critics neglected the quality and uniqueness of these films as visual artworks, and de-contextualized and submerged this body of work from contemporary awareness and appreciation. Then as now, this oversight has meant that we have overlooked the ways that, taken together, this film movement mounted an indictment of a historical conjuncture of capitalism, while it also redefined cinema by thematizing (non)reproducibility as a major dynamic of capitalism and of film-as-art.

Portraiture, in its stylistic unruliness and its lack of art-world legibility, proved risky as a basis for securing one’s career. On the one hand, film portraits could be made inexpensively and quickly. Because of their short length, they were programmed easily in film festivals, universities and art museums, which all prioritized the short format.²⁸ At the same time, portraits had a throwaway stature: they inherited the long-standing problem of film in relation to the wider art market. Unlike rarefied, one-of-a-kind artworks like painting or sculpture, film has a perceived noncommodity status by virtue of being a reproducible object.²⁹ Though some filmmakers have made successful careers from film portraiture or self-portraiture, such as Ross McElwee, portraits in general were infrequently purchased and rarely preserved except by collectors and institutions that were especially interested in the artist.

²⁸ Ahwesh, Buba, Beroes and Jacoby took advantage of the short film format. Their work was programmed widely in international film festivals. Buba in particular recalls that his short films yielded a financial return in their propensity to win prizes on the festival circuit, to the point where it actually paid better than teaching film in a university.

²⁹ Erika Balsom analyzes the theoretical and historical dimensions of film’s problematic status as an art commodity, due to its inherent connection to the economy of the multiple. She also highlights the efforts of some film artists to “rare-ify” film by modifying its circulation, rendering it as a limited edition for collectors, galleries, and museum institutions. See Balsom, “The Limited Edition,” *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017): 127-165.

But as a form of cultural discourse capable of responding nimbly to societal ills, portraiture was valuable because it seamlessly linked up with relevant historical developments and upheavals that interested the local filmmakers. As such, film portraits could be used as a tool to advance the needs of social movements, such as the unemployed worker's struggle against plant closures. Portraits also publicized and articulated the demands of the Women's Movement and Gay Liberation. These social movements, when they blended into the film activity of the city, as they did elsewhere, extended their political objectives. Socially conscious artists used film portraits to mount critiques of images of social minorities in mainstream media, or to question the nature of gender/sexuality power hierarchies in the wider heterosexist class society. Because of its intrinsic bagginess, portraiture also was capable of containing and absorbing a variety of other cinematic genres, such as found-footage, experimental narrative, autobiography, and even scientific discourses, such as visual anthropology. Filmic portraiture at this moment, to borrow Tom Gunning's phrase, constituted a "minor cinema" that parasitically attached itself to the dominant tongue of multiple "majority cinemas", all while avoiding serious attention or scholarly theorization.³⁰

Particularly with the case of women filmmakers, portraiture became a way to build inroads into ordinarily separate spheres of praxis. Feminism had taken root in Pittsburgh in the 1970s, as evidenced by the formation of 47 women's organizations in the city by 1976.³¹ However, the Pittsburgh Filmmakers organization and the Film Section at the Museum were far from being sites

³⁰ Gunning and other historians have turned to the "minor" as a conceptual tool to recover little-discussed art movements that derive their strength and political/aesthetic innovation by virtue of existing on the periphery, the margins of visibility in mainstream discourse. The minor is taken from Gilles Deleuze's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

³¹ The 2013 exhibition and oral history project, *In Sisterhood: The Women's Movement in Pittsburgh, 1967-1989*, curated by Patricia M. Ulbrich, reconstructs the breadth of women-centric institutional forms in the city, as well as their political accomplishments.

of women's equality. Many women reported that, in these decades, feminism was not well received or represented in the area of local independent filmmaking.³² Yet, in the case of turning to cinematic portraiture, women discovered a form where they were able to articulate their self-identities, respond to the gaps in public consciousness about equality, and intervene in contentious sites of social struggle, calling to account the rampant oppressions that afflicted the media art field as well as the wider society. Indeed, as scholars have pointed out, the genre of the feminist portrait film formed an important intersection between the Women's movement and nascent feminist film theory.³³ Feminist film portraits drew together objectives from film and activist discourses, as in first-person films about women's bodies that explored public and private dimensions of women's identities in Western societies.³⁴ The same reliance on film was true for unemployment campaigns and gay right's movements, though the form's utility to these has yet to be acknowledged. The city's independent circuit of production and exhibition enabled minorities to self-produce unique, socially progressive artworks and exhibit them to a wider public, thus providing a platform for amplifying objectives of the civil rights movements and those of adjacent discourses.

Part of the dissertation's larger purpose, then, is to excavate and articulate the film portrait as a relatively underdiscussed but widespread phenomenon whose omission has created a massive gap in the historiography of independent film and media art in the US. Considering each Pittsburgh filmmaker as a kind of "portraitist" demonstrates the breadth of style, subject matter and cultural impact which this underdog form has had. It also builds on the existing scholarly literature on

³² The film scene particularly in the 1970s was "a boy's club," according to Jean Tarbox, curatorial assistant to Sally Dixon, at the Film Section, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute. Personal interview with Tarbox, March 16, 2016.

³³ See B. Ruby Rich's fascinating recollection of women's experiments with filmic portraiture and its supporting infrastructure, in *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

³⁴ Jan Rosenberg *Women's Reflections: The Feminist Film Movement* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983): 112.

portraiture which has either been purely theoretical, as in Raymond Bellour's work³⁵; or restricted to the radical 1960s period, as in the writing of David Curtis, Paul Arthur, and David James. Though this literature has been invaluable for establishing the main concerns of filmic portraiture, it has been restricted by its temporal narrowness and its inability to consider dynamics of space and place in the functioning of the form. In other words, the issues that affected the portrait in the 1960s, in the cinematic capitals of Los Angeles, London, or New York were not the same issues facing artists in deindustrialized Pittsburgh.

In contrast to this previous scholarly work, I believe that the importance of the city's economic transfiguration in the era, and the cultural displacement artists felt by working outside cinematic capitals, resulted in a change to the portrait's fundamental traits. The qualities of remembrance, familial intimacy, backward-looking nostalgia; the articulation of social support networks through film; the specificity of tracing a localized geography via landmarks and local personalities; and the filmmaker's desire for articulating authentic self-identity (no matter how perilous such a goal was) – these qualities of the film portrait we see in the 1960s get intensified and put front and center in the regional cinema of Pittsburgh. They are informed by what Brooke Jacobson calls a regional voice³⁶; these are not just portraits of a single figure, but metaportraits of an entire region or social group in the city.

Recently, scholars have noted that portraiture played a prominent role in other deindustrialized art communities in the 1970s, such as the New York downtown scene of “art

³⁵ Raymond Bellour, “Autoportraits,” *Communications* 48 (1988): 327-387; and Bellour, “Eye for I: Video Self-Portraits,” *Eye for I: Video Self-Portraits*, (New York: Independent Curators, 1990): 7-20.

³⁶ For Jacobson, “the regional film is distinguished by its ability to speak from a position of closeness or identification with the people and place it represents. It is not simply about, but comes from the region. That is to say the regional voice(s) is somehow articulated in the text, whether directly by the filmmaker who comes from the area, or through the agency of an actor or people portraying themselves.” Jacobson, “Regional Film: A Strategic Discourse in the Global Marketplace,” *Journal of Film and Video* 43.4 (1991): 21.

school” filmmakers who made numerous portraits linked with the No Wave music scene, and whose imagery directly or indirectly made visible the wider socioeconomic dynamics.³⁷ In a similar vein, this dissertation considers why portraiture was such an apt response to the socioeconomic dynamics of Pittsburgh; and why sentimental images of family, in this era, become such dominant trends in these explorations, as compared to film portraits by Warhol, for instance. This consideration of a whole movement of film portraitists advances the very definition of portraiture and enhances our historical perspective, making it possible for scholars to consider the changes to this form over time, the commonalities/differences between portraitist communities in the same period, and the continuing legacy of portraiture beyond Pittsburgh. For even after celluloid film disappears, even after independent film infrastructure disappears, and as cinematic storytelling migrates (or relocates) to mobile formats like the smart phone, the portrait persists. (Self)portraiture remains more pervasive than ever, particularly in and across new social media technologies, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and so on.³⁸

³⁷ For two excellent treatments on the film portraiture of and by No Wave/punk filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s, see Joan Hawkins *Downtown Film and TV Culture 1975-2001* (Chicago: Intellect Books, 2015); and Vera Dika, “Vivienne Dick’s Film Portraits,” *The (Moving) Pictures Generation: The Cinematic Impulse in Downtown New York Art and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 53 – 68.

³⁸ The centrality of self-portraiture in the expansive, and ever-expanding domain of digital media, is the subject of a special issue in *Networking Knowledge*, titled “Be Your Selfie.” See Laura Busetta and Valerio Coladonato, “Introduction: Be Your Selfie: Identity, Aesthetics and Power in Digital Self-Representation,” *Networking Knowledge* 8.6 (November 2015): 1-3.

1.3 THE MEDIA ARTS CENTER MOVEMENT: INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS OF THE PITTSBURGH FILM SCENE

In the 1970s and 1980s, Pittsburgh filmmaking was oriented around two robust organizations, the Carnegie Museum of Art Film Section, and the Pittsburgh Filmmakers media center. These organizations were buoyed by the then-current excitement for homemade approaches to art and film; and they sprouted out of the newly available public and national arts funds that called for “regional development” outside the metropolitan centers.³⁹ Much like the explosive growth in State funds for film/media art in the UK,⁴⁰ the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in these years provided funds to stimulate growth and long-term stability in film, TV, radio and media.⁴¹ Local granting bodies, such as the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, appeared as well. The Pittsburgh filmmakers seized upon these funds and developed institutional resources in ways that would later have formative, extensive, and long-lasting impacts on the global media arts.

Sally Dixon supervised the Film Section, a bastion of innovative film exhibition. Dixon’s monthly Independent Film Maker (IFM) Series, held in the 194-person Museum of Art Theatre, included an introduction to new work by a visiting filmmaker, a presentation of the work itself, and a discussion involving the audience after the screening. The first two decades of the IFM Series attracted 200 internationally recognized artists to Pittsburgh, including Carolee Schneemann (USA), Jean-Luc Godard (France), Werner Herzog (Germany), Peter Kubelka (Austria), Joyce

³⁹ See “Public Media Program Guidelines: Fiscal Year 1976,” National Endowment for the Arts, 1.

⁴⁰ “Perhaps paradoxically, state financial support, particularly through the British Film Institute and the Arts Council, made a crucial contribution to the intellectual infrastructure of the radical film movement [in England].” See Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey, “Introduction,” *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and Experimental Film in the 1970s*, eds Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017): 8.

⁴¹ Funding for film, television, and radio activities and organizations were earmarked under the NEA’s Public Media Program, which started with a \$1 million pilot program in 1972; and in 1976, was renamed the “Media Arts” Program.

Wieland (Canada), Trinh T. Minh-ha (Vietnam), among many others. Dixon instituted other mechanisms such as a news bulletin, artist honoraria, a National Preview Network distribution service, and even assisted with the creation of some films. She went on to serve advocacy roles for media arts in the NEA and the US Information Agency (USIA).

Pittsburgh Filmmakers started in the basement of Selma Burke Art Center, an African American community space.⁴² The facilities were limited, but in exchange for low fees, citizens became access members and rented equipment for their work. After a few years of consolidation and fund-raising on the part of early leaders such as Bob Gaylor and Robert Haller, the Filmmakers won the funds it needed to build out into a proper independent space. It relocated in 1974 to the 205 Oakland Ave building owned by University of Pittsburgh, in an “environment specifically designed for darkrooms, a library, a gallery, and a small theatre.”⁴³ This prime location gave it close proximity to the Museum of Art Film Section, the University, and the WRS Motion Pictures Lab.

Pittsburgh Filmmakers borrowed many tangible and intangible characteristics from the film cooperatives and workshops that preceded it. Pittsburgh Filmmakers was founded initially to support media and photographic production, embraced a bohemian spirit of Do-It-Yourself, and the barriers to entry were practically nonexistent. This initial focus on production expanded to the full range of services necessary to ensure the reproduction of an independent film community. Young or old, male or female, gay or straight, nearly anyone could enter some phase of activity and make the space their own. In a reflection of the democratized and porous division of labor that characterized this world, Filmmakers would regularly hire access members or graduated students

⁴² Though Pittsburgh Filmmakers started in a black community center, African Americans in the film scene were underrepresented until the 1990s and 2000s.

⁴³ “Pittsburgh Film-Makers Incorporated,” *Carnegie Magazine* Vol XLIX No 1 (January 1975): 37.

from its course offerings to work in the equipment office or supervise the film exhibitions; Brady Lewis, a local animator who eventually served as the education director for thirty years, found himself entering the organization's workforce in just this accidental way.⁴⁴

As a media art center, the Filmmakers stood in marked contrast to the closed system and highly specialized division of labor that organized the Hollywood commercial industries and the TV broadcast industry. The center supported artists so long as they pledged allegiance to a conception of film as “noncommercial, creative self expression.”⁴⁵ Through these local institutions, artists pursued individual goals and independent careers, and they saw themselves as working professionals whose task was to expand their creative portfolio of work, and functioned as an “alternative economy” that was sustained within the dominant capitalistic system. The paradoxical nature of the alternative economy is expressed by the 1974 Pittsburgh Film-Makers Association newsletter, Vol 3 No 6. A comic strip emblazoned on the front page reads, “Toward a brighter tomorrow for the independent filmmaker.” Above the caption, a man, woman and child look toward a hilltop where a sun shines brightly—in the sun's center is a dollar sign. The almighty dollar signifies the desire for financial security and the (unstated) commitment to a capitalist economy. These twin desires would have been anathema to the earlier filmmaking collectives that had theorized the totality of their activity as anticapitalistic.⁴⁶

The media art center movement, the types of film they cultivated, the kinds of audiences they supported and sustained for media art, is curiously little discussed today. But in its heyday,

⁴⁴ Personal interview with Brady Lewis, August 5 2016.

⁴⁵ This credo, and other defining values of the independent film community, are detailed in a federally funded report. See Peter Feinstein, *The Independent Film Community: A Report on the Status of Independent Film in the United States* (New York: Committee on Film and Television Resources and Services, 1977): 4.

⁴⁶ The contextual situations and philosophical frameworks that shaped anticapitalistic film cooperatives, such as the London Women's Film Group or Cinema Action, is discussed in Petra Bauer and Dan Kidner, *Working Together: Notes on British Film Collectives in the 1970s* (Southend-on-Sea/South Sussex: Focal Point Gallery, 2013).

the media center generated a tremendous amount of literature and critical discussion. There was a lively theoretical discussion about what role independent film could play in people's lives, and what sorts of occupations could be built around moving-image art in long-term, sustainable ways.

The emergence of media arts centers, Green argues in his article "Film and Not-For-Profit Media Institutions," constitute a broader, decentralized "system" in which "all the activities ... are interrelated and form a larger entity. If any one element were removed, the whole fabric would be endangered, as in an ecologic system."⁴⁷ The regional center, according to Green, can be categorized by "six media-culture functions: funding, production, preservation, distribution, exhibition, and study or education."⁴⁸ Some institutions serve one function, others more. The important thing is that they work together. For Green, the system's overall functioning can be construed as a "circle" or "cycle," in which financing occurs first, leading to production, distribution, exhibition, collection/preservation, and ending with study, beginning the process over again. All the agents and objects belonging to the system partake of this process.

One of the principal innovations of the media center was that it moved beyond the shortsightedness of the film cooperative. Film cooperatives were essentially singular, inward looking. By contrast, media centers were theorized as existing in a vast network of other centers. The media center could not be autonomous, isolated; rather, in the view of early theorist Gerald O'Grady, it had to be *interdependent* in order to support the activity of the wider media ecosystem. O'Grady writes, "The concept of a *center* would mean *an organization or a coordinated body of such organizations* which served ... regions. To qualify for inclusion under this concept, each center would have to provide evidence of activity, intention and planning to democratically,

⁴⁷ Green, "Film and Not-For-Profit Media Institutions," 39.

⁴⁸ Green, "Film and Not-For-Profit Media Institutions," 38.

systematically and economically provide for these needs.” He adds that “although all centers would provide all the services, each center will quite naturally develop a research and planning strength which need not be duplicated at the other centers. This *coordinated network* would also mean the circulation of exhibitions, the lending and sharing of resources, etc. Eventually, the system could be linked to those of other nations.”⁴⁹ Film cooperatives also had the problem of clustering in metropolitan areas and focusing solely on the activities of urban artists. There are some exceptions to that tendency, particularly in Switzerland’s film coops,⁵⁰ but in the US, the narrowness and geographic isolation of cooperatives had long been an issue. The media center, by being envisioned as a national project with a regional development focus, turned away from this narrow model. The idea was that media centers would crop up around the US, in rural places as well as urban ones, anywhere with a minimal concentration of viewers, cultural producers, and advocates.⁵¹ A mixture of public and federal funds would finance these centers, and through strategic alliances between cultural institutions and educational organizations. All these forces would be linked in supporting a conception of film-as-art, with filmmaking conceived as “creative, non-commercial, self-expression.” This conception enforced a rigid divide between commercial and noncommercial film, despite the (now obvious) truth that such a divide could only be problematic in a society based on capitalism, as in the United States. The private/public divide stymied artists such as Stephanie Beroes. Beroes wished to earn a living at what she was doing,

⁴⁹ O’Grady, “Structure,” 2,4.

⁵⁰ Lars Gustaf Andersson and John Sundholm examine the transnational orientation of the State-funded Stockholm Film Workshop, in “Film Workshops as Polyvocal Public Spheres: Minor Cinemas in Sweden,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* Vol 19 No 2 (Fall 2010): 62.

⁵¹ Sheldon Renan believed that the key to the regional expansion and support of the centers would be to move away from the centralization of the European film institutes, toward building as broad a constituency as possible: “film audiences; filmmakers; scholars from any discipline needing to do research with film; teachers; industry (where the public good is somehow involved); and public television, including almost certain involvement with cable television.” Renan, “The Concept of Regional Film Centers,” 7.

but found that the media center movement presented a limited number of professional possibilities that in many cases were not well compensated.⁵² Nevertheless, this idea served remarkably well for decades. The longevity of the media center model is attested to in numerous success stories, such as Northwest Film Center in Portland, Oregon; or the Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky, whose tagline proudly reads “Making Media in the Mountains Since 1969.” This wider history is introduced in an excellent dissertation by Lindsay Mattock, who identifies foundational documents, crucial conferences among the centers, and the key institutional players at the federal, state, and local levels who drove this media center concept and concretized it in a variety of contexts.⁵³ She also focuses on Pittsburgh, following Ron Green’s pronouncement in 1982 that Pittsburgh Filmmakers was a paradigmatic case study, exemplary of the movement as a whole.⁵⁴ Recently, there have been a number of revealing “microhistories” written about media centers in particular regional contexts, such as Buffalo, New York, which enjoyed the presence of Media/Study Buffalo⁵⁵, the Hallwalls alternative art space⁵⁶, and, later, the Squeaky Wheel media center.⁵⁷

⁵² In a 1979 interview, Beroes describes the ambivalent public perception of independent filmmaking in Pittsburgh; the “incestuous, closed-circuit situation” that local artists find themselves in; and her ongoing dependency on funds and support from the Pittsburgh Filmmakers media center. See Marlynn Uricchio, “Stephanie Beroes,” [full title missing] *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* September 11, 1979: 21, Stephanie Beroes Artist File, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Oakland.

⁵³ Mattock, “Media Arts Centers as Alternative Archival Spaces: Investigating the Development of Archival Practices in Non-Profit Media Organizations,” unpublished dissertation, University of Pittsburgh (2014).

⁵⁴ Green writes: “Pittsburgh Film-Makers is a paradigmatic case history of growth from an original exclusive concern in 1971 for film production, through progressive relations with film study and exhibition, then preservation, distribution, and funding. The original singleness of purpose grew, through practice rather than theory, into a broad concern for all aspects of the system. The members found that as producers, they could not survive without some institutional relationship, with the other functional aspects of the film culture.” Green, “Film and Not-For-Profit Media Institutions,” 47.

⁵⁵ *Buffalo Heads: Media Study, Media Practice, Media Pioneers, 1973–1990*, eds. Woody Vasulka and Peter Weibel (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ Heather Pesanti, Lawrence F Brose, Bill Brooks, and Hollis Frampton *Wish you were here: the Buffalo avant-garde in the 1970s* (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2012).

⁵⁷ Ruth B Goldman, “Channeling Community: A Case Study of Squeaky Wheel/Buffalo Media Resources,” unpublished dissertation, SUNY Buffalo (2014).

My dissertation offers further insight into the rise and decline of the media art center movement by focusing on Pittsburgh's regional cinema that, in these decades, became widely seen as exemplary and paradigmatic of the issues facing the national movement as a whole. My case studies of individual artists contribute to the re-emerging consciousness around the media center movement, and show the vitality and diversity of the art that emerged from this period. Because local filmmakers were critical of their lack of national recognition, this focus also complicates some of the uninterrogated claims made on behalf of the media center. While the media center's proponents in their day were fond of speaking in abstract terms of a global village, or a vast network in which the centers existed in a horizontal relationship to each other, the truth is that there was still a cultural prioritization of work from the metropolis.⁵⁸ The core-periphery divide persisted, though was little spoken of, in their haste to justify the existence of an independent media sphere to funders and cultural stakeholders. But that said, the exponents were right in that, around the US, there was a proliferation of important artworks that manifested a local conception of identity and regionalism. The exponents were right in that the media centers in each locale would have to negotiate the very question of what defines, constitutes and falls outside of the term "region;" and what might be the advantages and disadvantages that follow when one understands oneself in a regional frame of mind.⁵⁹ The Pittsburgh films testify to the ongoing, constantly

⁵⁸ In 1978, Public Media Program panelist, Brian O'Doherty, discussed the media center movement as a flat, horizontal network, demonstrating a recurring theme of utopianism in how theorists and proponents saw the media center in a world of unevenly distributed resources. See O'Doherty qtd in John L. Reilly, "Clusters of Facilities, Zones of Artists: Major Media Centers (An Interview with Brian O'Doherty)", *Videoscope* Vol 2. No. 2 (1978): 5-11.

⁵⁹ A set of questions around definition (What is a region? Should regional centers solely promote activities of local/regional interest? etc.) is examined as a key concern in developing Public Media NEA guidelines, in a August 1974 memorandum circulated to Public Media Program Panel members. National Endowment for the Arts, Public Media program grants, Box 25, Folder 7, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

negotiated definition of regionalism that attended the activity of media centers which existed on the cultural fringes of the national media art world.

As I show in the first chapter, the displaced and culturally marginal geographic position of Pittsburgh cinema organizations, such as the Film Section and Filmmakers, led to the emergence of several extraordinary institutional devices and models. These models not only positively impacted the local scene in important ways, but also shaped the global trajectory of media art in these decades. Dixon at the Museum was a true pioneer in how she took complete advantage of existing within the “regional frame of mind.” She was a passionate booster for Pittsburgh, and recognized early on that local filmmakers and audiences needed to have regular access to independent artists making work around the world. She brought them in through her exhibition series. Dixon made sure to compensate artists well and to publicize their appearance, loudly and widely, resulting in what Paul Sharits fondly recalls a friendly, welcoming environment for the outsider.⁶⁰ This meant that there would be a *centripetal* pull into the city – for the city needed to remain connected with media art occurring globally. This flow of visiting artists had a transformative impact on locals like Buba. Indeed, Buba retells to this day an anecdote of Werner Herzog’s 1980 visit to the Museum to present work. Herzog asked to see local artists work, so they took him to the Pittsburgh Filmmakers, where the first work shown was a rough cut of Buba’s *Sweet Sal*.⁶¹ Herzog was so impressed by the film, and by the astonishing charisma of the lead character, that he immediately stopped the screening and asked to see every film Buba had made.

⁶⁰ Haller, *Crossroads: Avant-garde Film in Pittsburgh in the 1970s* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2005): 24.

⁶¹ This anecdote is described in more detail, in James Kreul, “The Films of Tony Buba,” *Tony Buba: Documentary Filmmaker: University of Wisconsin-Madison*, <https://archive.iarp.wisc.edu/buba/films.html>

This incident led to a long-lasting friendship between both artists, and Buba had his confidence in making work on Braddock strengthened and confirmed.

These kinds of fateful encounters where locals mingled with global artists was typical in those days, as in Ahwesh's recollection of Kurt Kren's lengthy stay with the Super 8 filmmakers in the 1980s.⁶² In his study of 1970s filmmaking in Pittsburgh, Robert Haller characterizes this traffic into Pittsburgh in vaguely colonialist terms, as though the visiting artist taught and civilized the indigenous local with new knowledge, a paternalistic relationship best represented by Brady Lewis' 1977 *Colliding* film. An affectionate portrait of Robert Breer, the film shows a series of views rotating around Breer in downtown Pittsburgh, as though Breer (and by extension the visiting artist) were the center of the universe around which Pittsburgh Filmmakers orbited. Though true in some cases, this simplistic metaphor is complicated by accounts of locals, particularly recollecting the 1980s. Rick Pieto described the local scene then as robust and self-defined to a point where the local artists showed and educated visitors on their own home-grown methods.⁶³

Dixon created the *Film and Video-Makers Travel Sheet*, a widely circulated news bulletin that connected artists to exhibitors, audiences, and prospective collecting institutions and employers for artists.⁶⁴ If the IFM Series brought the wider world to the local people, then the *Travel Sheet*, in principle, served the *centrifugal* function of sending local artists and artwork out into the world. This *Travel Sheet* expanded exponentially from its humble beginnings and ballooned in subscribership, such that it became a ubiquitous tool in the media sphere; indeed, a

⁶² Peggy Ahwesh, "Film, Baby," *Big as Life: An American History of 8mm Films*, ed Steve Anker (San Francisco: San Francisco Cinematheque, 1998) 79-80.

⁶³ Personal interview with Rick Pieto, March 3, 2016.

⁶⁴ Mattock provides an overview of the *Travel Sheet* in "Unearthing the Underground, Databasing the Avant-Garde, and Mapping the Independent Media Community," *IASA Journal* No. 46 (May 2016): 22-32.

1987 letter from Carolee Schneemann praised the *Travel Sheet* as “an integral channel of communication and confirmation ... by which we marginalized independents sustained a history of shared visual language and issue.”⁶⁵ Many museums utilized the *Travel Sheet*, such as John Hanhardt’s film program at the Walker Art Center, or the Museum of Modern Art’s Cineprobe Series. Media centers around the world used the *Travel Sheet* for booking artists, notably the British Film Institute in London.⁶⁶ Through this networking tool, local artists such as Jacoby found a means to spotlight their work worldwide, allowing them to establish residencies and in-person presentations which provided a valuable source of income.⁶⁷ Thus there was a centripetal and centrifugal push/pull that defined movements in and out of Pittsburgh. Despite being located in the geographic and cultural periphery, this very displacement motivated artists and curators like Dixon to renovate the material resources in the city and redefine the network in which Pittsburgh was a radiant node.

This last point is one of the important lessons of Pittsburgh’s film scene in these decades. Looking back, one is astonished by the sustained interconnectedness that existed between exhibitor, audience, and artist, and the extraordinary interchange between organizations and artists across the globe. We miss out on this “thick history” if we only retell stories of art innovations in the exceptional (well-trodden) metropolitan centers where so much is taken for granted. Pittsburgh’s regional cinema also shows the importance of taking seriously the role of the State and public funding in the maintenance of entire artworlds, which is a topic that, sadly, many write

⁶⁵ Carolee Schneemann’s letter to Bill Judson, March 29, 1987, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

⁶⁶ Mattock notes that “several years into the publication of the resource, the *Travel Sheet* was being used by over 2,000 film and video makers and institutions in the United States, Canada, and abroad.” Mattock, “Unearthing the Underground,” 25.

⁶⁷ Feinstein stresses the economic utility of the “one-man show” for sustaining the livelihood of traveling avant-garde filmmakers, in *The Independent Film Community*, 14.

off categorically as unimportant. Fortunately, the dubious scholarly aversion to discussing finances, public resources and infrastructure of media art is changing, as signaled in the proliferation of new studies on US avant-garde film support networks⁶⁸; on UK government funds in avant-garde media⁶⁹; and on 1960s Canadian avant-garde film organizations.⁷⁰

This institutional turn in the historiography offers counterintuitive insights. The art museum, commonly the “bad object” of film and media and experimental studies, was to the contrary a vital resource. The Film Section amassed resources that mattered, such as the cultural, human and technical capital sorely needed especially in a mid-sized city like Pittsburgh that lacked a deep history of filmmaking and exhibition. The backdrop of the media art center mattered, because it gave artists a livelihood when they sought to create art that had no commercial benefit. Buba, for instance, depended on the media center for teaching opportunities and technical resources when he made his Braddock films while living in his grandmother’s house. Looking to these resources show us how the social context informed the conditions of making art at this time. Similarly, a reorientation to the institutional side of Pittsburgh cinema reveals the fragility of these vital resources, and the inherent interdependency of artists on them. As Ron Green prophetically wrote, the so-called independent filmmaker was, and still is, *dependent*.⁷¹ This truth becomes

⁶⁸ Kristen Alfaro, “The Case of Anthology Film Archives and the Formation of a Canonical Film Avant-Garde,” *Early Video Art and Experimental Films Networks*, ed. François Bovier (Lausanne: ECAL, 2017); and Peter Decherney, “The Politics of Patronage: How the NEA (Accidentally) Created American Avant-Garde Film,” *Hollywood and the Cultural Elite: How the Movies Became American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 161- 204.

⁶⁹ Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image* (Bristol, United Kingdom: Intellect, 2012).

⁷⁰ Stephen Broomer, *Codes for North: Foundations of the Canadian Avant-Garde Film* (Toronto: Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, 2017); and Broomer, *Hamilton Babylon: A History of the McMaster Film Board* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

⁷¹ In counterpoint to the mythic ideal of the filmmaker as a lone agent, Green emphasizes that “independent filmmaker” is a misnomer: such an artist in fact has a deep “dependence” on an array of “multi-system institutions.” Green states: “they could not survive without some institutional relationship with the other functional aspects of the film culture” and “thus the ‘independent’ filmmakers were independent of commercial institutions, but not of their own not-for-profit (or profit) institutions, or of each other.” Green, “Film and Not-For-Profit Media Institutions,” 47.

poignant and painful when, as happened in Pittsburgh recently, funds and public support disappear, and the media art centers collapse.⁷² When that happens, so too collapses the independent media art. We cannot have one without the other.

1.4 DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND DURATION

A further goal of this study is to enhance the literature on global deindustrialization, by making a case for US independent and experimental film as a rich historical archive of images from/reflective of this period, an archive scholars have seldom explored to date.

Since the first wave of deindustrialization scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s, which offered abstract, bird's-eye view economic explanations of global capitalism, or obsessively examined the "body count" of jobs lost, there have been more recent attempts to complicate the picture. In an effort to see how deindustrialization is culturally experienced as part of a structural dynamic intrinsic to modern capitalism, scholars have turned to more nuanced approaches and more diverse kinds of archival sources, turning to memory studies, oral history interviews, public health and literary studies.⁷³ This work seeks to understand how deindustrialization affects the

⁷² The Film Section shuttered in 2003, terminating the Museum's active commitment to film activity in the city and the world. In 2018, after years of financial mismanagement and poor organizational leadership, Pittsburgh Filmmakers announced the sale of its base of operations at 477 Melwood Avenue, the cessation of its adult/college-level course offerings, and the sale of the equipment, effectively dismantling one of the nation's oldest media centers. For more on the closure of these organizations, see: Patricia Lowry and Caroline Abels, "Carnegie film and video cuts leave many reeling," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* Jan 18, 2003 <http://old.post-gazette.com/ae/20030118carnegie0118fnp2.asp>; Marylynn Pitz, "Pittsburgh Filmmakers cancels fall classes for adults, will sell Oakland building," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* May 23, 2018 <http://www.post-gazette.com/ae/art-architecture/2018/05/23/Pittsburgh-Filmmakers-cancels-fall-classes-will-sell-Oakland-building-Melwood/stories/201805230148>.

⁷³ Steven High provides a valuable review of the literature covering the 1970s to the 2010s, and considering a variety of disciplinary approaches applied to the subject. See High "'The Wounds of Class': A Historiographical Reflection on the Study of Deindustrialization, 1973 – 2013," *History Compass* 11/11 (2013): 994-1007.

development of businesses, reshapes the demographic configuration of cities, and affects people's bodies and mental and emotional health. It often involves a re-examination of the very word "deindustrialization," as exemplified in the work of Christine Walley:

...deindustrialization is not so much about evolutionary historical transformations in which, as some would argue, one abstracted kind of economy (an industrial one) turns into another (a service- and knowledge-based one). Rather, it's about the reworking of social relationships in moments of historical flux in a way that benefits some at the expense of others. It was a trauma ... that took place in the eye of the storm of the changing class landscape of the United States.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, many of these newer scholarly accounts fail to consider how members of deindustrialized communities not only offer historical evidence, but are active creators of historical evidence, and self-reflective historiographers in their own right, overlooking a range of creative practices toward the past, particularly visual images such as photo albums or home movies. A turn toward the visual and to material cultures enables a shifting of attitudes to see working-class populations no longer as passive victims – indeed, “workers were not just victims of this assault upon their ... deindustrializing communities, but also exercised agency and advocacy.”⁷⁵ Scholars such as High, MacKinnon and Perchard also rightly emphasize the need to focus on the “persistence and resilience of communities against immiseration.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Christine Walley, *Exit 0: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 89.

⁷⁵ Arthur McIvor, “Deindustrialization Embodied: Work, Health, and Disability in the United Kingdom since the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Spaces*, eds. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017): 27.

⁷⁶ “Introduction,” *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Spaces*, eds. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017): 5.

Independent and experimental filmmaking from Pittsburgh builds upon this recent work on deindustrialization by demonstrating how spaces of exhibition, narrative strategies, and formal devices afforded by the moving-image medium can add new insights into the cultural processing of loss, as well as shed light on the positive and liberatory aspects of deindustrialization which otherwise escapes our view when we consider this merely as an economic phenomenon. By their very nature as time-based media, films are able to transmit “dreams, memories, and altered states of perception”⁷⁷; film allows time and memory to become mobile, flexible, and strange. As Jeffrey Skoller writes, “the lapses and disruptions in the flow of time that occur in gaps between (non)linking images ... evoke the unseeable, the forgotten, and the spectral qualities of history.”⁷⁸ Film, more so than other forms of historical evidence, has the capacity to render the imaginative and political dimensions of people’s lives during a time of change.

Films of or about deindustrialization address the problem of point of view, and of workers’ cultural narratives. The voices of ordinary people can become overlooked in cities that have experienced deindustrialization, and that are affected by negative images of loss and stasis created by external storytellers, as in the sensationalistic mainstream news depictions of Youngstown, Ohio.⁷⁹ Cowie and Heathcott write, “The political project that remains after the mills are gone is to reclaim a positive civic identity by shunning the version of the town others thrust on it and developing ways for citizens and workers to lever their own past en route to a better future.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Jeffrey Skoller, *Shadows, Specters, Shards: Making History in Avant-garde Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005): xviii.

⁷⁸ Skoller, xx.

⁷⁹ John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon explore the various public discourses that figured Youngstown as a “site of loss [and a] site of failure,” in the 1980s and 1990s, in “Collateral Damage: Deindustrialization and the Uses of Youngstown,” *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, eds. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003): 201-218.

⁸⁰ Cowie and Heathcott, “Introduction,” 11.

In this sense, Buba's films shed light on the creativity and resilient imagination of working class populations when the structuring framework of the steel mill collapsed. Buba reveals that new ways of relating to each other, and to historical time, were necessary for survival and self-care. Through his emphatic imagery of the elderly steelworker, we see more vividly the aging process, the effects of industrial injury, and what one scholar calls "deindustrialization embodied:" how economic processes reshape the body.⁸¹ Buba's psychogeographic tour of Braddock landmarks depicts how, in a Deleuzian sense, layers of the past always co-exist in the present, even when that past is not completely perceptible to our rational consciousness. He also shows that even so-called ruined and abandoned places, such as the shuttered Braddock High School, can be powerful prompts for remembrance and for creating new forms of "temporal solidarity" between old and new generations. His work reveals that deindustrialization *is* productive—productive of present-absences, gaps, memories, and ghosts.

Likewise, the more abstract and experimental work of painter-filmmaker Jacoby offers hand-processing as a metaphor for the mutability of subjectivity during the tumultuous decades of the 1970s and 1980s, showing how issues of sexual identity were simultaneously visible and invisible, real and abstract, even in the relatively progressive working class art community of Pittsburgh. Jacoby's colorful hand-processing can be understood as a counter-image to the static and debilitating image of the exploding factory. For this radical artist, the space of 1970s Pittsburgh became linked with potential to remake identity endlessly, as in the chemical soups that Jacoby brewed at home.

Similarly, the deconstructive repetitions of feminine imagery and gender identity in Green and Ahwesh's filmic portraiture glimpse a different sense of this era, as one endless repeating

⁸¹ Arthur McIvor, 41.

cycle. Where some working class filmmakers explore the symbol of the exploding factory, these feminist artists generated personal symbols of repetitive cyclical patterns as a way to deconstruct normative strictures of gender and sex systems. Film's ability to stutter, to repeat over and over again, for them is not a sign of stasis but a way of working through difference, and becomes a key tool for developing new forms of embodied femininity.⁸² The haptic visualities of Green and Ahwesh make clear local filmmakers' investment in the body, in the gestures and social performances of gender.

Besides textual features of the films themselves, equally important is the community-building potential offered by the independent media infrastructure that existed during this time of crisis. "Cinemas are places in which personal and communicate experience meld, fostering an intimacy in the midst of collective experience."⁸³ Independent film exhibitions at the Museum or the Filmmakers media center were a way to foster community. Screenings were characterized by an intimacy of address, creating an atmosphere for engaging memory and maintaining a sense of continuity among the locals. In his one-person shows, Buba presented films as though he were sharing home movies in an Italian American household. Domike showed her video leaflets in unconventional sites such as factory spaces and union halls, befitting the labor militancy of her films. Ahwesh exhibited Super 8 work in punk music clubs like the Electric Banana, blending the audiences of the music world with the film world. Innovative strategies of film exhibition employed by these artists challenged the anodyne and anonymized televisual portrayal of

⁸² In this turn toward temporally repetitive representations of gender, I look to the work of art historian Clare Johnson, who writes, "femininity can be understood as a relationship to time," and that time itself is gendered "in the very practice of art making as well as in the performance of femininity." Johnson, *Femininity, Time, and Feminist Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 8.

⁸³ Tim Edensor, "Mundane hauntings: commuting through the phantasmagoric working-class spaces of Manchester, England," *Cultural Geographies* 15 (2008): 316.

socioeconomic crisis, and provided new ways of engaging with images of deindustrialized Pittsburgh that went beyond the static presentation of facts, but actually intervened in, and reconstituted, the communities being threatened by forces outside their control. In the words of local programmer and filmmaker Margie Strosser, the field of film exhibitions in Pittsburgh in this era operated as a kind of “regionalism with a vengeance,”⁸⁴ denoting a self-reflective interzone or temporary public sphere where global, national, and regional representations intermingle, and audiences develop critical co-awareness of the interconnections and differences between artists and films otherwise separated by geographic and temporal boundaries.

Filmmakers thus mobilized expanded forms of filmmaking and film exhibition, thereby opening a space in the visual culture “through which something other returns.” They treated the deindustrial condition of Pittsburgh as “a constantly evolving temporal collage,” rendering a portrait of their city “characterized by spatial juxtapositions and a host of intersecting temporalities which ‘collide and merge’ in a landscape of juxtaposed ‘asynchronous moments.’”⁸⁵ In their attention to sensual impressions, the mischievous play of memory, and overlooked communities from this era, their work pushes back against the desire of urban planners and corporate elites to forget or commodify the industrial past. Pittsburgh’s regional cinema provides forms of empathetic contact with a working-class population whose identity was marked by flux and existential in-between-ness, giving us glimpses of major social issues that confronted them, such as the recomposition of families; the shift in women’s public/professional roles in society; the growth of musical subcultures and alternative art spaces; and the deformation of neighborhoods by capital

⁸⁴ Strosser uses this phrase in the April 1985 Pittsburgh Filmmakers Newsletter, to describe her programming of international films alongside “flagrantly provincial films” by local artists. Box 3, Folder 6, Pittsburgh Filmmakers, Administration, Newsletter 1975-1985, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

⁸⁵ Edensor, 324.

flight. Improbably pitched between a conservative art museum and a bohemian media art center, Pittsburgh's film-world was a cultural split-screen, a shattered mirror held up to society that contained reflective fragments of antagonism and utopianism. The filmmaking that once thrived in the city mirrored broader social trends, but it was also a way of coping with a post-traumatic culture, and making something new.

2.0 FILM AS ART: THE EMERGENCE OF THE FILM SECTION, 1969-1975

Filmmaking in Pittsburgh was made possible by the formation of institutional resources that appeared in the late 1960s. In retracing the development of new resources, this chapter argues that, in the 1960s and 1970s, the film medium became deeply incorporated into the framework/remit of the institutional visual arts.⁸⁶ Further, over the span of twenty years, the American art museum placed itself at the center of infrastructural development supporting noncommercial, independent film artists. By the end of the 1970s, major museums—including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Whitney Museum of Art, the Walker Art Center, among others—would be designated “media centers,” serving a variety of structural roles to the field, as outlined by Sheldon Renan and Ronald Green.⁸⁷

For an emerging group of filmmakers who operated outside the formulaic, profit-driven framework of commercial film industry, the art museum would serve as a critical venue working alongside other institutions, in particular, the university, the art gallery, the artist co-op, the film festival, and independent movie theatres. The significance of these noncommercial sites has been

⁸⁶ Here are just a few statistics to indicate this broader picture. I draw these from Suzanne Regan’s invaluable 1981 study, which surveyed 580 museums in the US about the use of film in their exhibitions. In the 1960s, as Regan observes, 56 museums started stand-alone film programs, and 15 museums began collecting films during the same decade. In the 1970s, 86 museums started film programs, and 32 museums began collecting films. Of those aforementioned museum film programs, 65% (122) reported, in 1979, screening experimental films regularly (in addition to documentary, feature-length, and educational films). Among 189 museums that reported film programming of some kind, 42% (79) reported screening films on a daily or weekly basis. Though incomplete, this snapshot attests that the period of the 1960s and 1970s saw a spike in film programs in the US. For further discussion, see Suzanne Regan, “The Utilization of the Film Medium by American Art Museums” (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, 1981).

⁸⁷ Ron Green, “Film and Not-For-Profit Media Institutions,” in *Film/Culture: Explorations of Cinema in its Social Context*, ed. Sari Thomas (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 37-59; and Sheldon Renan, “The Concept of Regional Film Centers.” *Sightlines* 7.3 (1973/1974): 7-9.

addressed extensively.⁸⁸ But I claim that museums, unlike other nontheatrical venues for film exhibition, were uniquely suited to advance the needs and agendas of experimental filmmakers at a transitional moment when film was seriously being considered as art. In general, museums: 1) provided financial compensation to visiting artists in the form of honoraria; 2) regularized film series, modeled on the format of the temporary art exhibition, which gave shape and continuity to the work of artists who were otherwise disconnected and dispersed across time and space; and 3) gradually cultivated, sustained and educated a diverse viewing public.

This list hardly exhausts the range of activities which museum film programs engaged in. Indeed, most museums during the “boom” of avant-garde film exhibitions in the 1960s and 1970s played a fairly minor role in the wider “ecosystem” of independent media and filmmaking.⁸⁹ Many

⁸⁸ Haidee Wasson’s seminal research on the formation of the Film Library at Museum of Modern Art will be referenced regularly throughout this chapter, and is required reading for the study of film-watching in a museological context. See Wasson, “Studying Movies at the Museum: The Museum of Art and Cinema’s Changing Object,” in *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008): 121-148; and Wasson, *Museum Movies: the Museum of Modern Art and The Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). On the role of college universities as a crucial material base for experimental filmmaking, see Michael Zyrd, “The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance,” *Cinema Journal* 45.2 (Winter 2006): 17-42; Zyrd, “Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America,” in *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008): 182-216; and Scott MacDonald, *Binghamton Babylon: Voices from the Cinema Department, 1967-1977* (New York City, NY: SUNY Press, 2015). On the reliance of avant-garde filmmakers to artist-run film museums, in particular the Anthology Film Archive, see Peter Decherney, “The Politics of Patronage: How the NEA (Accidentally) Created American Avant-Garde Film,” *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005); Kristen Alfaro, “Moving Cinema: Experimental Distribution and the Development of Anthology Film Archives” (Thesis, Concordia University, 2012); and James Kreul, “New York, New Cinema: The Independent Film Community and the Underground Crossover, 1950-1970” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004). On the historical development of experimental-centric independent film societies, see MacDonald, *Art in Cinema: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006); and MacDonald, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002).

⁸⁹ The notion of an ecological system spanning media artifacts, institutions, and practitioners is borrowed from Ronald Green’s seminal research on media arts centers. Within this research, Green provides a taxonomy of services provided by media arts non-profit institutions: funding, production, preservation, distribution, exhibition, and study. As Green argues, “These definitions comprise an institutional model of the not-for-profit media culture. The model functions as a system, which simply means that all the activities we have talked about are interrelated and form a larger entity. If any one element were removed, the whole fabric would be endangered, as in an ecologic system.” My chapter’s claim is that the art museum functioned as a critical node, among others, within this wider ecology. For more, see Green, “Film and Not-For-Profit Media Institutions,” 39.

museums elected to exhibit films within a narrow, regional orientation, serving a local community without access to film beyond first-run Hollywood theatres. Others exhibited *and* collected films; these museums often organized their film collection and exhibition practices around the thematic focus of the particular institution. Alternatively, larger museums, such as MoMA or the Whitney Museum located in New York, became increasingly ambitious in their pursuit of film and video, mounting major exhibitions in the 1970s that would set the terms of scholarly and artistic debates about the moving image in the context of visual art.

As a case study, I present an institutional history of the Film Section at the Carnegie Museum of Art, based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; “[t]he program began as a limited, three-year venture but soon grew into a full-fledged, highly productive department.”⁹⁰ I argue that, between 1969 and 1975, the Film Section led this burgeoning field with three innovative programs: a visiting filmmaker series; a mailing list, *The Film and Video Makers’ Travel Sheet* (1973-1987), which connected filmmakers to museums, media centers, and universities for arranging film tours; and a number of films partly commissioned by the Museum, in particular, Stan Brakhage’s *The Pittsburgh Trilogy* (all from 1971). I argue that Pittsburgh’s museum-based media center, and its modernist framework of “film-as-art,” profoundly altered the cultural value of cinema in three ways: film screenings became framed as temporary exhibits; the title of filmmaker was replaced with the artisan, or “independent film maker;” and a veritable flood of films entered museum collections as auratic objects, not unlike painting or sculpture.

Existing scholarship in art history and film studies overwhelmingly prioritizes the moving image through textual analyses of exemplary objects/events, without reference to the importance

⁹⁰ From the description of the Film Section department, on the archival website of the Carnegie Museum of Art: “Finding Aid for Department of Film and Video Archive,” <http://records.cmoa.org/finding-aids/>

of exhibitions, and thereby fails to see the link between exhibitionary format and how the history of avant-garde film and art has been shaped by where and how it is shown. This chapter proceeds from the assumption that scholars need to talk about the ways in which film curation and film exhibition not only facilitate forms of filmmaking, but also how certain institutional entities-- like museums--make forms of art visible and recognizable as “art.” In other words, without understanding the cultural work of museum film programs, any history of avant-garde and independent film will remain incomplete. Museum film exhibitions gave filmmakers, audiences, critics, and curators the vocabulary for understanding authorship, artistic structures of collaboration, and forms of creativity that ventured outside the normative parameters of dominant cinema.

2.1 PRE-HISTORY OF THE FILM SECTION: “MOVIE JOURNAL” AND CAMPUS FILM SOCIETIES

In the 1960s, experimental film – both as an idea and an object – began trickling into the Steel City. The New York based newspaper, the *Village Voice*, circulated Jonas Mekas’ intriguing reports of a burgeoning “New American Cinema.” In his “Movie Journal” column (1958-1971), Mekas spoke tantalizingly of a movement comprised of disaffected poets, underground hustlers, and unflinching documentarians. This cinema, which was personal, artistic, and produced and distributed outside the corporate hierarchy of Hollywood, whetted the appetites of film-conscious

Pittsburghers: for them, it represented an opening, an opportunity to make art and join the forefront of a new, cresting movement.⁹¹

While rumors of New American Cinema spread, the ready availability of 16mm film recording equipment, after World War II, encouraged amateur efforts. The technology of film had finally developed to the point where a single, skilled practitioner could operate all the tasks of the production and post-production process (recording, editing, projection) which traditionally, due to more expensive and cumbersome 35mm equipment, had been defined by a strict division of labor. The only limitation that remained was the high cost of these materials, and the limited training to use these tools. In 1960s Pittsburgh, like the rest of the country, few production courses or degree programs existed.

By the mid-1960s a few local film enthusiasts and artists, who had seen the vibrant and mysterious moving images coming out of the West Coast and New York City, decided to pursue their interests more seriously by building infrastructure for independent film with like-minded folks in the area. The efforts that resulted were sporadic, largely unfunded, and marked by an unmistakable countercultural ethos of Do-It-Yourself. This ethos was reflective of a larger cultural matrix we could signal under the rubric of “the Sixties”: free love, free drugs, women’s lib, civil rights, and experiments with social organization of families and schools, not to mention Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan’s prophetic visions of a techno-utopian future, a “global village.”⁹²

⁹¹ Haller, Robert A. *Crossroads: Avant-garde Film in Pittsburgh in the 1970s* (New York City, NY: Anthology Film Archives, 2005): 7.

⁹² Media analyst Marshall McLuhan published seminal essays about the emergent “techno-mediated sphere” spreading across the world in the 1960s, in particular, his books *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, 1967, and *Counterblast*, 1969. McLuhan’s incisive observations--“today we live invested with an electric information environment that is quite as imperceptible to us as water is to a fish”--were a key part of the critical and popular discourse of the day. Museums and media centers regularly turned to McLuhan’s premise of an historic,

As Robert Haller's account of Pittsburgh prior to 1970 suggests, many of the institutions that emerged from this climate were one-off, "Potemkin paper structure" organizations with little management and virtually no hope of existing longer than several months or years.⁹³ They came and went. Nevertheless, the earliest film institutions in Pittsburgh were run by passionate and intelligent individuals whose values would give rise to, and inform the shape of, the blueprint for a film department at the Museum of Art, in Oakland. The energy and excitement growing around filmmaking crystallized in the words of one local writer, who, in 1969, announced: "Film is finally happening in Pittsburgh. A visual generation is coming of age. Independent filmmakers all over the country are creating a new way of looking at our environment. Electronics are dissolving the worlds of yesterday into one environment of today. And it's all happening before our eyes..."⁹⁴

An important outgrowth of the 1960s counterculture affecting Pittsburgh was the rising prominence of college campus film societies, which, in many U.S. cities, provided an outlet for specialized screenings (often centering on experimental film), and partially filled a gap in repertory programming. As Michael Zyrd observes, "The number of campus film societies rose from two hundred in the early 1950s to five thousand by the late 1960s."⁹⁵ The explosive rise of nontheatrical exhibitions on campuses was connected to several factors. The decline of Hollywood audiences in the 1960s⁹⁶ and the appearance of the first generation raised on television, led to a "media-

global media environment, and its corollary disruption of human literacy and communication, as justification for new organizations and resources dedicated to understanding the mass media and moving-image technologies.

⁹³ Ibid, 9.

⁹⁴ "Call Board," *Film Feedback* 1.1 (Fall 1969): 20.

⁹⁵ Zyrd, "Experimental Film and the Development of Film Study in America," in *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008): 191.

⁹⁶ Zyrd hypothesizes the declining appeal of Hollywood among college students with reference to two developments. The first was that, the Hollywood-produced films in this period were poorly received by audiences, in terms of their cultural, historical, and aesthetic merit, which led to a significant drop in box office returns. Viewers, especially younger ones, simply were not interested. Second, film and television industries had not favored university graduates for employment. When film production was taught in the classroom, students were encouraged to find employment in non-industry sectors. These factors led to the view, in the words of Robert Corrigan, NYU's School of the Arts first dean, that "Hollywood is a negative force—a model of what not to do." Among students who

enthused” group of young people who wished to explore filmmaking as a form of self-expression. Notably they pursued modes that were personal, experimental, artisanal, and documentary over dramatic fiction. The film societies, before the preponderance of college film and media degrees appeared in the 1970s, indirectly supported both the demand for new production and critical studies course offerings, by giving students a venue to experience the sorts of films they themselves wished to make and see, and provided access to acclaimed works of personal and experimental filmmaking, as well as works of “art cinema,” in films that were screened.

The city of Pittsburgh boasted powerful film societies at two colleges, Carnegie Tech (Renamed Carnegie Mellon University in 1967) and the University of Pittsburgh, both located in Oakland. The most significant and largest of these was the Franklin Pangborn Film Society, officially recognized in 1970 (named after the American comedic character actor), at the University of Pittsburgh. The Society in the late 1960s and early-to-mid- 1970s screened sell-out shows every week, in the David Lawrence Hall⁹⁷. The Society was extraordinarily well organized (they produced tri-fold brochures with film listings for every academic season), publicized events through the campus newspaper *The Pitt News*, and developed a devoted following. Films were shown on Thursday evenings, and individual tickets cost 75 cents to \$1 dollar; or, a multi-film subscription with admission to all films during an academic term could be purchased for \$5 dollars.

were interested in film as an aesthetic and conceptual pursuit, Hollywood became linked with clichéd product. Among students who wished to become technical practitioners, Hollywood was closed off as a professional prospect, so they turned their energies elsewhere. Together, these realities produced a ripe context for the academic study of, and technical training in, an alternative set of film modes that Zyrd claims, paraphrasing David James, represented a “ ‘participatory’ cinema that displaced film from its location in mythical Hollywood to a more accessible plane,” 193.

⁹⁷ University of Pittsburgh student Pat O’Brien founded the society to serve two functions, programming and film production. O’Brien felt “the University was not meeting the needs of students interested in seeing movies or making them.” Sam Choi, who served as President of Franklin Pangborn Film Society, in 1975, would also serve as curatorial assistant to the Film Section, at the same time. See Drew Provaznik, “Pangborn Runs Movie Gauntlet,” *The Pitt News*, 1975, author unknown, Box 2, Folder 12, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Tickets for admission and the purchase of a season pass required University ID from students, staff, or faculty on campus.

The films screened often centered on works of art cinema: For instance, the 1974 winter schedule lists screenings for *The 400 Blows*, *Two English Girls* (both by French New Wave director, Francois Truffaut) and *Cries and Whispers* (by Ingmar Bergman), among others.⁹⁸ On occasion, special screening series were organized to highlight experimental American film, and these events occurred with more frequency after the establishment of the Film Section at the Museum of Art, which emphasized experimental film programming, above all. A 1971 flyer announces “INDEPENDENT’S DAY FILM-MAKER’S SERIES” with works by Scott Bartlett, Bruce Baillie, George Kuchar, and Shirley Clarke, held in the University’s Benedum Hall Auditorium.⁹⁹ The Winter 1975 program indicates that, in solidarity with the United Nations’s proclamation of 1975 as “The International Women’s Year,” the Society would present films by women filmmakers, including “award-winning shorts by Gunvor Nelson, Freude [Bartlett], as well as local film artists.”¹⁰⁰ Franklin Pangborn also had the special honor of hosting the first Pittsburgh presentation of the Andy Warhol film, *Loves of Ondine*.¹⁰¹ According to Sharon Ruppert Green, a Pittsburgh filmmaker and university student who participated closely in the group, The Franklin Pangborn Society played a key role for university students who were curious about film production as well as unconventional film screenings; indeed, the Student Government at Pitt regularly

⁹⁸ The Franklin Pangborn Film Society, Winter 1974 brochure, Box 2, Folder 12, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

⁹⁹ The Franklin Pangborn Film Society, flyer for Tuesday October 12, 1971, Box 2, Folder 12, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁰⁰ The Franklin Pangborn Film Society, Winter 1975 brochure, Box 2, Folder 12, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁰¹ “Pittsburgh Premiere: Warhol’s Loves of Ondine,” 1975, Box 2, Folder 12, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

provided allocations to the Society for the purpose of independent film productions by students. In 1975, the Society famously threatened to shut down the screening events on campus, if their demands for additional allocations to student filmmaking were not met.¹⁰² However, as successful as the Society was, the restriction of admissions to university populations only became a key impetus for the development of film screenings based off-campus, as I discuss in the next section below.

2.2 FILM FEEDBACK

Film Feedback (1969-1970) was a short lived, but influential film journal edited by Pittsburgh resident Charles Glassmire, and it offers us a window into the desires and anxieties that fueled local artists in the late 1960s. The journal assembled movie reviews, poems, essays, technical how-to tips, and speculative writings dedicated to cinema¹⁰³. Contributions were solicited from college professors, artists, and film enthusiasts based in Pittsburgh. Later issues, contained personal letters, poems, political comic strips, and artistic manifestos submitted by leading figures of American avant-garde film: Ed Emshwiller; Bruce Baillie; and Stan VanDerBeek. The magazine's eclecticism arose in response to the lack of technical information

¹⁰² Franklin Pangborn's request of \$3,782, in Spring 1975, for the purpose of financing Pitt student filmmaking, was questioned by the Student Government president as "excessive," given that only 25-30 student filmmakers would benefit from such a large allocation of funds. In response, the Film Society threatened to cease all its film exhibition activity on campus; see: Pete Butch, "Pangborn Warns SGB: No Allocations, No Films," *The Pitt News* Vol. 69, No. 73, Friday April 11, 1975, 1-2.

¹⁰³ To sample the range of topic areas that appeared in these pages: "Cross Cuts" was a regular section that examined film industry news across the U.S., with a special focus on Warhol's underground films; Glassmire wrote a philosophical essay on movie popcorn in *Film Feedback* 1.1 (Fall 1969): 15; and "A Pocket Shooting Card," in *Film Feedback* 3.17 (Winter 1969): 8, was a cut-out diagram for 16mm projectionists that explained how to relate "the number of frames in the film to the number of feet in the same piece of film and thence to the number of seconds it takes to shoot or project the same".

around film, a dearth of home-grown film criticism on par with Mekas's "Movie Journal," and the readiness on the part of local artists to develop a news organ on behalf of the community. Remarkably, there was a great deal of similarity across the different voices and perspectives in the articles, rendering the journal into a sort of spokesperson for the Everyman filmmaker.

The premiere issue, released Fall 1969, was mimeographed on 8x11 black and white printer paper, modeled on the format of *Filmmakers Newsletter* distributed in New York. It opens with a manifesto-like proclamation, announcing the birth of a new human-machine hybrid. Glassmire's vision of a machinic future is peppered with evocative, hi-tech imagery: the space baby from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1969), the moog synthesizer, and laser beams all make an appearance. Glassmire worked as a nuclear engineer and was deeply interested in scientific applications of moving images. He would return to the topic of laser beam movies, holograms, optical computers and 3D films variously throughout the journal's pages. The first proper article, "New Cinema in Pittsburgh?" by F. Jones, is notable because it puts the problem of film exhibition front and center.

Despite the article's somewhat glib tone, Jones expresses a genuine and widely shared feeling: that for filmmaking to take off in Pittsburgh, the city would first need to establish a regular and dependable venue for the noncommercial types of films that people wanted to see and make. Jones complains that the area theatres, such as the Pittsburgh Playhouse, have "atrocious" programming, and "most of what is being done in the exhibition of good cinema is related to the universities or depends on them for business," which "makes it hard for non-students to know exactly when and where things are happening."¹⁰⁴ He reserves praise for Charles Glassmire's screening series at the Crumbling Wall Coffee House, a Lutheran owned business in Oakland, located across from the Carnegie Institute.

¹⁰⁴ F. Jones, "New Cinema in Pittsburgh?" *Film Feedback* 1.1 (Fall 1969): 2-3.

Glassmire's Crumbling Wall film series, an early microcinema, was the only place that nonstudents could view experimental films in Pittsburgh. These events were usually free to the public, with a donation jar to cover film rental costs. Glassmire believes an average of twenty or so people attended each screening. An advertisement for the film series, included in *Film Feedback*'s inaugural issue's back pages, "Reel Seen," reveals that Glassmire screened a dynamic selection of underground/experimental films: "Crumbling Wall, 4515 Forbes Street, Oakland. (near the museum). 2 showings nightly, 9:15, 11:00PM. Admission 50 cents. FRI/SAT 19-20 September. DUO CONCERTANTES, Larry Jordan, MOSAIK IM VERTRAUEN, Peter Kubelka, XFILM, John Schofill, BRIDGES GO ROUND, Shirley Clarke, LIFELINES, Ed Emshwiller, DIFFRACTION FILM, Jud Yalkut." This informal film program, during its one-year life span, became an important meeting place for the cofounders of what became Pittsburgh Filmmakers.

2.3 THE NEW CINEMA WORKSHOP

Besides a dearth of film exhibition, a frequent complaint and desire among locals was for more production resources, specifically, a filmmaking workshop. Another important article from the inaugural issue of *Film Feedback* was a proposal, "The Film Workshop: The Frontier for the language of the future," by Willard Van De Bogart. Bogart spotlighted a key meeting ground in the late 1960s, the New Cinema Workshop in the East End neighborhood of Shady Side. In the words of F. Jones, the Workshop was a "crystal ball affair", partly a reality, partly a paper tiger organization: it was a membership-based screening space erected on Ellsworth Ave. in "defiance of city zoning, building inspection and fire laws."

According to the proposal, Bogart envisioned his Workshop not only as an exhibitor but as a multipurpose “clearing house for many forms of information about films, jobs, equipment bargains [sp]...”¹⁰⁵ Bogart invited filmmakers to drop in for “open screening sessions to anyone that has shot some footage...In this way the film-maker [would be able to] get a reaction to his work from other workshop members and the public.” As an added bonus, the Workshop boasted a “film chamber,” a soundproof projection booth created by Bogart that projected films as three-dimensional, total environments that enveloped the spectator, walls, floor, and ceiling into a single image. Bogart’s film chamber received positive attention from the press in Pittsburgh, Canada and New York City.¹⁰⁶ The Chamber’s unique exhibitionary format-- encompassing the environment of the spectator-- recalled the “movie-drome” by Expanded Cinema artist Stan Vanderbeek, who contributed writing to *Film Feedback*. Local filmmaker, Greg Gans, describes the construction and eventual destruction of the Workshop: “I spent many hours there [at the New Cinema Workshop] actively involved – sawing, hammering, and painting with marvelous visions growing of a nurturing atmosphere fore [sic] ‘makin’ movies on your own.’ Will was interested in, among other things, the theater as an environment that affected the film experience itself... What really seemed so important then was Will’s energy and enthusiasm at a time when it was so needed. Later I was eager to get in on the grass roots of another ‘workshop’ but one whose name was suffixed ‘Inc.’”¹⁰⁷ Gans’ passing reference to the Workshop transforming into a new entity suffixed “Inc.,” is indicative of the view that the Workshop was a prototype for the incipient Pittsburgh Filmmakers,

¹⁰⁵ Willard Van De Bogart, “The Film Workshop: The Frontier for the Language of the Future,” *Film Feedback* 1.1 (Fall 1969): 16.

¹⁰⁶The *Pittsburgh Press* described the “egg-shaped” film chamber as projecting a two-dimensional image which “doesn’t seem to be on the walls and ceiling, at all. It seems to hang in thin air within the chamber, and takes on a highly three-dimensional quality.” George Swetnam, “Pictures Must Adopt The New Techniques if They Hope to Retain Public Acceptance: Film-Maker of the Future,” *Pittsburgh Press*, May 17, 1970, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Greg Gans to Lucy Fischer/Bill Judson, June 15 1979, Box 6, Folder 14, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Inc., media arts center, and, secondly, that the members of this early iteration played a vital role in its subsequent forms, regardless of how different it wound up being from the Ellsworth Avenue site, which ended up being demolished.

The prototypical notion of a democratized film workshop, which developed all over the world in the 1960s, would directly inform one of the services offered by the Museum's Film Section: that of providing an equipment bank and film training to area and visiting artists. Further, the original designation of "Film Workshop" would be used interchangeably with "Pittsburgh Filmmakers" until 1972¹⁰⁸; and, in this small way, Bogart's idea for the Workshop shaped the conception of Pittsburgh Filmmakers, when it appeared in 1970.

2.4 SALLY DIXON AND PREPARING THE FILM SECTION PROPOSAL

Sally Dixon, born February 1932, in Seattle, Washington, was the unlikely architect behind the Film Section. By the time she proposed a film department to Leon Arkus, director of the Museum of Art, Dixon, at age 38, already had three children and was recently divorced. She had lived in twelve different cities (including San Francisco, New York City, Washington DC, Detroit) before coming to Pittsburgh. She majored in Art and had taken classes at Carnegie Mellon University, Bennington College, and Chatham College. According to her resume, she received a pilot's license (and was, at the time, the youngest woman ever to receive one) in the state of

¹⁰⁸ Willard Van De Bogart, on April 30, 1969, received non-profit certification for "Pittsburgh Independent Film-Makers, Incorporated" from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Bogart should therefore be credited with the first instantiation of the Pittsburgh Filmmakers, recognized by the State of Pennsylvania. A scanned copy of registration of the Pittsburgh Independent Filmmakers can be found at:
http://www.earthportals.com/Portal_Messenger/filmchamber.html

Michigan. She was an artist who worked in her own studio, creating paintings, drawings, illustrations, book covers, and films. Some have reported that Dixon's interest in film began from her brief stint making film poems; but, if she ever made such films, we do not have any record of them besides Haller's account of a piece she made about a close friend's newborn child.¹⁰⁹ She had a coat designing business that sold nationally. She was known to contribute art criticism to a weekly newspaper, *The Point* (renamed *Forum*), and wrote an article on the first two decades of film in Pittsburgh, published in *Renaissance Magazine*.

Significantly, Dixon came from a family of great wealth, a fact that partly accounts for her unusual mobility within the upper echelons of the Museum world. Her upper class upbringing also distinguished her from those in the local film world, many of whom were middle- and working class. Her father, Fred C. Foy, was Chief of Koppers Company in Pittsburgh, as well as chairman of the board of Trustees at Carnegie Mellon University and a Trustee of Carnegie Institute. Koppers Company specialized in manufacturing carbon chemicals from coal tar, and in the 1920s was a thriving supplier of coke ovens to such customers as U.S. Steel. In 1929, the company opened a headquarters in downtown Pittsburgh, and the modern Koppers Building was the largest in the area, only to be surpassed by Gulf Oil's skyscraper, on Seventh Avenue, a few years later. In the mid-twentieth century, Koppers diversified into road building materials, chemicals, wood preservation products, railroad and utility equipment, until finally the conglomerate was bought out by British investor, Brian Beazer, for \$1.8 billion in 1988.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Haller: "Dixon had made a brief film portrait of a friend nursing her newborn child. The intimacy of this film, and the experience of making it, seems to have prefigured, or reflected, the highly personal kinds of film she would present at the Museum of Art." *Crossroads: Avant-garde Film in Pittsburgh in the 1970s* (New York City, NY: Anthology Film Archives, 2005): 9.

¹¹⁰ Kurt Eichenwald, "Koppers at Last Accepts Beazer's Bid," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1988.

Nearly everyone who came to know Sally Dixon mentions her magnetic personality. Dixon conveyed passionate enthusiasm, sensitivity, curiosity and a complete lack of prejudice towards all forms of art. Additionally, her powerful charisma, coupled with her unwavering devotion to film events, were important traits in evidence well before she curated film exhibitions at the Museum. She made herself visible early on by attending the meetings of the New Cinema Workshop, held at Bogart's Ellsworth location. She participated in the very few production courses offered at the time. In particular, she cites the Shady Side Academy, as holding the first public filmmaking workshop in Pittsburgh, in 1968.¹¹¹ Her beauty and grace, punctuated by the carefree accouterments of an upper-class lifestyle, were often noticed in the local press: "[Sally Dixon] seems a pioneer mother [...] Her leggy stride easily drops into a semi-lotus on the floor when she serves [one] herbal tea. The window at her back door is slung with 18th century paper dolls. In fact, she has an enormous collection of toys, all wooden and papier-mâché and bright paint, which she clearly enjoys herself."¹¹² Another newspaper writer would later say of her aura, "Sally Dixon is a paradox. She's a willowy, delicate-boned woman[...] The graying of her long, light brown hair contradicts her girlish enthusiasm. She looks like actress Delores Taylor of the 'Billy Jack' films and, like Miss Taylor sometimes appears on the verge of tears. Sally also has characteristics of Katharine Hepburn - the clarity of enunciation and the strong inner force. Who is Sally Dixon? [...] By role in the community, she's something of a savior to independent filmmakers and moviegoers in search of the unusual."¹¹³ During her six-year tenure at the Museum, she received

¹¹¹ Sally Dixon, "Film Program – Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute: Proposal," 3, November 3 1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹¹² "Personae," *Renaissance Pittsburgh*, December 1974, 19.

¹¹³ Blank, Edward L. "Filmmakers' 'Savior' Sees Community Serving the Artist." *Pittsburgh Press*. February 16, 1975.

the title “Sally of the Celluloid.”¹¹⁴ Her many admirers grew a myth around her as a kind of mother/savior figure, while her closest allies, lately, have worked to dispel this notion, as they believe it clouds the real person in all her complexity.

In any case, the plan for a film program in the Museum germinated in Dixon’s contact with members of the Film Workshop, especially Charles Glassmire. In his first meeting with Dixon in 1969, Glassmire was then teaching film production courses at a local chapter of the Pittsburgh Free University. The Free University was a type of educational model that evolved out of the 1960s ethos of collective participation and personal freedom, offering free-of-charge classes to community members. As with the college film society and Bogart’s film workshop, the Free University was another precipitating force for the creation of the Film Section.¹¹⁵ Glassmire recalls that Dixon seemed to stand out from the group of hippies, young people, and artists who regularly attended his lectures:

I was teaching filmmaking, and, ah, one class, I was, you know, in the middle of a lecture, and this lady came in, and she appeared to me – you know, certainly not a hippie type – she appeared to be a quite sophisticated lady, and perhaps in middle or late age, she sat down in the back of the class, which she was totally allowed to do, because it was free. And then after the class she introduced herself, and that was Sally Dixon. And Sally Dixon explained to me – this was 1969 – she explained to me her idea, that was for a filmmakers’ workshop in Pittsburgh.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ “Personae,” *Renaissance Pittsburgh*, December 1974, 19.

¹¹⁵ The connections between anti-hierarchical educational models developed outside the university system, and the experimental film community, require additional study. For a brief history on the Free University Movement across the United States, see Kathleen McConnell, “Classes in Advanced Fantasy: A Brief History of the Free University,” research presentation for “Beneath the University, the Commons,” University of Minnesota, April 2010.

¹¹⁶ Charles Glassmire, interviewed by Ben Ogrodnik, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 13 2016.

Dixon enlisted Glassmire's help. She saw strengths in both his writing background with *Film Feedback* and his technical expertise on equipment, and the two set to work on a proposal for a new filmmaker's workshop. This workshop would principally take the form of a film exhibition series, however, while also involving production and editing equipment for use by community members. Over several dinners, they put their heads together and devised a proposal for Arkus, who would submit the finished draft to James Walton, then director of the Carnegie Institute, requesting the imprimatur of his support.

As Glassmire helped draft the proposal, Dixon spent the rest of 1969 researching the exhibition of film "in Pittsburgh and other parts of the East," during which time "...she c[a]me to know quite a bit about of films and film-making as an art form."¹¹⁷ Dixon made regular visits to New York City, seeking the counsel of Mekas, writer at *Village Voice*. Beyond his film criticism, Mekas by this time had critical ties to the experimental film world and was well-connected in the domain of film exhibitions and infrastructure-building in New York City. Jonas, along with his brother Adolfas Mekas, helped co-found an artist collective, the New American Cinema Group (1960) and later a distribution center, the Film-Makers' Coop (1962).¹¹⁸ Previously, Mekas was a close friend to Amos Vogel, the founder and curator of Cinema 16, the primary experimental and independent film venue in the New York area, between 1947 and 1963. Finally, in 1969 Mekas was in the midst of co-organizing the Anthology Film Archive, which opened in November 1970, and became the center of New American Cinema.

¹¹⁷ James Walton to Richard Scaife, November 10 1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹¹⁸ David James, "Underground Film: Leaping From the Grave," *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989): 85-87, 100.

Dixon cites Mekas as “the single most important person” in preparation for the program.¹¹⁹ Mekas would connect Dixon with the significant filmmakers who, in turn, galvanized the nascent Pittsburgh film scene by showing their work, in person, at her series. For instance, through Mekas, Dixon made contact with Stan Brakhage. Mekas gave her suggestions of books and publications to read, advised her to make a tentative program of lecturing film-makers, and gave her an opportunity to screen films during one of her visits to NYC. Through Mekas, Dixon met Willard van Dyke, the head of the Film department at MoMA, who contributed his wisdom about Museum-based film programming; after all, Dyke had started the Cineprobe film series, centered on avant-garde film exhibitions, in October 1968. In a later section, I identify the structural and stylistic features of Cineprobe that Dixon borrowed, in shaping the design of the Film Section.

2.5 THE PROPOSAL FOR A FILM SECTION AND DIXON’S PHILOSOPHY OF FILM-AS-ART

On November 7, 1969, Leon Arkus and Sally Dixon submitted a proposal to James M Walton, President of the Carnegie Institute. The proposal requested \$89,820 of external funding for a three-year film program, this length of time “being necessary to develop the proper interaction between the community and a new film experience.”¹²⁰ The program, according to the founding document, would be comprised of an annual, “38-week chronological international history of film; a monthly screening of avant-garde films and informal discussion with the film-maker; an

¹¹⁹ Sally Dixon to Jonas Mekas, June 12, 1969, Box 57, Folder 18, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹²⁰ Sally Dixon, “Film Program – Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute: Proposal,” 4, November 3 1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

opportunity for screening the work of local or Tri-State film artists; and additional special features [or series] as they become available.” Dixon’s proposal opens as follows,

PURPOSE: The film as we know it has risen above mere visual entertainment and has emerged as one of the outstanding art forms of this century. It may, in fact, be uniquely instrumental in enabling man to transcend the dehumanizing, purely technical aspects of this electronic age to create with these very tools a more sensitive human environment. Therefore, we propose that the Museum of Art, as purveyor and guardian of the arts, should establish a solid and comprehensive film program that will promote greater understanding and appreciation of film as an art form and the film-maker as an artist.¹²¹

As indicated in the opening paragraph, the underlying driving force for Dixon was her view that film was an art form: the “film program...will promote greater understanding and appreciation of film as an art form and the film-maker as an artist.” By the late 1960s, this advocacy of film-as-art was not original in itself, but enjoyed a high point of renewal in certain quarters of U.S. culture: Film-as-art echoed a wider movement of artistic modernism in the art world and film worlds, and was a common refrain of an established American avant-garde movement that organized primarily on the East and West Coasts. There is, of course, a long and rich intellectual history underlying these attitudes: film theorists, from the turn of the twentieth century on, regularly made claims to cinema’s status as an art form--among them, Rudolf Arnheim, André Bazin, and Sigfried

¹²¹ Ibid, 1.

Kracauer.¹²² Yet, despite the apparent orthodoxy of this view, Dixon's claim had special significance and force within the institutional context of the Museum of Art in Pittsburgh.

Dixon's film-as-art philosophy echoed and built upon the views of Frank Stauffacher, the founder of the widely respected and well attended "Art in Cinema" series in San Francisco; and that of Amos Vogel, the curator of Cinema 16, in New York City. Her understanding of film-as-art was likely informed by her mentor Mekas: Dixon may have decided to draw explicitly upon film-as-art as an organizing rhetoric during the one year period of planning she conducted before submitting a proposal for the Film Section, during which time she had multiple meetings with Mekas for support and inspiration. Also, although Dixon may not have been aware, film-as-art resonated within a burgeoning movement of federal funding for the arts: the National Endowment of the Arts, from 1967 on, would finance film-related projects under the rubric of the filmmaker conceived as an independent artist. The U.S. art museum was becoming a key beneficiary of newly available federal funds to support film-related infrastructure, such as screening programs.¹²³

Nevertheless, the uniqueness of Dixon's conception of film-as-art lay in two factors. First, the Film Section explicitly linked film production with film exhibition, which broadened the role of the Museum of Art beyond merely exhibiting film. Second, the Film Section embraced a holistic approach to film programming, orienting its various film exhibitions toward new films by independent filmmakers. That is to say, all parts of each exhibition (each film series) were meant to integrate together and support "new interest and activity in film aesthetics and film making itself." I will show how this integrated approach to exhibitions worked, supporting (if sometimes

¹²² Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: U of California) 1969; André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley: U of California) 1967; and Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film; the Redemption of Physical Reality*, (New York: Oxford UP) 1960.

¹²³ Donna M. Binkiewicz, *Federalizing the muse: United States arts policy and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1965-1980*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 114.

indirectly) an appreciation of the contemporary independent filmmaker, in the section below on the exhibition series.

Sally Dixon was unique as an early film curator in her sympathetic recognition that the filmmaker, much more so than other types of artists, was on the margins of society, hampered by difficulties that ranged from the economic to the technical. She makes this known in “New Concepts in Museum-Independent Film Maker Relationships,” a lecture she prepared for a visit with museums in Stockholm, in 1975, on a trip sponsored by the US Information Agency (USIA). Here, she posits a definition of the artist as dependent on the assistance of others: “the independent filmmaker, by the very nature of his art, is a very dependent person – film being one of the most costly art forms from making through screening.”¹²⁴ Dixon practically created an ontological category for the independent filmmaker, which she shortened oftentimes as “IFM” in her writings.

As a result of the film artist’s inherently vulnerable status, Dixon argued, the task of the museum was to adopt an overall nurturing role, become a liaison, and support the filmmaker’s productivity and the promotion of their work at multiple levels. As she wrote, filmmaking “depends on others for its subject matter, if not crew, processing, distribution, exhibition, critical analysis, etc. So the Museum [of Art] seek[s] ways to help the film maker to affirm his dignity and worth as an artist and human being NOT as a commodity to be gotten and used as cheaply as possible.”¹²⁵ This last idea, that of the filmmaker as a human being and not an exploitable commodity, indicated Dixon’s belief that while film was an art form, it still lacked the adequate attention, financing, or cultural significance. It also hinted that, in its events programming, the

¹²⁴ Box 1, Folder 6, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹²⁵ Sally Dixon, “New York talk at New School of Social Research, April 1974,” Box 1, Folder 6, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Film Section would frame the independent filmmaker in terms of an “artisan”, stripping away film’s association with industrial modes of practice that are found in the Hollywood commercial industry.

Given the troubled stature of the filmmaker, Dixon believed that the Carnegie Museum would have to expand beyond the role of an exhibitor. In the abstract for her talk on the museum and its relation to the independent film maker, Dixon writes “...we [at the Film Section] recognize the need for the museum to enlarge and change its concept of itself as *primarily exhibitor* for the independent film maker and become involved in as many areas as possible from funding though making to distribution, exhibition and study if we are to continue to have worthwhile film to show.”¹²⁶ This quite radical notion suggested that if the Museum were to truly help and nurture the filmmaker, then it was not enough to merely exhibit the work of filmmakers, as other spaces, such as Museum of Modern Art, had done up until that point. This museum-as-liaison mandate was first evidenced in providing honoraria to film artists (MoMA infamously neglected to pay filmmakers until the establishment of Cineprobe in 1968).¹²⁷ Additionally, the Film Section, over the next few years, was to add several other responsibilities to its remit: namely, support for the production of films (in terms of access to equipment; access to certain spaces, institutions, or people as subject matter; and building a collection of works when they were completed). They would also implement the *Film and Video Makers Travel Sheet*, in 1973, which had a national reach helping coordinate efforts of other institutions and individuals. Dixon’s film-as-art advocacy,

¹²⁶ Sally Dixon, “Synopsis: New Concept in Museum – Independent Film Maker Relationship,” 1975, Box 1, Folder 6, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹²⁷ Dixon notes: “the Museum began to seek ways to help the film maker...The first obvious way was 1) money. We began by offering what we felt was an adequate honorarium for the screening/discussion.” See “New York talk at New School of Social Research, April 1974,” Box 1, Folder 6, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

though still-germinal in the 1969 proposal's emphasis with exhibition, thus eventually extended itself to encompass multiple areas of a museum-based media center: production; distribution; collection; study; and education.

Though her views on filmmaking were certainly noble, it is worthwhile to ask why Pittsburgh, of all places, served as a suitable laboratory for the redefinition and expansion of the museum's role in the domain of film. In the proposal, Dixon highlighted several factors in "the vast increase in world-wide film activity" that justified a museum-based film program in the city. First, the 1960s were pivotal in the creation of institutional infrastructure for film: the rise of international film festivals; the founding of American Film Institute (AFI) in 1967; the Center for Advanced Film Study at AFI; and the rise of media and film classes in schools. All these developments helped "the present generation become an enlightened, perceptive, and responsive film audience." Besides new trends in film study, education, and film-related publications, Dixon also points to the creation of funds for film-makers: "Grants have been established and in many countries government funds have been made available to aid the serious film artist, although this concept is relatively new in the United States."¹²⁸ These developments marked an auspicious opening for the Museum of Art to assert itself within a transforming landscape of film production, exhibition, and study. Film as an artistic medium was finally receiving the sort of serious attention accorded to painting and sculpture.

Further, film exhibitions were not entirely unheard of in the Carnegie Museum of Art; in fact, recent events suggested, "Pittsburgh is rapidly becoming oriented to film as an art form."¹²⁹ Speaking to the track record of film presentations in the Museum of Art, Dixon singled out the

¹²⁸ Ibid, 2.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 2.

February 1969 Women's Committee series of short films: "Shown on three consecutive Sundays, the Lecture Hall [in the Carnegie Institute] was filled or nearly so each time. The overwhelming response prompted another such program in April that was equally successful."¹³⁰ The Women's Committee, formed in 1957, consisted of all-women docents, board members, and art enthusiasts in town, "ranging in age from their 30s to their 90s, [to] support the museum's acquisitions, openings, and outreach programs."¹³¹ They founded the Three River Arts Festival, in 1959, after a visit to Boston's outdoor arts festival. In the 1960s, they organized screenings in the Hall of Decorative Arts, featuring the work of noted experimental filmmakers, such as Storm de Hirsch, Marie Menken, Charles Eames, as well as films created by artists, such as Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol.¹³² These screenings were scheduled and conceived as complements to the *Carnegie International* exhibitions of contemporary art.

Dixon was herself a member of the Women's Committee and, in a preface to the Film proposal, Arkus cited the Women's Committee subsequent screenings in Spring, as a "trial project" for the Film Section.¹³³ The Women's Committee's early iteration of a film series housed in the Museum never made explicit the claim of film as art. But, it implicitly suggested a harmony between certain kinds of filmmaking and forms of visual art that had long belonged in the Museum. Further, Dixon's connection to the Women's Committee lent the proposal for the Film Section a greater degree of credibility, and ensured her eligibility for the position of curator. The Women's

¹³⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹³¹ Christine H. O'Toole, "Golden Years: The Carnegie Museum of Art's Woman's Committee," Spring 2007, <http://www.carnegiemuseums.org/cmp/cmaga/feature.php?id=3>

¹³² A Film Series program by the Women's Committee, for October, November, and December 1967 list several films. Notably, the program does not mention titles of films or dates, only the names of recognizable artists, many of whom are visual artists: Henry Moore, Andy Warhol, Jim Dine, Magritte, Calder, Len Lye, Claes Oldenburg. This suggests they showed films about artists (educational films), as well as films made by artists.

¹³³ Leon Arkus to Richard M. Scaife, November 10, 1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Committee screenings were thus an important precedent that signaled film programming in the Museum would not be anathema to art-world audiences; indeed, it showed that public interest in such events was peaking.

There were other developments of world-historical importance for film, mentioned in the Proposal. Dixon referenced visits to New York City, which caused her to notice that major museums have entered into the film arena rather extensively, in particular MoMA, with its Cineprobe program. A letter attached to the proposal noted “at least sixty percent of the museums in this country regularly run cinema events.”¹³⁴ To avoid being left in the dust, Pittsburgh’s Museum of Art would need to join the race with film screenings immediately. Additionally, the McLuhanite rhetoric of an incipient electronic age, first articulated in *Film Feedback*, also reared its head in the proposal: The Museum could play a leading role in realizing film’s potential “in enabling man to transcend the dehumanizing aspects of technology,” and “that with the new tools of this time, film can help to achieve a more sensitive human environment.”¹³⁵

Finally, Dixon observed that among local artists “Pittsburgh itself is fast becoming extremely film-oriented.” She pointed to the New Cinema Workshop, included in the American Film Institute’s national listing of film-makers’ cooperatives; the bi-monthly journal *Film Feedback*; and a Fall 1968 film conference held at University of Pittsburgh. However, in the “STATEMENT OF NEED”, Dixon emphasized the scattershot, insular, and uncoordinated nature of this activity. Into this vortex of encouraging-- but random-- film activity, entered the Museum of Art as a force of clarity and coordination:

¹³⁴ Leon Arkus to James M. Walton, November 7, 1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹³⁵ Sally Dixon, “Film Program – Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute: Proposal,” 1.

Film in Pittsburgh... still lacks a sound, continuing framework from which to function, to grow. The natural choice for a coordinator in a comprehensive film environment, is, of course, the Museum of Art, as the purveyor and guardian of the arts.¹³⁶

The proposal was approved, with funds issued from the Allegheny Foundation, and the Film Section officially started in January 1970.

In a first year report on the Film Section, Dixon's notion of the museum-as-liaison took shape in several important ways. First, in addition to the Allegheny Foundation grant, an additional \$21,000 was secured, in 1971, from the AW Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, to start a filmmaking workshop located in East Liberty's Selma Burke Art Center: "A film makers workshop, equipped with 16, 8, and super-8mm. equipment has been started under the sponsorship of the Film Section...[to] provide facilities for independent film makers in the area as well as drawing top film makers in the country for workshops, seminars, etc."¹³⁷ This equipment bank would become the first iteration of the Pittsburgh Filmmakers media arts center. Second, the film series changed from the proposal's four, somewhat vague, parts to three parts. The three-part film series' structure remained unchanged until the 1990s. Third, thanks to a grant in February 1971, from the A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, and several gifts from the Women's Committee and the First Federal Savings and Loan Association, the Museum began its film collection. It bought three films by Brakhage: *Dog Star Man*, 1964; and two films he made in Pittsburgh, *Eyes*, 1970, and *Deus Ex*, 1971.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Sally Dixon, "Film Program – Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute: Proposal," 3.

¹³⁷ Sally Dixon, "REPORT ON THE FILM SECTION - Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute," 1971, Box 1, Folder 10, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹³⁸ These Brakhage films were purchased for \$600 each.

2.6 THE FILM SECTION: THREE EXHIBITION PROGRAMS

2.6.1 THE HISTORY OF FILM SERIES

In her efforts to promote Pittsburgh as a film-conscious city, Dixon established the Film Section with a robust film exhibition program consisting of three parts. The exhibition cycle lasted 11 months of the year, with a summer recess. The first part was the History of Film Series, September through July, designed to give a chronological and dynamic overview of the evolution of (mainly narrative, feature-length) filmmaking from an international perspective. This Series aimed to meet a specific, unmet need of regularized repertory film screenings in the area. (Indeed, Pittsburgh residents often complained at the inability to see classic films or even newer films once they left theaters.) Further, Dixon envisioned the History of Film programming as a pedagogical tool, in effect transforming the Museum into a kind of informal film classroom. As explained in the founding proposal, the ability for the general public to experience and watch films of aesthetic/historical importance, first hand, would be a thousand times more beneficial than having to read endless theoretical texts on the language of film.

The series consisted of a “new selection of films, repeating the same time span (1879-1960), shown each year providing the consistent viewer with an ever broadening film background and experience.”¹³⁹ The screenings took place in the Carnegie Institute Lecture Hall, every Sunday evening at 7:30pm, for 45 screenings annually. Weather permitting, the screenings occurred on the lawn with films projected against the side of the building. For the first several years, admission to

¹³⁹ Ibid, 4.

these screenings was free, until the rising cost of film rentals eventually made this feature untenable.

The first event in the History of Film, on March 1, 1970, was a selection of early films: Lumière actuality films (1885-86); *The Great Train Robbery* by Edwin S. Porter (1903); *The Lonedale Operator* and *The Battle of Elderbush Gulch* by D.W. Griffith (1911); and films by Émile Cohl, Louis Feuillade, and Jean Durand (1907-12), with a combined running time of 117 minutes.¹⁴⁰ The opening event attracted 353 filmgoers. The History of Film series became increasingly popular, consistently garnering the highest turnout of the three film programs. As data from the Film Section attendance records shows, the first month in History of Film Series shows a fairly stable and rising level of interest: The March 8 screening of Ferdinand Zecca and Chaplin films, attracted 635 attendees; the March 15 screening of *Intolerance* had 350 attendees; and on March 22, *The Mark of Zorro*, drew in 600 attendees.¹⁴¹

The enthusiasm for consistent and (for a time) free-of-charge repertory programming was reflected in a flood of fan mail, news articles, and opinion pieces. The Series held special value to schools in providing activities for young and old. Dixon noted, “The History of Film is the only comprehensive series of its kind in the area. As such it is used by high schools and colleges either as a supplement to already existing courses or as the visual framework on which courses are based...”¹⁴² She added that area psychologists have sent letters of praise to the Film Section, saying that the Sunday series has provided “the only link with the ‘establishment’ for many so-called ‘alienated youth.’” A writer for *The Post-Gazette* celebrated the Film Section’s programming as a

¹⁴⁰ Screening Notes April 1970, Box 24, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁴¹ Film Section Screenings - Attendance Record 1970-1987, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁴² Ibid, 2.

veritable “Film Feast”, and praised “[the] film history series...in Carnegie Lecture Hall” for “an absolutely priceless survey of great movies.”¹⁴³

The chronological film series was informed by Dixon’s film-as-art philosophy, as some in the press quickly picked up on: “The historically-important movies, significant in the development of film-making art, will demonstrate that one of the reasons why they have endured as classics is because they each were statements made by one man – independent directors with things to say: Ferdinand Zecca, D. W. Griffith, Fred Niblo, Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Louis Delluc, Rene Clair, Man Ray, Jean Cocteau, Ernst Lubitsch, and many others.”¹⁴⁴ In a similar vein, reporters specified that the film series would be of interest to art-minded audiences, and that the series aimed at viewers who were uninterested in frivolity, but instead curious and passionate about the possibilities of cinema as a visual form: “Those who are interested in movies as an exciting art form rather than nourishment for the libido will do well to turn their toes toward Carnegie Lecture Hall where the Institute’s Museum of Art offers without charge every Sunday evening the choicest films made in this country and abroad.”¹⁴⁵

Dixon’s view of film as art circulated widely and loudly in the early years of the Film Section. Through a variety of institutional media, this simple, sellable, and portable idea, film-as-art, served to encapsulate the mission statement and philosophy of the Museum’s stance on film in a way that reverberated throughout the city and beyond. The very first screening program, announcing the Spring 1970 events, proclaims, in no uncertain terms: “It is the purpose and the hope of the Museum of Art that this film program will promote greater understanding and

¹⁴³ George Anderson, “Stage and Screen,” *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 10, 1970, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Connie Kienzle, “Museum to Show Little Known Films,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, February 9, 1970, 22.

¹⁴⁵ Milton K. Susman, “As I See It,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, September 30, 1971, 6.

appreciation of film as an art form and the film-maker as an artist.”¹⁴⁶ As if to underscore the artistic, as opposed to commercial or spectacular nature of cinema, the design of the program notes echoes a view of film from the standpoint of visual modernism. Particularly between Summer 1970 and Spring 1977, the Film Section’s tri-fold program notes were characterized by a highly abstract, repetitive, and visually bold and controlled use of space and layout. This visual design communicates, nonverbally, the endorsement of film as an emergent visual art. The graphic designer’s name, Nicki Adler, is affixed to the front of every program, again to echo the incorporation of cinema into the fine arts realm, an implicit connection of film to visual abstraction, with abstraction acting as a signifier of the truly modern.

The History of Film, significantly, was not solely a parade through time of the feature-length fiction film, but also represented “major monuments” in experimental filmmaking. The first experimental film exhibition, represented in the Historical series, occurred on April 5, 1970 with an omnibus screening of “Experimental Films of the 20’s” –short films by Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Louis Delluc, Rene Clair, Man Ray, and Bunuel/Dali.¹⁴⁷ During the first five years, the History of Film Series regularly spotlighted experimental film: March 25, 1973 featured an omnibus event based on “Experimental 1940’s Films”, with 250 in attendance; on July 2, 1972, an event on 1950s experimental film brought a crowd of 469 viewers.¹⁴⁸ The History of Film incorporated experimental film in other ways. Dixon had a practice of presenting short films-- documentary, educational, or experimental in nature-- as a sort of palette cleanser before the evening’s main filmic entrée. For instance, during the 1970 screening cycle, Dixon put on several

¹⁴⁶ Screening Notes April 1970, Box 24, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Screening Notes, March 1973 and July 1972, Box 24, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

omnibus events in the month of July. On July 19, 1970, Dixon showed an award-winning, narrative French film, *White Mane*, with *Liquid Jazz*, an abstract animation set to Dixieland Jazz. For the History of Film's finale on July 26, Dixon presented *Nanook of the North* alongside *Timepiece*, a 1968 mythopoeic experimental film by Muppets TV show creator, Jim Henson.

These experimental shorts, particularly in the case of *Timepiece* or *Liquid Jazz*, functioned as a kind of coming-attractions trailer for independent filmmaker events. Dixon's former assistant, Jean Tarbox, who worked for the Film Section during 1973-74, explains how the inclusion of these short films supported the visiting artists,

She [Dixon] was educating the population who were coming to the [History of] Film Series, try[ing] to entice them to come to the Independent Film Artist Programs. And what she would do with the History of Film is, she would have 500 people trapped in a *King Kong* movie, and she'd force them to watch a three-minute clip of very interesting or difficult avant-garde work. They wouldn't riot; eventually, she got them. She would talk a little bit about the artist that was coming that week or that month, and that's how she built that audience for avant-garde work. She got them where they lived in the History of Film, then she got people you would never see, the new kind of work, she got them to come [...] She was always very intent in making the tent as large as it could be.¹⁴⁹

The curator's preference for 1960s experimental filmmaking, in the early years of the Film Section, thus framed the chronological treatment of film history. In this way, beginning with the History of Film Series, Film Section programming attempted to stage an intertextual dialogue between the independent filmmaker and the rest of film history, even as viewers received exposure

¹⁴⁹ Jean Tarbox, interviewed by Ben Ogrodnik, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 16, 2016.

to images they would not otherwise see. In effect, the implicit message of such “integrative” film programming was that the contemporary independent filmmaker comes out of, and in many cases extends, the history of film in all its aspects; and, further, that the act of experimental film viewing should not be seen as distinct or separate from the act of viewing narrative/documentary cinematic forms.

2.6.2 THE DIRECTOR’S SERIES

The second part of the Film Section’s programming was the Director’s Series. These screenings offered a retrospective look at the careers of two film directors, across a shortened yearly cycle (September through May). The Series began Fall 1971, in response to “numerous requests from the general public and educational institutions.”¹⁵⁰ Existing as an extension and offshoot of the History of Film Series, these retrospectives similarly followed a chronological sequence “so that the development of concepts and techniques can be clearly seen in the individual director as well as the history of film.”¹⁵¹ Admission to these events ranged from \$1.00-1.50.

The first directors featured were Ingmar Bergman (*The Ritual*, screened twice in September 1970); Jean-Luc Godard (*Sympathy for the Devil*, twice in October 1970); and Marco Bellocchio (*Fists in the Pocket*, twice in April 1971) but these were one-off events. The series, as a retrospective survey of multiple films, began in earnest with Orson Welles, in October 1971, with *Citizen Kane*; and Buster Keaton, in January 1972, with a selection of his films: *Our Hospitality*, *Sherlock Jr.*, *The Boat*, *Convict 13*, and *Navigator*.

¹⁵⁰ Sally Dixon, “REPORT ON THE FILM SECTION - Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute,” 1971, 4, Box 1, Folder 10, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 4.

The Film Section, in a 1972 grant request to fund the department for three more years, justified the existence of this director-centric Series as an intensification of the History of Film's three-fold aim: to provide a pedagogical orientation to filmmaking; to meet an unmet repertory need for older, classic works; finally, as reinforcement for the overall idea of film-as-art: "[The Director's Series] fills the need for an in-depth study of the work of those directors who have raised cinema from a craft, to an art form – the artists in their field", and "provides in-depth study of works of those directors who have transcended the banalities of entertainment and achieved true creativity in this medium."¹⁵²

2.6.3 THE INDEPENDENT FILM MAKERS SERIES

The third--and most important--screening series was The Independent Film Makers Series, in which the Museum invited a filmmaker or video maker to show and discuss his or her films: "The usual format include[d] an introduction to the work by the filmmaker, a presentation of the work itself, and a discussion involving the audience after the screening."¹⁵³ The first event, in April 1, 1970, featured a screening (Excerpts from *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches, vol. 1*) and lecture by Jonas Mekas, with 250 attendees; then, on May 6, 1970, Robert Breer visited and presented films (short films c. 1956-1969), with 150 in attendance. From September 1970 on, every month featured a different independent filmmaker visit for an in-person appearance with their recent work. A

¹⁵² Sally Dixon, Leon Arkus, and James M. Walton to Theodore Hazelett, Jr., "FILM SECTION, MUSEUM OF ART, CARNEGIE INSTITUTE," October 24, 1972, 3, Box 1, Folder 10, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁵³ Sally Dixon, "National Endowment for the Arts, Independent Filmmakers Series grant (1974-1976)", Box 18, Folder 12, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

filmmaker's inclusion into the Series was based on "films which are primarily motivated by an impulse toward personal expression rather than commercial interests, and which are of high 'artistic quality,' as well as to bring to this city filmmakers whose concerns and ideas have substance. A major factor behind each invitation is the degree to which the artist has contributed toward extending or rethinking the expressive means of film."¹⁵⁴

Following the 1974 museum addition of the Sarah Scaife Galleries, designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes, the independent film screenings were regularly held in the Museum of Art Theatre.¹⁵⁵ Crucially, this Theatre was constructed, in large part, for the purpose of these film-related events. The new space seated 194 visitors and was outfitted with projection and performance capabilities suitable for the sorts of events affiliated with the IFM series: "This theater has proven to be an advantageous facility for the independents; the sound is good, and four-screen projections worked well in two instances and two-screen in another. When a larger space is needed, the Lecture Hall seating 635 is available." (Dixon's successor, Bill Judson, later complained that the theatre's design retains several technical flaws, owing to the fact that Museum architects failed to consult with the film curators beforehand. Judson also lamented that many events drew audiences larger than the seating maximum, and that a room sized between the current MOA theatre and the Lecture Hall would have been more desirable for IFM events.)¹⁵⁶ It bears

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ "The Scaife Galleries [built in 1974], made possible by a gift of the Scaife Family and Foundation, more than doubled the exhibition space of the Museum of Art. Nearly half of the 125,000 square feet was for the permanent collection, and the rest of the space was devoted to a children's studio, theater, offices, café, and bookstore." See Ellen S. Wilson, "The Continuing History of the Scaife Galleries":

http://www.carnegiemuseums.org/cmp/cmag/bk_issue/2003/julaug/feature2.html

¹⁵⁶ From Suzanne Regan's interview with Judson, in 1981: "Bill Judson feels the design and set-up of the projection booth in the small auditorium to be inadequate. People cognizant of the needs and requirements of the quality film exhibition were not consulted." Judson added, "I wish the smaller theater held three hundred—we have an awful lot of shows that will draw between two and three hundred people." Quoted in Regan, "The Utilization of the Film Medium by American Art Museums," 98.

mentioning that, in view of the conventional belief that film-world and art-worlds rarely intersected, the very existence of the MOA theatre, and its original usage for film-related events, suggests that the Film Section's relevancy was inscribed in the very architecture of the Museum of Art, and thus testifies to the powerful link between film-world and art-world which the Film Section achieved in the 1970s.

Unlike the Directors Series, the individuals whose work was showcased here had no commercial appeal or institutional support, and public knowledge about them was limited to non-existent. The films and filmmakers who visited in the first five years were qualitatively different; namely, they were all self-described poets (Emshwiller, Brakhage, De Hirsch, Jacobs); many of them were involved in painting initially (Emshwiller, Jacobs); and they were traveling artists of limited means. The self-identification of many of these artists as poets was significant. Indeed, the affiliation of the independent filmmaker with the figure of the Romantic poet had been a critical social analogy in the 1950s-70s towards the legitimation of film as art. As David James observes, this conceptual linkage enabled the experimental filmmaker to claim a unique and artisanal mode of film production (despite the crucial irony that film was a mechanical, industrial medium); later on, the poetic identification of the experimental filmmaker had structural implications, necessitating the creation of infrastructure and a specialized system of distribution and exhibition for screening works that were not feature-length works but were short film poems.¹⁵⁷ For all these traits, the first wave of visiting filmmakers fit perfectly into Dixon's definition of independent artist as a dependent, an iconoclast who opposed commercialism, and whose personal and difficult work required a sensitive and nurturing audience. Writing for the NEA Grant Report in 1975-1976,

¹⁵⁷ David James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989): 32.

Dixon observed the centrality of in-person presentations by film artists: “The initiation of the independent filmmaker screenings at the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, was an integral part of the founding of the Film Section in 1970. *At that time there was no place in Pittsburgh where independent films could be seen.* Furthermore, the very nature of the work of filmmakers like Breer, Baillie, Brakhage, Hollis Frampton and others made the Museum a particularly apt forum for their work. *This continuing series may well be perceived, from a future perspective, as THE most important and most appropriate contribution by this Museum to the field of film*” [my italics].¹⁵⁸

While the IFM events were held in the new theatre, in Dixon’s lecture at the New School, in 1974, she notes the dialectic, overlapping nature of the three film exhibition programs, specifically that the History of Film was meant to coalesce with the IFM series: “Its basic program consists quite simply of a three part program. A History of Film Series which provides an historical background *that leads directly into the Independent Film Makers Series* that brings current artists working in film once or twice a month for a screening and discussion of their work. In addition we offer two in depth retrospectives a year based on the work of an outstanding director or era in film history” [my emphasis].¹⁵⁹ The three streams of film programming, as mentioned earlier in the use of experimental film as “coming-attractions” adverts, conveyed Dixon’s belief that the independent filmmaker exists not in a ghetto but is a critical part of the entire film culture as a whole.

¹⁵⁸ Independent Filmmakers Series grant, 1974-1976, Box 18, Folder 12, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁵⁹ Sally Dixon, “New York talk at New School of Social Research, April 1974,” Box 1, Folder 6, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The Independent Film Makers Series was modeled on pre-existing film programs, specifically MoMA's Cineprobe film series.¹⁶⁰ New York City, being the center of film activity, was often the first place Dixon would look toward for new filmmakers to schedule into the calendar. According to former Cineprobe assistant programmer, Larry Kardish, Dixon was able to find prospective visiting filmmakers using Cineprobe/MoMA member monthly calendars, in order to coordinate their film tours.¹⁶¹ Though she was not the first to implement artist honoraria, Dixon made it Museum policy to compensate artists rather high sums who made in-person appearances, setting a trend that would be instituted in museum film programs elsewhere. Haller observes: "Crucially, the film program at Carnegie Institute...offered substantial financial incentives – honoraria – to visiting film-makers...At \$500—and later \$1,000—the Carnegie Institute Museum of Art's speaking fees for visiting film-makers were the highest in the country."¹⁶² Haller continues: "Dixon's decision had far-reaching consequences. By setting an example that was soon followed by other museums in 1971 and 1972 and later, important new income was added to the

¹⁶⁰ The most significant early avant-garde film exhibition program was MoMA's Cineprobe, a forum in which the independent and/or avant-garde and/or experimental filmmaker would show his or her work and then take questions from the audience. Started by Film Department Head Willard Van Dyke and curator Adrienne Mancia, Cineprobe began as a once-a-month program in October 1968 (*David Holzman's Diary* by Jim McBride and L.M. Carson was the first film shown), but by the beginning of 1969 Cineprobe was scheduled twice a month from October through May. In an interview with me, Larry Kardish explains the Museum's vision for the Cineprobe series as follows: "The idea was to educate (after all, museums in New York State are chartered as educational institutions) the film-going public (most of whom were MoMA members) and to give voice in a prestigious institution to those filmmakers whose works were scarcely shown because (a) there was critical resistance to unconventional cinema and (b) the venues for an artist's cinema were virtually non-existent." Admission to Cineprobe events was free for visitors with the price of museum admission, and members could see as many films in a year as they wished at no cost other than cost of membership. Artists typically came from New York City, but, over time, they ranged widely in terms of national background. Cineprobe has been a constant in the Museum since 1968, with specialty programs added to reflect changes in the constitution of the moving image as an artistic medium: curator Barbara London started Video Viewpoints, in 1978, with a focus on media art beyond celluloid single-channel work; and Modern Mondays, started in 2008, featured artists and artworks that merge performance with moving-images. Cineprobe has hosted around 1,100 moving-image artists since its inception.

¹⁶¹ Larry Kardish, interviewed by Ben Ogrodnik, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24 and 27, 2016.

¹⁶² Haller, Robert A. *Crossroads: Avant-garde Film in Pittsburgh in the 1970s* (New York City, NY: Anthology Film Archives, 2005): 8.

avant-garde film community. Many more film-makers began traveling, and that traffic soon affected film in Pittsburgh...”¹⁶³

Of all the exhibition programs, the Independent Filmmakers attracted the most interest and publicity from the local press. There was widespread optimism that, with filmmakers bringing work and making new films in or about the city itself, that the Pittsburgh region would become a new gateway for filmmaking, or what Haller perceptively described as a “third coast”, becoming a middle path between Los Angeles on the West Coast and New York City in the East. There was a great deal of interest in exposure to new styles of independent filmmaking that few had seen before, besides screenings that occasionally appeared to small audiences at the Crumbling Wall or a university classroom. Some of these styles, such as structural filmmaking or mythopoeic filmmaking, by that point, had still only begun to penetrate across the middle, south, and mid-Atlantic United States. In the section below, I discuss some of the key films made with the Museum’s support.

The stylistic and conceptual import of these films was palpable, for they not only departed from Hollywood but also the emerging “New Hollywood” alternative cinema. The independent filmmakers often times seemed like harbingers of the future media world that had been promised by prominent thinkers like McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller. Technological innovation in film, which embodied the tantalizing the possibility of glimpsing the future, was a big draw, well represented by the Museum screenings of “solid light” filmmakers like Anthony McCall, or Expanded Cinema artists like VanDerBeek.¹⁶⁴ More like events than traditional screenings, these

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Vanderbeek visited on November 18, 1971, with the following films: *Computer Series* (1969); *Poem/Field* (1970); *Violence Sonata* (1970); and *Video/Graphics* (1970-71). McCall presented *Line Describing a Cone* and *Four Projected Movements*, on September 9, 1975.

IFM presentations were exciting because the experience was a genuine novelty: The filmmaker was present to guide the viewer fumbling through a visual form that was still being articulated. In addition, Sally Dixon's ever-soothing presence as emcee helped tremendously in assuaging viewer's fears and skepticism about what they were seeing. Importantly, she herself was not an expert in the traditional sense; she did not embody an authoritative academic, nor was she a conventional custodian of art and film.¹⁶⁵ Dixon's approachable and expansive framing of the Q&A session, especially for environmental works and performative appearances by Tony Conrad, Carolee Schneeman, and others, served to ease the tension between those in the know, and those who were not.

The filmmaker's in-person appearance was essential. Because the modes of film practice being presented were of an artisanal, abstract or handmade nature which oftentimes rejected the mimetic realism and literary content presumed by the narrative cinema, the audience would be naturally curious as to what they were seeing and how the images were made and why. These independents made films using a variety of relatively unknown techniques: Cameraless techniques such as drawing, scratching, or painting images directly on the filmstrip, to artists who manipulated the film's optical soundtrack by hand. Some films were created by distorting the surface of the celluloid film, applying materials such as paper, glue, food, or prescription medication, or natural elements such as dirt, salt, leaves, or blood. Others were composed by processes that purposefully deteriorate the film, such as bleaching the film, dunking it in saltwater, or burying it in soil. For instance, Conrad's in-person presentation of "cooked" films, on May 3 1971, at the Film Section: Conrad stood before a Pittsburgh audience and presented on stage a selection of film reels which

¹⁶⁵ In her interview with me, Tarbox commented that Film Section likely would not have succeeded were Dixon an academic, in fact, her non- or even anti-academic stance was an asset to the formation of a truly populist film scene.

he literally cooked based on Thai and Cajun recipes.¹⁶⁶ These films took the material form of sculptural and performative works as much as films (he admitted these reels would set fire to projectors). Being able to speak to these sometimes challenging artistic choices, the filmmaker acted as an ambassador of a strange new land.

The first several visitors-- Mekas, Breer, Frampton, and others--were eloquent speakers. Through their sheer oratory power, they seemed to bridge the gap between the spectator's understanding and the visual alterity of the filmic experience. Jonas Mekas, appearing on April 1, 1970, was a critical first visitor to the Museum's fledgling film department. In a lecture on his diaristic filmmaking method, Mekas challenged the conventional view of "underground cinema" as sensationalistic and pornographic motion pictures, toward a new view of film as a modernist art medium:

If you would look to the last ten years [of] past coverage of independent cinema, all you would see is sex, sex, sex. But that's only what the papers are interested in, that sells for a certain segment of the public... But that was never the main concern or preoccupation of the filmmakers. We had, until 10 years ago, and for 99% of the population today, we had ... narrative, feature-length film. The [independent] filmmakers' main achievement, the main achievement of the underground filmmaker of the last ten years is working out a vocabulary, forms, techniques of non-narrative cinema.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ A video documentation of this screening-cum-performance lecture by Conrad is available at: <https://vimeo.com/154776772>

¹⁶⁷ An audio recording of Mekas's Film Section lecture is accessible online. See also: Kate Barbera, "The Time Avant-Garde Filmmaker Jonas Mekas Visited Pittsburgh," CMOA Blog, April 1 2015, <http://blog.cmoa.org/2015/04/the-time-avant-garde-filmmaker-jonas-mekas-visited-pittsburgh/>

Mekas's lecture is a microcosmic example of the Film Section's broader role to the Pittsburgh public, and an early instantiation of the independent filmmaker as a personal cinema poet/diarist. Further, his talk not only described but enacted a mode of spectatorship which the Film Section will eventually strive to subject to people-- what Haidee Wasson calls "studious attention"--in which film is placed within a museological framework as an object of cultural value, and therefore deserving historical investigation.

Independents such as Frampton or Brakhage were linguistically gifted, writers of poetry, critical essays, or reviews of film, and in Frampton's case particularly, spoke in a kind of esoteric, poetic verse. Frampton's dialogues dazzled audiences, puzzled them with literary and historical references oftentimes extending far beyond the domain of film. Among the various topics that arose in the Q&A sessions, the Independent Film Makers' discussions around film craft, in particular, served a larger goal of advocating for artisanal modes of film practice, which existed on the margins of the commercial industry. The Q&A after the screening, which sometimes turned into a lecture by the artist (Brakhage) or a fierce debate between artist and audience members (Brakhage again), resisted the commodity logic of film industry in several ways. Except for several introductory remarks by Dixon, dialogue with the artist was not pre-determined or scripted but an open-ended process. This opportunity for genuine dialogue had the potential to re-consider the status of film as a project, not an industrial product that one consumed and quickly forgot, as in a typical first-run movie theatre experience.

Some of the films being presented were in-progress works, which held the possibility that the audience's insights could play a part in the final product. This was the case when Storm De Hirsch screened her work-in-progress and sought feedback, on April 15, 1971: *An Experiment in Meditation* (1971) and an excerpt from her feature film, *Goodbye in the Mirror*. The dialogic

nature of the Q&A, which often centered around issues of *praxis* as well as symbolic meaning, was another tactic by which Dixon's film-as-art philosophy opposed the commodity form of industrial cinema. As David James notes in *Allegories of Cinema*, the emphasis on making and on opening up awareness of modes of film practice, extended the Sixties' spirit of participation, of breaking barriers between producer and audience, and engaged all parties in a process of mutual creativity.¹⁶⁸ The idea of dialogue between in-person filmmaker and a receptive audience became foundational: While their taste in film deepened, members of the audience who wanted to make films themselves received an informal, piecemeal education on the technology of the moving image. Viewers gained an awareness of how film can be used (within the film-as-art rubric) to communicate experiences, dreams, ideas; or to convey visual knowledge about oneself, the world, and the cosmos. On several occasions, filmmakers complemented their personal appearances with a technical workshop.

Besides exposure to technical knowledge (informal education) and new aesthetic paradigms (visual literacy), the in-person presentation served a role of social networking, of connecting local people to other places, other segments of art, history, and the world; in particular, we might consider Ondine's presentation of *The Chelsea Girls*, on May 7, 1975. Ondine's preliminary remarks allowed Pittsburgh audiences to learn about the unconventional directorial methods of Warhol: that the double-channel film could be projected in multiple ways by the projectionist; and that the film was shot in such a "claustrophobic" way that actors could "work out" their personal turmoil on screen. But Ondine, in being the critical, central character of "the Pope" in Warhol's infamous film, also operated as a witness/survivor of Warhol's silver factory, and shared gossip and insights about the experience of filmmaking from the point of view of the

¹⁶⁸ James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 99.

Superstar performers.¹⁶⁹ Such events were lively affairs that rarely ended when the conversation around the film came to a close; it was common for the filmmaker and a group of audience members and colleagues to retire at Dixon's home for one of her famous spaghetti and wine dinner parties, and carry the conversations into the early hours. The sociability of these encounters became vital for the first and second generations of Pittsburgh filmmakers, many of whom made films in direct response to the dialogues they had or powerful visual experiences they remembered from the Series.

Elsewhere, in her public capacity as a spokesperson for the Museum, Dixon frequently contrasted the independent filmmakers shown in the Film Section with the Hollywood conception of film-as-commodity. In 1975, Dixon said, "[Film] is an art form new to this century...and many people have been conditioned that films are 'movies,' just Hollywood sideshow entertainment. I draw a distinction between Hollywood films and the personal expression of the film art. It's as different as a Hallmark greeting card from a Picasso. Both are valid, but very different, made for different purposes, different audiences." Dixon justified her presentation of works that could be considered difficult, extreme or undecipherable by describing herself being a guide or facilitator for enhancing people's sensitivity. Even visual experiences that seem deliberately unpleasant, hostile, or difficult (like *The Chelsea Girls*), ultimately had a positive effect on the public: "We want to condition people to openness. New ways of seeing."¹⁷⁰ The rhetoric of excellence, of quality aesthetic experience, followed naturally from her view of film-as-art. "People have to be very selective about what they spend their eyes, money, time and consciousness on. To safeguard, they must equip themselves to know what is good art and what is just a good movie. I really want

¹⁶⁹ A video documentation of Ondine's presentation on May 7, 1975, is available at: <https://vimeo.com/154909928>

¹⁷⁰ Dixon quoted in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 25, 1972.

something rich when I put my eyes on it. I've got a lot of living to do and I want it to be of quality. I want people to familiarize themselves with what is art so they will recognize it everywhere. Good films can enrich life but only real art can transcend everyday life and consciousness.”¹⁷¹

2.7 MAKING MOVIES IN THE MUSEUM

Part of Dixon's vision was for the Museum to host a space for actual filmmaking activity. Unlike any other museum film programmer at this time, she linked production with the exhibition of new films by independent filmmakers. As mentioned in her Proposal, the Film Section was to take an active role in harnessing the energies of a critical mass of committed and hard-working individuals making films in the city. In a second grant for the Film Section, \$21,000 issued by the AW Mellon and Charitable Trust, the Museum founded an equipment center: “the free workshop [is] the only one offered in the United States by a Museum. Its facilities have ... great value as an artist-initiated center for learning and teaching.”¹⁷²

The equipment center was freely accessible to area independent filmmakers but also for use by visiting filmmakers. As indicated by her letters with the earliest visiting artists in the years of 1970 and 1972, Dixon regularly asked filmmakers to make films in Pittsburgh. In this correspondence, Dixon guaranteed them honoraria, news publicity and an audience for their work. But she also asked: is there anything they would like to record, any footage they would like to gather or edit in Pittsburgh? Here are just a few examples of Dixon offering Pittsburgh as a place

¹⁷¹ Dixon quoted in Michelle Pilecki, “Pittsburgh: A Frontier of Filmed Art”, April 2, 1975.

¹⁷² Sally Dixon, “REPORT ON THE FILM SECTION – Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute,” 1972, Box 1, Folder, 10, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

to make film: “If there is anything in Pittsburgh that you would like to film while here that would need permission let me know and I will do what is necessary. (Stan Brakhage did the Pittsburgh Police and returns to do hospitals. Hollis Frampton is shooting some footage of furnace tapping at U.S. Steel etc.)”, Dixon’s letter to Storm De Hirsch, January 15, 1971.¹⁷³ Or: “[Mr. Emswiller] Is there anything you want to film while you’re in Pittsburgh, for which I could make arrangements if necessary?” in Dixon’s letter to Ed Emshwiller, December 31, 1970.¹⁷⁴ In retrospect, how strange it seems for a film curator to suggest an artist make work during a visit! Nevertheless Dixon’s encouragement speaks volumes about the attitude toward creativity at the time— hence, a brief film tour could become the occasion for continuing or sparking a film project.

Dixon regularly promised a degree of access to certain institutions and spaces as subject for films, and access to postproduction resource at CMU, Pitt, and the Museum’s equipment center. As Dixon herself recounts, there was a particular trajectory to her idea of the Museum as being a liaison for film production: It began with the visit of Stan Brakhage, who flew in for a presentation in September 1970.¹⁷⁵ Picked up by a friend of the Museum, Michael Chikris, a talented news photographer working for the *Pittsburgh Press*, Brakhage mentioned his desire to record police officers at work; a project he always wanted to do but never could. Chikris and Dixon spoke on behalf of Brakhage seeking permission to film the Pittsburgh police; and, in turn, Brakhage received access to record footage from within a police patrol car based in the Number 2 station in the Hill District section of downtown Pittsburgh. Camera in tow, Brakhage recorded the workday

¹⁷³ Sally Dixon to Storm de Hirsch, January 15, 1971, Box 31, Folder 12, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁷⁴ Sally Dixon to Ed Emshwiller, December 31, 1970, Box 6, Folder 4, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁷⁵ Sally Dixon recounts the importance of Brakhage’s Pittsburgh visit in her article, “Pittsburgh Opens Up to Filmmakers,” *Carnegie Magazine* 1973: 14-17.

activities of three police officers. He produced one thousand feet of film, showing interventions into petty crimes, police officers' treatment of citizens, their activities at the street level. Brakhage stayed in Pittsburgh for three extra days, shooting film, and crafted the first part of what became the *Pittsburgh Trilogy* or *Pittsburgh Documents*. The film, titled *eyes* (1971), initiated a new phase of his filmmaking, involving observational treatment of real-life public institutions. Following the police film, Brakhage made a film about Western Penn Hospital (*Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*, 1971) then a third film about an autopsy at Pittsburgh morgue in the same year (*Deus Ex*).

Brakhage thus began a short-lived but consequential trend in which some of the major filmmakers in American avant-garde film, too, decide to record footage while they visited during a film tour. Those who followed Brakhage's example include Hollis Frampton, who visited in October 1971, and recorded a dissection in a UPMC Mercy Hospital. Frampton would later make an important industrial art film called *Winter Solstice*, recorded at a U.S. Steel Factory.¹⁷⁶ Dixon recalls, "Hollis had requested the open-hearth filming in other cities and been turned down...It was done here. This is the best thing an artist could ask for – just permission to film, to get the footage he needs to say what he has to say."¹⁷⁷ Ed Emshwiller, in February 1971, took up Dixon's offer to collect footage in the city and records from the incline the Pittsburgh skyline. Storm De Hirsch visited in April 1971 to show several works in progress but she also decided to collect footage based on her visit of the Museum of Art. Storm de Hirsch notes in her letters to Dixon her fascination in the architecture of Oakland and of the Carnegie Institute; photographs held in the Museum of Art archives depict De Hirsch using her camera and recording pictures of statues and various artworks in the museum. Ken Jacobs visited in May 1971 and recorded images of the three

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 17.

¹⁷⁷ Dixon quoted in Maggie Patterson, "Pittsburgh... 'In' Place to Make A Film," *The Pittsburgh Press*, December 5, 1971, Roto sec., 52.

rivers, which then became the basis of a technical demonstration for the Film Section audience. With footage of the Pittsburgh rivers, Jacobs demonstrated 3D projection, which later occupied much of his media performance work: He asked the audience to watch the footage while holding up to their eye a piece of brown acetate paper; the special “glasses” create a kind of optical illusion of three dimensions.¹⁷⁸ Much of this work would never see the light of day in a finished artwork (with the exception of Brakhage and Frampton’s films), but Arkus and Dixon went on to report these activities in the second-year and five-year reports on the Film Section. As they noted in a 1971 request for funds to support the Director’s Series, this high pitch of artistic activity, in their somewhat optimistic view, represented “a reversing of trends”: typically in the visual arts, when artists want to advance their careers they relocate to New York City. Instead, filmmakers were making work in the city using visual aspects of Pittsburgh as focal points in their films.¹⁷⁹

This stream of visiting artists and their productions, which utilized the city as a subject, appealed to the local press who stimulated fantasies of Pittsburgh as a burgeoning hotbed for film production: “[Dixon’s] independent Film Makers Series was opened over a year and a half ago to bring in the best-known artists who are completely independent of Hollywood or any other movie industry. They are not the names on marquee lights of first-run houses, but the avant-garde, the experimenters, who use the media strictly as an art form.”¹⁸⁰ The article continues: “Each film maker [became] captivated with a different aspect of the city. Each expresses surprise at the cooperation received here from institutions which closed their doors on his camera in other cities. ‘Through their eyes and their comments,’ Mrs. Dixon said, ‘I see that we are visually a fascinating

¹⁷⁸ Dixon, “Pittsburgh Opens Up to Filmmakers,” 16.

¹⁷⁹ Leon Arkus to James M. Walton, October 14, 1971, Box 1, Folder 10, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁸⁰ Maggie Patterson, “Pittsburgh... ‘In’ Place to Make A Film,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, December 5, 1971, Roto sec., 51.

city as far as textures and planes and surfaces, architecture and patches of concrete interspersed with patches of green hills.”¹⁸¹

Dixon’s comments with journalists shed light on specifically what filmmakers found interesting about the city: The city’s unpredictable combination of concrete, rivers, and patches of green, the variegated topography of the hills. From Dixon’s point of view, the initial shock on the part of filmmakers attracted them to the landscape and the city’s less obvious photogenic aspects. After 1972, however, the idea of creating films in the city slowly faded out of correspondence with artists, and vanished from funding and budgetary documents after 1975. Nevertheless, the films made in Pittsburgh by the American avant-garde, circa 1970-1972, will leave an indelible mark on the first generation of city-based filmmakers, as I discuss in later chapters of this dissertation.

2.8 THE FILM SECTION COORDINATION OF FILMMAKERS’ TOURS: *THE FILM AND VIDEO MAKERS TRAVEL SHEET*

In the 1970s, many independent filmmakers toured a circuit of U.S. cities located along the Coasts, opening out into the Middle, South, and Mid-Atlantic regions, appearing before small audiences and exhibiting films for small pay. It did not matter whether one was critically acclaimed with an established reputation, occupied a teaching post, or was an amateur just starting out; for everyone, it was standard to tour one’s films in order to raise publicity and attention for one’s work and to garner a bit of earnings. For a time, even art-world celebrity Andy Warhol arranged for tours to college campuses and festivals to screen his work, in-person. “Depending on one’s

¹⁸¹ Dixon quoted in Maggie Patterson, “Pittsburgh... ‘In’ Place to Make A Film,” 51-52.

domestic situation, it's like the traveling salesman or the visiting farmer's daughter, bouncing from city to city, with nothing to worry about except where you have to get to next," reported filmmaker Stan Lawder about his life as a touring filmmaker.¹⁸² Well-known artists like Hollis Frampton had an agent who arranged tours and even produced a tri-fold brochure for film institutions and festival programmers seeking to book an event. Frampton's brochure advises particular films depending on exhibition theme and type of institution. Such publicity materials were commonplace.¹⁸³ The "tour" was well known to practitioners in the field, and would become a key component of efforts to connect filmmakers with federal subsidies and grants, especially among members of the advisory panel of the NEA Public Media program and the major conferences centered on the media art center movement. As a *Film Comment* writer keenly observed, "Today most filmmakers teach, all filmmakers tour. The circuit includes universities, museums, special 'media centers,' and film societies, and is widely acknowledged to represent a pattern of federal largesse [...] a filmmaker simply must tour, because a portion [of their funding] comes only as an honorarium — and that has become the major source of film-related income."¹⁸⁴

Much of the correspondence between Dixon and visiting filmmakers centered on the financial challenges of travel, and artists expressed great relief at the promise of honoraria. Dixon came to realize it would be beneficial for filmmakers to lengthen tours by booking additional screenings in a particular city: "It seemed logical for us [the Film Section] to contact screening centers such as museums, schools in other cities that were nearby or en route for the travelling filmmaker so that, hopefully, enough screenings could be had on one trip to enable him or her to

¹⁸² Quoted in Mitch Tuchman, "The Mekas Bros., Brakhage & Baillie Traveling Circus," *Film Comment* (March/April 1978): 13.

¹⁸³ Hollis Frampton, "Hollis Frampton Film Maker," Box 6, Folder 8, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁸⁴ Mitch Tuchman, "The Mekas Bros., Brakhage & Baillie Traveling Circus," 13.

stay home for a good while and make more films ([which] had been going on informally and randomly for some time between interested institutions and artists).”¹⁸⁵

Against this national backdrop of filmmakers on tour, in 1973 Dixon and her staff embarked on one of the lesser known but certainly more consequential aspects of the Film Section: the creation of a mailing list and directory of filmmakers and film exhibitors, *The Film Makers Travel Sheet* (later renamed *Film and Video Makers Travel Sheet*, in 1975). Keenly aware of the difficulties posed by film tours, and concerned with boosting the communications among film institutions scattered across the U.S., early correspondence indicates Dixon had planned such a mailing list since the beginning. In early iterations of the concept, she titled the project “The Wormwood Dog and Monkey Show,” so named after Edwin S. Porter’s tour of motion picture theatres in 1897. This label was dropped when Dixon realized the reference was too obscure and nondescriptive, and renamed it after the first edition. The mailing list, in short, “encourage[d] and facilitate[d] a wider use of the independent filmmakers’ tours”, by distributing the travel schedules of these independents to a few institutions regularly programming the independents, a number of appearances at different locations could then be arranged during a single trip.”¹⁸⁶ With the pilot edition partially funded by an NEA Grant in 1973-74, it appeared as an oversized, mimeographed paper document with an initial subscriber base of 50 individuals, and “contain[ed] film maker travel plans on a projected three month basis.”¹⁸⁷

The first *Travel Sheet* had minimal design and austere layout for maximum readability and minimum economic expense. Against a faded beige backdrop of Porter’s original Wormwood

¹⁸⁵ Dixon quoted in Maggie Patterson, “Pittsburgh...”, 52.

¹⁸⁶ “National Endowment for the Arts, Filmmakers Travelsheet grant, 1974-1976,” Box 18, Folder 10, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

graphic, and emblazoned with the Carnegie Institute masthead, an alphabetized list of names mentioned touring filmmakers' addresses; provided dates of events; and locations of film screenings, with an economy of information. To take a random entry: "James Broughton, 71 Park Drive, San Anselmo, California 94960, Jan 9, 10 I.S.U.; Jan 11 A.I.C.; Jan 24-31 MOMA."¹⁸⁸ Sometimes the personal address was withheld: "John Cassavettes, Mar 14 A.F.I."; or, place of work was listed in lieu of the filmmaker's permanent residence: "Hollis Frampton, Center for Media Study, Annex A-8, SUNY at Buffalo, Buffalo, N.Y. 14214, Jan 25 MOMA; Feb 13 C.I."¹⁸⁹ Late additions were included where necessary. On the backside, listed institution had full addresses and handy abbreviations: "(MOMA) Larry Kardish, Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10019, (212) 956-6100."¹⁹⁰

Initially a free-of-charge service, the *Travel Sheet* was mailed at the end of each month to museums, media centers, high schools, universities, galleries, and individuals interested in programming screening/lectures by independent filmmakers, as well as to the filmmakers themselves. The range of filmmakers represented was profoundly diverse: The list not only mentioned amateur and experimental filmmakers on tour, but film-world household names Steven Spielberg, Roberto Rossellini, and Nicholas Ray.

The necessity of such a networking tool was well recognized by members of arts and film-related fields. In the first year, *Travel Sheet* subscriptions jumped from 50 to 250, with readers spanning 6 foreign countries. These numbers tripled by the 1975-1976 cycle: May 1976 featured 830 domestic subscribers and 60 foreign subscribers. The popularity of the *Travel Sheet*, and its

¹⁸⁸ *Film Makers Travel Sheet*, January, February, March 1973, Box 2, Folder 1, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

funding-restricted mandate to support noncommercial independents, forced its editors to remove advertising for commercial films, and approve only information “pertinent to that activity by artists who are engaged in film and video as means of personal expression, and to whom the ‘educational’ and ‘commercial’ aspects of their work are not essential factors in the creative process.”¹⁹¹ As the subscriber base grew, and numbers of participating filmmakers swelled, the *Sheet* was redesigned to become more functional and informative: later editions announced the completion of new works and new job opportunities for independent film and video artists, particularly in the teaching field.

The *Travel Sheet* created the possibility of a knowledge-sharing communications network among different cities and regions across the U.S. It manifested Dixon’s desire to have the Museum of Art function as a beacon and leader in coordinating the activities of film exhibitors and filmmakers. This coordinating effort extended, significantly, to other museum-based media art centers. In merely noting the institutions listed on these sheets, we find evidence that other museums relied on the *Travel Sheet* to boost their visibility and reach out to artists seeking new exhibitionary prospects. Over the years, the number of participating museums continued to climb: the Smithsonian; Franklin Institute; School of the Art Institute Chicago; and so on. Besides a mouthpiece for broadcasting one’s own institution, the *Travel Sheet* became a way to solicit filmmakers. For instance, in the Sept, Oct, Nov 1974 edition, the Cineprobe programmers posted the following ad: “CINEPROBE, Museum of Modern Art, NYC is looking for independent works - at least 50 minutes by one filmmaker. Contact Larry Kardish, MOMA, 11 W. 53rd, NY, NY 10019.”¹⁹² In their interviews with me, Museum film programmers Larry Kardish (MoMA) and

¹⁹¹ Bill Judson letter, December 1, 1975, Box 18, Folder 10, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁹² *Film Makers Travel Sheet*, September, October, November 1974, Box 2, Folder 12, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

John Hanhardt (Whitney; Walker Art Center; MoMA) affirmed that they turned to the *Travel Sheet* regularly for new films. This attests to the *Travel Sheet*'s potential for cross-institutional synergy in the arrangement of film screenings – it connected museums, universities, and art centers with artists in one helpful resource.

How did the *Travel Sheet* impact local artists? The first Pittsburghers listed on the *Travel Sheet* were Dixon herself, in the first Jan, Feb, March 1973 edition; and Pittsburgh Filmmakers' director, Robert Haller, in the second edition, Feb, March, April 1973. The third Pittsburgh person, and first Pittsburgh filmmaker, to appear in the *Travel Sheet* was Roger Jacoby in the January, Feb, March 1975 edition: "Roger Jacoby, 5739 Walnut St., Pittsburgh PA, 15232, Feb. 15 N.A.N.E. Gallery, Chicago, Interested in lecturing on Non-Laboratory Film Processing." The same edition announces new films by Jacoby — "FUTURIST SONG 1969 7m, color; DREAM SPHINX 1972-3 10m, color; L'AMICO FRITZ' GLAMOROUS FRIENDS 1974 10m color; AGED IN WOOD 1974, 10m color; (Note: All color is hand processed by Jacoby - except FUTURIST SONG) Rental: R. Jacoby, 5739 Walnut Street, Pittsburgh PA 15232."¹⁹³

Jacoby was uniquely reliant on the *Travel Sheet*. As a filmmaker he developed an "anti-Kodak" method of "Non-Laboratory Film Processing" for which he became renowned on the film circuit.¹⁹⁴ By self-advertising on the *Travel Sheet*, Jacoby would arrange to visit sites like Berks Filmmakers Inc., Pennsylvania, where he conducted lectures on a short residency. Secondly, Jacoby resisted duplicating his hand-processed film prints; he made what he called "originals," or films that were not rented through regular channels but which had to be rented directly from him

¹⁹³ *Film Makers Travel Sheet*, January, February, March 1975, Box 2, Folder 14, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁹⁴ For more on Jacoby's hand-processing methods, see Bill Judson, "Reflections on the Films of Roger Jacoby." *Field of Vision* Vol. 2(Summer 1977): 15-18.

or exhibited during one of his tours.¹⁹⁵ This is to say that Jacoby's filmmaking reputation outside the city was, for a time, sustained by the ties and connections he cultivated through the *Travel Sheet*. More than that, Jacoby's films themselves, as original prints, circulated not through the anonymous distribution structure of the co-ops (such as New York Filmmakers Co-operative), but had to be specially requested from Jacoby himself, through personal information he provided in the mailer. In other words, the Museum's *Travel Sheet* sustained Jacoby's artisanal approach in production and distribution by giving him the agency to directly work with prospective exhibitors, sans middle men.

Many local artists followed Jacoby's lead. LeAnn Bartok Wilchusky, a conceptual artist and filmmaker who created "skyworks," regularly advertised in 1975 her interest in lecturing/performance/screening events.¹⁹⁶ Ondine, the Andy Warhol superstar and romantic partner to Jacoby, used the *Travel Sheet* to advertise direct rental of several prints of Andy Warhol's major films which, through the mid- to late-1970s, had been withdrawn from distribution: "Ondine, 5739 Walnut St., Pittsburgh PA 15232, May 7 Carnegie Institute. Appearing for discussion after screening of Andy Warhol's CHELSEA GIRLS. Available for lecture tours with Warhol's VINYL 1965, CHELSEA GIRLS 1966 and LOVES OF ONDINE 1967. Contact Ondine."¹⁹⁷ Ondine was infamously incapable of holding jobs, lived in a state of semi-poverty, and regularly battled drug addiction; thus he too benefitted financially from the *Travel Sheet*, becoming the country's sole distributor, in this case, of hard-to-find Warhol films.

¹⁹⁵ Robert Haller, "Paul Sharits at Carnegie Institute, Roger Jacoby at Pittsburgh Film-Makers," *Field of Vision* Vol. 3 (Winter 1977-78): 26.

¹⁹⁶ *Film Makers Travel Sheet*, April, May, June 1975, Box 2, Folder 16, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

The global reach of the *Travel Sheet* is reflected in the letters from admiring and grateful film programmers. Many repeatedly expressed their sincere thanks that the networking tool has made arranging film tours more efficient and timely for their programming schedules. Some of the subscribers included: the British Film Institute (“we find your publication very useful, and we like to keep a complete file for reference purposes” – Joan Ingram, Periodicals Librarian, March 4 1979); the Australian Film Institute; Canyon Cinema, San Francisco (“I really think that the *Travel Sheet* and the *Directory* are a valuable service to the independent film (& video) community” Michael Wallen, Canyon Cinema Coop, December 23, 1978); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts (“I recently received my first copy of the *Travel Sheet*, and I am astonished to find that a vital service which I have often wished were available is indeed in existence and being handled very well. My congratulations and thanks” (Michael J. Leja, curator, June 6, 1977)).¹⁹⁸ Filmmakers expressed gratitude that the existence of the *Travel Sheet* enabled them to make contact with additional programmers in a region they were already visiting on a tour, thereby allowing them to extend their stay and screening schedule. As New York filmmaker Reggie Life wrote, “I recently did an in-person screening at the Cinematheque in San Francisco, and were it not for the *Travel Sheet*, the engagement would never have come about.”¹⁹⁹ Scott MacDonald, noted film and literary scholar, writing for *Afterimage* in 1978, singled out the *Travel Sheet* as a major pillar for creating an audience for independent film. As MacDonald put it, the *Travel Sheet* was invaluable for those populations and regions outside the metropolitan centers associated with film production: “even people outside of those cities which have theaters regularly exhibiting

¹⁹⁸ *Travel Sheet* fan mail, various authors, Box 8, File 13, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

¹⁹⁹ Reggie Life to Bill Judson/Film Section, May 27, 1980, Box 8, Folder 14, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

independent film are able to learn where filmmakers are showing their work and what their newest films are in the *Film and Video Makers Travel Sheet* published by the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh.”²⁰⁰

2.9 BEYOND THE MUSEUM OF ART: CURATING FILM PROGRAMS ABROAD AND THE USIA TOUR

The *Travel Sheet* became, as I have shown, a meeting ground, a networking tool; but, on a deeper level, it became publicity for the Museum of Art’s film activities and the entire filmmaking scene in Pittsburgh to advertise around the world. Through the *Travel Sheet*, the Film Section was able to champion its own events, artists, and institutional identity. The philosophy of film-as-art was heard all around the world where it was being distributed. In this sense, a piece of Pittsburgh was distributed in every mailer.

Along with this desire for outreach and bringing Pittsburgh to the rest of the world, and not just bringing the world to Pittsburgh, Sally Dixon, in 1973 to 1974, engaged in travel abroad on several occasions to elucidate the developments in Pittsburgh filmmaking. On these travels, she publicized for European countries the activities and cultural power of cutting-edge filmmaking getting noticed in Pittsburgh, thanks in large part to her curatorial department. The Pittsburgh press got wind of some of these trips. Much like the excitement generated when for a time it seemed an alternative film hub was being set up in town, local reporters were equally excited by the prospect that, through Sally Dixon’s travels and tours of film, Pittsburgh, by the same token, would be able

²⁰⁰ Scott MacDonald, “Independent film: where’s the audience?” *Afterimage* March 1978: 6-8.

to teach the rest of the world to follow by its example, becoming a global leader in independent film productions. This is validated by the somewhat chauvinistic and perhaps overzealous title of a *Post Gazette* article from September 1973, whose title reads, “Europe Trip Proves: U.S. Leader in Art Films”²⁰¹ -- where “U.S. Leader” refers to Pittsburgh.

In the fall of 1973, Dixon was able to organize a three-week survey of art films that she brought to London, Brussels, Paris, and Amsterdam. She had organized this trip, with the Museum’s blessing, on the foreknowledge that in order to propagate the concept of museum-as-liaison, and her view that Pittsburgh as a heart of film production, she would need to coordinate activities not only in the nation but outside it. She borrowed Brakhage’s *Pittsburgh Documents*, as well as the Brakhage film, *The Text of Light*, which had premiered in the Scaife Galleries at the Carnegie Museum of Art.²⁰² She toured them at different film centers in Europe, such as the BFI and the London Film Co-op, both in London; in Paris, she went to La Cinémathèque française; in Amsterdam, the Stedelijk Museum. In her interview with a *Post Gazette* writer about her travel, Dixon noted that the Pittsburgh film scene was perhaps the greatest in the world; she further indicated that of all the film facilities she saw, Pittsburgh had the best film workshop, and the Carnegie Institute’s lecture hall was the biggest and best venue for film she had seen.²⁰³

Besides broadcasting to the world Pittsburgh film, she also clearly had a stake in demonstrating US national supremacy in the area of experimental film. The same *Post Gazette* article mentions Dixon’s disappointment that the predominant movement in London was “structural film” - Dixon had long been somewhat of a partisan for mythopoetic film, and structural

²⁰¹ Donald Miller, “Europe Trip Proves: U.S. Leader in Art Films,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 3, 1973.

²⁰² James M. Walton to Sally Dixon, July 12, 1973, Box 1, Folder 3, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

²⁰³ Dixon quoted in Donald Miller, “Europe Trip Proves: U.S. Leader in Art Films.”

film may have been considered too academic with its formalism. In addition, Structural film had become the leading film style of UK-based artists. Dixon used the films of Brakhage as a foil/exemplary of American national independent film. While in Paris, she lent the Museum's films to La Cinémathèque française for a month of programming dedicated to Brakhage's achievements ("homage a Brakhage").

Her travels abroad culminated in an important trip sponsored by the USIA. This trip was significant in multiple ways: it designated a shift in her position as film curator at a transitional moment; it was also important for how avant-garde film, in the mid-1970s, was recruited by the US government to propagandize a certain sense of US cultural identity, reinforcing mutually beneficial relations between US and allied nations. The details on the USIA trip remain sketchy, but archival documents give us the broad outlines of the trip and its purpose: From Dec 7, 1974 to January 14, 1975, Dixon had a 3-week trip abroad, the first leg of which involved her participating in the 5th annual Belgium International Film Festival. Belgium's was the leading film festival, a vital meeting ground where individuals of all nationalities presented films; a sort of "contact zone" where different styles could be experienced by people separated by nationality and geography. From January 6 through 14, she visited Hamburg, Stockholm and Brussels: the purpose of this leg of the journey was to be a representative of the USIA and show films of US national importance to European audiences. She gave lectures in these cities on two topics: first, to describe to European museums the film department model she established in Pittsburgh; second, to exhibit Brakhage's trilogy of films.²⁰⁴ In Germany her lecture/screenings took place at the Amerika Haus in Hamburg,

²⁰⁴ "Report on S. Dixon's trip abroad, Dec. 27, 1974-Jan. 14, 1975," Box 1, Folder 3, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

an institution functioning as a cultural embassy, several which America built throughout post-war Germany to foster cultural respect and understanding between both countries.

Brakhage, who was so important to Dixon in making sense of the notion of the filmmaker as personally expressive poet, circulated a model of artisanal film practice as the most important work being done in the U.S. Dixon reported about the USIA trip that what interested audiences most in these events was the mode of film practice – that is, the ways in which Brakhage made these films which resembled nothing else. She was also keen to observe the multiplicity of film styles in Europe going on at this time.²⁰⁵ But, if Dixon had a particular stake in the “best” of independent filmmaking, it was certainly exemplified by Stan Brakhage. At the same time, on the USIA trip she once more broadened the role of the museum as exhibitor: she brought the Film section into European museums, in effect programming their film exhibitions. Simultaneously, she in effect took the role of the itinerant filmmaker-exhibitor, to which she was so sensitive in the *Travel Sheet*. Dixon ultimately became a cultural ambassador by showing work being done in Pittsburgh, just as the USIA, representing the US government, made a significant decision to showcase Pittsburgh films that were originally screened to US audiences, as the most vital, independent work being done that was suitable for a world public.

2.10 DIXON’S LEGACY: “NEW WAYS OF SEEING”

Between 1970 and 1975, the Film Section emerged a true leader among museum film programs. It rallied nontheatrical venues and independent filmmaking production as a guiding

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 2-3.

light, and its streams of programming and *Travel Sheet* mailers showed signs where the filmic art medium was heading. Dixon herself sought to be the central node of an institutional network emerging across the United States, and built up a rationalized system of film tours and experimental film exhibitions where a great deal of randomness and informal, ad hoc activity had existed previously. As the *QED Renaissance* noted in 1974: “Colleges, universities and even some private groups have come to recognize the showing of films to be an experience which all can share and recognize as part of a common heritage. But, until recently, each of these groups went its own way with no thought of coordinating with other organizations. Sally Dixon has changed all that.”

But the highest praise for Dixon’s program came from Stan Brakhage, who wrote,

As the reports come in from around the nation, it begins to be clear that The Carnegie Museum Film Series is perhaps the MOST important in the United States [...] It is being ‘spoken of’ in relation to Frank Stauffacher’s famous ‘Art in Cinema’ series in San Francisco’s mid-fifties. That means your series has entered Film History already. BRAVO!²⁰⁶

The Film Section produced an understanding of the regional media center that was not exclusively centered on exhibiting film. Rather, it created a hospitable ecosystem for a complete cycle of independent film production -- from research, to production, to advertising, to training. The only missing pieces were distribution and preservation of films. Importantly, as I have stressed, the Film Section linked exhibition to production. Rather than merely show movies, as the Whitney and MoMA were doing, the Film Section participated in the actual making of films. At

²⁰⁶ Stan Brakhage to Sally Dixon, August 7, 1972, Box 8, File 13, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

the same time that the Museum established a three-part film series (in effect creating the repertory film culture in Pittsburgh), the Film Section also planted the seeds of the Pittsburgh Filmmakers, through its free-of charge equipment center and workshop.

As a museum-based media center, the Film Section has had several lasting effects on our conceptualization of the moving image as a phenomenon of cultural value. First, as Suzanne Regan has argued, the idea of a film screening shifted with the rise of museum film programs in the 1960s and 1970s – a film screening was not simply a fleeting entertainment. Instead, the film screening became redefined according to the model of the temporary art exhibit.²⁰⁷ Indeed, the Film Section employed the media, marketing, rhetoric, and graphic design that treated fine art, and applied it to moving-image objects. This paved the way toward a new type of spectatorship. Haidee Wasson, following Tom Gunning’s work on the “astonished” spectatorship that characterized early film reception, describes film viewing in museological contexts as a form of “studious attention.”²⁰⁸

The Film Section drew upon the Museum’s affiliation with visual art, and its archeological and historical methods of analysis, in propagating an ideology of “studious attention” among its diverse audiences. It is no coincidence that, when museum film programs like the one in Pittsburgh were founded, film theory gained recognition as an academic discipline, film became a serious object of inquiry, and graduate/undergraduate programs organized around it. I claim that the studious attention offered by the Museum’s seriousness toward film-as-art, imbued itself to the

²⁰⁷ As Regan notes in her research on museum film programs: “The orientation and purposes of film screenings are similar to the orientations and purposes of the temporary exhibits that have become increasingly important to contemporary art museum programming.” See *The Utilization of the Film Medium by American Art Museums*, 168.

²⁰⁸ Wasson, speaking about the effect of MoMA’s Film Library, which in 1935, subjected cinema to the museological ideals of the art-world: “films took an important turn away from the ephemeral existence of the amusement park, the urban spectacle, and the phantasmorgic arcade; they also became stored objects, more resistant to the temporal flows of daily life...Films became more intensely studied objects, lending themselves to detailed formal analysis in a way that previously had been impossible.” See Wasson’s *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 21-22.

critical discourse of film, legitimizing film and media arts as worthy of scholarly attention for the benefit of future generations.

Second, in this period, the filmmaker became institutionally recognized as an independent artist. As we have seen, Dixon's film-as-art framework was presciently suited to a new type of artist coming into being, one that Sally Dixon christened the independent filmmaker (IFM); an individual that qualified for funding through the Public Media Program of the NEA, who used film in a way that was personally expressive, abstract and modern; and thus contributed to the legacy of visual art in the United States.

This new type of artist occupied an interstitial structural position somewhere between the filmmaker, the artisan, the painter, and the poet. Dixon's programming posited this artist in opposition to the industrial division of labor of the Hollywood film industry. Indeed, the in-person presentations for the IFM series cultivated a particular understanding of the filmmaker befitting of artisanal, (a)collaborative and handmade modes of film practice. Audiences gradually came to recognize this form of filmmaking and its numerous off-shoots. A curiosity, respect, and enthusiasm attached to experimental film as museums de-coupled such film from the prurient, semi-pornographic subject matter and anarchic activity that defined much "underground" cinema in the 1960s.

Third, the founding of a film collection, pursued in a manner similar to collecting sculpture/painting, established film as a major art form. Pittsburgh would build up a film collection dominated by American avant-garde filmmakers, making it a vital resource for film study in the decades to come. However, as we will see later on, while the collection practices were quite aggressive, the Museum of Art (like many other fledgling media centers) failed to address the enormous, looming problem of long-term film preservation; indeed, many of the Film Section's

early acquisitions in film/video were not meant to last multiple decades. This in turn would have a catastrophic effect on the longevity of its own programming. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Film Section suffered all the problems associated with the decline of celluloid-based film: the loss of qualified projectionists; the loss of funding lines to acquire better prints or renovate prints; and the indifference of communities/institutions to recognize preservation as a risk for the exhibition of film.

This chapter aimed to answer several questions: how did the Carnegie Museum of Art, in the 1960s and 70s, become a hospitable venue for avant-garde film? How did the Film Section participate in the widespread institutionalization of film as art? What was the shape of its exhibition programs-- what were the limitations and possibilities that they embodied? The Film Section, after 1975, would remain the material base of experimental filmmaking in Pittsburgh to such an extent that the film scene was intertwined with it, and that to separate either would be to destroy them both. In future decades (as I discuss later) the decline of the museum-based media art center subsequently led to a contraction in area filmmaking. In the chapters to come, I examine how the rise of the museum-based media center had significant consequences on the aesthetics of avant-garde film: in particular, it led to an exploration on the part of filmmakers to find and work within filmic genres that were conducive to exhibition/circulation in a circuit of universities, media arts centers, and museum film programs. Among the filmic genres they took up included: the industrial art film; the film portrait; and abstract animation films. These three film types, I argue, enjoyed a great deal of success in the 1970s and 1980s, since they were the most suitable to the realities which defined independent production and exhibition: filmmakers were able to travel with these films, and thus they built upon American avant-garde film in ways that audiences recognized and institutions supported.

In the next chapter, I discuss the influential but little discussed social documentary films by Tony Buba. Buba is an Italian American ex-steelworker and working-class filmmaker based in Braddock, Pennsylvania. In the early 1970s, while still an MFA student in Film, Buba developed a portrait-type film style, comprised of short, black-and-white films about landmarks and inhabitants from his dying steeltown. As I explain through a series of visual analyses of his most significant films, Buba's work demonstrates a "familial gaze" and "imaginary cohesion" toward the individuals he records, evoking the sentimentality and nostalgic looking associated with home movies and photo albums. I consider how Buba's homespun film practice contrasts with the era's often depersonalized, mainstream images of deindustrialization, as seen in nightly news broadcasts, televised soap opera programs, or in liberal documentary films. I argue that Buba offers us a humanistic account of deindustrialization, revealing how economic catastrophe affects working people on an emotional level, re-shaping their sense of memory and the way they inhabit the decaying urban environment. In Buba's hands, film portraiture becomes a vehicle for constructing complex structures of time, and a means to resist and withstand the temporal ruptures associated with deindustrial decline.

3.0 PROBING A STEELTOWN'S UNCONSCIOUS: TONY BUBA'S *THE BRADDOCK CHRONICLES*, 1972-1983

This chapter situates Buba's early "film portraits" of the 1970s and 1980s in the swirl of competing discourses around the uncertain fate of the mill town Braddock, and by extension, the fate of Pittsburgh and its industrial, multi-ethnic heritage. At a time when deindustrialization wracked the Steel City, images of the cityscape in mass media seemed dominated by only a few perspectives. As I will show, a handful of stock images appeared and reappeared: The image of the exploding steel mill; the corporate fantasies of the futuristic "Roboburgh;" and the liberal model of Pittsburgh as deindustrial ruin, were all visions of a changing Pittsburgh. Yet, these images, to varying degrees, evacuated important questions of local identity and collective memory, especially for the city's immigrant communities and the newly unemployed steelworker.

My chapter argues that Tony Buba's film portraits resisted the one-dimensional representations of Pittsburgh that characterized the deindustrial period. Using archival research into Buba's promotional materials for his films, and close readings of the documentary aesthetics of several of his film portraits, I claim that Buba was a savvy media practitioner, well aware of how the filmic medium could be used to generate new relations of familiarity, familiarity, and continuity in a time of upheaval. In the first part of the chapter, I examine the most common deindustrial representations of the Steel City, both locally and nationally, and I address the problematic treatment of Pittsburgh's white ethnic immigrants and working class populations in these urban depictions. In the middle part, I show how Buba established a career for himself by working as a teacher and freelance filmmaker, which enabled him to devote his life to documenting his hometown of Braddock. In the final part, I challenge the current scholarship on Buba, which

all too often compares him to “New Documentary” filmmakers like Michael Moore. Instead, I emphasize his importance lies in redefining representations of steel production and life in America’s mill towns. Analyzing a handful of his films –*To My Family* (1972), *Sweet Sal* (1979), and *Voices From a Steeltown* (1983), I cite his interest in images of family; the frequent entwinement of space and memory; and the use of recurring characters across multiple films. These techniques not only challenged documentary protocols of the era, they added a sense of permanence and recovery to his portraits of Braddock in decline.

Indeed, Buba’s film portraits remain notable for breaking with stereotypical urban visions. Buba’s use of the home-movie format, his sense of humor and pathos, and the charmingly low-rent aesthetics in his films, offered local and national audiences a different way to engage urban change. Buba traded the then-staid conventions of liberal documentary for what Marianne Hirsch calls the “familial gaze.”²⁰⁹ That is, he sought to recast deindustrialization through images of family, with a focus on the plight of White ethnic immigrant groups. He sought to humanize the milltown. Through these films, Buba gave a platform for an indigenous point of view on deindustrialization, while pushing against the grain of largely one-dimensional representations of Braddock and Pittsburgh. Buba’s film career performs a complex relationship with time and history itself, as distinct from the simplified temporalities suggested by images of deindustrial ruin circulating at the time.

Analyzing several notable film portraits from the *Braddock Chronicles*, I aim to make clear how Buba pursued and refined a progressive project, producing new relations to memory, history, and heritage with a political dimension. Using analyses of news articles, reviews, and promotional

²⁰⁹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997): 7.

materials, I aim to make clear that the aesthetic and political choices he implemented, and the venues of film exhibition through which he ultimately made his work public, were aimed against the prevailing mediascape of deindustrial ruin. This project was oftentimes met with difficulty. Indeed, film programmers and critics based in metropolitan areas, such as the Museum of Modern Art's Cineprobe or *The New York Times*, often coded the very things that make his work compelling and timely, such as the topics of familiarity, intimacy and nostalgia, as naïve or awkward shortcomings.²¹⁰ Similarly, Buba regularly found it challenging to obtain funding for these films: the lack of a clear "message" resulted in several projects being unfunded.²¹¹ In short, if the film portraits were celebrated locally, on a national level the critical establishment sometimes saw fit to reduce his work as the narrow provincialism of a so-called "regionalist" filmmaker. Buba's career would be marked by a deep ambivalence toward his own subject of Braddock: his beloved hometown had, on the one hand, brought him success and attention but it also, in his mind, risked becoming a blockage for new filmmaking possibilities and further recognition on a national stage. This spatial ambivalence emerged as a theme and determinative aesthetic content by the end of the film portraits, in the late 1980s. As such, the shifting treatment of Braddock was perhaps symptomatic of the difficulties and anxieties facing the regional independent filmmaker and documentarian in the nonprofit media system.

²¹⁰ In 1988, J. Hoberman called Buba's film, *Lightening Over Braddock*, "one of the few regional movies to successfully and unsentimentally peel off the national smile button." The designation "regional movie" operated as code for "provincial," a class of film that was seen as less important than filmmaking pursued by cosmopolitan and more worldly filmmakers. Hoberman quoted in John Anderson, "A Steel Town's Chronicler and Conscience," *New York Times*, June 3, 2012: AR16.

²¹¹ In a lengthy interview with Buba, he explained that some his early films, such as *Sweet Sal*, were rejected for state and regional grants because "there was not a clear message in them." *Sweet Sal* in particular faced criticism from its seeming endorsement of the titular street hustler, Sal Carulli. One critic called Sal "a paranoid antagonist in an neighborhood that breeds a phantomized fear; he carries a baseball bat in the back seat of his Chevy that he claims to use on occasion but mentions no victims." See Jim Duffy, "Filmmaker Tony Buba's Portrait-Type Documentary," *Pittsburgh New Sun*, April 17, 1980.

3.1 PITTSBURGH AND THE CRISIS OF DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

Through the twentieth century, images of steel and factory work were inextricably linked to Pittsburgh. But, after World War II, steel producing employment reached its peak in the late 1940s and early 1950s, with about 80,000 steel producing jobs in the Western Pennsylvania region.²¹² In the mid- to late 1960s, profits generated by the steel industry were no longer reinvested in the plants themselves.²¹³ Steel producing companies, as in other national industries, shifted away from manufacturing and gradually transitioned into the financial sector. Indeed, in 1979, when he launched a campaign of acquisitions and diversification, the US Steel chairman announced that his main duty was “to make money, not steel.”²¹⁴ As economic, labor, and cultural historians have pointed out, there were other structural shifts that compounded the financial sector’s takeover of manufacturing: a decline in steel consumption in the US; the “dumping” of cheap foreign materials in US markets; overcapacity and overproduction of steel; and a disparity of global labor costs.²¹⁵ In the US, the steel sector became oriented around extremely high labor wages, while in foreign countries, steel costs and labor costs were significantly lower, worsening the prospects of the domestic steel industry.

²¹² Dale A. Hathaway, *Can Workers Have a Voice?: The Politics of Deindustrialization in Pittsburgh* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993): 26.

²¹³ Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (London: NLB, 1979): 220.

²¹⁴ Quoted in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990): 158.

²¹⁵ These factors that led to the decline of manufacturing in the US have been treated in a number of important historical texts. To name just a few, see John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry* (Pittsburgh, PA: U of Pittsburgh, 1988); William Serrin, *Homestead: The Glory and Tragedy of an American Steel Town* (New York: Vintage, 1993); John Strohmeyer, *Crisis in Bethlehem: Big Steel's Struggle to Survive* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1986); Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca: ILR, 2003); and Steven C. High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca: IRL, 2007).

In this period, industrial employment in Pittsburgh dropped significantly. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, it decreased by 44%, and many of these workers were forced into the service sector, which saw a rise by 25%.²¹⁶ Subsequently, the city of Pittsburgh, between 1970 and 1990, lost 30% of its population.²¹⁷ Steel producing plants, one by one, closed up. In 1984, the US Steel mills in Duquesne and Clairton closed; in 1985, the Aliquippa Works was idled; in 1986 the Homestead Works closed; in 1986, the Wheeling-Pittsburgh closed its Monessen factory; and in 1987 the National Tube and American Bridge closed. When the closed mills were not demolished outright, leaving behind “desolate moonscapes,” many were bought out by developers, dismantled and adapted into commercial complexes, as in the transformation of the 430-acre site of the Homestead Works into the Waterfront, the city’s “premiere lifestyle and shopping destination.”²¹⁸ To borrow the words of a *Post-Gazette* writer: “The working factories were gone, becoming overnight relics. And during this time, the relics were gone too, knocked down to make way for new shopping centers, new housing, new business parks, new river parks and new city.”²¹⁹

The small town of Braddock, located 10 miles outside Pittsburgh and upstream from the mouth of the Monongahela River, was both an outlier and emblem of the economic changes taking place. The town was named after Edward Braddock, a British general who, in 1755, was defeated in a territory renamed Braddock’s Field, when he miscalculated a military campaign against Native Americans, and lost quite miserably. Culturally and economically, Braddock had become central to Pittsburgh’s industrial identity. In 1873, Andrew Carnegie built the Edgar Thomson Steel Works on Braddock’s Field. The Steel Works, in 1875, became the first major steel mill in the US, and

²¹⁶ Hathaway, 27.

²¹⁷ Bill Toland, “In desperate 1983, there was nowhere for Pittsburgh’s economy to go but up: A tide of change,” *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 23, 2012.

²¹⁸ Marth Roth, “Homestead Works: Steel lives in its stories,” *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 30, 2006.

²¹⁹ Toland, “In desperate 1983.”

was widely known for the Bessemer process, a revolutionary and efficient means of producing mass steel.²²⁰ The city of Braddock was among the first recipients of Carnegie's humanitarian "gifts" in the form of a free public library, built and dedicated on March 30, 1889. The demography of Braddock, thanks to its busy mills, boasted a diverse racial and ethnic makeup. In 1900s, East European immigrants from Slovenia, Hungary, Poland and elsewhere settled there.²²¹ Later on in the century, during black migration from the South, black communities took root and struggled to gain employment in the steel mills in the face of wide discrimination.²²² This painful racial history Buba himself later documented in the 1996 award-winning film, *Struggles in Steel*.

During deindustrialization, Braddock, along with several other towns along the river in the Mon Valley, was hit especially hard. Once hailed as the "shopping center" of Western Pennsylvania, with a glorious and heavily trafficked commercial district, Braddock suffered numerous business bankruptcies and closures of civic institutions.²²³ Businesses that had once attracted out-of-town visitors, such as movie theatres, were adapted into community centers that catered to the needs of the homeless, unemployed, and struggling families.²²⁴ However, the Edgar

²²⁰ Routes to Roots: Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, "Three Rivers: U.S. Steel Edgar Thomson Works," <http://www.r-to-r.com/us-steel-edgar-thomson-works>.

²²¹ The immigrant experience is dramatized as a multigenerational story of a Slovak family in Braddock, in Thomas Bell's award-winning novel *Out of This Furnace: A Novel of Immigrant Labor in the US* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1941/1976).

²²² As historian Dennis C. Dickerson points out, while post-WWII employment of blacks in local mills increased, the African American steelworker in Braddock continued to face discrimination in terms of job hiring and job advancement. Dickerson writes, "Most African American steelworkers had been frozen in lower-echelon unskilled and semiskilled departments, where their bodies had faced debilitating decades of hard labor. Their seniority was operative for promotions mainly within these departments and seldom on a plant-wide basis where they could have access to better-paying jobs in less physically exacting positions." This pattern of racial discrimination was lessened by the 1974 court-mandated consent decree which resulted in fairer promotion practices and the compensation of \$31 million to 34,449 black and Hispanic steelworkers and 5,559 female employees hired prior to 1968. See Dickerson, "Black Braddock and Its History," in *The Notion of Family* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2014): 139.

²²³ Braddock's mid-century reputation as a center of commerce is discussed in Corinne Segal, "A bird's-eye portrait of what was once a thriving steel town," *PBS Newshour: Art Beat*, November 16, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/latoya-ruby-frazier-braddock-pennsylvania/>

²²⁴ For example, while the economy worsened, the old Paramount Theater building in Braddock was converted into a neighborhood food center, Alexander's Market, which utilized the former marquee billboard to advertise hard

Thomson Works weathered the storm, albeit with a severely restricted production output, and continues to operate today.

In the meantime, the town lost a great deal of its population, while its municipal and civic facilities shut down, including the closure of the hospital, high school, and library.²²⁵ Between 1950 and 1970, the population decreased by half from a starting point of 16,000 people. In 1980, 30% of Braddock's population reported living below the poverty line.²²⁶ About 18% of housing units in Braddock would stand vacant as late as 1995.²²⁷ Unemployment ranged between 8-16% in the mid-1980s.²²⁸ A survey of three mill towns (including Braddock) by the *Pittsburgh Press* in 1985 showed that 55% of all heads of households and working age males were unemployed.²²⁹ Banks proceeded to "red-line" Braddock's private sector, amplifying the corrosive impact of plant closures and layoffs, as businesses were forced to close without loan money. As historian Jefferson Cowie observes, the former industrial center of Braddock, after hemorrhaging its worker and economic base, came to look like "an industrial mausoleum."²³⁰

It was in this context that Buba made his films.

salami and other meats to locals. For more histories of buildings and businesses in Braddock during deindustrialization, see Robert M. Grom's *Images of America: Braddock, Allegheny County* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008): 124.

²²⁵ The Carnegie Library in Braddock, established in 1889 to serve the employees of the steel mill in the town, temporarily closed in the 1970s due to dilapidated condition and lack of funding. A community effort reopened the library in the mid-1980s. Braddock High closed in 1981. UPMC Braddock Hospital, opened in 1906, stopped accepting patients in 2009.

²²⁶ John Schriefer, "Glimmers of hope in Braddock, Pa," *New Steel*, September 1996, 36.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ "Artists Record the Death of the Mill's Way of Life," *The New York Times*, July 1, 1985.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1985/07/01/us/artists-record-the-death-of-the-mill-s-way-of-life.html>

²²⁹ "Survey Claims 50% Jobless Rate in Valley," *Pittsburgh Press*, July 25, 1985.

²³⁰ Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 235.

3.2 MASS MEDIA IMAGERY OF STEEL'S DECLINE: PITTSBURGH IN A STATE OF RUIN OR "POST-INDUSTRIAL RENAISSANCE?"

The films of Tony Buba need to be understood in relation to the turbulent context that the mass media and news imagery constructed around the dying steel mills, for which Braddock, Pennsylvania was known. Previous scholarly studies on Buba have only made passing reference to Braddock, the steel history of Pittsburgh, the media images of steel decline, and the besieged working class identity that he has documented.²³¹ However, the situation of deindustrialization in Western Pennsylvania was more than a reference point for his films. Throughout the 1980s, deindustrialization was an all-pervading interpretive context, a "thick reality" which all individuals lived, breathed, discussed and thought about at different moments in the day. Regular news reports detailed the upheavals in the industrial sector, the loss of jobs, and the hostilities between the labor movement and the management running these firms. In the popular visual culture, a battle of ideas and images was being waged over the identity of Pittsburgh (and its related towns, including Braddock). Would Pittsburgh, like the steel mill, fall into ruin? What would be the fate of its future, of its past?

An unending stream of news images of decline suggested that Pittsburgh and industrial America as a whole was irreversibly changing and its people displaced. The image that most

²³¹ Many news articles and critical reviews cite the working class identity of Braddock as a descriptor of Buba's films, without exploring how the town was depicted in the media at the time he made his films. In other words, they fail to show how Buba was engaged in a project of intervening in other media representations. For examples, see: Janice L. Reiff, "Review: *Voices of a Steeltown*," *The Public Historian* Vol 11.4 Labor History and Public History (Autumn 1989):153-55; Pat Aufderheide, "Tony Buba's Steel Town Saga: 13 Documentaries and 'Lightning' Record the Decline of Braddock, Pa.," *The Washington Post*, March 27, 1989, C1; Amanda Henry, "Filmmaker showcases his personal side," *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 20, 2001; "A quintessence of rust" *The Economist* (May 3, 1989): 102; and Mary Ellen Schoonmaker, "Memories of Overdevelopment; in Love and Danger, Tony Buba Documents a Dying Pennsylvania Steel Town" *American Film* (October 1985): 47-49.

powerfully condensed the fearful possibility of economic, social and psychic death was the proverbial exploding steel mill, shown across local news channels and appearing in documentaries, such as *Business of America*.²³² The steel mill, once wedded powerfully to the identity of the city, now floated freely, shown over and over in slow-motion, being disintegrated in a fiery explosion and disappearing into a cloud of darkened smoke.

Not everyone in the Pittsburgh community felt sympathy toward, or remorse concerning, the victims of deindustrialization. In fact there was at least one group - composed of elite business, academic and scientific interests - that welcomed the opportunity to redefine the identity and economic future of the city, and to sever the steel-working heritage or at least minimize it as much as possible. Various projects on the part of city and business leaders arose to provide a positive counter-image of what Pittsburgh is and could be. One of the most notable was a 1981-82 media campaign called "Dynamic Pittsburgh." Twenty-one corporations, including steel companies, contributed \$850,000 to this ad campaign, and produced full-color, single or double-sided ads in major media outlets, including the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Each ad was meant to be a travel brochure for the purpose of business growth and investment from outsiders.

The advertisements focused on a corporate sponsor's specialties and promoted aspects of the city. Pointedly, these ads minimize any reference to multiethnic demography, immigrant communities, or steel working or manufacturing. Instead, they put attention on recreation, cultural amenities, and sporting events. What is telling as well is the fact that the composition of these advertisements is reminiscent of tourism imagery. An aerial-view photograph presents a depiction

²³² The film contrasts two Pittsburgh steelworkers' conventional faith in private enterprise with the actual strategies and priorities of US Steel. See *The Business of America*, directed by Larry Adelman, Lawrence Daressa, and Bruce Schmichen, San Francisco: California Newsreel, 1984.

of the neighborhood of Oakland, the site of the major research universities Carnegie Mellon and University of Pittsburgh. The image is devoid of any people; it shows impressive academic buildings, namely the Cathedral of Learning, and suggests some vague atmosphere of business stimulus, inviting the viewer to imagine how they could grow financially by claiming this space for themselves.

Through the 1980s a “postindustrial renaissance” was indeed underway. Jumping off of “Dynamic Pittsburgh,” the region styled itself with the new title of “Roboburgh.”²³³ From 1982 to 1985, high tech, computing, and programming firms increased employment by 25%, against the backdrop of a withering steel sector. Technology and computing sectors came to redefine Pittsburgh’s economic landscape. There were portents of this change: With the support of Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh was the recipient of the Software Engineering Institute, in 1984, a project initiated by the Department of Defense and a \$21-million-dollar facility which included one of the first supercomputers created for professional use.²³⁴ Buoyed by the emerging tech sector, politicians, journalists, business personnel saw fit to make divisive public statements about leaving behind the steel working past. In 1985, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* published a widely criticized editorial which suggested that the population loss of 40,000 residents among towns in the Mon Valley should be seen as “a blessing that should be accepted and built upon.”²³⁵ Jay Aldridge, the director of Penn’s Southwest marketing firm, said in 1985 that the city should change the name of its beloved football franchise from “Pittsburgh Steelers” to “Pittsburgh Softwares.”²³⁶

²³³ US senator and industrial heir H. John Heinz II described the white-collar makeover of the Steel City as a “postindustrial renaissance.” See Dan Fitzpatrick, “Pittsburgh Image-Makers Battling to get Message Out, Negate Bad PR,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 30, 2002.

²³⁴ Hathaway 45.

²³⁵ *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* “No Growth a Blessing”, lead editorial, May 29, 1985: 8.

²³⁶ Don Oldenburg, “The Selling of American Cities,” *Washington Post*, December 17, 1985, B5.

As historian Allen Dietrich-Ward observes, city residents and families affected by decline took note of this with skepticism and alarm. Many locals wrote letters to newspapers expressing their disapproval of the decade-long development campaign, which seemed to scrub community members out of existence.²³⁷

But local residents -- rich or poor, militant or capitalist -- weren't the only ones constructing competing images of Pittsburgh, a city torn between the tension of an emerging technical class and the fading-out of a worker class. Imagery of Pittsburgh in the 1980s would be defined by yet another actor, that of the visiting documentarian, the left-leaning liberal who saw in Pittsburgh a convenient synecdoche of global capitalism gone amok. Television actor David Soul (of *Starsky and Hutch*) famously visited Pittsburgh in 1986 in order to make a PBS documentary, *Fighting Ministers*, involving his brother, Reverend Daniel Solberg, a Lutheran pastor who was a member of the local Denominational Ministerial Strategy, or DMS.²³⁸ Religious leaders in the DMS argued a moral defense against the dismantling of unions and the disinvestment in the region's steel sector, the effects of which had harmed their religious congregations with increased suicides and divorce rates among parishioners. Solberg barricaded himself in the Nativity Lutheran Church for 8 days in protest of "corporate evil," citing US Steel and Mellon Bank as responsible for causing heavy unemployment in western Pennsylvania.²³⁹

²³⁷ For further discussion of local reactions to growth-oriented narratives of Rust Belt deindustrialization, see Allen Dietrich-Ward, *Beyond Rust: Metropolitan Pittsburgh and the Fate of Industrial America* (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania, 2016): 215-223.

²³⁸ *Fighting Ministers*, Richard Wormser, Arlington: Public Broadcasting Company, 1989.

²³⁹ Associated Press, "Lutheran Pastor—Brother of Actor David Soul—Jailed", *Los Angeles Times*, May 22 1985. http://articles.latimes.com/1985-05-22/news/mn-16729_1_lutheran-pastor

As if to capitalize on widespread sympathy for the plight of the steelworker, a short-lived TV program, *Skag*, aired on NBC as a three-hour television movie, then became a mini-series between January and February 1980, for a total of five episodes.²⁴⁰ *Skag* focused on the life of 56-year-old foreman Pete Skagska (Karl Malden), a simple man of Serbian-Orthodox ancestry working at a Pittsburgh steel mill, while trying to keep his family together. Episodes were shot in Braddock and the show's melodramatic themes wedded real-life problems of joblessness and the older generation's alienation from the young, with a slick, professional television sheen. These and other projects were portents of a short-lived "boomlet" of milltown documentaries and shows occurring across the nation. Whether or not this newfound attention was helpful to the cause, was the subject of much discussion in local press.²⁴¹ The most successful of these projects was Michael Moore's documentary on Flint, Michigan, *Roger and Me*, in 1989.²⁴²

Moore's film signaled it was now "trendy" and "chic" to live among the ruins. However, such high-profile projects drew ire and controversy among local artists, particularly the Pittsburgh filmmakers. In an interview, Buba said of *Skag*: it was a TV series "that pretends to show the life of a working class man and his family...Braddock, as you may know, is the area where the producers of *Skag* went to get a feel for their show. The result, most people (especially working-class people) complain, is far from realistic."²⁴³ For Buba, the faddish strain of liberal film and TV constituted a cynical form of "left-wing ambulance chasing," in which the left-wing opportunist went from one global disaster to the next, all while boosting his professional media profile. Buba's

²⁴⁰ *Skag*, Abby Mann, NBC, 1980.

²⁴¹ Don Hopey, "Roll 'em: Films set here capture milltowns' plight," *The Pittsburgh Press*, March 24, 1985, A1, A30-31.

²⁴² *Roger and Me*, Michael Moore, Warner Brothers, 1989.

²⁴³ Cathy D. Miller, "Braddock's Skag: Film Maker Tony Buba," *Pittsburgh New Sun*, February 21, 1980, 2.

frequent collaborator, the feminist artist and curator Margie Strosser, who programmed film exhibitions at Pittsburgh Filmmakers, also criticized the lack of an “indigenous” media perspective on the economic state of affairs.²⁴⁴

It was in this context-- a boomlet of documentary and mass media images in which Pittsburgh was alternately envisioned as a futuristic utopia for business interests, a trivialized site of dark tourism for a hypocritical and opportunistic media elite, and an exploded image of Pittsburgh working class heritage -- that we should place the project of documentary filmmaking by Buba and his colleagues. Paradoxically, Buba’s importance in this field owes much to the fact that he did not seemingly take a militant, pro-labor position on the topic of deindustrialization. Some local artists such as Strosser felt that the solution was to develop an “indigenous voice.” Strosser and others adopted a model of advocacy that positioned film as a public representative on behalf of a threatened minoritarian group, addressing the wider community of the United States.

Buba did not seem to share this militancy or optimism about the film medium as a political instrument for direct change. As he frequently mentioned, the very act of filming, given Braddock’s ongoing destruction, was something not innocent but always already morally suspect: “ ‘You know,’ Buba says, smiling and shaking his head. ‘film making is one of the most bourgeois things you can do. Most of the film makers are white, male, middle-class. When I taught [filmmaking], that was practically all I had in my class. Well, I’m white, I’m male, but I’m working class. At least that’s one thing that’s a little different.’ ”²⁴⁵ Though Buba regularly cites Third World Newsreel and Soviet school of filmmakers as vital inspiration for his work, and certainly identifies as a leftist, his film portraits lack the overt features we might expect of a radical “countercinema”

²⁴⁴ Hopey, “Roll ‘em,” A30.

²⁴⁵ Buba quoted in Miller’s “Braddock’s Skag,” 2.

project. Instead, he demonstrates concern that Braddock's ongoing trauma will be commodified and recirculated as a spectacle in the symbolic economy. Further, instead of radicalization or consciousness raising, he and his films seems to have arrived belatedly. In his work, the steel mills are either gone, or in the process of disappearing. The decline of Braddock seems a foregone conclusion. Even when his films involve the experiences of the present-day residents, he adopts a backwards-looking lens to the problem of deindustrialization.

As I hope to show in close analyses of several films, Buba's filmic project pursued a different orientation to the political. I aim to argue that Buba saw the moving image as a way of visualizing one's identity, one's needs, and grievances. He also felt the filmic medium provided some kind of agency over one's image as a group of people. He believed, by extension, that the importance of cinema lay in reception: viewing a film could be a means of generating an "alternative public sphere," in the words of Miriam Hansen.²⁴⁶ This conception of moving-image-as-public-sphere, was no doubt dependent on the independent media channels opened by the Museum's Film Section and Pittsburgh Filmmakers, and the whole nonprofit media field of the era.

Below, I examine the ways in which Buba's film portraits create new relations of intimacy and familiarity between the movie audience and his Braddock subjects. For instance, my analysis examines some of the promotional materials of certain films (like *Sweet Sal*, *Voices from a Steel*

²⁴⁶ As Hansen writes of the early silent American cinema in the 1900s, "exhibitions varying from time to time and place to place allowed for culturally specific acts of reception, opening up a margin of participation and unpredictability. In this margin the cinema could assume an alternative public sphere for particular social groups, like immigrants and women, by providing an intersubjective horizon through – and against – which they could negotiate the specific displacements and discrepancies of their experience." As I will argue, Buba's unusual mode of film exhibition and film style similarly worked, albeit in a far different time/space, to construct an alternative public sphere. His films produced a novel viewing situation in which viewers, local and non-, were able to explore their discomfort with deindustrialization. For more on cinema as alternative public sphere, see *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991): 43-44.

Town, and *Lightening Over Braddock*) which create an almost familial intimacy between the viewer, the film subject, and the filmmaker. I also intend to highlight how and why, in Buba's film portraits, familiar people and places reappear, over and over again, which creates a (positive) impression of déjà vu and recall. In these ways, I argue that Buba redefined the mediascape imagery of Rust Belt America.

3.3 ON BUBA AND THE FILM PORTRAITS

Tony Buba (b. 1944--) is an Italian American and life-long working class native of Braddock, Pennsylvania. Before entering media production, he worked three years in a steel factory and served six years in the Navy. A director of 36 films since 1972, his film/video works span genres and modes as disparate as social documentary, music video, interactive website, sponsored educational film, and fiction film.²⁴⁷ He has received most attention for a handful of documentaries and videos he made in the 1980s and 1990s, which address the history and decline of the steel working industry in Western Pennsylvania. In particular, his 1996 *Struggles in Steel* addresses the African American community's fight to gain employment in steel working and industrial sectors.

In the scholarly literature that covers his filmmaking, Buba's career has been conflated with the high-voltage documentary filmmaker Michael Moore, of Flint, Michigan.²⁴⁸ Both Buba

²⁴⁷ In addition to his personal work, Buba's company Braddock Films has been involved in producing award-winning educational documentaries in the Pittsburgh area.

²⁴⁸ See Louise Spence's "Working-Class Hero: Michael Moore's Authorial Voice and Persona," *The Journal of Popular Culture* Vol 43.2 (2010): 368 - 380; John Tiech, *Pittsburgh Film History: On Set in the Steel City* (Charleston: The History Press, 2012): 25-6, 35.

and Moore have been characterized as members of a then-emergent movement of American-based documentary, dubbed “New Documentary” (these practitioners include Errol Morris, Ross McElwee, and others). The New Documentarians are said to have shifted away from observation, direct cinema, and *cinéma vérité* into a decidedly postmodern register. Film scholars such as Linda Williams have explicated the features of this “new” documentary, in which the filmmaker devotes a great deal of attention to calling into question the values and presumptions of classical documentary film, such as objective truth, reliable sources, and the grand narrative of history.²⁴⁹ This new wave of 1980s documentary filmmaking is said to have replaced traditional, scientific values with more exploratory notions of memory-making; the subjectivity of truth; a blatant celebration of the artifice and theatrical visual style of filmmaking; and the agency of the recorded subject prioritized over the authority of the detached, fly-on-the-wall filmmaker.

This scholarship, though praiseworthy and insightful in many respects, loses sight of the importance of Buba within the specific context of Braddock and deindustrialization more broadly. Postmodern film criticism argues for spatiotemporal compression in which the world’s particularities become homogenized. However, this fails to account for the tremendous significance of regional specificity in Buba’s filmmaking: for his entire career, he has made films and photographs about Braddock and its people. In contrast, figures such as Moore have become generalists, jumping from topic to topic. The frequent comparison to New Documentary filmmakers has reduced Buba into a sort of bargain-rate copy of Michael Moore.²⁵⁰ Buba is oftentimes treated as the Catholic, ethnic, regionalized, local, small-scale version of Moore’s

²⁴⁹ Linda Williams, “Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary,” *Film Quarterly* Vol 46.3 (Spring 1993): 9-21.

²⁵⁰ This comparative analysis film scholarship, which argues for the classification of Buba as a postmodernist (and copy-cat of Michael Moore), is demonstrated in Spence’s “Working-Class Hero: Michael Moore’s Authorial Voice and Persona.”

erratic, outsized, theatrical, and attention-hungry persona. His work is compared favorably to Moore's, but the inability on the part of scholars to find sustaining distinctions between both filmmakers' work has made Buba languish in Moore's shadow as though he were an imitator, despite the fact that Buba's breakout film, *Lightning Over Braddock*, 1988, was released a year before Moore's blockbuster indie documentary, *Roger and Me*.

Buba, like Moore, is engaged in a broadly anticapitalist project of critique against the myth of history as progress. However, the way in which Buba's project unfolds is quite different. His earliest films, which took the form of short, 5-20 minute black and white film portraits, and shot on a Bolex 16mm camera while he was still a graduate student at Ohio University, demand more sustained investigation. These portrait films, which began his film career in 1972, have since been dubbed "The Braddock Chronicles."

The film portraits are distinctive firstly for their format: they are all short, 16mm celluloid films (the longest ones being under 30 minutes). Lasting only several minutes, they pack emotional punch without overstaying their welcome. The films that comprise this body of work include: *To My Family* (1972, 3 minutes); *J. Roy – New and Used Furniture* (1974, 10 minutes); *Shutdown* (1975, 12 minutes); *Betty's Corner Café* (1976, 11 minutes); *Sweet Sal* (1979, 25 minutes); *Home Movies* (1980, 3 minutes); *Washing Walls with Mrs. G* (1980, 6 minutes); *Mill Hunk Herald* (1981, 13 minutes); *Peabody and Friends* (1983, 7 minutes); *Voices from a Steel Town* (1983, 28 minutes). These films have been shown individually or together, as a kind of "family album," and have been collected in a DVD titled *Braddock Chronicles: Volumes I & II*.²⁵¹ The above-cited films all have a family resemblance, owing to their affinity with photography and portraiture.

²⁵¹ *Braddock Chronicles: 1 & 2*, Tony Buba, New York: Zeitgeist Films, 1972-1985.

The films focus on friends and acquaintances living in Buba's hometown of Braddock. In the words of one local critic, "For Tony Buba's films...a more character-oriented style is added to vérité [style of filmmaking], and his own portrait-type documentary emerges...Tony's camera records the sincerity, jive talk, and the random philosophy of his subjects in a cross-section of his hometown; we're permitted a keyhole view of unrehearsed human drama that turns with pathos and hilarity."²⁵² As eccentric character studies driven by a vérité, "truth film" spirit, these films feature little to no didactic framing material (i.e., talking head interviews, title cards, etc.), though the final portrait, *Voices From a Steel Town*, features multiple characters and some intertitles for context.

Visually, all but one or two portraits use a monochromatic black-and-white palette. This was a significant artistic choice given the relative availability of color film stock by the 1970s. Black-and-white film is historically linked with realist filmmaking: the cinema vérité filmmakers shot in black-and-white, and the agitprop newsreel films and television broadcasts were shot similarly because of the cheapness and efficiency of the black-and-white film stock. Buba's work draws upon the presumed urgency, immediacy, and authenticity of black-and-white images. The first few portraits – *To My Family*, *J Roy*, *Shut Down*, *Betty's Corner Café* and *Sweet Sal* – were made during his MFA program in Film at Ohio University. Buba shot these films during his holiday break from school, a fact which subtly adds an impression of sentimentality, intimacy, and personal meaning to each documentary portrait. This is especially true in the case of *Sweet Sal*, made during Christmas and Thanksgiving breaks. In the film, Braddock citizens warmly reference the coming holidays just as frequently as they discuss the difficulty of making ends meet. Sal, in

²⁵² Jim Duffy, "Filmmaker Tony Buba's Portrait-Type Documentary," *Pittsburgh New Sun*, April 17, 1980.

particular, meanders into sentimental reveries that are at least partly induced by the introspective nature of the holiday season.

Being academic exercises (assignments for MFA courses), the film portraits aesthetically lend themselves to experimentation. They were one-off trial-and-error explorations of different cinematic techniques. Buba explains that the first film, *To My Family*, was an exploration of Kuleshov-style montage; *Washing Walls with Mrs. G* investigates the signifying potentials of static framing and the use of off-screen space; meanwhile, the dynamics of speech, rhetoric and personal testimony at the heart of *J Roy New and Used Furniture* reflected Buba's first attempt at shooting synchronous sound film.²⁵³ As Buba continued to make his portraits, they traveled far along the festival and media center circuit in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵⁴

By the late 1970s, the film portraits were titled "The Braddock Chronicles," and frequently screened together in an omnibus presentation. The co-existence of these portraits, in a single viewing, had significant, intertextual effects. As Buba states,

When I first started I didn't think I'd be doing films about Braddock. But after I made a couple, I had screenings in Philadelphia, and Linda Blackaby named them the *Braddock Chronicles*. So I ended up using it after that ... From there, then, I decided, OK, I want to make each film work as a short film. But then, I wanted them shown together as a long piece, so each one was short but then also it shows as a big long structure... That's really a narrative influence from Truffaut and

²⁵³ Personal interview with Tony Buba, Pittsburgh, June 14, 2016.

²⁵⁴ Though far from complete, Buba's resume provides clues as to the exhibitionary afterlife, and geographic reach, of several of his film portraits. *J. Roy* screened and won awards at Refocus Film Festival, in Ames, Iowa; the Bellevue Film Festival in Bellevue, Washington; and State of Illinois Film Festival. *Betty's Café Corner* screened and won awards at Santa Barbara Film Festival; Athens Film Festival in Athens, Ohio; Kenyon Film Festival; and Great Lakes Film Festival in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. *Washing Walls with Mrs. G* screened and won awards at Big Muddy Film Festival, and the New York Filmmakers Expo. *Sweet Sal* screened and won awards at the Ann Arbor Film Festival; the New York Filmmakers Expo; and the Great Lakes Film Festival.

Bergman using the same actors. You watch them age. You watch Nataalka get older. You watch me get older. You watch the people I'm interviewing get older. You see them all aging through this process until we're all dead.²⁵⁵

As Buba hints above, there were practical reasons for the short film format. Buba began making short films in the hope that, after graduating, he could build a career as a freelance short filmmaker and part-time teacher. Film freelancing, Buba recalls, was a viable vocation in the early 1970s, one which, at that time, paid better than a film instructorship at a local university. Buba, ever the scrappy businessman, realized that a film less than ten minutes has double the chances of being programmed in a festival. And, besides the efficiency and ease with which he made these films, he could bolster his career, by gaining awards and more audience exposure, if he hewed closely to the format that most likely to be shown at festival events. The short film also facilitated collaborative production teams. Buba regularly worked with local Pittsburgh Filmmaker artists, Nataalka Voslakov, Margie Strosser, and Peggy Ahwesh, all of whom made regular appearances in his films, such as *Lightning Over Braddock*. These connections were enriched by the fact that, between the late 1970s and early 1980s, he was a teacher at Pittsburgh Filmmakers and taught workshops in Super-8 production. Besides this, he worked as a technical assistant on George Romero's major 1970s films, including *Martin* (partially shot in Tony Buba's mother's residence), *Dawn of the Dead*, and *Knightriders*.

Buba created a web of connectivity in his portrait films. Though each portrait ostensibly depicts a single subject (to wit: *Betty's Café Corner* documents a bar owner named Betty), Buba indulged a habit of revisiting the same individuals after many years, in order to catch up with them and to show how they changed along with him. He explains in interviews that one of the things he

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

wanted to achieve in his filmmaking is not only register the economic disinvestment in Braddock, but also to have the viewer occupy and feel time itself through his films, “with a sense of loss.”²⁵⁶ As he says, through the repeated exposure of the same individuals across different films, we see individuals “age” until the point of their death.

Several individuals in particular tend to reappear – Sal Carulli, J. Roy, Margie Strosser, LeRoy, several salesman and unnamed by-standers. Seeing these characters produces a sense of déjà vu for viewers. This social connectivity works its way into the representation of urban change in Braddock. These films being shown together, in a group of five to seven, immersed the viewer in a network of relations created and sustained by each portrait. Buba himself explains that each film was meant to stand alone, but they also were meant to be comprehended as part of what he called “a big long structure.” The omnibus presentation format lends a sense of communitarian identity. Much like a family photo album, multiple aspects of the same place, the same person, exist as part of a larger, ever-evolving constellation.

The short film is often associated with amateur visual forms, such as the home movie, photographic portraits and family albums. These visual forms, as Marianne Hirsch argues, are organized by a “familial gaze.” Hirsch writes, “When we look at one another within what we think of as our families, we are also the objects of an external gaze...the powerful gaze of familiarity which imposes and perpetuates certain conventional images of the familial and which ‘frames’ the family in both senses of the term.”²⁵⁷ As Hirsch argues, forms of portraiture perpetuate an idea of family and stability. In Buba’s films, these attributes of stability, conventionality, and familiarity

²⁵⁶ “Artists Record the Death of the Mill’s Way of Life,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 1985.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1985/07/01/us/artists-record-the-death-of-the-mill-s-way-of-life.html>

²⁵⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997): 11.

exist in opposition to the temporal decay, discontinuity, rupture, and isolation perpetuated by deindustrialization.

The impression of familiarity, familiarity and intimacy works like a filter or veil over which Buba makes sense of his Braddock surroundings; indeed, it is impossible to separate the filmmaker from his documentary productions. As Carnegie Museum of Art film curator Bill Judson explains, “when critics find it essential to consider Buba *as a person* when writing about his films, it is because they recognize shared constellations of identity in the man, the town, and the films” [his emphasis].²⁵⁸ This partly owes, again, to the fact of the films’ creation: Buba made these films with family, friends, and while living in his parents’ home. After graduating Ohio University with his MFA in Film, in 1976, he returned to Braddock and lived in his grandmother’s house, paying \$40 in rent each month.²⁵⁹

The proximity to family ensured he could make these films financially, but the tie-in to domesticity inflected the tone and style of the films. Many of the films take place inside the homes of friends and family. Most obviously, *Washing Walls with Mrs. G* is shot exclusively inside the kitchen of his grandmother. Static long shots show his grandmother recollect her migration to Braddock decades ago, in a heavy Italian accent (semi-translated with Buba’s own subtitles). Meanwhile Buba, shown partially out of the frame, scrubs and cleans the walls. As Buba has said, succinctly, of the film: “the title describes the film.” A sense of familiarity emerges in the fact that his depicted subject (his grandmother) is presented as not being a stranger but a close and knowable person. Familiarity emerges as well in Buba’s humorous asides, the self-deprecating awe-shucks tone that pervades the “voice” of all his documentary productions, which scholars have been quick

²⁵⁸ Program notes, “Tony Buba in person,” *Identities & Obsessions: Department of Film and Video*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Thursday March 12 1998, 1.

²⁵⁹ Personal interview with Tony Buba, Pittsburgh, June 14, 2016.

to point out. In the scholarly literature, this self-deprecating humor is often considered a mark of “postmodern” aesthetics, a clever jab at the presumed objectivity of the contemporary filmmaker, or evidence of the “subjective turn in the American socio-political documentary in the 1980s.”²⁶⁰ However, it may be more accurate to characterize the humor as a way of drawing viewers into an atmosphere of comfort. This strategy extends beyond the film text to the viewing space and promotion of the films themselves.

Indeed, less remarked upon, this familial gaze inflects the publicity materials which he circulated to promote his films. The Museum of Art’s Film Section published a poster for Buba’s omnibus film presentation, on November 20 1980, as part of their ongoing Independent Film Makers Series.²⁶¹ The poster, designed by Film Section designer Maria Kyros Menniti, features a large, sepia-toned close-up photograph of Sal Caru, star of *Sweet Sal*, smiling into the camera. The photograph is enclosed by a picture “frame” made from scrolling text announcing the other titles of Buba’s portrait series: *Sweet Sal*; *J Roy – New and Used Furniture*; *Betty’s Corner Café*; *Washing Walls with Mrs. G*; and “other works” to be announced. The familial gaze is constituted on several levels: Sal Caru’s handwritten note, “Regards from Braddock” adorns the bottom of the picture, in the manner of a handwritten note or postcard.

Sal’s close-up renders the poster as a photographic object (through the spatial subordination of the text to the single visual). With movie poster reimagined as a photographic object, it resembles the sentimental ornament one might hang in their bedroom or destined for some other domestic space. As photo portrait, it functions as a source of memory and ritualistic

²⁶⁰ Iván Villarrea Álvarez, *Documenting Cityscapes: Urban Change in Contemporary Non-fiction Film*, (London: Wallflower, Columbia UP, 2015): 107.

²⁶¹ Poster for Visiting Filmmaker Tony Buba at Museum of Art Theater, November 20, 1980, Box 7, Folder 19, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

looking: one does not look at the figure once then turn away; rather, we are encouraged to dwell with the figure, looking often. Finally, the scrolling text of the other film portraits suggests an intertextual and social connection between *Sweet Sal* and the other works – Sal is merely the face of the “big longer structure” of Buba’s filmic portraiture.

Likewise, the premiere screening flyer for the 1988 film, *Lightening Over Braddock: A Rustbowl Fantasy*, shown at the Rococo-style Fulton Theatre downtown, borrows some of the familial cues that characterize Buba’s *Braddock Chronicles*. The layout of the flyer seems rather unremarkable at first glance. The film’s title appears in bold text at the top; below, a screenshot of the Ghandi scene featuring Nataalka Voslov and Sal Caru; finally, a requisite description of the film and blurbs from positive reviews. However, upon closer inspection, these critical blurbs are clearly not the words of independent critics: “BRILLIANT FILM. MY SON CAN DO NO WRONG.” – MRS. BUBA. “MIO NIPOTE FILMMAKER GRANDE.” – MRS. GENTILE. “ALL I KNOW IS MY NEWPHEW WILL STICK ME WITH THE JOB OF BAKING THE ITALIAN COOKIES FOR THE RECEPTION.” – MRS. CUCCARO. “THAT S.O.B. PUTS ALL THOSE SWEAR WORDS IN THE FILM. WHAT WILL THE NUNS SAY?” – MR. BUBA. These so-called critical blurbs are obviously in fact fabricated; not so much a Brechtian technique aiming at distanciation, they are voices of Buba’s immediate family and relatives. This positions the filmmaker in a child-like relation, as the son who made good on the family, but retains a sense of mischievousness, hinting at the humor that became a draw for Buba’s local audiences. The flyer’s paratextual weave of familial voices anticipates a nostalgic and familial gaze for the would-be viewer of the film: this is a movie not created by an industrial studio or out-group filmmakers engaged in “left-wing ambulance seeking.” Rather, this film is homemade, and the promotional materials invite the viewer to join the family, so to speak.

This framing is ideological, in the sense that it deflects a possible criticism or skeptical stance by inviting the viewer let his or her guard down. An attitude of familial intimacy—sarcastic, but lovingly so—is reflected elsewhere in the humor-laced flyer: “We are pleased to invite you to celebrate the premiere of Tony Buba’s newest film. The festivities will start at 7pm with live music...Tony will then show fan favorites, WASHING WALLS WITH MRS. G. and BRADDOCK FOOD BANK. Following the film there will be a reception in the Fulton Lobby catered by the Rainbow Kitchen, Mrs. Cuccaro and Mrs. Buba...Don’t miss this chance to see some great films, hear good music, eat fresh homemade pastries, meet the stars of the film...and if your [sp] real lucky you might even get mentioned in the SEEN column.” An intertextual social web is reflected in the cast list: “stars Sal Caru and features J. Roy, Nataalka Voslakov, Steve Pelligrino, Margie Strosser, Bill Judson, Tony Buba, with guest appearances by George Romero ... almost every unemployed person in Pittsburgh and introducing, Carla Hignett, as the reporter with the pencil in her mouth.”

With these materials framing the films themselves, Buba crafts a homespun, one-of-a-kind viewing experience for the audience. The humorous form of direct address, and the familial gaze which recasts the town of Braddock in the image of Buba’s own Italian lineage, starkly contrasts with the depersonalized media representations of “Roboburgh” in corporate advertising or Pittsburgh-as-deindustrial-ruin in milltown documentaries. In the next section, I provide a series of close readings of films to show how this familial effect is reinforced by various textual aspects and aesthetic strategies in the major works of the *Braddock Chronicles* – *To My Family*, *Sweet Sal*, and *Voices from a Steeltown*.

3.4 ANALYSIS OF THE FILM PORTRAITS

3.4.1 *TO MY FAMILY* (1972)

Despite its brevity, the first film of the *Braddock Chronicles* displays perhaps most clearly Buba's statement on documentary film, as a process involving the production of memory-images that alternately shock and console us into a recollection of a lost past. Produced at Ohio University in 1972-1973, *To My Family* is a three-minute, black-and-white film, depicting his grandfather's Braddock shoe-repair shop prior to its demolition. The proto-film-portrait also suggests, albeit in embryonic form, the aesthetic dynamics which will concern Buba across his body of work: still images combined with movement images; architectural views of derelict Braddock buildings; alternations between long shots and close-up shots; visual strategies that give a proximate and sensory experience, not of what has recently disappeared, but of the condition of grasping desperately for a connection to the past; the prioritizing of flashback techniques and abrupt transitions; the prominent role of nostalgia and subjectivity; the identification of the viewer with the camera operator's point of view; and the treatment of the filmmaker and the audience as both occupying a child-like position of wonder, enchantment, and all-pervasive loss.

The film opens with a long shot depicting his mother's kitchen, eerily empty, with natural light shining through the far window. In the next shot, we overlook an unkempt backyard, with a theological symbol of the Virgin Mary in a nativity sort of scene. As the camera pans slowly across the yard, revealing nothing but empty lawn, a voice-over conversation occurs between Tony Buba himself, and a woman, presumably his mother:

Mother: "Hi Butch how was the trip?"

Tony: "OK, but I'm tired."

Mother: “Do you want some coffee?”

Tony: “Yeah, I’ll take a cup.”

Mother: “Oh, I just painted that statue, don’t you like it? [Dog barking in background] Did you know they just tore the shop down?”

Tony: “Naw, when’d they do that?”

Mother: “Oh, about a week ago.”

The family’s off-screen conversation triggers an abrupt transition that transports us away from the Braddock home, in a kind of mental flashback, to Buba’s grandfather’s shoe repair store. From here, a montage sequence follows: a snapshot of the exterior of the storefront; a store sign, with a Coca-Cola advertisement, naively inviting affordable and “expert” shoe-shine sessions; a photographic still-image of Buba’s grandfather; and a poster of a proverbial shoe maker. The shoemaker is a white, elderly, bespectacled, but muscular man, proudly hammering into finished form a simple shoe, against an empty backdrop featuring a sign that reads “Get Longer Wear by Shoe Repair.” The uneasy pairing of a white shoemaker and Italian grandfather’s portrait passes without comment.

Inside, we see the once-proud store vacated of all human presence: half-empty shelves, torn strips of wallpaper hanging haphazardly in all directions, a workbench overstuffed with tools, boxes, and untold devices of industry. Heavy shadows give an impression of desertion, desolation: we are in a ruined site. Buba lingers curiously over work tools, including a sewing machine and shoe-shine chair. Some of these objects trigger eerie, nondiegetic sounds of productivity on the soundtrack, as if haunted by ghosts. Visually, sometimes the work tools are legible, as in the sewing machine, which casts a frightening shadow against the wall; or the chair’s shining platform, which protrudes into space like a spire or prehistoric megalith. In other instances, the camera is

positioned so close-up to the object that the only discernible visual is a tangle of chords and metallic fingers, suggesting the fossil of a long-dead creature, something no longer of this world.

In the third and last segment, the repair-store flashback abruptly terminates. We return to the familiar shot of a second-story window, looking below onto the backyard. We hear, off-screen, Mother: “Hey Butch, your coffee’s getting cold...” The film then cuts to a pair of white intertitles: “to my family / Produced at Ohio U., 1972-73.” Cut to black.

In the film, Buba is preoccupied with the passage of time (a thematic and material activity undertaken in all his films). The film’s action occurs by way of a spatial encounter, in which objects that inhabit real space are charged with psychic energy, liable to induce in the beholder involuntary and shocking memory-images that emphasize distance from the past. It is significant that Buba’s, his first “appearance” in his film portraiture, as it were, occurs in connection with a member of a generation different than his own. His mother’s reference to the store triggers a memory-image that floods the visual field. From this moment on, Buba-the-filmmaker will rarely depict colleagues who are of his same age and generation. In positioning himself (in this and many other films) as character who sees, but does not act, one whose main activity is to think the past, Buba resembles the Deleuzian “seer” of the time-image, identified in the Italian neorealist films of the postwar period.²⁶² Similarly, with respect to the presentation of Braddock’s industrial history and white ethnic heritage under assault by the forces of progress, the grandfather’s shoe repair shop might be said to embody a Deleuzian “any-place-whatever,” standing in synechdochically for the demolition of Braddock as a whole.

Offering a kind of spatial mapping of Braddock, *To My Family* performs a collision in which two unlike spaces, private and public, the domestic home of Buba’s mother, and the now-

²⁶² Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (London: Athlone, 1989): 73.

demolished workplace of the shoe repair store, are juxtaposed and connected through a dream-like, sentimental relation which Buba shares to those spaces. Home and shoe-repair store, figured not as sites of plenitude, but as haunted sites, fuse through their similar visual depiction by the film as desolate and empty, “found” spaces that require an active observer to make sense of them, with few signs of life to harness the viewer’s attention in an otherwise sparse soundtrack and severely emptied visual field. Further, both spaces are meant to be looked *through* as well as looked *at*. Indeed, the visual trope of the window frame, as a metaphor for the entwinement of visual perception and remembrance, recurs throughout the *Braddock Chronicles*. Visual activities of framing, looking, and remembrance converge on the figure of the window frame, triggering a metaphorical passage from adulthood to childhood in the film’s middle section. The viewer is aligned with adult Buba in the home, at the film’s start, signaled by the high-angle shot which looks out onto the yard; conversely, in the flashback to the shoe store, through the numerous low-angle, close-up shots of machines and tools, which blur legibility, we may be said to occupy a fantasmatic position of Buba-as-child, in which the world’s objects loom large before us, overwhelming both the frame and our possibility of comprehension, not unlike how the adult world may appear to be unknowable, and threatening, to the young.

The contrapuntal image-sound relationships in the shots of machines/tools illustrate how closely space is coupled with memory and psychological travel in Buba’s films; these contrapuntal sound/image relations also underline the inherent risk involved in memory-making. The “found” objects in the repair shop are characterized by lingering, ghostly traces of the shoe-worker’s labor. The ghostly sounds of industry, ambiguous and opaque, give a sharp edge to Buba’s exercise in memory-making: one’s awareness and consideration of the tools does not bridge the temporal distance which these objects represent. Indeed, Buba aestheticizes that distance as his main

interest: the sounds are fragmentary, incomplete, eerie; as such, they can only materialize his alienation from a previous generation.

In all these ways, *To My Family* crystallizes Buba's project in the film portraits as a whole. As a historical record, the film is not about the shoe making industry or his grandfather, but rather is about the filmmaker exploring his own increasing distance from these things. The film manifests his fear that an attenuated connection to family history will one day be completely severed. On the positive side, Buba's careful attention to a "wasted space" before its demolition shows how powerful and generative his approach to the past can be. He adopts a reverent and exploratory attitude to spatial ruin. The shoe-repair-store-as-ruin is not forgotten, but is simultaneously enriched and haunted by traces of the past. As demonstrated in the film, these past traces have a special agency all their own which exceeds textbook historical treatment. Even if the memory-image of the empty store is not the same as the store itself, it is "not not the thing", to borrow a formulation by Rebecca Schneider, in her writing on the paradoxical productivity of the double-negative of historical reenactment.²⁶³ That is, the false copy of the store-in-memory (and its falsified sounds of hammering, shining, and shoe-repair production) nevertheless brings a reorientation of oneself to the past, a revivifying sensation is registered and affirmed through the

²⁶³ Schneider describes the embodied and affective dimensions of historical representation, when she discusses the cultural work of historical Civil War reenactors: "In the course of attending Civil War reenactments, I repeatedly betrayed my own biases in that I was continually surprised by the complexities involved in the (re)actions I witnessed. Problems of ambivalence, simultaneous temporal registers, anachronism, and the *everywhere* of error were not lost on any of the reenactors with whom I spoke, despite their common depiction as, by and large, simple or naïve 'enthusiasts.' In affective engagement, many of them find reenactment to be, if not the thing itself (the past), somehow also *not not* the thing (the past), as it passes across their bodies in again-time." Along the same lines, one might characterize Buba's recreation of the shoe repair store, in *To My Family*, as rife with potential inaccuracy, error, and ambivalence. Likewise, however, Buba engages this site affectively, and allows memories of the sounds of tools (ie, the past) to pass across his body, and the audience's body, in "again-time." For more on the status of historical representation in forms of documentary reenactment, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011): 8.

viewer's body, aligned with Buba-as-child: "something cross-temporal, something affective, and something affirmative circulates. Something is touched."²⁶⁴

The store's disappearance, then, becomes a timely occasion for Buba's familial recovery and for the artistic creation of an investigative/forensic relationship to the past. Buba thus embarks on a model of documentary filmmaking heavily layered with a sense of "geopsychic" space, Giuliana Bruno's term for a folding together of memory and real concrete space, "a place where social geography and psychic paths are written together in a phantasmatic construction of the present."²⁶⁵ This theme of real and imagined space and time folding together, in *To My Family*, becomes explicit through the stylistic contrast of nondiegetic sound and visual stillness. Later on, in subsequent portraits, the pursuit of geopsychic space becomes the occasion for breakdowns in style and blurring of formal categories.

3.4.2 *SWEET SAL* (1979)

In later film portraits, Buba trains his camera-eye away from himself and onto Braddock citizens who stimulate a similarly revelatory encounter with the spaces and places of the city. In broadening the sociological focus of his camera, these film portraits still retain a familial orientation, in which the films take place in domestic spaces and/or involve characters recounting lost connections to family members. All these tendencies converge in *Sweet Sal*, another black-and-white short film, which depicts the life of middle-aged streetwise hustler Sal Carulli, as he interacts with passers-by, friends, shop owners, his ex-wife, and culminates in his visit to the

²⁶⁴ Schneider, 43.

²⁶⁵ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2002): 253.

graveyard of his deceased father. With Sal as the central subject, his aggressive, theatrical, and half-way coherent monologues to the camera provide the main subject matter and focus of the film. As a hustler he essentially is rootless: we see him in a diner, a restaurant, a bar, a clothing store, and driving (never working). *Sweet Sal* went on to become a centerpiece of Buba's *Braddock Chronicles*: the enigmatic figure of Sal attracted the fascination of visiting German New Wave filmmaker, Werner Herzog, when he first viewed it in 1980 at the Carnegie Museum of Art.²⁶⁶ Sal makes reappearances throughout Buba's oeuvre, often as a villainous but sympathetic figure who decries how Buba made his filmmaking career off of making him look bad.

The film begins *in media res*, with Sal addressing the camera directly. The film's close-up framing of Sal, his body upright against a brick wall, immediately captures our attention. Most striking is how, as he speaks to us in a breathless clip, Sal seems to shift his personality, tone and mood, as if he were in a drug-induced altered state. His face, viewed in close-up, reveals graying hair, shifty eyes, a kaleidoscope of "microexpressions", to borrow Bela Balázs' term for the absorptive power of the human face on film.²⁶⁷ When Sal smiles or widens his eyes, it is nearly

²⁶⁶ Herzog left a deep impression on his February 19, 1980 visit to Pittsburgh, during which he presented a handful of films at the Film Section department in the Carnegie Museum of Art. Herzog was one of many German-speaking filmmakers (including Kurt Kren, Peter Kubelka, Wilhelm and Birgit Hein, among others) streaming into the city in droves. At the 1980 event, Herzog screened his 1976 film, *Heart of Glass*, which involved directing a group of nonprofessional actors under hypnosis, and afterward he confessed to the audience a deep affection for Steelers football: "I'm very proud that the [Steelers] football team won the Super Bowl. Football is a very, very fine game." Between the screenings and his lecture, Herzog asked to see some local films. Buba brought *Sweet Sal*. As the movie credits rolled, Herzog demanded to see every film Buba ever made. In Buba, Herzog found a searching sympathy for people who seemed slightly crazy at first glance: Buba, similarly to Herzog, resisted taking sides or moralizing in his films. He made portraits of people you weren't sure you could trust, with a healthy sense of humor. The truth was not contained in a message, but something one had to work out after the film ended. For more on Buba's connection to Herzog, see Marylynn Uricchio, "Buba's beautiful portraits," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Friday July 10, 1998: <http://old.postgazette.com/magazine/19980710breview2.asp>

²⁶⁷ Balázs writes of the revelatory power of the cinematic close-up of the human face, "What is meant by the microphysiognomy of the camera close-up...refers to the face *beneath the play of expressions*. This underlying face cannot be manufactured. We have it from the outset; it has always been there and is inescapable. It may be frequently obscured by our conscious expressions. But the close-up brings it to light. It is not the face we wear, but our actual visual appearance that is decisive. For all of us appear in the end just as we are...Real expression is created in the barely perceptible movements of the tiniest parts of the face." For Balázs, as for Buba, the human face on film involves a constant interplay of masking and unmasking one's inner character and sometimes hidden

impossible to determine how he is feeling, recalling the unstable performativity and camera-mugging antics of an Andy Warhol Superstar. His opening monologue to the camera begins with these words:

--She pushed a button on me. Nobody's gonna push a button on me. Nobody, nobody. The only guy who can do that is that guy up there [pointing to the sky]. J.C. J.C. my man. He's the one who calls the shots on me. Why's he making me live? I don't know. Why? There's something here he must want me for. He wants me for something. On this wild earth. [Intertitle – *Sweet Sal*] The real name's Salvatore [exaggerating the Italian pronunciation]. Salvatore, *ah finale*. But it's a beautiful name. It means savior – savior. Am I savior? I'm a killer! [he gestures his hand into a gun-shape, pointing at the camera, and laughs]. Ha ha! I'm a killer – I'd pop somebody in a second. Savior. Boy, I'll tell ya man. The times we had together – me, you, Nick. Your brother was always on the cool side. He was always on the cool side. He kept his mouth shut. But me, when I have something to chirp, I chirp; you know, I chirp about it. Or had something to do, I did it. If I had to bust somebody's balls, then I did. You know? Ha! Like Herman. Put my cigarette out on his hand outside the store. "Get away from me you crumb! Get away, don't need ya!" Out of my face. We'll see him tomorrow. Got fat, got *fatter than a swine-buffalo, like a rhino*. [the sing-songy cadence of Sal's speech]. In fact, the hungriest animal wouldn't even eat him. That's how much he stinks, stinks.

Sal gives a unique lens on Braddock. As a person who lived most of his life on the street,

motivations, through the quasi-investigative recording of facial expressions. Bela Balázs, and Erica Carter. *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film* (New York: Berghahn, 2010): 104.

he defines himself by a certain toughness, a mobility, a lack of sentimentality. Buba often films him from mid-level or below (low angle), giving Sal a strange sense of stature, at once corrosive and charming. When he interacts with others, we see him boast about his facility with women. In a Braddock clothing store, he explains that he needs to buy the tightest fitting jeans because the women he knows demand it. ("I like them tight across the ass. If they're loose in the keister, I can't have 'em."). The citizens of Braddock know Sal well. Most times, when he encounters someone else in the frame, they laugh and cannot stop from laughing. In the shop, he even asks the store owner for a special price – "what's MY price?" Besides his out-sized, theatrical masculinity, Sal is also something of a con artist. He explains that his rival, Herman (whom we never see directly) is easily tricked and manipulated. We later see Sal on the phone with his ex-wife. After the conversation he tells the camera how he will kick her to the curb if he discovers, when they meet again for the first time in ten years, that she has gained weight. He speaks of her disparagingly in a playful singsong: "I'll have her eating out of my hand like she always did... She may look like a flip-flop, I'll say take a walk. Take a walk." He repeats such clichéd, musical phrases like a rapper dispenses rhymes, creating a forcefield of words around himself. But Sal is not all machismo. In fact, one of the most fascinating aspects of the portrait is seeing how Sal uses words, stories, and clichéd phrases as mask-like protections to hide a painful fragility of his innermost identity from the outside world.

While driving his car, Sal tells us, "I was a born actor. I acted all my life." He proudly proclaims he is not above hurting people who disrespect him. Then he says: "But I'm a good guy. When this season [Christmas] comes around, it tears me up. Because the old man ain't here. He gave me inspiration, he gave me inspiration. Good for him." In another scene, we glimpse his vulnerability again, the underside of his macho worldview. Sal has been shaped by the isolation

and desperation in which he has lived. “Even though you’re teaching film [speaking to Buba], that’s a hustle. Even to survive in life, no one’s going to give it to ya. Who’s going to give you anything, other than your mother and your father? ... You gotta hustle every day man. Wake up, think, ‘What am I going to do?’ That’s the same old rhythm, but something may jump off that day.” Sal, in many scenes, presents himself as a tough-talking and powerful masculine figure, but Buba makes sure to provide a counterpoint throughout. He does this by exposing us to moments where Sal, even as the camera rolls, lets his guard down. As Sal describes how he hustles in order to survive, subtle but distinct notes of nihilism and hopelessness emerge.

In interviews, Buba explains that his portrait-type documentary involves letting go a sense of directorial control. In 1980, Buba stated, “I let my people tell me what to do. When Sal (of *Sweet Sal*) was doing the film, he ran everything. He said, I’ll take you here, I’ll take you there,’ and I followed. That’s the only way to do these films ... I want it to be their film more than mine. Their story more than mine...”²⁶⁸ Buba’s approach to filming his subjects, *Sweet Sal* and elsewhere, shares features with 1960s filmmaker Jean Rouch’s programme of a Surreal “cine-ethnography”, in which subject, documentarian, and audience partake of an egalitarian relationship, dissolving hierarchies of power and knowledge.²⁶⁹ Buba allows the subject to direct his camera. Further, Buba’s portrait-like framing is never solipsistically centered on a single individual, but rather is visually designed to allow the outside in. Frequently, other subjects and citizens of Braddock enter into the frame. Buba follows a “socioformal” pattern of shot distribution, in which he prioritizes up-close and intimate framing of his subjects, and he prioritizes the group-shot. Whether focusing on hustlers, out-of-work steelworkers, elderly people, or used

²⁶⁸ Quoted in Miller, “Braddock’s Skag: Film Maker Tony Buba,” 2.

²⁶⁹ Jean Rouch, and Steven Feld, “The Camera and Man,” *Cine-ethnography* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2003): 32.

furniture salesman, his camera is poised to them as close as possible, creating a sometimes claustrophobic jumbling of multiple figures in the frame, and creating group portraits of the society as a whole. This is pronounced in a film like *Betty's Café Corner*, a film about alcoholic unemployed steelworkers who spend their days at the local bar. In *Betty's*, Buba trains the camera in such a way that two or more figures often appear in a close-up or mid-shot framing. A speaking subject and a nonspeaking subject will coexist in the same visual field. This draws the viewer's eye to multiple subjects, forcing him or her to make choices about which figure to study, for how long, and how to apportion attention to different figures who occupy the same social space.

This socioformal framing of the portrait subject in relation to others, is repeated in *Sweet Sal*. Buba places the camera on bustling street corners to capture the fading streetwise gangster in a lively urban habitat. In these moments, Sal is regularly distracted by passers-by. But, instead of Buba's camera shifting focus or cutting, so that Sal might be shown talking to these acquaintances in a clearer view, Buba simply keeps the camera rolling: he shows Sal gesturing and addressing them, barely visible inside or even sometimes beyond the movie frame. As a trained photographer, Buba controls the camera in such a way that Braddock's inhabitants constantly emerge around or penetrate the frame. Braddock residents are pictured and visualized along with the environment, but in his portrait-films, he does not break these into separate shots. He prefers the group shot, even when focused on a single person. Such a choice not only thematizes the viewer's attention and the choices we make about how to apportion and divide our attention (which is often an ethical choice in Buba's cinema), but it also, in Sal's case, shows antagonism in the world around him. Sal is shown laughing with others, but just as often, we see him isolated from them even while they surround him; it seems just as likely that his compatriots laugh *at* him as well as with him. This fluidity and ambiguity around Sal's social status is reflected visually through the camera's

generous but disciplined tendency to accommodate minor characters who enter the visual field around Sal Caru. His centrality in the camera frame gradually becomes something of a burden of self-overrepresentation. Toward the end of *Sweet Sal*, one senses nothing more liberating for Sal, than if the camera were not trained on him all the time; that is, if he did not always have to perform/entertain, have something to prove.

Gradually, deep themes of loss, death, and parental longing break through Sal's mask. We notice that when Sal speaks to others, he often speaks past or over them. We notice the glassy look in his eyes. Though he smiles and smirks quite a bit, he is usually in fact expressing his face in the shape of a frown. He stares off into the distance. He seems absorbed in thought, distracted, aloof. At one point, he tells a bar patron, apropos of nothing: "Your true love is your mother and father...once they're gone: So long. But a broad, she'll have you today and drop you the same day. That's why you've always got to be one step ahead of them." His monologues about feminine wiles, which seem addressed to no one in particular but himself, hint at pain and heartache around family.

The film's episodic structure abruptly coheres into and reveals a linear through-line during the final scene. Sal takes Buba and film crew to the graveyard where his father is buried. The camera tracks Sal as he walks, bundled up in a coat, along the steep side of the graveyard, pulled toward the grave of his father, Francesco Carulli. Sal addresses the camera: "He's in a place right here. Here's where I want to be." The ambiguity of Sal's statement lingers: what does it mean to say *here* (a grave) is where I want to be? Does this mean Sal wishes to die – or that he wishes to be reunited with his father? Or both? Sal wipes the gravestone, and places a Christmas card adorned with a Snowman onto the faceplate. Sal begins a monologue addressed to his deceased father:

You are my man. When you left me, I gave up. I didn't care about nothing no more. About cash, about nothing. And I always made big cash. Always. Because you taught me. You gave me something, you gave me something to go for. I did it for you, you knew I was making it, and it made you feel good. Because you knew I was no dummy. You wanted me to be a lawyer. Yeah, a lawyer. I've become a bum. That's all. I make it and blow it. Another year, another Christmas. Why can't I get croaked? I want to get croaked every day. Just to be croaked; can't do it. I don't know why Jesus Christ has let me live. To suffer I guess, huh?

Sal's commentary is contradictory. He veers from parental longing to thoughts of suicidal ideation and hopelessness, to a messianic conception of himself as a suffering Christ. In turn, Sal's former posturing about personal successes is exposed as a ruse. We learn he once harbored dreams of becoming more than a street-corner hustler. In presenting himself as a child begging for father's forgiveness, Sal also embodies and duplicates Buba's own self-alienation as a Braddock resident. Both Buba and Sal display reverence to the lost, adult world. As he kisses the gravestone, and expresses his wish to die out of love for his father, an implicit bond is generated between Buba and Sal: Buba seems to offer this parting scene not only to turn the viewer's perception of Sal on its head, but also to offer Sal a kind of forgiveness in the act of witnessing.

3.4.3 VOICES FROM A STEELTOWN (1983)

Voices from a Steeltown, a 28-minute color documentary, 1983, is the most refined instance of the film portrait model. As the title suggests, the film is a *metaportrait*, consisting of not one but multiple "voices," perspectives, and communities of immigrants and minorities who find their realities shaken by the economic catastrophes of the 1980s. Characters we once saw in earlier

black-and-white portraits, in *J. Roy* (1974), *Sweet Sal* (1979), and *Mill Hunk Herald* (1980), make return appearances, but without much fanfare. Significantly, Buba neglects to identify these recurring subjects with so much as an intertitle, perhaps hoping that the experienced viewer will suddenly feel a gentle sense of recall, of *déjà vu*: We recognize the familiar Braddock personality in much the same way one encounters an old friend or acquaintance by surprise. But these returning subjects, by virtue of their changed and aged bodies, powerfully indicate the passage of time, and underline Buba's larger project of showing how a person's personality can be changed, distorted, and made more cynical by the trauma of economic crisis.

The returning characters in *Voices of a Steeltown* do not discuss their lives in the present, as they did in earlier films. For example, the youthful salesman in *J. Roy*, who in that early film was dressed in dapper formal wear, selling the viewer a piece of china with good cheer, is now shown wearing dark and worn out clothes, a rumpled flannel shirt, his hair thinning. He appears a hardened worker inside an auto or mechanic shop; at any rate, he clearly is no longer in the business of selling the American Dream. Rather, the salesman, and the other portrait subjects, stand in a different, distanced relationship to Braddock. In this film, they try to provide an explanation for its now-undeniable ruin. Rather than comb and weigh these comments for objective historical truth, we are meant to take note of a deeper issue. As individuals who are aware of their previous life in Buba's *Braddock Chronicles*, they now relate to the town, as a lived experience and a social construct, with more distance and pensiveness. We might say they have become aware of themselves as images. They are now in the position of the seers and thinkers that Buba occupied in *To My Family*. Thus, an essential part of his project of portraiture is to show how Braddock citizens change in relation to the camera that records them.

In the film, Buba once again takes up a uniquely personal and sentimentalized approach, emphasizing what we might call “embodied” modes of history and memory-making. In the film he presents his own biography as a long-time resident, as an entry point into the larger cast of voices which end up organizing the film. Through a voice-over narration, Buba states he grew up “standing on the street corner.” A photographic portrait from his youth shows him doing just that, decades ago. The image itself an homage to Sal Caru, the street corner hustler who made Buba famous in *Sweet Sal*. Buba strives to show himself, and the body of others, as embodying and reflecting the past. His camera, tapping into Benjamin’s notion of the cinematic “optical unconscious” and of unconscious optics, more often than not, detects signs, symptoms, and micro-expressions from the documentary subject’s exterior body – their clothing, their jokes, their way of walking. As he said of his method, he wishes for the subject to direct him. In general, *Voices of a Steeltown* prioritizes the figure of the elderly and the child. We might consider these as organizing problems he raises in this final film portrait: what does it mean for old and new generations of Braddock to intersect and meet? Where do these connections literally take place in the town? Which architectural sites remain important to young and old, as vessels of memory and historical continuity?

In order to facilitate his subjects in disclosing their truth in the real space/place where they have once lived, worked, or grown up, Buba adds an intriguing innovation to his method of documentary filmmaking. In *Voices of a Steeltown*, Buba consciously brings to the fore the physical environment, the landmark spaces of Braddock, as a character and a trigger for memory production in the minds of his interview subjects. In this respect, he attempts to stage generative, sometimes eerie and mournful, encounters between Braddock’s long-time residents and the town’s now-fading landmarks. He takes his camera crew to various locales which, in the present moment,

carry the scars of neglect or commercial repurposing in their very architectural being. To the outside observer, such “wasted spaces” may not be worthy of more than a passing glance. The film is thus organized around spatial landmarks, with each space (the Braddock library, the Braddock high school, and the former Buba farm complex) activating his subjects, enabling them to perceive Braddock, for themselves and the audience, anew.

As I wish to make clear in this section, this film (like Buba’s *To My Family*) is especially concerned with geopsychic space. In *Steeltown*, Buba asks his subjects to give him tours of formerly significant spaces of industrial production, or civic spaces that have become ruins (such as the library). This choice to hand over the film, figuratively speaking, to the Braddock-resident-cum-tour-guide, causes the Braddock citizen very quickly to alternate from the empirical description of the site, to a more memory-driven and imaginative conception of what the space means to them personally. The spatial tours with residents inaugurate an “imaginative geography”, to borrow Edward Said’s term, where mental spaces of memory and material spaces of history collide. In turn, the viewer shuttles back and forth from the speaker’s imagination and the physical environment that surrounds him/her. This method, of course, is one we first witnessed in Buba’s *To My Family*, where Buba’s conversation with his mother in his Braddock home is momentarily, but powerfully, interrupted by his point-of-view involuntary recollection of his grandfather’s repair shop. *Voices of a Steeltown* brings us full circle: instead of an interior journey into one’s own mind (formally constituted as a montage), Buba here evolves that conceit by broadening his canvas. He provides a series of itineraries with a diverse cast of Braddock residents, whose testimonials bring the space to life. In effect, while they tour the city, they also tour the psychology of their own minds; likewise, while they contrast how the facilities were used historically versus

their current non-use, they perform a critique of urban geography under the conditions of neoliberal life. This is Buba as both self-portraitist and psychogeographer of a steeltown's unconscious.

As if to thematize urban space as a site of struggle over memory and history, the film opens with an archival photograph, "Welcome to Braddock: Valley's Greatest Shopping Center." Through a time-lapse effect, the sign gradually fades into nothingness, like a footprint in the sand being blown by the wind or washed away by water. A montage organizes the rest of the opening sequence: 1) a long, panoramic shot pans the Edgar Thomson Steel Works in Braddock, with movie title/director credits; 2) a mid-shot from inside a person's home (presumably Buba's own), shows a living room decorated with Christmas cards; and 3) Buba gives observational footage of the streetscapes of Braddock.

In this opening segment, the film shows it is not only concerned with dynamics of real space (private and public), but is reflexive toward the media representations of space/place that give a simplified and sensationalistic vision of Braddock. Inside the living room, a TV broadcasts news imagery of Braddock's decline, while a reporter announces the closure of US steel Edgar Thompson Works: "It will suspend all operations indefinitely except for basic maintenance...Today's 1000 layoffs could be devastating for the borough." An impression of reflexivity manifests in the portrayal of a generic viewer watching TV images of steel's decline, and in the time-lapse effect of the archival photograph where, first, Braddock figures as a shopping center, a symbol of consumerist prosperity; then, by the second and third shots, an emblem of stasis and decline. In the flickering TV, the shopping center seems a distant reality indeed.

From there, Buba offers views of Braddock from a decidedly "insider" or indigenous standpoint. Multiple long shots of houses crammed together on a hill. A slow tilt shot shows the exterior façade of Braddock High School: a beer bottle on the steps; broken windows; and a rather

beautiful engraved title of the school. This image is particularly shocking because it performs a temporal reversal, from present-day degradation (emblemized by beer bottle and broken windows) to the former glory of the high school, a moment of nostalgic remembrance which gets revisited later in the film. Buba then shows us several demolished homes; a cratered roof that looks like a bomb dropped through it; the interior of a derelict home, framed by a doorway, draped in shadow and dramatic light; a crooked and unusable parking meter; and a window showing “Merry X-Mas” an ironic comment on the desolate scenery and a subtle node to the persistent religious overtones which pervade all his film portraits. Finally, the sequence ends with a long shot of the Edgar Thomson Works riverfront. The inoperative smoke stacks resemble ruined columns of an excavation site. As the camera zooms in on this image, we get no closer to it than where we started. Buba keeps the mill at a distance.

In the next segment, Buba introduces the voices that will constitute the main subject of the film. Notably, Buba seems to have chosen to interview either elderly people who lived in Braddock all their lives, or members of a younger generation who reflect on their parents who lived and worked in Braddock. In one telling image, he shows the children of an elderly woman as they listen to her memories about the town. We then hear Buba’s own voice through voice-over narration, set against a montage of archival, family-album photographs of immigrant residents:

I [Tony Buba] was born and raised in Braddock, and I still live here. I spent a lot of my younger days standing on the street corner. I started making films here about ten years ago after I finished graduate school. My parents still live here. My father worked at the Edgar Thomson Mill before he retired. My mother worked at the Braddock hospital. My father was born in this country, but my mother was born in Italy. Most of the immigrants came here at the turn of the century, they were mostly

east Europeans – Polaks [sic], Slovaks, Italians, Croatians. They all came here to work in the mill. Andrew Carnegie didn't have any great love for these immigrants, he just thought they were hard workers and basically a docile group of people. He didn't want any labor problems in his mill. However, not all the immigrants went to work in the mill. Some, like my grandfather, were farmers.

This historical context is interwoven with Buba's own self-presentation in the form of a photograph, where he is pictured as a young Italian American boy, nonchalantly relaxing on the street corner. He speaks in the soft, gentle tone of a son speaking to his parents. His language is simple and uncomplicated, almost child-like. Indeed, as Judson writes, every portrait film by Buba is in a sense always a self-portrait, so intertwined is his identity with the group that he depicts.²⁷⁰ The film, even when it presents historical information, still feels like an odd species of home movie. The discussion of the influx of migrant workers proceeds rather briskly, becoming the slim backdrop for the remainder of the documentary, which takes the form of present-day spatial tours taken through once-significant places where the descendants of various communities lived. In characteristic fashion, Buba pivots away from the militancy of the labor struggles which dominate many of the media narratives of Braddock at the time. His only allusion to political strife is that Andrew Carnegie made use of the immigrants as workers and suppressed any attempts at resistance. His main concern is not the labor narrative within this history, but how aspects of Braddock's history are remembered today.

Three spaces in particular dominate: the parking lot where Buba's grandparents once owned and operated a farm; the Braddock high school; and the Braddock Community Library.

²⁷⁰ Judson, Program notes, "Tony Buba in person," *Identities & Obsessions: Department of Film and Video*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Thursday March 12 1998, 1.

Except in the case of the parking lot, Buba takes us to civic communal spaces (an intriguing choice given the predominance of the derelict mill, in news coverage). The shooting style for these segments is different from the rest of the film, which is otherwise rather straightforward as a documentary work (talking heads, archival footage, photographic inserts, voice-over narration). Consider the parking lot scene: using handheld cameras, Buba and his crew follow two older men, unidentified, walking about in a partially filled parking lot. The older men point past the cars to the distant green hills, describing what this space used to be. It is a sunny, mid-afternoon day, possibly fall or spring. The camera moves back and forth, swaying with the movements of the older men, who walk forward and back, turning around, spinning gently, as they recall the memories of the rolling farmland which used to occupy the now flat parking lot.

From one of the men, the audience learns that this site used to be a farming complex, and the only vehicle (in contrast to the situation now) was a truck purchased in 1947. The men discuss, half-joking, that the Bubas (the director's ancestors) were womanizers who used to pick up and seduce local Braddock women and take their friends out to social dance. They gesture to an empty lot: "We used to live along the side over here." Buba lets this emptiness alone: he does not investigate this space further, nor does he give a recreation of what the home may have looked like. We remain connected with the present-day recollections of the older men, how they served in the military and worked in the mill. One man says, "all you worried about in those days is how to get a job, to find work; it's almost like it is today." Amid the joking, the wandering, and the anecdotes about driving a truck around town, the men's commentary jolts the viewer into awareness around the disappearance of work. The man's observation conflates past and present, through a mention of economic precariousness. In a kind of temporal shock, the desperation of the past returns to Braddock. The emptiness of the parking lot, which bears no traces of the vibrant

farming community that once sat on the land, forms a visual rhyme with the scarcity of jobs, the desertification of Braddock. The spatial flatness works as a subtle reminder of the workers and families that continue to contract out of the town. As tour guides, the two men tell us rather little about the town's socioeconomic structure, or other kinds of historical data. We are not given their names, even less about the parking lot, the surrounding business, what it is used for. But, through their language and bodily comportment, through their nervous laughter and references to the work crisis of yesteryear, they allow us a glimpse into their past, and, briefly, they enable a serendipitous moment of continuity between generations of Buba to congeal together.

We are taken to Braddock High School, in which a group of black youths wander through the tall grass around the back of the former school, which has been sealed and condemned for only two years, but which now seems like a place haunted by ghosts. Before thrusting us into the darkened building, Buba gives the audience a montage of historic news clippings celebrating the accomplishments of Braddock football and other sports teams. As if nodding to his previous work, *To My Family*, which presented his grandfather's repair store through idealized advertising images before showing the space derelict and ready for demolition, here Buba similarly uses a before/after editing technique. He shows how the school was remembered (given a rose-tinted glow through newspaper headlines and joyous sports commentary from decades past) then shows, in real time, how it functions today, materially, as an abandoned space.

After wandering over tall grass, a group of five or six children lead the film crew to an opening in the fence where they enter and access the building through the side on the upper floor. The cameraman enters a darkened doorway. In the next shot, we see the children laughing and standing about in an empty hallway. Only sunlight illuminates the children; behind them, the building remains too dark to see, illegible. According to one child: "It [the high school] was so

nice, but everybody messed it up now. 1981, it was all nice; 1982, look at it. It's all messed up.” The camera then follows a diminutive boy in a baseball cap. The camera takes in views of empty classrooms, torn-up wallpaper, broken windows, and a desolate scene of a classroom with its windows smashed in and a single chair and desk isolated in the center. On the soundtrack, we hear polka music - a sonic counterpoint to the grim imagery (and a nod to the East European immigrants who settled there). Buba shows another news clipping of the historic sports teams, then zooms out to show the entrance of Braddock High School. Its regal faceplate and neoclassical archway contrasts sharply with the rows of broken windows that face the streets outside.

The window, again, serves as a symbolic device for Buba. Where, in *To My Family*, the closed window overlooking his mother's backyard provided an occasion for an involuntary memory, coupled with a Catholic sense of guilt and familial alienation, in *Voices From a Steeltown* the image of a broken window does not trigger any sentimental attachment to the past. The African American youths have a very different sense of time – recall the child saying, in 1981 it was nice; only a year later it winds up a trash heap. Buba invokes the Eastern European immigrants alongside the younger generation of African American youths (some of whose parents worked in the steel mills), showing how the school, today, fails to carry forward a sense of futurity and pride in the town. It exists now as a cross-roads where two temporalities, two generations of residents, co-exist but do not ever meet. The present-day youths repurpose the space as a melancholic playground, their laughter and play belie the unending series of empty rooms, giving way to a sense of detachment, of self-loss; and the previous generation's nostalgic time of scholastic achievement, proud athleticism and self-congratulation, along with the implied economic benefits and middle-class stability that attended one's matriculation through schooling. Buba's informal tour through Braddock High School reveals how the bruised architecture – self-enclosed, empty, and only

accessible through a hidden entryway -- now operates as a fragment of the American Dream, a place for looking backwards to the past: "How nice things were in 1981," but not anymore, not now when things are "messed up." For the youths of Braddock, the school is an opaque relic of a past glory inaccessible to them; for the older residents, who stay outside and dare not venture in, it is a painful reminder of their forsaken status in the global economy. This time, when Buba's camera looks outside a window, it only shows more broken windows.

The final tour, in the Carnegie Free Library of Braddock, has the former head librarian lead us through the darkened and now-abandoned structure. In a long take, the camera shows the older man veering back and forth through the library stacks. As with the high school, the filmic images are very dark, with little sunlight, and electricity evidently cut off. The librarian, turned away from us, bleeds in and out of the shadowy space; the loss of figure/ground gives the vertiginous sensation that the space may be haunted, even dangerous. The librarian, in describing the library's biography ("Funds for the library were allocated in 1881 by Andrew Carnegie, the building was founded about 1889..."), cannot help but relate the ways in which his own life was intertwined in the building:

When I was 6 years old, perhaps, I would use the children's reading room downstairs. I remember that day very well, like it was just yesterday, I learned to swim here, in the swimming pool, when I was a youngster. I used the gym upstairs. I used the adult library. I attended many affairs at the music hall throughout the years. In 1962, I became librarian here until 1974 when the building closed. I always had the hope that the building could be reopened. There were many negative reactions to that - they wanted to tear it down... What will they do with that?

The librarian's testimony reveals what is at stake in the disused library, even as it elides the historical exclusions of Carnegie Free Library of Braddock with respect to certain community members. Not only serving an anchor for the town, it is a signifier of Braddock's historically conflicted identity with its benefactor, the steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie. Indeed, an entire life span could be sustained by the multiple activities one could do there, including bathing, swimming, exercise, musical entertainment, besides the more obvious ones. The library once existed as a veritable universe of possibility for some, but not all, of the citizens. The librarian fails to disclose that African Americans were not permitted in the Library. Instead, he presents a vision of the Library as a benefactor for white ethnic groups in Braddock.

Nevertheless, the librarian powerfully testifies to the library as a space of memory. In this he recalls the words that Umberto Eco used to describe memory itself as a library, and that God (if one exists) must take the form of a grand library of libraries.²⁷¹ Buba reinforces this grandiose vision of what a library could be, prior to deindustrialization: the film presents a series of photographic inserts of the space, adding visual illustration to the librarian's mournful words. The loss of the library would be tantamount to the loss of Braddock's history and communal identity. In the librarian's case, he personalizes this question on the scale of a single human life: To lose the library would be to lose part of his life, his livelihood.

Buba's meta-portrait film, by the end, does not offer any consciousness-raising resolution, nor does Buba explicitly politicize issues of labor struggle. Nevertheless, a political dimension to the project emerges. He allows the film audience to be taken on a tour by diverse residents of Braddock. He alternates from black youths, to elderly individuals, to people who worked at the

²⁷¹ Umberto Eco, *Vegetal and Mineral Memory: The Future of Books* (Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2005): 2.

facilities that now lie in a state of disarray. And, he does this to generate a dynamic, dialectical relationship with time itself, an oscillation between an evidently “dead” or wasted space and an encounter with people or objects in that space who retain the power to render it anew, if only imaginatively. In the above section, I have tried to show that this memory-making process is at the heart of his political activity around Braddock.

3.5 “BRADDOCK COMES TO THE WORLD”

Buba’s film portraits, in content and form, were shaped by a sense of nostalgia and familiarity that were sustained by the independent media circuit of which he was a part. Through his professional connections and his collaborative production team, he was able to expand the film’s familial visual style (as home movies) into the actual space in which the films were viewed. For a number of his portraits, he produced and circulated specialized promotional materials which interpellated the spectator as a participant-observer of his Italian American family. The film promotion materials added a sense of intimacy and meaning. Buba humanized the perception of Braddock beyond sensationalistic newspaper headlines, and challenged a media landscape full of depersonalized images of dying steel towns. Buba’s local film screenings, which often included in person appearances by Buba himself, further amplified the atmosphere of intimacy and recollection, the humor and pathos, which characterized his character-driven approach to film form. With few exceptions, he rejected overt political statements, as pursued by other leftist filmmakers. He found it more effective to create dense, shifting relationships with people and landmarks of the place he called home. His portrait films drew upon the photographic medium’s potential as a memorializing technology, its implicit association to “what has been.” This mattered,

in the face of Braddock's ongoing economic hardship, and in terms of giving non-Braddock residents an opportunity to envision life in this town with him.

Buba in recent decades has become something of a local hero. Today, he continues to be interviewed regularly as a reliable source whenever the news media wishes to take the pulse of Braddock's health. As a filmmaker, we might consider his project as performing a reversal of Braddock's former slogan: "The World Comes to Braddock"; in Buba's filmography, "Braddock Comes to the World." His intertextual and home-made film portraits, whether shown in omnibus format or singly, operated as postcards that circulated a piece of Braddock history around the world. Some of the most interesting features of Buba's films – especially their desire to break down the barrier between viewer and documented subject – were occasionally sidelined by the metropolitan film intelligentsia as "regional" filmmaking. The label, regional filmmaker, dogged Buba like an Albatross around his neck. This paradoxical situation, in which Braddock figured as both a blockage and springboard for Buba's film career, received cinematic treatment in several films he made after his film portrait series of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly his well known *Lightening Over Braddock: A Rustbowl Fantasy*, 1988.

Nevertheless, Buba's investigative/sentimental relation to "geopsyche" space, his camera's searching approach to the optical unconscious of his documentary subjects, and his child-like reverence to the places and people of Braddock's past, make him a prominent figure in Pittsburgh film history. Buba, more so than New Documentarians like Michael Moore, made possible a form of filmmaking that was both memorializing and politicizing. His film portraits, operating together in an intertextual web, function as a kind of cognitive mapping of deindustrial America, a form of history-making from below.

The next chapter considers how portraiture can function as a potent visual archive of how men and women differently view the female nude. In 1971, Sharon Green, a young and talented filmmaker, produced a short work called *Self Portrait of a Nude Model Turned Cinematographer*. In part one of the film, Green displays nude photos of herself created by Robert Haller, one of the administrators and executive directors of Pittsburgh Filmmakers during the 1970s. Part two contrasts the highly sexualized imagery of her body produced within Haller's photo camera, through a counter-image of Green as "image and image maker," to borrow Carolee Schneemann's words. Green's mobile camera depicts her body in motion and, through numerous subjective shots, displays a dissonant, first-person awareness of how differently her body appears to herself and others. I show the ties between Green's radical self-portraiture and similar work by pioneering women filmmakers, such as Carolee Schneemann and Yvonne Rainer. I argue that Green's erotic self-portrait lies at an unformed intersection between the Women's Movement, cinefeminism, and DIY independent filmmaking. Recovering her story leads us to a more nuanced view of gender oppression within the local film scene.

4.0 REINVENTING THE FEMALE NUDE: SHARON GREEN'S *SELF PORTRAIT OF A NUDE MODEL TURNED CINEMATOGRAPHER* (1971)

In 1971, a nineteen-year-old University of Pittsburgh freshman student Sharon Ruppert Green (b. 1952--) made a four-minute, black-and-white silent film entitled *Self Portrait of a Nude Model Turned Cinematographer*. In a fit of anxiety and stress, she completed the film (both the editing and recording) in a single evening before the assignment was due for a production class at the university. The resulting film is deceptively simple and straightforward. The first part consists of photographs that Robert Haller, the executive director of Pittsburgh Filmmakers,²⁷² took of her; and the second half consists of original, moving images created of and by Green herself. In the second section, Green operates a hand-held 16mm, black-and-white camera and produces mobile shots of her body both in full view and focused on different body parts – breast, vagina, nipple, eyes, hair, hands, and so forth. Shortly after making the film, Green dropped out of school and left Pittsburgh.²⁷³ She spent time living in Colorado, then Texas, until finally settling down in Washington. By 1972 she left the film world and started training as a modern dancer and a photographer. Years later, she pursued and received a MS in Social Work; today, she is a practicing Lacanian psychoanalyst based in Seattle, Washington.

Her short film, all but forgotten and unseen until Haller received funding to preserve the work at Anthology Film Archives in 2005, initially appears as a mere footnote to the artistic ferment of Pittsburgh's film scene. Green, unlike the other artists, produced no large body of work,

²⁷² Haller served as Executive Director of Pittsburgh Filmmakers Inc., 1973-1980.

²⁷³ Personal interview with Sharon Green, Pittsburgh, August 6, 2016.

and is thus easily overlooked in conventional historical accounts. In fact, I myself nearly overlooked including Green in my historiography of Pittsburgh filmmaking were it not for encountering two texts: Haller's short chapter on Green in his 2005 book on Pittsburgh film²⁷⁴, and Green's own 2010 essay on making her film, titled "Embodied female experience through the lens of imagination."²⁷⁵ These texts promptly sent me to the Anthology Film Archives in New York, where I watched the film four times, utterly entranced by it. These texts and the film itself piqued my interest in what Green described as the challenge of art-making in a historical period "in which all spectators were assumed to be adult men, all pronouns masculine, where the God of my family and church could only be imagined to be a masculine entity, and where 'the' masculine was conflated with activity and subjectivity, and 'the' feminine with passivity and objectivity."²⁷⁶

Green suggested, in other words, that her film and artistic career reflected a struggle against the masculine bias she experienced in the local scene and society at large. Though she was a figure model for several important artists and photographers at the time she lived in Pittsburgh, she found herself almost permanently stuck in the role of model; she did not receive encouragement to pursue her artistry.²⁷⁷ When she did finally receive some recognition for her 1971 film, she suspects it owed not to her talent but to her affiliation with Stan Brakhage and Robert Haller. As she later confessed to me in an interview: "I worry that I am only considered a filmmaker - and am included in Haller's book - because of the photos he took of me."²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Haller, "Sharon Ruppert, Dancer/Film-Maker," in *Cross-Roads: Avant-Garde Film in Pittsburgh in the 1970s*, New York: Anthology Film Archives (2005): 20-22.

²⁷⁵ Sharon Green, "Embodied female experience through the lens of imagination," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 55 (2010): 339-360.

²⁷⁶ Green, 345.

²⁷⁷ Green, 346.

²⁷⁸ Personal interview with Sharon Green, Pittsburgh, August 6, 2016.

Upon reading the highly nuanced reflection she wrote in 2010, I noticed certain striking differences between Haller and Green's accounts of the same events during that period. Haller had emphasized an impression of social harmony, of near-constant formal innovation. He organized his narrative from the viewpoint of Great Men of History. When he touched on the circumstances under which Green became a nude model for local and visiting artists, he said she enjoyed the process. However, in this telling, he failed to consider the power dynamic existing between sitter and artist involved in these photographic sessions.²⁷⁹ In the process he failed to ask the larger question of how women's experience of filmmaking and art-making might be different from men's.

In stark contrast, Green's sensitivity to issues of power and gender oppression in her telling opened my eyes to a whole set of questions, questions that dramatically raised the stakes of film historiography: Why, in accounts of Pittsburgh film and of avant-garde film more generally, does one find so few women film artists? Does the paucity of literature about women's contributions occur because women were not interested in filmmaking? Were they simply less talented, less committed, less serious? What sorts of obstacles existed for women and how were these obstacles different than those faced by men? On a more reflexive level, how can I myself avoid reinscribing silences and omissions in telling this history? Thinking about all these issues, my investigation into Green's film eventually became organized by the following research question: in what ways did women operating in Pittsburgh contribute to a nascent form of feminist film theory and praxis?

²⁷⁹ In Haller's account, Green "liked the experience of being filmed and as a dancer was not uncomfortable nude." He also writes, speaking of Green's participation in Brakhage's films in 1971-72, that "When Brakhage asked her to take her clothes off, she had never done this for a camera – but did so 'out of love for film and her admiration for Brakhage,'" *Cross-Roads*, 21. This oversimplifies and distorts Green's lived experience, and Green herself directly contradicts it in her interviews with me. Her 1971 film and 2010 essay both testify to her desire and desperation to be recognized beyond a photographer's model. She felt difficulty expressing this desire in a community where she had been pigeonholed as a female muse.

Or, to put it another way: What can a single short film tell us about women's experimental filmmaking at a pivotal moment in the American avant-garde movement?

In this respect I have decided to position the film as a powerful and jarring reclamation of the tools of visual observation from a formerly male perspective to a female one. In this frame of mind, we join an insightful critic who once dubbed the film as a work of "degree-zero cinefeminism."²⁸⁰ Cinefeminism is an apt descriptor for Green's film and the contested reception around the film. Drawing on B. Ruby Rich's reflections on the term, it designates a form of women's filmmaking that is a form of theorizing in its own right.²⁸¹ Prefiguring major works of feminist film theory in the mid-1970s, Green's film operates as a work of cinefeminism not only by issuing a conceptual challenge to imagery of women, but also by foregrounding women's strategies in making film. It centers on that most powerful topic of feminist poetics: point of view. Through the lens of autobiography, it tells a larger story of how women were visually objectified and, subsequently, how they contested this one-way objectification by making images of themselves, for themselves. Green's work is therefore a critical landmark for both the Women's Movement and the feminist awakening within film theory occurring in the early 1970s.

In this chapter, I aim to clarify not only the aesthetic significance of her piece through visual analysis, but also consider how it operates as a work of historical critique. To do this I show, first, that the film is an important proto-feminist contribution. It is a contribution in three ways: the radically decentering visual style that it puts forth, the multiplicity of looks – male and female

²⁸⁰ Ed Halter, "Film: Crossroads: avant-garde film in Pittsburgh in the 1970s," *The Village Voice*, April 5 2005.

²⁸¹ Rich explains cinefeminism, in discussing the rise of women-centric women's films before feminism: "the initial cross-fertilization between the women's movement and the cinema...took place in the area of practice rather than in written criticism. The films came first. In fact, we find two different currents feeding into film work: one made up of women who were feminists and thereby led to film, the other made up of women already working in film and led therefrom into feminism." *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1998/2012: 65.

– it presents, and the questions around the politics of visual images that it unleashes. In focusing on these aesthetic traits, I show how it is a work that prefigured the academic interest in critiquing and negating the “male gaze.”²⁸²

Second, rather than simply analyze the work from the viewpoint of her lived experience, I wish to complement and build upon Green’s own analysis by embedding the film in the longer trajectory of debates around feminist experimental modes of filmmaking. I reclaim her film as evidence of a growing tendency in the 1970s that combined tendencies of the Women’s Movement as well as radical film aesthetics. She manifests an enduring tradition in women’s experimental filmmaking, extending from Maya Deren to Abigail Child, that sees film both as a “means of self-exploration” and an investigation into points of view.²⁸³ I compare her film to pioneering feminist work by more proximate practitioners, Carolee Schneemann and Yvonne Rainer.

In particular, I claim that the 1971 film opens up important questions around spectatorship. Green does this by forcing viewers (men and women) to identify with her own self-image and subjective point of view, which stands in for women’s more general existential struggle for self-actualization and self-definition under a patriarchal system. To make this argument, I utilize the

²⁸² The British film theorist and radical filmmaker Laura Mulvey is credited with drawing attention to the male gaze as a three-part system of looks within the cinema, whose aim is to produce images of femininity as a source of visual pleasure for a presumably male spectator. Her ideas are laid out in the now-canonical essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989: 14-28. In 1978, Mulvey also advocated strongly for the creation of a women-centric cinema in the domain of avant-garde filmmaking in a companion essay titled “Film, Feminism, and the Avant-Garde,” in *Visual and Other Pleasures*. The legacy of her writings on gender and cinema have been treated extensively in several retrospective essays, including Mandy Merck, “Mulvey’s Manifesto,” *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, vol. 22, no. 66, 2007: 1-23. A recent dossier of *Screen* journal was devoted to reexamining the validity and influence of Mulvey’s ideas. See Isaac Julien, “Visual Pleasure at 40’ Dossier,” *Screen*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2015, pp. 475-477.

²⁸³ As critics have argued, Deren transformed the “first person” approach to film art (nothing new) by having her films shift “among multiple points of view, becoming increasingly complex and disorienting,” a tactic which became a defining characteristic of women’s filmmaking during the latter part of the 20th century. Green fits squarely within this lineage. See VeVe A. Clark, Millicent Hodson, Catrina Neiman, *The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Work, Volume 1 Part Two*, 98.

theoretical methods of Mary Anne Doane, Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey, and others. I make the claim that the viewer identifies with Green's first-person camera in "primary identification." In this way, the film creates a condition of "ontological shock" by oscillating between a conception of woman as object and as subject, so that the viewer comes to occupy the fragmented, first-person consciousness of Green. We witness the consciousness of a nineteen-year-old woman who is coming-of-age artistically while reckoning with different ways of visualizing her body, and probing the implications of nudity, the feminine, and the gendered identity of the beholder.

In turning to 1970s feminist debates for a critical vocabulary to make sense of the film, I join a growing group of scholars who argue that the vital work of this era can and should be rehabilitated for contemporary criticism. I am particularly interested in the recent work by Clare Johnson which has tried to recover some of the enduring questions of 1970s-era feminist film theory for art history while also acknowledging its theoretical shortcomings.²⁸⁴ Following Gilles Deleuze, Johnson calls upon us to recognize femininity as a continual process of "becoming." Femininity-as-becoming is a conception strongly asserted by Green's film. Green herself does not posit a new and fixed idealized image of femininity, free from men's influence; instead, she presents femininity as constantly changing, something (re)defining itself in response to different arenas and contexts.

Further, a long-time debate in feminist media discourse has been the relationship between visual pleasure and critical politics, wherein the appearance of pleasure in film (the sexualization

²⁸⁴ Echoing many others before her, Johnson criticizes second-wave feminist film theory on several grounds: the critical emphasis on negation and displeasure, rendering it difficult for women to imagine themselves at all in a representational medium like film or visual art; the teleological project of a total transformation of society, through feminist critiques of gender representation, has generated accusations of failure and naïve modernist utopianism; and the exclusive focus on deconstructing images of gender fails to consider how artists can work productively, positively within patriarchal culture to "re-orientate femininity from within its symbolic infrastructure." See Johnson, *Femininity, Time, and Feminist Art*, England: Palgrave MacMillan (2013): 3.

of the female body, for instance) is taken to be something imposed by a male imaginary. Following Johnson and more recent commentators, I reject that position because it precludes consideration of how sexualized pleasure is a legitimate component of women's subjectivity, and how a sexualized form of femininity may be productive both of and in itself. I agree with a growing group of feminist scholars who believe it is important not to disparage or disengage from the pleasures and displeasures of sexualized femininity.²⁸⁵ Green's film, along these lines, has a remarkably contemporary feel. While highly critical of how men treat women as objects in a fantasy of power and control (prefiguring the thinking of Mulvey and Doane), it is also appreciative of the fact that to be displayed and looked upon by the spectator is pleasurable, empowering, and perhaps worthy of defending. In this way, Green's film resists a necessary division between pleasure and politics that obtained in British and U.S. feminist art practice and film criticism in the 1970s and mid-1980s.

Ultimately, I argue that Green's film functions as a "dialectical image" in the sense meant by Walter Benjamin: an artwork that embodies in its very structure and posthistory of reception, the painful and revelatory coexistence of the past and the present.²⁸⁶ As Benjamin writes of the

²⁸⁵ Alison Butler summarizes several arguments that emerged in the 1990s against the uncritical promotion of "negative aesthetics," stating that a blanket rejection of visual pleasure risks "indefinitely postponing the production of meaning which is essential to political art," while pointing out that it is paradoxical to require female spectators "to renounce visual pleasures already denied to them." See Butler, *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen*, London: Wallflower (2005): 8.

²⁸⁶ Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image has been treated by many critics and historians. One of the most useful analyses of his work is provided by Michael Jennings, who writes, "The image into which the past and the present moment flash as a constellation, thereby coming to legibility, is an image formed from the perception of the 'non sensuous similarity' that links one name with another. Dialectical images are burst of recognition which, in revealing knowledge of a better world and a better time, may precipitate revolution," 119. Jennings identifies several constitutive components of the dialectical image: 1) a series of images torn from their 'natural' context and reintegrated in the form of a montage or constellation; 2) within and amongst these images, "isolated and obvious features from the realm of the base" are placed in an "unmediated and even causal relationship with corresponding features of the superstructure;" and 3) the effect of the whole is not a mediation but a collision between various elements, a collision that aims to activate our sense for the individual elements in their particularity. See Jennings, *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

dialectical image, “The past does not throw its light onto the present, nor does the present illuminate the past, but an image is formed when that which has been and the Now come together in a flash as a constellation. In other words, image is dialectic at a standstill. For while the relationship of the present to the past is a purely temporal one, the relationship of that which has been to the Now is a dialectical one: the relationship is not a temporal one, but rather has the character of an image. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical.”²⁸⁷ Green’s film functions dialectically along these lines. It has a dual structure that articulates a collision between found/original images. Its presentation of femininity does not resolve into a synthesis, but only conveys “dialectic at a standstill.” That is, we see femininity at a crossroads, envisioned between a masculinist tradition and an emergent feminist break with the past.

Her film is a Benjaminian “constellation” of two different representational systems, two gendered ways of seeing and apprehending femininity in the cinematic medium, at a pivotal moment when revolutionary change was about to spark the historical discourses of film. It is “genuinely historical” in Benjamin’s sense of the term: the film is a historical investigation into how femininity has been coded within avant-garde art. On another level it exists as a documentation of a single artist’s attempt to reckon with that past, sincerely and frankly, thereby fulfilling B. Ruby Rich’s guidelines for the fusion of style and politics in feminist filmmaking.²⁸⁸ In its visual roughness and in its radical use of montage, found imagery, and techniques of stoppage, stillness, motion and doubling, the film allegorizes the struggle of women artists to

²⁸⁷ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999: 462-463 [N 3, I].

²⁸⁸ As Rich writes, “Feminism has always emphasized process; now it’s time that [the] process of production and reception be inscribed within the critical text. How was the film made? With what intention? With what kind of crew? With what relationship to the subject? How was it produced? Who is distributing it? Where is it being shown? For what audience is it constructed? How is it available? How is it being received? ... Formal devices are progressive only if they are employed with a goal beyond aesthetics alone.” Rich, 81.

achieve recognition and autonomy in the male-dominated art world. And, as I show in the object's afterlife of reception, its subsequent mishandling by male critics and filmmakers-- its misrepresentation as a work of homage rather than a pioneering work of sociocultural critique-- is indicative of how the forces of patriarchy continue to hamper women's access to technology, access to symbolic resources, and obscure their placement in the history of art.

4.1 SHARON GREEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE PITTSBURGH FILM SCENE

The films of Stan Brakhage first piqued Green's interest in avant-garde film. His films were visually chaotic, shot out of focus, featuring "hypnagogic" camera work that was restless, zooming in and out, cutting hundreds of times within several moments.²⁸⁹ They were also *silent* films. Her father was a deaf, blue-collar patriarch; she had grown up in a conservative family with no concern for the arts; she was expelled from high school in an incident concerning marijuana.²⁹⁰ In the dense, personal tumult she experienced while in her first year at Pitt, she cited the silence of Brakhage's films as provoking in her an insightful reflection about distance she had felt to her father. She was also drawn to the visceral presentation of the human body in Brakhage's films. As Green described her reaction to seeing *Window Water Baby Moving*, 1959, "it brought everything about film and bodies and filmmaking into question — i.e. what could be thought about (and seen) and what couldn't be thought about (or seen) in social discourse. The film showed a baby being

²⁸⁹ As Annette Michelson notes, in Brakhage's hypnagogic work images "come to us in a half-waking state...Brakhage's films present a nonstop renewal of the perceptual object that resists both observation and cognition. The hypnagogic, as Sartre had noted, can excite attention and perception: 'one sees something, but what one sees is nothing.'" See Michelson, "*Andy Warhol: The October Files*," Eds Benjamin Buchloh, Andy Warhol, Annette Michelson, MIT Press (2001): 106

²⁹⁰ Personal interview with Sharon Green, Pittsburgh, Jun 28, 2016.

born, Stan's penis, other images that now seem ordinary — but not then.”²⁹¹ These fragmented, silent images of bodies, which she described as “non-Hollywood coded,” attracted her, though I do not know if they alone (or in addition to other films) were “influences” that drew her into filmmaking. Apart from this brush with Brakhage's work, she had little to no background in film or art history.

She became Brakhage's nude model by means of a misunderstanding. They met when he visited the Pittsburgh Filmmakers Inc. at the Selma Burke Art Center, on September 13, 1971, where he attended an organizational meeting. Previously, Green had seen his films at an informal showing at the Hillman Library along with a television interview he gave where he showed and discussed *Mothlight*, 1963.²⁹² She also attended his presentations at Carnegie Museum earlier that month, which included *Dog Star Man*, 1961-63, and *Deus Ex*, 1971. During this fateful encounter at the Pittsburgh Filmmakers, she overheard Brakhage lamenting that the person who had offered to help him on a film had not shown up. As Green said to me in an interview, “That's when I volunteered (thinking it would be ‘technical’) and ended up being the model for *Sexual Meditation: Room With a View*.”²⁹³ In her time spent in Pittsburgh, she appeared in *Sexual Meditations--Room with a View*, 1971, and *Office Suite*, 1972, works by Brakhage; and was photographed by Bruce Baillie (the images were destroyed in an accident while being developed).²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Haller writes of Baillie: “Baillie...a film-maker who was often in Pittsburgh in the early 1970s ... also recognized the extraordinary impact of her image, seeing in her the ‘swan neck’ grace of a Modigliani painting. Baillie made still photos of her, but they were accidentally destroyed as they were being developed.” *Cross-roads*, 22. There is some speculation by Haller that Green appeared anonymously in another film by Brakhage (one in the *Romans* series). There was also a film that Green made for a class by Kenneth Love (a Pitt student documentary filmmaker) that starred Greg Gans. At one time he, Green, and Kenneth each had a copy — but she believes it is now lost.

Though she does not say as much, this “misunderstanding” around the proper roles of men and women in the experimental film production context is rather typical of a male viewpoint, pervasive at the time, that saw women principally as muses in the creative process.²⁹⁵ In experimental films up until the 1970s, women tended to figure as physical objects to be displayed and altered, like raw material, through cinematic technique. The figure of woman, in the experimental as well as dominant cinema, became a floating signifier, in the words of Claire Johnston,²⁹⁶ and a convenient pretext for any number of experimental-formalist preoccupations. As B. Ruby Rich observed in her account of the budding feminism in the avant-garde film world in the 1970s, for the young male all one needed was a camera and a half-naked girlfriend, and one was already halfway there to becoming a filmmaker.²⁹⁷ Though this is partly playful exaggeration, it is also confirmed by numerous accounts provided by women through the period.²⁹⁸

The persistent binary of male artist, female muse is confirmed in Green’s own participation with male filmmakers in the Pittsburgh film scene. Her first appearance on screen was not the Brakhage pieces but in a film by local filmmaker and University of Pittsburgh student, Greg Gans. Though very young, Gans became a significant figure in the local scene for creating film poetry “of everyday life,” and working at both Pittsburgh Filmmakers and a local film-processing lab.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ As Robin Blaetz observes, despite many women being exposed to experimental film and making it in the art world and in colleges and universities in the 1960s and 1970s, “the field of avant-garde cinema was institutionalized as a thoroughly masculine one called the American avant-garde...With some major exceptions, the women’s work was more or less plugged into a structure built around the notion of the romantic artist, and women’s films seemed to be peripheral to a tradition that had been defined as male.” Blaetz, *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007: 2-3, 7.

²⁹⁶ Clare Johnston, “Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema,” *Notes on Women’s Cinema*, ed. Johnston, London Society for Education in Film and Television (1973): 32-33.

²⁹⁷ Rich, 104.

²⁹⁸ For a far-from-representative sampling, one notices references to the pervasive stereotyping of male-artist/female-muse arise in Rich, 8-9; Mitchell Rosenbaum, “Interview with Yvonne Rainer,” *Persistence of Vision* no. 6 (Summer 1988): 101-108; and Carolee Schneemann, *Carolee Schneemann - Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 2002: 26.

²⁹⁹ Gans was celebrated by Haller, Mekas, and others for being able to edit films in camera, and for his “innocent vision” which seemed derivative of Brakhage’s hypnagogic style, particularly in the films *Homecoming*, 1974; *The*

Titled *The Room*, the film was a rather effective Brakhage-esque 16mm short color film. Gans defined himself as a film poet, and was interested in merging the ideas of John Coltrane (vertical melody) and the conflictual model of editing proposed by Sergei Eisenstein. Gans believed that in film, one principally saw visual patterns, forms and shapes; in his filmic poetry, he oriented his creative activity toward expressing “something [that] cannot be said if you’re doing a narrative film with actors.”³⁰⁰

The Room, 1971, explored the formal properties of light, framing, filmic space and off-screen space. For visual material, the film utilized a bedroom in his parents’ home which had all its furniture removed, showing only bare wood floors and white walls.³⁰¹ Shot during a sunny day, mid-afternoon, and “running the film through his camera two times to double expose it,” the film is composed of several superimposed layers of shots: mobile and static shots, closeups and long shots, all showing different aspects of the room’s architecture. The purpose is not to examine the room, but to produce novel, surprising, and aesthetically pleasing visual effects of motion, transparency, flatness, volume, and so on. Gans achieves this by making sure the filmic image is not unified and static but constantly in flux. For instance, in some shots, the corners of the room intersect with shadow and sunlight; in other shots, shadow and light form sharp angles, straight lines and gauzy lenses that coalesce within the visual field. He allows pouring, sensuous sunlight

Room, 1971; and *A Song of Rosemary*, 1974. For a sampling of reviews on Gans’s films, see Mekas’ “Movie Journal,” *SoHo Weekly News* April 21, 1977; Linda Dackman “Independent Films From Eye Music,” *Artweek*, February 12, 1977, 12; “Pittsburgh Film-Maker’s Haller Leaves Legacy,” *Post-Gazette* December 18, 1979 23; and Bill Wisser, “Oakland Studio for Novice Moviemakers,” *The Pittsburgh Press* August 10, 1975, C4. Gans worked as a professional film editor-conformer at a film laboratory for two years in Pittsburgh. For more on Gans’ mode of film practice, career, and a complete filmography, see Haller, “Interview with Greg Gans,” *Field of Vision* No. 5 (Winter 1978-79): 7-17.

³⁰⁰ Gans quoted in “Interview with Greg Gans,” 9.

³⁰¹ Gans explains, “[T]his film [*The Room*] was made in camera. I just wanted to film in this bedroom I grew up in, at my parents’ place. I moved everything out of it, the furniture, the curtain rods, the carpet – and I slept on the bare, hardwood floor in my sleeping bag for a month – go get closer to the room, a better feeling of it. And come into closer touch with some of the dreams and memories that that space evoked [in anticipation of filming, planning to shoot there]” Gans quoted in “Interview with Greg Gans,” 9.

hit the camera directly. Thanks to the use of different film stocks throughout, images move at different speeds (some slowed down, others sped up) allowing the viewer to see each image as distinct in itself, while also generating a pleasurable feeling of drama and anxiety because it is difficult to register or isolate the visual forms moving all at once. All this creates a thickly collaged effect, as if thin laminations of images were piled on top of each other, moved around by an invisible, nervous hand. Most remarkably, the film is, by Gans' account, completely unedited, that is, the final product consists of all the raw footage he shot.³⁰²

Green is featured in the film as yet another object/modality of visual interest.³⁰³ Figuring as a nude model in her nubile youth, her presence adds a sense of erotic stimulation to what otherwise might have been a drily formalist exercise. Green is shown in piecemeal, forming another component of the thickly collaged visual field. Importantly, she is shown in fragmented parts; mainly, we see Green's bare side and breasts. In one shot, her body is placed at border of the frame, partially off-screen, creating a visual parallel to the partially shown walls and doorframe. The strong verticals of her body effectively produce a frame-within-a-frame, reinforcing Gans' interest in making a film in which cinematic properties like frame become the central subject.³⁰⁴ Elsewhere, we see her nude body standing beside a window with sunlight pouring in; in these shots, her head and face are not shown. At certain points her outstretched arm produces a shadow blocking light coming from the windows within the room. These images repeat

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Gans summarizes the process of shooting Green for the film:

In the room I set up the lights – all the way around. I had a young woman come in [Sharon Green], and had her stand in different places where I told her to stand, and I also, kind of, let her be open . . . spontaneously, to certain movements that she would make. At times I said she couldn't move, and at other times she could feel free to move as she wished. Then I filmed the room, with this woman in the room, with my younger brother turning different lights off and on, along with the sunlight which was filtering in- a mixture of tungsten and sunlight, which you are not supposed to do...And I multiple-exposed these images [over the ones I shot with the figure]." Gans quoted from "Interview," 9.

³⁰⁴ "Interview with Greg Gans," 10.

and recur until the film comes to a close: a curtain and window frame signal a temporal passage from daylight to nighttime, until total darkness empties out the image and the film comes to an end. In this way, her body is utilized as a visual detail within and as part of the architecture, with no attempt to image her in a way that would separate or isolate her from the space of the room.

The stereotypical treatment of woman-as-signifier, often in a sexualized way, began to change by the mid- and late 1970s. Rich notes that male artists were increasingly forced to acknowledge the artistic and social agency of women and felt pressure at the criticisms of male bias in the visual culture; correspondingly, their films changed, and women figured less often as a floating signifier, a visual aid to erotic stimulation.³⁰⁵ Nevertheless, I do wish to highlight in Gans' film the trope of the female figure as something spatialized, treated as landscape or passive visual form in the hands of the modernist-formalist male artist. For the repeated, objectified treatment of woman as abstract-yet-eroticized visual form is cited directly in her own film.

In her fragmentary and abstract figuration in Gans and Brakhage's films, Green unwittingly stands in for many other women who found themselves involved in experimental filmmaking at this rudimentary level, even when they may have wished (as Green did) to serve a more creative or technical role in the filmmaking process.³⁰⁶ The fragmentary construction and eroticized display of Green's body in this film is repeated in Brakhage's *Room with a View* series. Tellingly, Green says of her participation in these films that she sees herself as a kind of ghost, "an abstract female

³⁰⁵ Rich: "The early union between the New American Cinema and sexuality as a cinematic subject perfectly suited the mood of the culture." However, this ended with the start of the feminist movement and women fed up with the use of women's bodies "to sell everything from the antiwar movement to 'underground' movies." As Rich recalls, "The use of women in film became suspect, the exhibition of sexuality even more so. Most male filmmakers have felt the cultural pressure to eschew blatantly sexist behavior, which has rendered some changes in their subject matter." Rich, 111.

³⁰⁶ Rich recalls, for instance, that filmmaker and artist Carolee Schneemann discussed with her "how hard it had been to borrow Bolexes from Stan Brakhage, Stan Vanderbeek, and Ken Jacobs back those many years ago, recalling how reluctant they'd been to place their 'tools' in the hands of a woman." Rich, 25.

element.” Consider the interview between her and Haller, prepared for the 1978 screening of her work alongside men’s films, “Films By/Of Sharon Rupert”:

Robert A. Haller (RAH): In The Room you are without a head

Sharon Ruppert Green (SRG): Its true, I often, from an ego point of view, wish there was more of me in these films. In Office Suite I am just a tit and an eye

RAH: and a ghost

SRG: And a ghost! In Room With a View you get a little bit of me . . . an abstract female element. Jane [Brakhage] said the same thing [of the images of herself] in an interview...³⁰⁷

It is in this context that we need to situate the film by Sharon Green. With this background it becomes clear that Green intended to reveal something of a larger pattern of how women are utilized as “abstract female elements” in the avant-garde cinema.

4.2 ABSTRACTING AND SPECTACULARIZING THE NUDE: ROBERT HALLER’S PHOTOGRAPHS

In the following analysis, I posit that Green’s film must be engaged beyond her remarks that it is personal coming-of-age film (in which she achieves some kind of artistic autonomy by challenging male-created images of her).³⁰⁸ In truth, it functions as a media-historical investigation into how women are depicted by male artists in the American avant-garde movement. To

³⁰⁷ Robert Haller, “Films By/Of Sharon Rupert Green,” *Pittsburgh Film-Makers*, May 4, 1979: 2.

³⁰⁸ As Green writes, “I will approach [the film] by exploring how remembering this film has become a personally transformative experience.” Toward this end, she utilizes the critical methods of postmodern, psychoanalytic, and feminist discourses “that have emerged since it was made.” Green, 339.

understand this historical dimension we must consider how and why the photographs of her were created, and how Green's film both reveals the constructed artifice of this photographic enterprise and situates it within a before and after temporal structure, giving the images a historical or "past" quality.

Beyond his administrative role in the independent film scene, Robert Haller worked as a modern art photographer. A skillful writer, he was able to obtain grants from NEA and Pennsylvania state arts councils to mobilize resources and equipment for the creation and maintenance of the Pittsburgh Filmmakers' dark room and photographic lab.³⁰⁹ Through the regular documentation of Film Section events and his meetings with visiting artists, Haller became the most important social photographer of the avant-garde film activity in the city. He generated the largest collection of photographic documents of this period, as well as the most well composed and stylistically distinctive images; his name today is practically synonymous with the visual remembrance of 1970s Pittsburgh.

As he said of himself in an interview with me, back then he saw himself as a historian actively chronicling important events when others had neglected to do so.³¹⁰ His social photographs were highly effective. They tend to be well framed with rich shadows, flattering and clarifying areas of light, and well-focused subjects placed in their social environs. These photographs have since been reproduced in many publications, catalogues, and exhibitions about avant-garde film history. In particular, his photographs of leading artists such as Brakhage, Hollis Frampton (particularly his filmmaking activity around the Pittsburgh steel mills), Bruce Conner, Ed Emshwiller, have been placed in the Anthology Film Archives and Carnegie Museum of Art

³⁰⁹ Haller, 47.

³¹⁰ Personal interview with Robert Haller, Pittsburgh July 17, 2015.

Film and Video Archives, and they are regularly utilized by high-profile publications, such as *Artforum* or *The New York Times*, for specific pieces, and have been exhibited at the Albright Knox gallery.³¹¹

Haller had another major photographic interest, which is taking photographs of the female form and relating the female body to forms of landscape.³¹² These are photographs that utilize the tropes and poetic conventions of pictorial art photography in order to present a female subject as an anonymous and eroticized object within a natural environment. The images borrow the style of František Drtikol's nude portraits. The female subject is framed and lit in such a way as to blur boundaries of figure and background, transforming the human body as though one were viewing a land mass: a sand dune, a mountain, a hilly plot of land with contours and crevices. Through this novel treatment of form/content, Haller seeks to achieve a kind of art photography that assumed the values of the unique image associated with painting: he aimed at beautiful, auratic images of femininity that could be contemplated and appreciated for aesthetics alone. Haller writes of these images: "When I started making these photographs in 1971, I was interested in exploring how the body could be reduced to surfaces with curves similar to sine waves and other mathematical topographies. Initially, the images were very close up and at times difficult to decipher. Was a form a shoulder, breast, or elbow? Very soon my interest expanded to seek out subcutaneous structures of muscle, bone and tendon."³¹³

³¹¹ Haller has published two books of photography from this period: Haller, *Forty Photographs from Avant-Garde Film*, New York City: Re: Voir/The Film Gallery, 2014; and *Across Time: Nudes and Standing Stones*, Thessaloniki: Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Greece, 2011.

³¹² As art historian Themis Veleni wrote in the introduction to Haller's exhibition of these photographs: "Fascinated by the beauty of the female body and demonstrating respectful familiarity of his long-aged affiliation with the dance-world, he handled nudes similar to landscape, focusing on specific body parts highlighted by the play of light and shadow." Veleni, *Across Time: Nudes and Standing Stones*, 2.

³¹³ Haller's comments on his photo gallery website, http://logosonline.home.igc.org/haller_photos.htm

In these images, the woman model is unspecified. She is decontextualized from her ordinary existence as a real person; taken out of the concrete world, she is placed in an Edenic natural wilderness. Natural or dramatic lighting, pastoral iconography (trees, grassy plains, stones and no signs of civilization) are combined with women whose lithe and nude bodies combine with the natural scenery. Rather than specifying the person, what matters is attention to the play of light and so on. Haller described his method of working with his models in these terms: “With Sharon, as with all of the others, we would shoot alone, sometimes using a single lamp for highlighting. Vanessa, another model I photographed for two years, was rather detached, saying that her body was her ‘instrument’ either for pictures or her employment as a professional dancer. She had never been photographed before to her satisfaction, a common feeling I often encountered. For most models I became a kind of mirror, and we had repeat sessions.”³¹⁴ When Haller did shoot a woman looking back at the camera, the woman looks as though she is making a romantic and gratifying overture to the beholder.

In 1971 Haller utilized Green as a subject in this burgeoning genre of art photography that preoccupied him. He shot many photographs of Green as a nude model. These photographs make an appearance in her film. She is shown in various postures and positions which suggest, if not an erotic situation, than an erotic appreciation of the female body. In contrast to Haller’s account, she indicated the experience being photographed by Haller and other men as being “uncomfortable.” Green writes, “The photographer posed me in various settings and positions in order to obtain the particular composition he wanted. This usually involved being very close to my nude body. I often could feel his arousal and I experienced his passion for his work as possibly disguised passion for

³¹⁴ Ibid.

my body.” She concludes, “In appreciation for my work, he [Haller] gave me copies of the photos and proof sheets for *my* gaze.”³¹⁵

The photographs of Green are beautiful in their framing and handling of light and dark, but overall they have a leaden and sterile quality, owing to the visual clichés and voyeuristic nature of the composition and treatment of the subject matter. Green, like the other female subjects of the photographs, appears to be frozen in the eternal time of pictorialism forming a male fantasy about women. Green’s body in such situations is rendered passive and conveyed as a form of nature. There is, in fact, nothing “natural” about women’s scopophilic alignment with nature.³¹⁶ Further, these images reflect nothing of the vital, interesting and complicated social lives that women like Green led outside the confines of the idyllic, isolating scenes in which they were placed. As art, the photographs seem blithely unaware of the numerous critiques of the ideological processes of identification and voyeurism in the photographic domain, put forward by artists and thinkers like Susan Sontag, Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula in the 1970s. Again, I mention all this because such a photographic enterprise has direct presentation in Green’s film. The pastoralizing treatment of femininity as a passive object of enchantment and mild erotic stimulation, and the implicit glorification of the male artist as creative force and the female as a passive material to be shaped, both undergo a radical revision.

³¹⁵ Green, 346.

³¹⁶ In an important 1983 essay, Martha Rosler observes how the equation of the feminine and the natural contributed to the glorification of the male artist in the postwar period. She critiques, in the domain of abstract-modernist art-making by men, the “emphasis on the universalistic nature of the aesthetic and its inability to stray into any other domain, whether politics, religion, morality, literature, or appetite,” 91. Rosler also notes that the upshot of the repeated glorification of the male romantic artist is the exclusion of women from participation in modern art: “Women, by virtue of their earthliness and closeness to Nature, and their involvement with natural birth, were foreclosed from Genius, for, of course, flesh and spirit do not mix,” 90. See Rosler, “The Figure of the Artist, The Figure of the Woman,” *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001*, Cambridge: MIT Press (2004): 89-112.

4.3 FILM ANALYSIS: *SELF PORTRAIT OF A NUDE MODEL TURNED CINEMATOGRAPHER*

Green serves as the best explicator of the film's form: "For the opening, I created a montage of the still photographs taken of me by the male photographer. The opening shot establishes the setting as a photographic session between a photographer and model: Naked, I casually sit with my arms folded over my legs in a photographic studio with a camera tripod placed in front of me while gazing directly into the camera." Green notes the eroticized quality of the photos themselves: "they are sensually signified by conforming to the lighting and composition codes of photography that create the patriarchal ideal of an attractive young female."³¹⁷

However, that the first photographic image selected or "found" from Haller's collection in this montage is not beautiful or sensuous at all, is significant: the first photo is a poorly cropped image, clearly intended for the cutting room floor. It shows a desk and office space from the Selma Burke Art Center, on which desk a nude Sharon Green sits in profile view. Shot from an awkward low angle, her upper half is cropped out, revealing only her legs and buttocks. The window blinds are drawn closed and a lighting kit is propped up from behind. What is most prominent in the picture frame-- becoming the true subject of the image-- is the tripod for the photographer's camera. Via the tripod's obtrusive presence, this behind-the-scenes shot posits the subjective viewpoint of the photographer. In Green's hands, this otherwise forgettable image – a test shot – signifies the first act of ripping away the veil of the idealizing art-photographic apparatus.

The found image precisely depicts that which is usually concealed in genres of art photography: the artificial technical environment of the photographer's studio, and the (absent)

³¹⁷ Green, 347.

presence of the photographer himself who assembles (or disassembles) the reality of production in a well-crafted image. This found image sets in motion a process of cognitive dissonance that retains throughout her film, ensuring that whatever erotic gratification we may receive from the nude images of Sharon Green, it will be at least partially negated by the fact that the photographic apparatus is on display. To borrow the words of Paul Arthur, who analyzes the radical politics of found footage cinema generally, Green's use of found imagery produces a rupture in the "enunciative framework" of masculinist visual culture.³¹⁸ By presenting the appearance of the back-stage photographic studio in all its awkward artificiality, she essentially places brackets around the photographic image, suggesting that it is rooted in a particular time and place, that it depicts a particularized and nonuniversal viewpoint of a male artist. This de-mystifying treatment of the photographic image stands in opposition to the fetishism and naturalized, free-floating status often accorded to sensual, eroticized images of women.

After this startlingly direct reference to the originary context of photographic production, what follows is a series of found images that relate Green's body to processes of visual abstraction, leading to naturalistic notions of femininity and woman-as-space. Exemplifying the tendency of what we might call "womenscape" art photography, we see Green framed in such a way to abolish the sense of a fully realized and specific corporeal human figure. Instead, closeup shots are framed in such a way to suggest structures (such as stone henge) or natural formations of a monumental

³¹⁸ Paul Arthur argues that the power of the "found" image lies in the rejection of the verité conception of the visual world as unmediated truth or one-to-one access to reality. The found image embodies the contrary claim that "images are capable of eliciting multiple responses" and that "the field of meaning shifts according to thematic context and enveloping syntax [...] that field cannot be universalized or free from historical determination." Arthur adds that found footage practices in film (which he terms "collage") is fragmented and fragmentary as a signifying practice: "The organizing 'voice' in collage films is decentered or split between an enunciative trace in the original footage encompassing stylistic features and material residues of production....and a second, overriding source of knowledge manifest by the collage work through editing, application, new titles, and so on. As an enunciative framework, collage constitutes an antidote to the unabashedly individualist (and performative) encounter with social reality." See Arthur, "The Status of Found Footage," *Spectator* Vol. 20 No. 1, Fall 1999/Winter 2000: 60.

scale. In one close-up shot, for instance, her wrist, arm and hand rest on knee; through tight cropping of the frame, and the technical control over lighting, the white wall of the Selma Burke Center basement dissolves into a blank expanse, and the arm and leg appear to rest on each other as though they were a sandstone formation in the southwestern desert of the United States.

Other shots spatialize feminine form but with a formal concern toward chiaroscuro lighting effects and the abstracting potential of negative space. Two shots in particular, following the formal modernism of Man Ray and László Moholy-Nagy, explore the ways in which the human form can operate as a lively surface for producing lighting effects. In one tightly cropped shot, Green's torso leans back at a 45-degree angle, suggesting a sloping hill, punctuated by her breasts. Her right leg juts out at a severe 90-degree angle. A brilliant triangle of light (again shot against the Selma Burke walls) produces a stark visual opposition of light and dark. Another tightly framed shot shows Green's torso curling inward; a lighting source is placed at a far angle on her right side, so that brilliant bursts of white light (resembling high noon sunlight in a desert) dance across her body. The brightness of the lighting source contrasts with the darkness of her body, resulting in an interplay of negative space that abstracts the environment around Green. Her body is alternately rendered monumental and imposing, like a ruin in a fading sunset; or rendered passive and supine, suggesting an erotic encounter.

The treatment of Green as a semi-translucent ghostly image, and as one part of a thickly collaged visual composition (first seen in Gans' *The Room*), returns in Haller's photography. Green appears as a composite image consisting of multiple photographs of her; each photo of Sharon Green is assigned different light values, ranging from dark to near white. These multiples are arrayed in a graphic pattern, like a fan. In addition, she appears monumentalized so that her tilted, resting face in the foreground appears like some mysterious giant's visage. Her appearance

multiplies through the presence of reflective surfaces. Haller presents the feminine body and doubles it as a vehicle to play with optical effects. However, Green's own doublings of herself - in the second half of the film - raise the critical and proto-feminist question of how, why and for whom is the image of femininity produced? This movement away from faintly eroticized formalistic play, toward questions of gender politics and the power dynamics of looking, occurs most powerfully through Green's recontextualization of Haller's photo contact sheet.

The montage culminates in several contact sheets of Green nude. Here, her image is once again serialized-- but with a difference. First, the serial image of the contact sheet troubles a scopophilic relation to Green which we may have felt intermittently during the first few moments in the montage: The contact sheet is another reminder of the base artifice of the photographic enterprise, giving a texture of "discontinuity and shocking collision."³¹⁹ The crudity and technical nature of the contact sheet, the sprocket holes and the awkward framing also shatters Haller's aspirations toward auratic artist-genius. It forcefully, even violently, indexes the subjectivity of the photographer via reference to the workflow and behind-the-scenes activity: as if by saying, this is all a construction. The photographs become reduced to a text as opposed to an integrated work of art, shattering the modernist ideal of a unified whole, unique in its making and perfect in its form. In the words of Walter Benjamin, describing the role of the materialist historian, Green performs a "mortification of the object," that is, she mortifies (kills) Haller's photographs: she strips them

³¹⁹ Catherine Russell argues that found imagery "evokes alternative, invasive, and dialectical forms of temporality and history... Recycling found images implies a profound sense of the already-seen, the already-happened, creating a spectator position that is necessarily historical." The spectatorial position of the already-seen, of dialectical temporality interrupts the suspended timelessness associated with pastoralizing images of femininity. For more on the radical temporality of found images, see Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, Durham: Duke U, 2003: 241.

from their intended presentation as artful (alienated) commodities while pointing to the means of their construction, thereby giving them a history.

As a serial image within the contact sheet, Green becomes no longer herself but a multiple without an original, a “simulacrum” without a guaranteed referent in the world. Through the presence of contact sheets showing Green in various poses and performing her body in repetitive ways, the spectator becomes increasingly sensitized to photographic representation as a coded construction that produces an effect of femininity as though it were real. These fragments of the posed model and her body parts points to a language of desire that is fetishistic. As Catherine Russell explains, the body in found footage cinema is not naturalized – as in the fetishistic and pastoralizing “womenscape” photograph – but instead becomes denaturalized, a *cultural* body.³²⁰ What is made visible is the coded nature of photography and with that, the coded nature of masculine desire. As with the image of the tripod that opens the film, the eroticism of the images is laid bare and severely hampered, and the referential dimension of photography is weakened, by the presence of the contact sheet. This strategy of doubling, of multiplying the female figure – unlike Haller’s usage of the technique – generates a sense of excess and critical detachment; the repetitions of Green reveal the artificiality of poses, gestures, displays and effects.

After a homemade title card reading “Self Portrait of a Nude Model Turned Cinematographer” initiates the latter half of the film, the visual content shifts from the recontextualization of found imagery to original footage in which the movie camera moves and observes Green’s body with a surprising vibrancy and curiosity. The lyrical camerawork stands in

³²⁰ Russell writes, “Because the filmmaker works with images that are already filmed (‘ready-mades’), she can distance herself from the body filmed. In the intertextuality, fragmentation, and discursivity of found-footage filmmaking, the body has a very different status...it is no longer representative of culture, but an element of culture, a signifier of itself...” Russell, 238.

stark contrast to the stasis and “staccato rhythm” of the first half of photographic images. Haller’s photograph of Green looking directly into the camera (the concluding image of the first section) is matched by a shaky, handheld shot of Green holding a 16mm camera to her eye. In this shot, Green is framed in a mirror; the significance of the mirror, as Green explains, is to move the spectator and the filmmaker into a consideration of how the model herself views her own image apart from the masculine gaze which colored the idealizing depictions of her previously.³²¹ The self-mirroring gesture also negates Haller’s statement that he acted as a mirror for his female models; in other words, Green no longer needs a male artist for her own self-visualization. Green reads a further developmental meaning into this particular shot, citing the mirror stage of adolescent consciousness as described by Jacques Lacan.³²² By this reading, Green achieves a proper identification with her own image and thereby actualizes herself as an artist and a woman, no longer as separate or opposed aspects but unified and whole.

In the second section Green performs several repetitions of poses and salient images taken from Haller’s photography. In her hands as the cinematographer, the resulting copycat images have a decidedly rougher feel. As opposed to the beautiful and auratic treatment of the human body, there is what one critic at the time observed to be a child-like “innocence” that characterizes her handling of the camera and her portrayal of her own femininity.³²³ She remakes in particular the images of her eyes. In Haller’s photographs we see extreme closeup shots of Green’s eye and mouth. Illuminated from below, the shots suggest an ethereal and ghostly presence. This conveys

³²¹ Green, 348.

³²² Green writes, “This shot heralds my transition from object to subject; I am announcing that I am the active agent as the cinematographer controlling the film viewer’s gaze and revealing that there is someone – an active subject – behind the movie camera.” However, as Lacan notes about the mirror stage, the perception of a coherent subject is an illusion: “Thus, ‘I’ both reveal myself *and* conceal myself in this mirror shot.” Ibid.

³²³ Thomas Fosha, “Portrait of a Nude Model Turned Cinematographer,” *FIREWORKS films: In Review*, 1978.

woman as a mythic siren. In contrast, Green reshoots images of her mouth and eyes, performing if not an erasure then a rewriting upon Haller's original imagery. Her self-depicted eye recalls not a ghost or abstract female element, but the radical "kino-eye" of Dziga Vertov, a fusion of human and machine that appears as an eye superimposed with a camera lens in *Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929.

In addition, Green reinterprets and riffs on the womenscape concept where the female body is related to a spatial form. Her principal innovation is to utilize the camera in such a way to embed the viewer from her subjective point of view. In several instances she places the camera on her chest or right above her pubis. The camera is physically embodied in a way radically distinct from Haller's disembodied photographic objectivity. The resulting views are often uncomfortably close to the body, partially obscured by it. In one characteristic shot with the camera placed on its side, she frames her torso and legs in such a way suggesting folds in a landscape, though without optical techniques making beautiful or dramatizing the body. We see human flesh without the softening abstraction of a skillfully placed lighting kit, without the controlling eye of an aspiring art photographer.

The body is no longer ethereal, translucent, and weightless but is – to borrow Walter Benjamin's words – "creaturely."³²⁴ She writes, "The male fantasy of the naked female body is reduced to the everyday reality of my lived body in its average everyday desiring [i]n the

³²⁴ Benjamin uses the word "creaturely" describes the fallen, godless condition of human bodies and animals in German baroque drama. The term has since been elaborated upon by other commentators, most intriguingly Eric L. Santner's *On Creaturely Life*: as Santner observes, the creaturely refers to *creatura*, "a thing always in the process of undergoing creation; the creature is actively passive or, better, *passionate*, perpetually becoming created, subject to transformations at the behest of the arbitrary commands of an Other. 'Creature' is not so much the name of a determinate state of being as the signifier of an ongoing *exposure*, of being caught up in the process of *becoming creature* through the dictates of divine alterity...ultimately becoming generalized to signify 'anyone or anything that is produced or controlled by an agent, author, master, or tyrant.'" See Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2006), 28.

fragmented, subjective views of body parts that appear and disappear.”³²⁵ As she said of her handling of the camera, there was a conscious effort on her part to connect the movie camera to her own real, naked eye.³²⁶ While I agree with Green that the camera becomes a prosthetic extension of her eye, in fact, the camera is decentered from a knowing consciousness and monocular perspective, by virtue of being placed where no eye can see. What these novel framings reveal is how it is to feel, be, and see as a body. High angle shots observe her toes – as though we were looking from above, as she might. But later, a haptic – rather than optic – connection between touch and seeing is created in several shots where a nipple, a breast, a clump of hair, overwhelm the image’s frame. The camera, in these moments, functions like a hand; indeed, several shots show a hand clasping her toes, rubbing her shin and feet as though to touch them was to know them, to apprehend them. Contrary to Haller’s careful treatment of figure/ground, depth, and lighting effects, the imagery feels gritty, almost abject in its micro-scopic attention to details of human flesh. The presentation of female form is decoupled from an optic register to a tactile one.

The original footage by Green is notable also for its radically shifting sense of movement and motion. Green performs a sort of disorienting dance with the camera: she places the camera at her hip, observing her legs sway back and forth. The carpet shifts as she moves the camera and her body, creating an impression of an incipient earthquake. Unlike Haller’s imagery, the shots of her pelvic region/pubis reveal her hand nervously enter the frame, hurriedly covering over her vagina. On the one hand, as in the tradition of Western painting, this may suggest feminine modesty, and thereby indicate covertly (or overtly) courting a voyeuristic gaze. But on the other hand, the

³²⁵ Green, 352.

³²⁶ Green, 348.

presence of her hand concealing the pubis could suggest the reverse – that Green wishes to conceal aspects of herself from a desiring gaze, wishes to recover a part of herself, for herself.

The political significance of Green's fragmentary portrayal of multiple, conflicting images of femininity (both found images and self-created ones) can be better understood by way of Mary Anne Doane's theories on the female spectator and masquerade. As Doane observed, only men can be true, fetishistic spectators in the cinema (as outlined by film theorist Christian Metz) whereas women cannot. This inequality arises for several reasons. First, following Sigmund Freud's work, young girls do not have a penis and yet they desire one, leading them to identify with and as the object of male desire.³²⁷ Second, particularly in the cinema, women become associated with, and even coextensive with, the cinematic image and processes of imaging. As Doane writes, "The woman's relation to the camera and the scopic regime is quite different from that of the male [...] The woman's beauty, her very desirability, becomes a function of certain practices of imaging – framing, lighting, camera movement, angle. She is thus, as Laura Mulvey has pointed out, more closely associated with the surface of the image than its illusory depths, its constructed 3-dimensional space which the man is destined to inhabit and hence control."³²⁸ The problematic relation of women to the visible, to form, woman-as-form, arises clearly in Haller's photography: as we have discussed, Green and other models' bodies become coextensive with modernist optical techniques of abstraction, doubling, translucency and transparency, lightness and darkness. Unlike the proverbial male spectator, who exists exterior to the image even when depicted inside it as a male protagonist, women viewers do not enjoy any such distance from the

³²⁷ Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23:3-4 (1982): 79.

³²⁸ Doane, 76.

image. The woman spectator and woman character within cinema are forced to identify with the “overwhelming presence-to-itself of the female body.”³²⁹

As Doane observes, the nearness of women to the cinematic image and the distance of men to images (images created for their gratification), means that women spectators have a limited range of viewing positions they can adopt toward cinematic representations of gender. Whereas the male, by virtue of his phallus, can be voyeuristic and can separate seeing from being, the female suffers from a condition of overwhelming nearness. The female spectator has three possible positions that fall short of the voyeuristic ideal posited by cinematic representation. The female spectator can: 1) identify with the male gaze (this is what Doane calls the transvestite position – where a woman looks and thinks like a man, adopting the masculinist values of the cinema); 2) she can identify *against* the male gaze with the fetishistic image posited in the cinema (here Doane delineates two closely related positions – masochism and narcissism – in which the woman identifies with the passive female character or images of femininity); and 3) she can flaunt the mask of femininity by exaggerating its component parts in what Doane calls the “masquerade.” Doane writes, “produc[ing] herself as an excess of femininity...foreground[s] the masquerade. Masquerade is not as recuperable as transvestism precisely because it constitutes an acknowledgement that it is femininity itself which is constructed as a mask – as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity.”³³⁰

Doane goes on to state that the radical potential of feminine masquerade lies in the “denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as, precisely, imagistic.” Where “the transvestite adopts the sexuality of the other-- the woman becomes a man in order to attain

³²⁹ Doane, 79.

³³⁰ Doane, 81.

the necessary distance from the image [...] Masquerade, on the other hand, involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accurately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image."³³¹ Femininity conceived as masquerade is a denial of the visual plenitude and objectivity accorded to women as images. As Doane writes, it points to the borders of the frame, the exterior, and the surface in order not to possess or control women, but to establish an awareness of how femininity is a gender performance in constant process of becoming, of being assembled.

Following Doane's remarks, the dualistic structure of Green's film becomes most interesting. The confrontation of multiple scopic regimes of femininity in the film serves not to recuperate a wholeness of feminine selfhood (as Green describes it in her account); rather, the film's structure emphasizes a more radical position of "a certain distance between oneself and one's image." The opposition of found imagery and original footage highlights that for women under cinematic representation, "femininity itself ... is constructed as a mask ... a decorative layer which conceals a non-identity."³³² Green has admitted to her own partial identification and ambivalent participation in the image-world on display, in regards to the photographs. However, to accept this against the film's radical construction would be to adopt (and reassert) the masochistic/narcissistic position of cinematic femininity and female spectatorship, as defined by Doane. Instead, it seems to me that the power of the film derives from the presentation of overwhelming absences, of visual gaps. The startling sensation of vertiginous movement, the incomplete depictions of the female body (closeup shots and subjective shots) coexist with the otherwise straightforward seeming instances of femininity as "overwhelming presence-to-itself."

³³¹ Doane, 82.

³³² Doane, 81-82.

However, Green's film also stands against Doane's theoretical position in an important way. Doane states that closeness/nearness always results in *over*-identification with the image. In other words, the female body in cinematic representation is a reminder that women in patriarchal culture are understood and valued as bodies. This would seem to imply that any representation of femininity risks reinforcing that patriarchal assumption, leading us down the path to negative aesthetics that predominated feminist film theorizing and practice in the latter part of the 1970s and early 1980s. Images of the female body therefore represent a risk for Doane. A female spectator may encounter a patriarchal visual representation and identify with it as true and representative of her experience, without challenging the representational nature that presents gender as such.

In contrast, in her film Green uses the inherent nearness/closeness of the spectator's relation to images of femininity to radical and destabilizing effect. First, let us consider how this relation of closeness transforms the male spectator. The construction of femininity as overwhelming presence-to-itself is apparent in the film's montage of found photographs but even more explicit in the second half, manifesting in Green's mobile subjective camera shots visualizing her body in fragmentary ways. Through the first-person subjective shots of her body – which depict the female body not as ethereal and stylized and possess-able, but creaturely and basely materialistic - she essentially performs a transvestism upon the male spectator, whereby the male spectator, too, is forced to “over-identify” with images of femininity as if he were looking at his own body in a mirror, now newly feminized. This temporary transference of transvestism away from the female to male viewer occurs because, as Christian Metz points out in his study *The Imaginary Signifier*, film's inclination toward making the viewer identify with the camera, first

and foremost.³³³ The look of the camera is primary because it produces the visual world for the audience: whatever “it” sees is, by extension, the look with which the viewer must adopt. The all-powerful camera look is in contrast to that of secondary identification, which refers to the diegetic realm of characters, places and things. Though we might think that characters anchor our point of view, it is in fact the camera that structures how we see, over and above how characters look within the filmic universe.³³⁴

How might the female spectator be affected? I propose that the second half of the film, in which subjective images of femininity appear as “creaturely,” a powerful assertion of agency is created. The creaturely, as we discussed, refers to a being that is controlled or created by a sovereign; the creaturely refers to an “active passivity,” a condition of being acted upon. Green’s “fragmented, subjective views of body parts that appear and disappear” allegorizes the condition of the female film artist as creaturely being; yet, it also resists the sovereignty of male fantasy. This resistance occurs by way of shots of the body that “flesh-out” without any attempt to present the body as complete, a consumable commodity. A position for the female spectator is thereby

³³³ In describing the voyeuristic ideal and male spectator, Metz writes, “At the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am *all-perceiving*, too, because I am entirely on the side of the perceiving instance: absent from the screen, but certainly present in the auditorium, a great eye and ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive it.” Cinema “inscribes an empty emplacement for the spectator-subject, an all-powerful position which is that of God himself...and it is true that as he identifies with himself as look, the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at.” In Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1977): 49-50.

³³⁴ Metz believes that characters are secondary to “the identification of the spectator with his own look,” because the identification with the camera is what allows for a film to be comprehended and enjoyed. In Metz’s words, “it is I who am perceiving all this, that this perceived-imaginary material is deposited in me as if on a second screen, that it is in me that it forms up into an organized sequence, that therefore I am myself the place where this really perceived imaginary accedes to the symbolic by its inauguration as the signifier of a certain type of institutionalized social activity called the ‘cinema.’ In other words, the spectator identifies with himself, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, which comes before every *there is*.” Metz, 48-49.

created somewhere in between the three positions established by Doane; the spectator is able to move fluidly between them all.

Green recognized the power of turning the tables not only at the secondary level but primary level of filmic identification. Over the course of the film, the viewer comes to occupy the viewpoint of a nineteen-year-old female artist in how she sees herself, and how her body sees and feels the world. In the first section, by reference to the contact sheet and the photographer's studio, she reveals how images femininity are often artificial masks and how they conventionally reproduce the all-powerful, transcendental and masculine film spectator. She ruptures this way of seeing by juxtaposing them with her own subjective images: "in contrast to the mirrored self, I reveal my dismembered body and by implication the fragmented self."³³⁵ The subjective shots of her body in close-up, of hands touching her skin as though apprehending the body itself, work toward helping the spectator internalize images of embodied (rather than disembodied) femininity. The over-identification of spectator to images of femininity (caused by being forced to view the body from a first-person vantage point) work toward creating a powerful sense of empathy and understanding; they work toward creating feelings of curiosity, awe, shock, and disgust. The internalization of subjective shots of her own body shows us a vision of proto-feminist aesthetics around the female body. It resists the cliché treatment feminine form, the commodification of femininity via art photography, pornography, and other masculinist modes of visual culture. Haller's images – being the images of a patriarchal logic – do not have the final say on women's lived experience.

Significantly, she presents this critique of objectification without attempting to create a totally separate (pure) feminine viewpoint free from any influence from a male gaze. She presents,

³³⁵ Green, 348.

in the first section, an ironic masquerade of female masks imposed on her in order to heighten women's desirability and to-be-looked-at-ness for the gratification of a male spectator. Then, in the second section, the masquerade is doubled by a fragmentary visual exercise in self-reflection. We might be led to ask: Why was it necessary to include Haller's photos – why include both? To borrow Benjamin's words, the dialectical structure of this "constellation" reveals that for Green (as well perhaps for other women in the 1970s and beyond), the desiring gaze associated with the male spectator cannot be fully overcome -- and perhaps shouldn't be. Green confided to me that the images created by Haller gave her some degree of gratification.³³⁶ Importantly, she did not put his images under erasure: she did not strike through them, tear them up, symbolically dominating them. Rather, she sought to carve out a space for two rival modes of representation, two modes of identification, two different ways that a woman becomes acutely aware of herself as the seer and the seen. Trying to have its cake and eat it too, juxtaposing male and female spectatorial positions side by side, the film ends up creating a double consciousness instead of one. It does not banish sexualized displays of femininity for the sake of critical politics, but incorporates them. Against the claims of Mulvey, Doane and the incipient feminist film theory of the 1970s, visual pleasure and critical detachment can in fact coexist, as shown by Green's film.

³³⁶ Personal interview with Sharon Green, Pittsburgh, August 6, 2016.

4.4 SELF PORTRAITS OF WOMEN AS “IMAGE AND IMAGE MAKER:” GREEN, CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN, AND YVONNE RAINER

In her essay about the film, Green remarks that the exhibition of the film had been traumatic for her. She notes that when the film was first screened for her instructor and peers in a film production class, her film was received with a “thunderous” silence; unlike the light dramas and comedies which typified the student film shown in the class, her strange film was not met with applause or any approving comment by the professor. She writes, “When the film ended, there was ...No applause. No comments. Just silence. The shock and shame that I experienced in the wake of this silence was immense.”³³⁷ The shameful and shaming silence of the audience is, for Green, repeated 38 years later when shown as part of the NEA-funded restoration-screening event organized by Robert Haller. “[W]hen the film was shown at the debut of the NEA film programme in New York City in 2005 – again, silence from the audience and a surge of shame in me.”³³⁸

Silence in terms of the images (it is a silent film) and in the reception of the film (the wordlessness of the spectators), can be understood in terms of the ontological shock that is experienced in the gender-crossing spectatorial positions, going from a male point of view, to a fragmented and fragmentary female one. As one film reviewer remarked about seeing the film: “The viewer has the tendency to figure his or herself prominently in the compositions – the focus of the camera’s eye. At the point in which the film has generated this response, nervous coughs, shuffling feet and a dead silent theatre witness this audience response. We are all too aware of ourselves as the model on display...”³³⁹

³³⁷ Green, 349.

³³⁸ Green, 350.

³³⁹ Fosha, 2.

But a third, paratextual source of silence has to do with the problematic framing of the film itself since its creation. Masculinist bias has colored the reception of Green's work as found by analyzing the clippings, flyers, art newsletters and exhibition adverts for screenings of her 1971 film, after she had already moved away from Pittsburgh. I find the historical framing of Sharon Green in these texts to be very typical of how masculinist avant-garde film criticism apprehended and framed women's experimental filmmaking. Namely, her work is treated as personalized, emotional, and nonartistic ("Sharon used her feelings rather than techniques to unify the work").³⁴⁰

Another tendency is to compare her work to a male film canon, which positions the film as an homage to male influences. The title of her retrospective show at Pittsburgh Filmmakers in 1978 was "Films by/of Sharon Rupert," and the title right away signals the ambiguity of engaging with Green as a historical actor in avant-garde film history. In the description for the event, Haller gives an account of her as an artist. After stating that Green appeared in several artists' films and photographs, he states she made a film in 1971 as a "response" both to men's perceptions of her and to her own self-perceptions she felt as being "overweight and unattractive" (he quotes an interview with her to this effect).³⁴¹ The film, for Haller, is an essay examining how her body became an object of desire by men. The political implications are downplayed: "In the first part she is regarded from a male perspective, being looked *at*, and in the second part, from her own perspective, she seems to look *out*."³⁴² He notes that for years she hid it inside a shoebox until Brakhage finally saw it, enjoyed it, and convinced her to show it to the world. Through a circular logic, Green became a filmmaker only through her encounter with Brakhage; and in turn, Brakhage completed her work by rescuing it from obscurity.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Haller, "Films By/Of Sharon Rupert Green," *Pittsburgh Film-Makers*, May 4, 1979: 1.

³⁴² Haller, 22.

Reading this, it is impossible to ignore that Haller-- and avant-garde film scholarship in general-- is often invested in an idea of a male, outsider genius figure, to the point where the way it perceives/understands other filmmakers (of diverse identities or minority backgrounds) is to assimilate them into this model. It doesn't matter if maleness is announced or not. As Homi Bhabha remarks about the unmarked presence of masculinism in art discourse: it is "about the subsumption or sublation of social antagonism; it is about the repression of social divisions; it is about the power to authorize an 'impersonal' holistic or universal discourse on the representation of the social."³⁴³ In my interview with her, I asked Green about Haller's account, that it seemed like he positioned her work (ontologically) as a reaction against male artists. She said, of Stan Brakhage, she admired him greatly; of Robert Haller, she admired his portraits, and part of herself found his scopic fascination with her body to be gratifying. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the film is not reducible to an homage to the artist(s) who gratified her with images of her body; nor is it wholly a reaction to a male-dominated visual culture of female objectification.

We can compare Green's film to Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses*, 1965. Both artists share an interest in the ambivalence of women as both "images and image makers," in the words of Schneemann. Both made autobiographical, self-shot works that utilize the body as material, reflecting their relationships with men and their struggle to retain an independent artistic identity and sexual autonomy as women. Green and Schneemann were nude models for experimental artists and filmmakers (Schneemann was a model for Brakhage, Stephen Dwoskin, and Robert Morris, and Peter Gidal).³⁴⁴ They are linked further in their relationship to Brakhage, their filmmaking being indebted to and breaking from Brakhage's hypnagogic visual vocabulary. As

³⁴³ Quoted in Anna Chave, "Minimalism and Biography," *The Art Bulletin*, 82.1 (March 2000), 158.

³⁴⁴ Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics*, 35.

Schneemann says, “[*Fuses*] was in conversation with *Window Water Baby Moving* (Stan Brakhage, 1959). I had mixed feelings about the power of the male partner, the artist subsuming the primal creation of giving birth as a bridge between male constructions of sexuality as either medical or pornographic...I know that Stan and Jane passed the camera back and forth, but I was still very concerned that the male eye replicated or possessed the vagina’s primary of giving birth...Brakhage’s work touched into the sacred erotic. But we have to remind ourselves that throughout the sixties, only men maintained creative authority: women were muses, partners.”³⁴⁵

Schneemann’s objective in *Fuses* was to redefine feminine eroticism away from being a taboo subject; to do this, she presented direct images of a woman’s sexual pleasure. She presented men and women’s naked, coital bodies. She organized the visual field in a collaged way (there were literally so many pieces of film glued onto the celluloid that Schneemann was unable to make copies at the printer). The collaged effect was done so as to disrupt the rigid binarization of women and men in visual art. She explains, “I edited sequences so that whenever you were looking at the male genital it would dissolve into the female and vice versa; the viewer’s unconscious attitudes would constantly be challenged.”³⁴⁶ According to Schneemann, James Tenney, her partner in the filming, was her intellectual and physical equal. There was no power struggle in the act of creation, for he played a part in shooting and editing the film. There was thus an equality that is not present in Green’s film; instead, the implicit power struggle between male photographer and female subject/object provides much of the tension in Green’s work. Because Schneemann’s film depicts real scenes of love-making between a man and a woman (her partner James Tenney and herself), she broke barriers in representing men and women’s genitals and naked flesh on screen. Gene

³⁴⁵ Schneemann quoted in “Interview with Kate Haug,” 23.

³⁴⁶ Schneemann quoted in “Interview,” 33.

Youngblood famously said of the film in its first-ever review, it was like seeing “a ninety-foot penis in CinemaScope.”³⁴⁷

Schneemann and Green part ways in the treatment of gender representation as it relates to power. As I have shown in the visual analysis of *Self Portrait*, Green concerned herself with the power dynamic involved in gendered images, focusing on the act of artistic creation itself. Rather than men and women being positioned as equals, it is evident that Green sought to reveal a conflict that existed between herself and a male observer. As Haller mentions in his recollection of the film in 2005, “Unknown to me, she was making a film of being photographed. Ruppert used copies of some of my pictures of her...” This lack of knowingness on Haller’s part underlines the risk Green faced in making the film (what if she asked permission to use the images and he declined?), but it also points to how Green was concerned with the wider patriarchal dissemination and circulation of women’s images as commodities. Her artistry must occur by stealth under this system. Finally, the tone of Green’s film is ambivalent, ironic and disquieting, whereas Schneemann’s filmmaking is confident, rhapsodic and lyrical.

Another revealing comparison can be made by relating Green to Yvonne Rainer, a pioneering dancer and filmmaker who made films in the 1970s that were highly skeptical of images of femininity. Rainer, like Green, aimed at a Minimalist aesthetic that was critical rather than expressive and exuberant. Throughout her films, Rainer sought to transform hegemonic traditions of depicting women and women’s bodies. For instance, Rainer’s 1974 *Film About a Woman Who...* reworks the melodrama form to examine how gender norms are maintained through overused narrative protocols and visuals.

³⁴⁷ Youngblood quoted in “Interview,” 26.

While it is tempting to turn to Rainer's later, more overtly feminist output in the mid-1970s, her 1966-1969 short film series titled *Five Easy Pieces* exemplify a de-mythologizing treatment of the female body which is of a piece with Green's film.³⁴⁸ Of particular interest is her first film (which she termed an "exercise" rather than a fully fledged work), *Hand Movie*, 1966. A single shot film (5 min, silent, black-and-white), we see a static frame showing only a woman's hand, moving subtly in place against a white, abstract background. The hand becomes performative, with each finger enacting minimalistic movements that parallel Rainer's minimalistic dance choreography, albeit on a much smaller scale. On several occasions, the entire hand shifts into a profile view; fingers move and bend but the hand remains upright, as though the fingers were dancers in an ensemble – the hand becomes stage, choreographer and dancer all in one. Carrie Lambert describes *Hand Movie* as "vaguely clinical," an example of "studied neutrality,"³⁴⁹ and argues that the series as a whole typifies the "period['s] attempt to think the human body as part of the physical world, an object among objects."³⁵⁰

Even on the most superficial level, connections between *Hand Movie* and Green's film abound. Both Green and Rainer were dancers as well as filmmakers, marking these films as early instances of dance-on-camera. In both works, plain, uneventful shots depict the female body. While Rainer's was shot by a male friend, both films present a first-person subjectivity, instantiated by point-of-view shots of a woman observing her hand. Through the figure of the hand, a haptic, rather than optical, connection is made between touching/seeing, and the hand (as in "the artist's hand") gets associated with creativity.

³⁴⁸ By contrast, the latter Rainer films deal more specifically with narrative and characterization, with acting and performance, and problematizing romantic structures found in commercial cinema. I have chosen to avoid these works because they depart from Green's single-minded focus on visualizing the female body in a de-specified space.

³⁴⁹ Carrie Lambert, "Other Solutions," *Art Journal* Volume 63, Issue 3, (09/2004): 51.

³⁵⁰ Lambert, 59.

More deeply, we can say that Green and Rainer both share an interest in overcoming ideals of femininity (whether in the dance realm or the photographic/filmic realm), working through ideas about self-image and weighing the artistic capacity of the body. Rainer made *Hand Movie* while she was hospitalized,³⁵¹ while her body was in a state of crisis and incapacitation. This crisis coincided with her wider artistic project to move the feminine form of the dancer away from humanist/metaphysical symbolism; similarly, Green made her film while battling negative notions around her self-image and body weight, and her “creaturely” point-of-view shots scarcely retain any romantic symbolism of the feminine. These short films both enact a destruction of the aura attached to movement/motion, to the female body, as when Green’s film decays the aura of Haller’s art-photographic images of Woman-as-signifier. Finally, an implicit sense of aggression and violence is registered when Rainer’s hand briefly moulds into a fist –such barely veiled aggression is matched by the symbolic violence in Green’s film with the mortification of Haller’s photos and the rapid editing/disorienting motion of her film’s second half. The hand raised in a “stop” sort of gesture could indicate Rainer’s wish to prevent the spectator from seeing her with the intent to idealize and possess, thereby enacting a stoppage in the process of signification, of reading meaning into the body³⁵² – much like Green covers her vagina in a stoppage of masculine fetishistic desire and a stoppage of the encoding of the female body as an object of arousal.

³⁵¹ Lambert writes, “*Hand Movie* was made in the hospital while she recovered from a life-threatening illness and major surgery in 1966. Her friend, the dancer William Davis, brought an 8mm camera to the hospital and filmed Rainer moving her hand as a way to dance when her body couldn’t: ‘I was very ill, but I could move my hand.’ *Hand Movie* thus participates in the testing by Rainer’s generation of the necessity of the link between dance and the ideal of a body beautiful, youthful, and well,” 53.

³⁵² Rainer’s work in dance and filmmaking was intended to compare the body with objects, in order to “preclude metaphorical, metaphysical, or psychological interpretation.” See Lambert, 49.

4.5 GREEN'S SELF PORTRAITURE AS "DIALECTICAL IMAGE"

Against the tendency to sublimate social antagonism, and against the tendency to view the film as pure homage/response to male filmmakers, I have tried to argue that Green created an important work of an incipient "cinefeminism." I tried to aid and amplify her investigation by relating this story to the wider social conditions of women's experimental filmmaking, to the challenges that women face when they seek to make films in a patriarchal visual culture.

Haller and others have failed to critically examine the "misunderstanding" that occurred when she initially thought she would be taught to use technology when instead she became the prop or human furniture for Brakhage's films. This way of looking at the history of film, and how women exist in the world, makes it difficult, I claimed, to identify and acknowledge the struggles of female cinematic authorship because it presents a world without conflict, and the sexual divide is made implicit rather than explicit.

The omission of Green from feminist film history can, I hope, be corrected by considering the film from the vantage point of feminist film theory and poetics. Alongside crucial early works such as *Dyketactics*, by Barbara Hammer in 1974 (the first "lesbian-lovemaking film to be made by a lesbian"), or *Regrouping* by Lizzie Borden in 1976 (an experimental documentary about a women's group, formed to offer solidarity among women exclusively), Green's film presents a counterarchive of found and original images that dramatize the struggle for self-identity which faced women artists in a pivotal moment of experimental film. As Green wrote to me,

When I immersed myself emotionally back into 1970-72, in order to try to give you an emotional feel, it re-evoked the Dionysian madness — not just of me — but the times! However, I would worry if I left the impression that I — and my friends — were not also interested in *thinking* about film. We were, but didn't have the film

theories and discourses through which you can now look backwards. Stan's films and others were ripping into the existing film codes (symbolic order) and unleashing a lot of 'the Real' — which is linked to life, death, sexuality. And the era was struggling with war, birth control, free love, etc etc as we discussed trying to figure out the new "rules of the game" in light of the new technologies (birth control etc).³⁵³

Green's biography and work continue to be important for complicating the picture of avant-garde art and film. Her dialectical imagery deconstructed the male artist-female muse, and helped lay the groundwork for explicitly feminist filmmaking to come.

In Chapter 5, I turn attention to Peggy Ahwesh, a working class artist who grew up in the deindustrial milltown of Canonsburg, Pennsylvania. Formerly a technician on George Romero's films, Ahwesh became widely known in the early 1980s for her film portraits based on friends, artists, and acquaintances living in the economically depressed neighborhoods of Pittsburgh, such as the South Side. Ahwesh developed a distinctively gritty and lo-fi visual style of portraiture, informed by the small gauge format of Super 8mm film, her interest in ethnographic films by Ray Birdwhistell, and the local punk music scene that advocated the creation of "anti-stylistic" and "formless" art that merged the spectator with the subject of the work, as though the spectator were part of the documented world on screen. In showing her "Super 8 Chic" film portraits at local punk music venues and around Europe, Ahwesh and her crew of female creative collaborators positively re-valued the Rust Belt context of Pittsburgh, turning it into a fashionable "New Depressionist" brand. Her *Pittsburgh Trilogy* (1981-83), the focal point of the chapter, bridges the Warholian exhibitionism and anthropological dimensions of her films while highlighting their dark sense of

³⁵³ Personal interview with Sharon Green, Pittsburgh, Jun 28, 2016.

humor and anarchic playfulness. I argue that Ahwesh utilizes portraiture as a form of “experimental ethnography” that reflects the social dynamics and creative practices that characterized her artistic subculture.

5.0 AGAINST EPISTEPHILIA: THE SMALL TOWN ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMS OF PEGGY AHWESH

5.1 “RUST BELT CHIC”

Against the backdrop of Pittsburgh’s economic collapse in the mid-1980s, a women-centric group of filmmakers rose up, revived the use of the older media format of Super 8mm film, and started to challenge the idea of industrial ruin as a negative ideal.

An exhibition flyer in 1986, at the Hall Walls gallery in Buffalo, New York, indicates how Pittsburgh filmmakers rediscovered and mobilized “ruin” – formerly understood as an economic phenomenon -- into a marketing tool and artistic material.³⁵⁴ Narrating in the tone of a Benjaminian allegorist, guest curator Margie Strosser describes her hometown of the Steel City with dizzying, ludic references to ancient dinosaurs, metal bones, Mister Rogers, and high rise condominiums haphazardly jumbled together, making the city appear like some baroque painting, equally apocalyptic and joyous:

In 1986 Pittsburgh is a blue collar town putting on the white collar. We are the rust bowl, a river valley of gentrifying ethnic neighborhoods, where abandoned mills lie like ancient dinosaurs, metal bones rotting in the sun, and condominiums cap the surrounding hilltops. We are the city of Mister Rogers and Flash Dance Fantasy, we’re girl welders transformed into cinderellas in the shadows of post-industrial castles – reflections in glass and chrome. We are a cinematic backdrop for the

³⁵⁴ “Pittsburgh Film and Video: Images for a Future Nostalgia,” guest curated by Margie Strosser, *Hall Walls: A Contemporary Art Center Newsletter*, January 9, 1986.

nation's industrial fatigue [...] We see the buildings rise and fall and watch the new constructions through the cracks in the corporate board fence. We are charting the transition with a personal sense of self irony that is Mid-American, like white collars and polyester suits.³⁵⁵

With tongue planted firmly in cheek, Strosser offers a glimmer of hope in light of the deindustrial devastation occurring in Pittsburgh and the Rust Belt. On the one hand, she acknowledges widespread unemployment, the displacement of the working classes, uneven gentrification, and few cultural resources available. On the other hand, the city is-- or could be-- a site of play, of never-ending cultural production. Despite the darkness of decline, the shrinkage of the population, Strosser hints that some may find creative freedom in breaking things down and starting over again. Such a characterization found resonance among younger groups of artists trained in film programs and art schools, eager to be seen in the spotlight.

The chaotic stasis of 1980s Pittsburgh, and the self-knowing, wink-wink primitivizing of the city, crystallized in a short-lived trend of films known as "Super 8 Chic" or "New Depressionism." Linked with Pop Art and the "instant art" subgenre thereof – mail art, color Xeroxes, and Polaroid photos – these films were defined principally by the use of the Super 8mm camera. The camera was seen as more versatile and less costly than 16mm film. The limitations of the medium – "nervous projection," "gritty sound"³⁵⁶ – once seen as hopeless flaws, were revalued as unique features of an emerging moving-image form.³⁵⁷ Because Super 8mm cartridges could only accommodate three to four minutes of footage per cartridge, many films wound up being

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Jim Davidson, "Film: A Super-8 Evening, 'New Depression' Style," *Pittsburgh Press*, Thursday July 15, 1982: D4-D5.

³⁵⁷ Janice Schuler, "Super 8 Chic," *City Times*, October 1980.

short works and were frequently excerpted. They were shown “incomplete” and sometimes criticized as such, only giving a glimpse of a larger whole (which frequently never was finished).

The Super 8mm filmmakers all were young, fresh out of college or film school, and worked exclusively on each other’s films, trading roles of director/performer on a single production, which suggested a fluid, nonhierarchical structure of artistic collaboration. They had an anti-institutional ethos, resisting the influence of their elders. This younger generation remade the Pittsburgh Filmmakers media center into a countercultural bastion of punk music and culture. Indeed, the growing influence of the punk scene on Pittsburgh Filmmakers Inc., the locus of the city’s filmmaking activity, was apparent in various aspects. The very space of Pittsburgh Filmmakers in its second location, on 205 Oakland Ave, evinced a punk makeover. In its moody atmospheric interior corridors, a portrait of Maya Deren in the lobby celebrated an allegiance to scrappy experimental film. Meanwhile, the punks working at the equipment office frequently discussed underground filmmakers Mike and George Kuchar or Jack Smith, who epitomized the spirit of guerrilla film and the attitude of high/low art promiscuity that was typical of the time.³⁵⁸

Out of this heady cultural ferment, the most successful of the Super 8mm filmmakers was Margaret “Peggy” Ahwesh, a recent Film Production graduate from Antioch College who returned

³⁵⁸ Numerous members of Pittsburgh Filmmakers recall the startling and disjunct interior décor of the media arts center, and the indelible mark it left in their memories. Ahwesh writes, “Personal Aside #3: I wonder who did that painting of Maya Deren at the top of the stairs at the old Pittsburgh Filmmakers venue on Oakland Avenue? It is taken from her 1943 film *Meshes of the Afternoon*, a portrait of Deren gazing out a window with her hands gently placed on the glass, her image merging with the reflections of distant trees. It was the founding mother of American avant-garde cinema who greeted us as we trudged up the stairs to the screening room.” Ahwesh, “Bored in Pittsburgh: The Obscure Film That Immortalized 1980s Punk,” Carnegie Museum of Art Storyboard (January 31, 2017): <https://blog.cmoa.org/2017/01/bored-in-pittsburgh-the-obscure-film-that-immortalized-1980s-punk/>. A later filmmaker, Jesse McLean, who came of age in the 1990s working in the equipment office, notes that her co-workers had a “punk” sensibility. They coveted George Kuchar and unsung heroes from the first generation of Pittsburgh Filmmakers, like Roger Jacoby, who embodied a stark and “painfully independent” aesthetic and lifestyle which, today, could be described as prefiguring some of the tendencies of the punk movement. Jesse McLean, interviewed by Ben Ogrodnik, July 30, 2016.

in 1978 to Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, in her words “a sad, industrial town.”³⁵⁹ She found creative mentors in Antioch instructors Tony Conrad and Crystal Janis Lipzin, stalwarts of experimental art. She ran the film exhibitions programming at Pittsburgh Filmmakers and the Mattress Factory Museum. At the same time, Ahwesh began to concentrate her film productions by working with two other prominent female artists in Pittsburgh, Margie Strosser, also a filmmaker, and Nataalka Voslakov, a filmmaker and photogenic actor with a penchant for drama. They all met working as crewmembers on George Romero’s 1982 horror film, *Creepshow*. After that initial meeting, the women involved in Ahwesh’s circle reported being unemployed, drifting from job to job; they turned their cameras inward to make films about their world.³⁶⁰

Many films in these years came about when Ahwesh would take the camera out to record them doing errands, meeting people, and looking for work. “We might just visit somebody and hang around with the camera until something interesting happened.”³⁶¹ Ahwesh and her crew made use of what was immediately at hand: “The filmmakers, the bands in the emerging punk scene, the photographers, an odd assortment of crazy people and, for some reason, a number of people who worked as bank tellers, made up our arts community.”³⁶² Ahwesh’s films were set in the working-class neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. They filmed in the South Side—which Strosser jokingly dubbed “East Berlin”—and other spaces where “women with out-dated hair-dos wait for trolley cars on traffic islands in the drizzling rain” and where “[p]eople are out of work and out of style [...] old coats from the early sixties, old store clerks in fuzzy slippers leaning on the counters of

³⁵⁹ See John David Rhodes, “From ruin to ritual,” *Screen* 55.4 (Winter 2014): 494-499.

³⁶⁰ Margie Strosser, “Making Peggy’s Movies,” Journal entry July 3, 1983, 1.

³⁶¹ Strosser, “Making Peggy’s Movies,” Journal entry May 12, 1982, 2.

³⁶² Ahwesh, “Film, Baby,” in *Big as Life: An American History of 8mm Films*, ed. Steve Anker, San Francisco Cinematheque San Francisco, CA 1998: 81.

deserted drug stores in the middle of the afternoon.”³⁶³ The old, the decaying, and the forgotten intermingled together, forming their props, actors and film set.

The resulting films – which Ahwesh later called portrait films and “small town ethnographies”³⁶⁴ – found stylistic inspiration in past experimental traditions (Andy Warhol’s profilmic improvisations). And the films explored adjacent, non-art related disciplines (postmodern ethnography and visual anthropology). She favored documenting the simple and everyday goings-on in the immediate environment. In cinematic terms, Ahwesh preferred sensory and sensuous material transcriptions of reality, and spent considerable time thinking about and generating profilmic activity in front of her camera. In all, Ahwesh demonstrated an analytic fascination with the city she called home.

In this chapter, I argue that Ahwesh’s Super 8mm films perform an ethnographic study of the postindustrial ruin and the working-class inhabitants of Pittsburgh, and that Ahwesh herself should be interpreted as an “experimental ethnographer,” borrowing the terminology of Catherine Russell. I look to Ahwesh’s most significant – yet underdiscussed – series of works made in the city, *The Pittsburgh Trilogy* (*Verité Opera*; *Para-Normal Intelligence*; *Nostalgia for Paradise*; 1983, Super 8mm synch sound film, 50 minutes). The *Trilogy* is a triptych portrait of her friends and collaborators shot during the years 1981-1982 and completed in 1983.

Ahwesh was obsessed with the work of visual ethnographers, and cites the work of Ray Birdwhistell as a particularly formative influence on her filmmaking. She recalls that she watched Birdwhistell’s *Microcultural Incidents at Ten Zoos* (1969, 16mm film, 34 minutes) at the

³⁶³ Strosser, 3.

³⁶⁴ Ahwesh quoted in “Peggy Ahwesh 2007: An Interview,” interview by Steve Reinke, *Video Data Bank*, November 2007, <http://www.vdb.org/titles/peggy-ahwesh-2007-interview>.

University of Pittsburgh.³⁶⁵ In the film, Birdwhistell broke with scientific norms by presenting footage of families at zoos within a poetic formal structure, providing repetitious but beautiful images of parents and children behaving in the company of animals.³⁶⁶ Ahwesh was attracted to the repetitious chunks of human behavior that comprised Birdwhistell's film. She also found herself drawn to the era's leading sociologist, Erving Goffman. Goffman coined the influential idea of "the presentation of self," and argued that identity is not natural but a scripted set of taught behaviors, much like a theatre actor putting on roles for an audience.³⁶⁷

As a young, punk-ethnographic filmmaker, Ahwesh created problematic, open-ended documentaries. They were problematic in that, as documentary records, they purposely misdirect the viewer's "epistephilic" desire for satisfying illusions of plenitude, meaning, and stable understanding. Instead, her Super 8mm films elude these outcomes by centering on performances and theatrical personae that are constantly in a state of transformation. Sensitive to the aesthetic and thematic content informing her filmmaking, this chapter draws attention to her interest in language and gender performativity, as well as filmic techniques of paratactical editing, repetition, parody, and collage. These techniques, I argue in the next section, aim to redefine the objectives

³⁶⁵ Ahwesh states of her time in Pittsburgh in the late 1970s: "I was into Erving Goffman then. I remember *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* but I might have gotten ideas from Vito Acconci. An important source for me was Ray Birdwhistell—Pitt had 16mm prints of his films you could borrow from their library— so my interests tipped towards the ethnographic, body language and small group dynamics." Peggy Ahwesh, interviewed by Ben Ogrodnik, July 6, 2015.

³⁶⁶ Birdwhistell was an American ethnographer who founded a subject area he called "kinesics," which analyzed and classified human movement through the lens of Saussurean structural linguistics. He produced a series of innovative films that focused on the micro-gestures, interactions and facial expressions among humans as a way to learn about the cultural makeup of the social order as a whole. His film projects, focused on the close analysis of motion/movement in a variety of social contexts, expanded the repertoire of anthropological filmmaking to include high-tech, military projection units, such as the PerceptoScope, "designed for the complete time control of in-focus images," which enabled him to analyze movement in greater detail. In both the selection of film tools and the conceptual methodology behind his film projects, Birdwhistell himself could be considered avant-garde.

³⁶⁷ Goffman's seminal research defines human behavior with notions of acting and performance, utilizing dramaturgical tools to describe the layers of performativity in different social spheres, such as the workplace, relationships and family. See Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959.

of visual ethnography toward being more empathic, more open to forms of Otherness, and nonhierarchical.

5.2 SITUATING AHWESH'S ETHNOGRAPHIES OF THE CITY

It is necessary to reexamine the “ethnographic” character of Ahwesh’s Super 8mm aesthetics, and linked to this, her apparent refusal to produce possessive knowledge of her subjects in her portrait films. This “anti-voyeuristic” aspect to her filmmaking is anticipatory of recent scholarly work that focuses on issues such as on visual opacity, impersonal narcissism, and the ethical problems of documentary and visual anthropology.

Documentary filmmaking is historically linked with the norms of truth-telling, objectivity, and knowledge production that define nonvisual “discourses of sobriety,” such as sociology, forensics, and law.³⁶⁸ However, in recent years a disparate group of scholars such as Leo Bersani, Douglas Crimp, Catherine Russell, Hal Foster, TJ Demos, Hito Steyerl, Okwui Enwezor, and Edouard Glissant have exposed that the seemingly objective, neutral character of these fields disguises a range of power inequalities.³⁶⁹ In particular, they question documentary-inclined

³⁶⁸ See Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, Bloomington: Indiana University, 1991: 39.

³⁶⁹ Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008; Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997; Douglas Crimp, “Our Kind of Movie”: *The Films of Andy Warhol*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012; Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999; Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996: 302-309; Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, *Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, Berlin; Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Sternberg Press, 2008; Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, 1st ed. New York, N.Y.: International Center of Photography; Göttingen: Steidl Publishers, 2008; and TJ Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

artworks that represent cultural Others, surfacing a set of issues which we could sum up as the problem of epistophilia.

Bill Nichols defines “epistophilia” psychoanalytically as the pleasurable pursuit of knowledge established by the rhetorical and visual attributes of a documentary text, rooted in realism and objectivity. He outlines the problems and ethical ramifications inherent in mainstream documentary’s “will to knowledge.” As Nichols writes, “Documentary convention spawns an epistophilia. It posits an organizing agency that possesses information and knowledge, a text that conveys it, and a subject who will gain it. He-who-knows (the agency is usually masculine) will share that knowledge with those-who-wish-to-know; they, too, can take the place of the subject-who-knows. Knowledge, as much or more than the imaginary identification between viewer and fictional character, promises the viewer a sense of plenitude or self-sufficiency. Knowledge, like the ideal-ego figures or objects of desire suggested by the characters of narrative fiction, becomes a source of pleasure that is far from innocent. Who are we that we may know something? Of what does that knowledge consist? What we know and how we use the knowledge that we have are a matter of social and ideological significance.”³⁷⁰

Under the epistophilic paradigm, the pursuit of knowledge establishes a power imbalance involving several parties. The documented subject becomes the object of knowledge, something to be exchanged between the knowing artist and the unknowing audience. A documentary is considered successful (and pleasurable) when, by the end, the audience passes from a state of “those-who-wish-to-know” to “the-subject-who-knows.” The epistophilic documentary presents itself neutrally. This neutrality, cloaked in techniques of visual realism, expedites the smooth transmission of information, and realizes the promise of “plenitude” and rational “self-sufficiency”

³⁷⁰ Nichols, 31.

toward satisfying and educating the spectator. In turn, the aesthetic and technical design of documentary films often fail to question or investigate the representational nature of film as a technology or medium (let alone film's entanglements with scientific, colonial and economic forces).

In sum, the problem with much filmmaking, photography, and visual art when artists attempt to provide "realistic" depictions of marginal groups, is the repeated (if unwitting) desire to render them as objects for the audience's knowledge-seeking, voyeuristic gaze. Filmmaker, ethnographer, and critic Trinh T. Minh-ha criticizes the mainstream documentary and visual anthropological film for not problematizing "reified" Western conceptions of truth that manifest in oft-repeated conventions and techniques. She points to the convention of the tracking shot, in which the camera smoothly follows and records its subject, while making invisible the filmmaker behind the scenes. The tracking shot is a relation that aggrandizes and conceals the identity of both viewer/filmmaker, by substituting an illusion of presence, as if one was really there.

Minh-ha further notes that mainstream documentary theory has produced a number of problematic binary oppositions. All kinds of techniques viewed as "true" are valorized (long takes, synchronous sound, etc.); meanwhile, the techniques that appear to be non-neutral, self-referential, or artificial are devalued as "false" (montage, editing, any overt visual stylizations).³⁷¹ Minh-ha, and other ethnographers following her critique in the 1980s and 1990s, purposely utilizes very techniques that were once deemed "artificial" and devalued, and they believe it important to challenge the stable positions of self/other when filming cultures by making films that surface problems of representation.

³⁷¹ For a filmic expression of this critique, see her *Reassemblage*, 1982, 41 minutes. She has also written many critical essays on this subject, in particular, see Minh-Ha, "Documentary Is/Not a Name," *October* Vol. 52 (Spring, 1990): 76-98.

The epistephilic construction of the Other-as-object/the viewer-as-Subject, even when pursued for progressive political ends, serves to assimilate the Other to the norms of the (dominant) audience, subordinating their customs, differences, and subjectivities. Though far from existing in a sort of consensus, Minh-ha and other thinkers all advocate a radical questioning of the assumptions of objectivity and truth-telling typically accorded to documentary film. Such assumptions, in their various accounts, posit the spectator in a one-way power relationship that typically benefits the spectator (reinforcing their cultural, moral, and intellectual superiority) at the expense of the filmed subject's own agency.

On the positive side, these debates have led to the creation of new categories of analysis and praxis, such as “experimental ethnography.” Coined by Catherine Russell, this refers to artworks that, on one hand, focus on depictions of Otherness but which, on the other, disrupt the ethical presuppositions that underlie visual conventions of realism and scientific observation.³⁷² This lively realm of cultural production encompasses the artists who mobilize tools of visual science and realism for experimental ends (Chantal Akerman, Andy Warhol, David Rimmer, Joyce Wieland, James Benning, and Bill Viola), and scientists whose otherwise straightforward observational films exhibit self-critical reflexive devices that seem associated with modernist and postmodernist poetics (Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, Jean Rouch, and Ray Birdwhistell).³⁷³

³⁷² Though Russell resists a prescriptive definition, she identifies various attributes of the confluence of ethnographic and experimental tendencies in contemporary and late modern art. In its broadest sense, experimental ethnography denotes “an examination of ‘culture’ from the perspective of ‘art’ that inverts and reinvents the conventions of cultural representation,” and commonly features “the performance of social actors, [an] assortment of recycled imagery, and the many stories that are told...are grounded in ‘the real’ and have the aura of ethnography.” See Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1999: 375.

³⁷³ In a typical passage, Russell maps transformations in postwar anthropology, in which traits of modernist reflexivity seem increasingly to obtain in ethnographic texts, alongside the parallel development in art-making in the aftermath of Greenbergian medium specificity, in which a quasi-anthropological interest in cultural contact and

In the world of experimental filmmaking, Russell cites the tendency toward filmic techniques of discontinuity or extended duration, as in the Structural films of Andy Warhol, films in which “nothing happens.” Take, for instance, *Blow Job*, 1964, Warhol’s landmark proto-Structural film. *Blow Job* has been variously attacked or celebrated for what it does not show: an off-screen act of fellatio. But the purposely restrained filmic framing and the extended duration of the film evince an ethnographic quality to the project: it spotlights a marginal subject without, crucially, offering him to a possessive, acquisitive gaze that would extract some stable knowledge about him, a social group or its marginality. For scholars like Douglas Crimp, the *Blow Job* film ultimately resolves into a kind of distanced, and neutral, presentation of Otherness, representing a powerful and ethical instance of “anti-voyeuristic looking” in the cinema.³⁷⁴

Likewise, in his narrative film productions with playwright Ronald Tavel, Warhol’s neutral camera captures “psychodramatic” acting out on the part of the actors, moments of revelatory authenticity that violate the dramatic content which brought them together in the first place. Crimp evokes the ethnographic potential of acting-out for Warhol’s camera: “Because Warhol refuses to

realism have returned once more to avant-garde practice: “Since the 1950s, ethnographic films have consistently adopted reflexive techniques to inscribe the relation between filmmaker and subject(s) within the film. References in the text to the means of production – shots of camera equipment, voice-over comments, dialogue with ethnographic subjects about the making of the film – have for a long time served as attempts to correct the imbalance of power between those who are making the film and those who are being studied.” She adds, “At the same time as these changes have been happening in documentary and ethnographic filmmaking, experimental filmmakers have moved closer to documentary. That is to say, they tend to be more concerned with cultural representation: they are ‘political’ without necessarily being didactic or polemical.” See Russell, 355.

³⁷⁴ In *Blow Job*, Warhol displaces the viewer’s focus away from the off-screen sexual act. Through strategies of lighting, framing, the long-take and static camerawork, Warhol offers us an enigmatic face (DeVeren Bookwalter’s) that resists the viewer’s voyeuristic attempts to see and grasp in it a singular meaning, which Crimp deems “anti-voyeuristic.” Crimp writes, “We do see his [Bookwalter’s] face, but we see it only when he does not look at us, when, sometimes in rapture, sometimes in tedium, he tilts his head back – and therefore looks away from us. Often he looks directly our way, but we cannot see him looking at us. Warhol’s camera captures this face and the sensation it registers, but simultaneously withholds it from us; and he does this through a simple positioning of the light as if by chance, a bare lightbulb hung from the ceiling just above and slightly to the left of the scene. We cannot make eye contact. We cannot look into this man’s eyes and detect the vulnerability that his submission of being pleased surely entails. We cannot take sexual possession of him. We can see his face, but we cannot, as it were, have it. This face is not for us,” 7.

edit, there is no going back, no fixing mistakes – for that matter, no such thing as a mistake in the sense that it might be rectified by a retake and edited into the finished film. The essential condition of ‘acting’ in a Warhol film is that you are left to your own devices and that whatever you do will simply be the way you appear in the film. If you make a fool of yourself, a fool you will be, for all to see.”³⁷⁵ Precisely because of the refusal to edit, and the flouting of narrative protocols of plot/story, such films have much to offer ethnographic representation. The actors cease to be fictions, becoming social actors. As Russell observes, Warhol’s films make “no break between describing and what is being described”, producing “a new theory of cinematic realism.”³⁷⁶ Warhol allows everything to be recorded and shown, offering – in a sense – an anthropological record of life in 1960s downtown NYC.

Meanwhile, Structural-ethnographic films like Peter Kubelka’s *Unsere Afrikareise* (Our Trip to Africa, 1966, 13 minutes), dramatize the incommensurability of cultural encounters. In this film depicting a confrontation between African inhabitants and opportunistic European visitors on holiday, Kubelka deploys filmic techniques of discontinuity: sonic counterpoint, rapid-fire montage editing. Kubelka’s thickly layered visuals and the dissonant soundscape remake the travelogue film. The disruptive collisions of animal and human, neo-colonial and postcolonial subjects, challenge the presumed objectivity of documentary representations, and blur the opposition of us/them.

More recently, Russell has extended the analysis of anthropology and modernism intersections beyond the 1960s to the present-day “Sensory Ethnography Lab” films.³⁷⁷ These

³⁷⁵ Crimp, 51.

³⁷⁶ Russell, 162.

³⁷⁷ The Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL), established in 2007, is an experimental laboratory at Harvard University, training Media Anthropology Ph.D students in ethnographic film techniques across sound, visual, and interactive media forms. The SEL department is supervised by Lucien Castaing-Taylor, director of *In and Out of Africa*, 1992;

films, by virtue of their thick description of space/place, and their materialist decentering of a presumed Western controlling gaze, suggest a Benjaminian spirit of “anthropological materialism.”³⁷⁸ Works like *Leviathan* (2012, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel) concentrate on a human activity --fish hunting off Massachusetts-- but reject a human-centric orientation to visual representation. With hundreds of tiny GoPro cameras, the film depicts different aspects of a single fishing boat and underwater images of fish catching – images and forms that the human eye, by itself, cannot normally see. As such, the film offers a defamiliarizing and epic portrayal of the sea, the boat, even the processes of capitalism, within an expanded, post-/nonhuman sensorium.

Scholarly interest in retracing such historical parallels and cross-pollination between experimental and anthropological film only continues to gain traction.³⁷⁹ Contributing to this growing discourse, I point out the ways in which Ahwesh draws on the body of ethnographic film, its tools and assumptions, and its tradition of documenting cultural Otherness, as a means to portray Pittsburgh in a time of decay and transformation. This “ethnographic impulse” is seen in the *Pittsburgh Trilogy*’s repetitious editing patterns; the attention to role-playing, language, identity-as-performance; and the anthropological images of marginalized people living and interacting in their working class environment. My thematic focus on the interrelationship of visual science and

Made in USA, 1997; *Sweetgrass* 2009; *The High Trail*, 2010; and *Leviathan*, 2012. The significance of SEL filmmaking, and the new wave of “sensory-based” ethnographic filmmaking, has been treated in many articles to date. For two especially good overviews of these films, see: Scott MacDonald, *American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary: The Cambridge Turn*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013; and Karen Nakamura, “Making Sense of Sensory Ethnography: The Sensory and the Multisensory,” *American Anthropologist* Vol. 115 No. 1 (2013): 132-144.

³⁷⁸ Russell makes an argument for Walter Benjamin as a spiritual predecessor of sensory ethnography in “*Leviathan* and the Discourse of Sensory Ethnography: *Spleen Et Idéal*,” *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2015): 27-34.

³⁷⁹ For two recent book-length investigations, see Scott MacDonald, *Avant-doc: Intersections of Documentary and Avant-Garde Cinema*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015; and Arnd Schneider and Caterina Pasqualino, *Experimental Film and Anthropology*, London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

experimental film, which posits Ahwesh as an “experimental ethnographer,” builds upon more recent, 2000s-era scholarship that has tried to clarify some of Ahwesh’s more opaque filmic techniques and critical interventions from a variety of methodological perspectives, including feminist film theory, avant-garde film formalism, postmodernist theory, theories of performance and theatre, and ruin studies.³⁸⁰

I argue that experimental ethnography is the dominant aesthetic category guiding and shaping the Super 8mm films, which is demonstrated at the level of content and form. Ahwesh displays an attention to the temporal rhythms of daily living, obsessively recording the chores, the minor interactions, the jokes and comments of her characters with an almost encyclopedic level of detail. There is an extraordinary fidelity to space, as evinced by her site-specific title *Pittsburgh Trilogy*, which highlights the domestic and rundown urban spaces of Pittsburgh (normally overlooked) receive extended treatment. Her films all focus on particular social archetypes in her immediate milieu of the 1980s Pittsburgh arts scene. She focused on images of black queer transgender individuals, masculine women, feminist filmmaker punks, and socially awkward male bachelors living on and off the streets, creating a kind of Birdwhistellian human zoo.

Her films, in a sense, operate as visual “thick-descriptions,” in Clifford Geertz's famous formulation.³⁸¹ They allow the audience to observe individuals and activities defined in a particular space over a long period of time. Through this extended duration within a culturally specific

³⁸⁰ The “Peggy Ahwesh dossier” in the Winter 2014 issue of *Screen* originated in a symposium on Peggy Ahwesh’s work held at the BFI in 2013 and supported by the Sussex Center for the Visual at the University of Sussex. The dossier represents a wide range of methodologies and approaches to her work. See: Elena Gorfinkel and John David Rhodes, “Peggy Ahwesh dossier: Introduction,” *Screen* 55.4 (Winter 2014): 490-493; Elinor Cleghorn, “Technical Revelations and material encounters: female corporeality in the work of Peggy Ahwesh,” *Screen* 55.4 (Winter 2014): 500-506; Michele Pierson, “Exhibitionist performance and theatricality in *Trick Film* and *Philosophy in the Bedroom, Part I* and 2,” *Screen* 55.4 (Winter 2014): 507-513; and Elena Gorfinkel, “Corpse, corpus, contingency: Peggy Ahwesh's ‘Deadman’ Trilogy,” *Screen* 55.4 (Winter 2014): 514-521.

³⁸¹ Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, 1973: 3-30.

setting, we are exposed to and have repeat contact with diverse subjects--or “social actors,” in anthropological terms.³⁸² The audience comes to learn and may even adopt, as a participant-observer, the life ways and habits of the subject on social and psychological levels. Ahwesh thus qualifies as an ethnographic urban explorer of life in Pittsburgh investigating a variety of sub-cultural settings.

5.3 FILM ANALYSIS: *THE PITTSBURGH TRILOGY*

5.3.1 *VERITE OPERA*

As Ahwesh explains in her interview with Scott MacDonald, the *Pittsburgh Trilogy* was conceived not as a diary film or a documentary film, but something existing in between: a portrait film. Ahwesh states,

The films—what are they *about*? I don’t know—they’re not diary films, and they’re not documentaries, and they’re not narratives. ‘Portraits’ seems inadequate, actually, though that’s the word I usually use.

It’s more like me doing conceptual exercises so that I can figure out what kind of relationship I have with the person, and what kind of relationship the camera has

³⁸² Bill Nichols uses the term “social actor” to refer to individuals who appear in documentary films. Such individuals operate as representatives of a class or group. Nichols writes, “Those whom we observe are seldom trained or coaxed in their behavior. I use ‘social actor’ to stress the degree to which individuals represent themselves to others; this can be construed as a performance.” See *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991: 42.

with the person, and how do you shoot positive and negative space and what *is* it about people that makes them interesting?

To me these three people were amazing examples of humanity, and I really liked them all.³⁸³

To make the *Pittsburgh Trilogy*, Ahwesh used two Canon S8 sound cameras that she bought from a TV cameraman who had used them on assignment in Poland and then had no further use for them.³⁸⁴ Unlike the poetic evocation of space that characterized many other Super 8 open-form diary films, where light and objecthood are granted a mysterious dazzling agency, there is a degraded and worn-out feeling of domestic space that comes through the grainy Super 8mm lens. A shallow depth of field flattens one's sense of the surroundings. The "low-end anti-industrial qualities of the home movie"³⁸⁵ here emphasize the precarious class standing of these characters.

Each portrait has startlingly direct and mundane content, focused on the day-to-day lives of her friends. There is an anthropological temporality of the present tense, as though each film unfolded in a single day. Speaking to the weird atemporality of the "now" that obtains in Ahwesh's documentary films, Ivone Margulies writes, "Mostly shot in super-8, the films seize an obvious priority for the profilmic, creating an abruptly-edited texture with long chunks on this or that 'person' or situation. The sense of immediacy and spontaneity in her work is, however, deceptive, with her raw footage held on the backburner "sometimes for a year before editing."³⁸⁶ The priority for the profilmic, the stark presentation of space, and the sustained present-tense of the films,

³⁸³ Ahwesh quoted in MacDonald, "Peggy Ahwesh Interview."

³⁸⁴ Peggy Ahwesh, interviewed by Ben Ogrodnik, July 6, 2015.

³⁸⁵ Russell, 366.

³⁸⁶ Ivone Margulies, "After the Fall: Peggy Ahwesh's Verite," *Motion Picture* Vol 3 nos 1/2 (1989-90): 31.

imbue them with an anthropological inscription of the Real, forming the first and most immediate linkage with that discursive field. Other relevant linkages to visual ethnography I describe below.

The first film, *Verité Opera*, set in Claudelle's Hill District apartment, opens on mundane interactions between Claudelle Bazemore and F. Roger Schwab. With radio music in the background, Roger, evidently camera-shy, turns away from being filmed. Claudelle meanwhile spruces up the living room. However, as soon as Claudelle notices the camera fixed on her, she transforms out of her workmanlike demeanor. She blossoms like a flower: she sets everything aside, begins to smile, plays with her hair and does a few glamour poses. The camera tracks her closely, giving a compressed and tight shot of whatever activity she occupies herself with. While it may seem obvious to some from the start that Claudelle is homosexual and a drag queen, it is nonetheless surprising when the camera tilts down to show us the fluffy, feminine slippers on her feet, which clashes with her otherwise masculine, blue-collar attire (blue jeans and sleeveless black shirt).

As Roger puts on a Rolling Stones record, Claudelle prepares a chess table for a match. The two begin playing a game. Roger then looks at a stack of records. A jump-cut occurs and takes us forward in time much later in the day. We see Claudelle dressed in a flamboyant outfit of baby blue color, ready for a night out. Looking in a mirror, she applies lipstick. The chess match never resolves in a winner, and the film more or less ends.

The film structure follows anthropologist John Marshall's idea of the "sequence film."³⁸⁷ Such films portray, in chronological and observational ways, the key elements of social activity

³⁸⁷ Between 1950 and 1958, John Marshall made four expeditions to film a group of Bushmen of the Nyae Nyae region of Namibia (then South West Africa). During this time, Marshall shot over 300,000 feet of 16mm film (157 hours). He later produced a total of 23 films exclusively from this footage. 15 of those are short films that Marshall referred to as "sequence films." Each focuses on a single event, providing the viewer a brief introduction followed by an uninterrupted sequence. See *Kung Short Films*, John Marshall, 1958/ digitally remastered 2009, 161 minutes.

belonging to a foreign culture, typically oriented around ritualistic, religious, or reproductive behaviors. Viewer and filmmaker remain in one place and time to watch patterns of life progress from one stage to the next. In this piece, Ahwesh applies the rite-of-passage film and the sequence film not to a foreign culture, but to the gay and punk subcultures that occupied her attention in the early 1980s.

However, the normally straightforward treatment of ethnographic subjects in the sequence film is here disrupted by jump-cuts. The jump-cuts break up the action of characters. Events are shown out of chronological order, taking us backward and forward temporally. The most startling jump-cut occurs when Claudelle's cleaning. This action is interrupted by a strange insert of an empty couch, then followed by a wide shot in which Claudelle wears different clothing – a fanciful, blue jumpsuit. Thus we are jolted forward in time. The jump-cut shows a significant transformation in Claudelle's self-presentation, but without a sequential building up of details or didactic framing that would try to make sense of her shift in identity.

Interestingly, the disruptive and discontinuous editing patterns that characterize this portrait also render Claudelle into a compelling "social actor," that is, an individual who stands in for a wider group. Amid all the jump-cuts and confusing edits, there remains a constant character-trait in Claudelle: Her preoccupation with the camera's gaze. This preoccupation with, and joy at being watched and observed, renders Claudelle into a Warholian exhibitionist, one who delights in nothing more than her own self-presentation as a theatrical persona. She becomes what Ahwesh called "a living artwork."³⁸⁸ One of the highlights is when Claudelle dons her black coat and elaborate hat, and turns toward the camera with a smile beaming on her face, as though she gained some new life and vitality.

³⁸⁸ Ahwesh, 80.

The fragmentary editing, moreover, reveals Claudelle as an author of her own hybridic identity. As Russell argues, Ahwesh's disjunct editing draws attention on her actors' performance. It does not break apart our attention, but rather focuses and heightens it, and our confusion gradually becomes a form of analysis. We begin to see patterns, see shades of personality, and character agency, revealed through the use of repetition, the sudden interruptions in an action, or abrupt shifts in time/space. As Russell writes, "The jump-cut [in Ahwesh] is the *modus operandi* [...] it functions as much more than a reflexive device. In filming people it becomes a means of analyzing behavior. Cutting on gestures, breaking up movements and dissecting bodies [...] is a key means by which people (actors and nonactors) become objects of study. Each performance is made into a text this way."³⁸⁹

Through the film's "abruptly-edited texture," Claudelle's self-performance indeed is "made into a text." Imagery of Claudelle in her room, and of her social attire, reveals that she is consciously constructing herself. Her apartment room (ramshackle though it may be) is littered with rich signifiers of self-creation. The mannequin with a woman's wig indicates her desire to compose herself and shift in and out of gendered identities. The handmade drawings of Egyptian goddesses hint at her concern for other societies that use mythology and symbolism, possibly surfacing a respect for the collage-like identity of Egyptian mythic beings – individuals that are part animal, part god and part human.

We begin to recognize that identity, and gender itself, can be related to a process of collage and discontinuity. Everyday, even in our most private moments, we compose, decompose, and recompose ourselves with bits and pieces of cultural imagery and accouterments. Gender, as Claudelle reveals, is often read off of articles of clothing, shaping one's body and performance

³⁸⁹ Russell, 372.

into a particular, pre-existing category. However, queer gender performance can be creative, pushing back against the binaristic nature of these categories. These binaries can be troubled and broken down, as Claudelle teaches us, by sampling from different sources that span history and mythology; the Egyptian Goddess of Love (the subject of one of her lectures to the camera) becomes for her both a queer diva and muse, a model for another way of being and doing. Appropriately, the circular editing, the use of jump-cuts, reflects a kind of temporal backwardness, or playful schizophrenia, in the fashioning of queer gender performance.

Interestingly, Ahwesh opts not to dramatize this recognition of the constructedness of gender, nor politicize it. Rather, she exhibits a stance of what we could call “radical ordinariness” with respect to the collaged nature of gender identity. As evidenced by the simple and crude jump cuts which leap us in time from Claudelle dressed masculinely to Claudelle dressed femininely-- and the blunt and artless indifference with which this occurs-- there is a fluidity, continuity, and stability that is paradoxically attached to the gender transformations that regularly occur in the films. This fluidity and neutrality neutralize the spectacle of Claudelle’s own performance, to present it as ordinary and domesticate it. Gender identification switches back and forth as seamlessly Ahwesh edits/arranges “long chunks on this or that ‘person’ or situation.”

The techniques deployed in this film -- the jump-cut-driven editing, the prioritization of profilmic recording (in which “performers at times confront the camera directly; at other times they acknowledge its presence in a literally sidelong glance”³⁹⁰), the use of sync sound, the foregrounding of the subject’s return gaze-- could easily be read as modernist-Brechtian revelations of “form as form.” Instead, or perhaps likewise, I would claim that Ahwesh wishes to reveal the cultural apparatus of gender.

³⁹⁰ Margulies, 31.

She deploys film's radical capacities (its ability to break up time and performance through editing) in order to challenge the presumed solidity, and stasis, of gender expression. We should recognize that Ahwesh's primary material in the portrait film is not the cinematic apparatus per se, but rather gender "essence." Her filmmaking displays an overarching interest in arranging and re-arranging the gendered character of her documentary subjects, presenting documentary records of this process. Through an aesthetic of ruin and collage, in which the editing pattern deconstructs a stable sense of self, and which juxtapose characters in disorienting situations without a stabilizing context, the characters perform no inner truth but show us the performance of self.

Much like drag, which, as Judith Butler notes, revels in the parodic deconstruction of gender truths, the film does not reveal a character's essence but only focuses on the contingent techniques of self-presentation that each character utilizes in various situations. This is the portrait's true object: Gender expression molded and plied like a Super 8 film strip, (re)cycled like different clothes and personae put on for the camera.

5.3.2 *PARA-NORMAL INTELLIGENCE*

Part II of the *Trilogy*, *Para-Normal Intelligence*, is an exploration of how the camera operator relates to the performer. A young, spiky-haired woman named Margie Strosser, in striped T-shirt and shorts, is shown in her apartment in the South Side neighborhood of the city. Roger operates a record player, back turned to the camera.

Strosser delivers an intimate confession to the camera. Strosser explains her desire to have a "normal" (read: heteronormative) life, where she can raise kids, own a house, have a stable lifestyle with a husband. Ahwesh immediately interjects and undermines this confession from behind the camera. Ahwesh says to her, "Well, that's boring, that's a stupid project. You need to

continue working with your other projects.” From there the conversation descends into a full-blown argument, in which Strosser lashes out, claiming she is being misunderstood and “defensive about [her] identity.”

While the two women argue, the camera is highly fluid, roving gesturally around. It pans left to right, right to left, tilting up and down. The movement visually echoes and amplifies the tension unraveling the verbal discussion. The conversation reaches an emotional highpoint with Ahwesh admitting that she herself has difficulty expressing her emotions, that she too often remains quiet, detached and observant from those around her.

Strosser demands at one point, “Why don’t you talk to me, explain to me what’s going on... this is a dialogue even if I’m the only one in the fucking frame!”

By the scene’s end, both women laugh and shout playfully at each other. The camera becomes even more unfixed, wobbly from laughter. At one point Ahwesh puts her own hand in the frame, interrupting the visual portrayal of Strosser. The film transforms, briefly, into an autoethnographic self-portrait.

The portrait’s camerawork offers a stark contrast to the stable, zoological gaze associated with much ethnographic filmmaking. The camera reframes and unframes its focus on Strosser, making her appear near and far, displaying a looseness toward the visual field which hints at Ahwesh’s desire to pry loose the stable binarizations of observer and observed. As Russell observes of the “roving camera” and purposely unreliable framing of subjects in her films, “When shooting people talking or performing, the framing [in Ahwesh’s films] is often ‘too close’: it lops off a head, it wanders away from the person being filmed, or it refuses to follow people as they walk out of a shot. Meanwhile, the person behind the camera is hard to position, as camera

movements are never directly tied to the filmmaker's movements. Instead, they take on a life of their own, literally 'floating' over the field of vision."³⁹¹

We see Ahwesh at several points reflected in a large circular mirror in the room. The image of the camera operator, miniaturized in the mirror, offers a playful consideration of the filmmaker as though she were a child playing with a toy. Wees has noted further the use of toys and models as a source of "acting out" and "playing primitive," describing the Super 8mm films as "little playgrounds."³⁹² Strosser's direct address to the camera, and Ahwesh shattering the observational frame by adding her own verbal commentary as she records the situation, is a reminder of Minh-ha's claim that the camera operator is always orchestrating and framing the visual material in a particular way. She eschews the expectation to be a neutral observer, a fly-on-the-wall, as in cinema verité or direct cinema traditions. Ahwesh makes matters worse by projecting herself into the film. She is seen prodding, joking, and hurling insults at her subject. At the height of point of tension between each other, she tells Strosser to quit complaining about the troubles of the artist's life and simply get a job.

As evidence of an anti-voyeuristic ethos, Strosser as a filmic subject seems unwilling to disclose herself in a way that is transparent or coherent. Strosser complains that Ahwesh does not express her emotions, she does not announce to the world how she really feels. Interestingly, Ahwesh chooses to edit the film portrait in such a way that includes this potentially damaging disclosure, and thereby describes the working relationship that Ahwesh and Strosser have together generally, in their creative pursuits.

³⁹¹ Russell, 362.

³⁹² Wees, "Peggy's Playhouse: Contesting the Modernist Paradigm," in *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, ed. Robin Blaetz, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007: 291.

The portrait reveals that Ahwesh relates to her subjects much in the same way that Warhol did: absenting a heavy directorial hand but not completely. Ahwesh's absences (her lack of exposition or didactic framing of the action) are doubled with intrusive, authorial gestures of presence, signaled through her technical ineptitude. Like Warhol, Ahwesh appears unable to film a scene properly – as when she knocks over a light fixture in the portrait, or placing her hand in between camera and the camera's subject.

Yet, this intrusive presence of the director, which interrupts the transmission of knowledge on which most documentary films depend, is revealing of Ahwesh's ethics of relationality: We glimpse how these creative women coexist together in a space that is displayed for the camera, and participate in that relationality through Ahwesh's invasive camera.

Ahwesh's fluid and self-critical model of film collaboration is thus the main subject of the second film portrait. She blurs boundaries of documented/documenter, and mocks the presumed objectivity of the documenter versus the documented subject. Her hand thrusting into the camera frame, and her insults to her filmed subject, recall the insults that Surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel hurled at village people in *Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan*. Ahwesh wants a kind of leveling of the ethnographic power relationship to take place.

This desire for an equality of documenter and documented characterizes experimental ethnography. In the words of Russell, "The utopian project of experimental ethnography is to overcome the binary oppositions of us and them, self and other, along with the tension between the profilmic and the textual operations of aesthetic form."³⁹³ Ahwesh pursues this utopian project without any sense of utopianism. Much like the Super 8 Chic films that circulated at this time, the film exists primarily as a document of its own conditions of being created, inviting the audience

³⁹³ Russell, 19.

to participate in the everyday mythologies generated by the subjects in the films. This portrait reflects how Ahwesh orchestrates a particular situation, a world of social relations organizing around her recording camera. Russell's observation that the Super 8mm films are often records of their own creation is indeed apropos here: "Ahwesh's performers are often flamboyant and dramatic, but they always retain a certain cultural integrity as people that underwrites their performances and grounds their stories in a history, if only the history of the making of the film."³⁹⁴

The portrait partakes of the popular punk ethos of the era, that the thrilling thing about art and culture is the *process*. How artworks are created and disseminated is just as important, if not more so, than the final finished product. This punk-inflected interest in how "performances and stories" are "grounded in the history of the making of the film" thus emerges centrally in the piece. The doubling of Strosser as object/author of Ahwesh's film undoes the presumed power dynamic of confessional address. Much more so than Strosser, Ahwesh herself ends up the object of scrutiny, thanks to the chaotic porousness of the profilmic recording situation.

5.3.3 *NOSTALGIA FOR PARADISE*

In *Nostalgia for Paradise*, rather than gender or artistic collaboration, questions of language, storytelling and the ambiguity of communication appear as key problems.

F. Roger Schwab, the proverbial Benjaminian storyteller, is shown in a state of "transformative repetition."³⁹⁵ In the first sequence, he is shown repeating a story about a Philadelphia philosophical society and the nature of language. The repetitious structure of the

³⁹⁴ Russell, 384.

³⁹⁵ Margulies, 31.

segment (8 nearly identical shots of Roger telling the same sentence of a story) breaks down the linguistic relation of signifier and signified. His speech and story-telling, under these conditions, reveal anthropological details about himself, his authoritative and self-serious manner of speaking/self-presentation, and how he orients himself in a social space.

His words, like Ahwesh's unruly camera, float freely, unfixed from a single determinate meaning. Repeated ad nauseum, Roger's words like "Rhinoceros" mean something and simultaneously mean nothing. In the process of seeing Roger repeat the same sentence over and over again, the viewer is reverted to the position of the child who latches onto a word for reasons other than meaning, only to delight in phonetics and the material shape of linguistic expression. As Ahwesh strains our ability to listen solely for symbolic content Roger is thus denied the satisfaction of a well-told story and his desired self-presentation as an entertainer. Her repetitious montage of Schwab turns the presentation of his words and his overall demeanor into a text in itself, standing out against the deliberate stylelessness of her home-movie framework.

In his stuttered speech, he becomes like a skipping turntable, repeating fragments without moving forward. Ahwesh is not, however, aiming at the nihilistic abolition of meaning or the absence of knowledge completely. What do we gain from the repetitious cut-up treatment of Roger's voice? Underneath the repeated story, we hear the nasal pitch of his voice; we notice his rigidity of expression when he tells jokes intended to make us laugh; we observe how he awkwardly tries to situate himself in space alongside others. We notice how Roger, in fact, is a deviously tricky subject to film, that he usually eschews the spotlight, preferring to lob comments from the peanut gallery outside of view.

Russell points out, “As ethnography, [Ahwesh’s] work is profoundly unscientific, and consistently challenges all forms of objective representation.”³⁹⁶ Indeed, it is this deep questioning of visual realism which makes her valuable and relevant to both ethnographic and experimental traditions. The violent collision of ethnographic, punk, and experimental-film tropes across her work offers an alternative set of terms for a renewed experimental film language.

As Tom Gunning argues, in place of the highly mannered Structural film which had become a staid, “international” style, and positioned against the Romantic, self-aggrandizing ethos of Stan Brakhage’s visionary tradition, Ahwesh led to a third way for women filmmakers working within an avant-garde milieu at the beginning of the 1980s.³⁹⁷ She subjected cinematic realism to processes of stylistic collage, resulting in subversive “minor” films that did not recapitulate logo/phallogocentric authority over the documentary subject.

5.4 IMAGES OF A FUTURE NOSTALGIA: OR, PLAYING IN PEGGY’S RUINS

This chapter situated the *Pittsburgh Trilogy* as a merging of punk attitude and reflexive ethnographic filmmaking. It makes clear the connections Ahwesh drew to normally separate spheres of film practice, modernism and anthropology, through her focus on visual thick-

³⁹⁶ Russell, 357.

³⁹⁷ Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on the literature of Franz Kafka, Gunning claims that Ahwesh is representative of a movement that does not break from experimental film, but parasitically situates itself in relation to the dominant tendencies of the 1980s. Gunning writes, “The image, rather than the Self dominates in minor cinema. This nearly epistemological impulse moves Ahwesh [...] towards documentary, but a documentary filmmaking in which the language of images never becomes subjugated to the objectivity of fact. Ahwesh’s manipulation of the celluloid surface [in a work like *Martina’s Playhouse*] constantly filters the reality she records, a reality which itself is composed of role-playing, performance, and attempts at seduction of the filmmaker and the audience.” Tom Gunning, “Towards a Minor Cinema: Fonoroff, Herwitz, Ahwesh, Klahr and Solomon,” *Motion Picture* 3 No. 1/2 (Winter 1989–90): 4.

description, repetitive editing, and reflecting the situation of filmmaking. My main objects of analysis have had to do with the parodic presentation of social actors in Ahwesh's portraits. Along with this, the abruptly-edited texture, the treatment of performance-as-text, forecloses the epistophilic pursuit of knowledge and prevents voyeuristic looking. I claim that the devious suspension of meaning and ethnographic convention renders Ahwesh of a piece with a reflexive paradigm in ethnographic filmmaking in the 1980s. In this, she followed other women filmmakers such as Su Friedrich, Leslie Thornton, and Abigail Child. Above all, Ahwesh shows that (like other experimental ethnographers) her portrait films demonstrate a desire not for knowledge but for a merging with the objects and subjects being portrayed. It is this "integral relationship" toward Otherness that makes Ahwesh unique among other documentarians working in the Rust Belt. Where others, like her colleague Tony Buba, wanted to make sense of economic industrial ruin, Ahwesh sought to stop making sense, and instead aestheticized her surroundings and social milieu for the viewer's pleasure.

Much like the punk music documentaries of the 1980s with which she would have been familiar, Ahwesh involves herself - and the audience- with the documented subject. She does not merely describe, she merges with her object. Her hand entering the film frame is the perfect visual distillation of this idea, but many other textual features of her films reflect the open and porous nature of social experience that interests her. As an experimental ethnographer, she deliberately breaks from the technophobic bias of realist observation (the ban on references to the camera apparatus), and she challenges the conceptual/technical suppositions underlying the ethnographic recording of people. Her analysis of behavior in the social actor, for instance, departs from the staid visual conventions of a static camera or series of long and medium shots that are meant to give a sense of a social actor undisturbed by the filmmaker. She often puts herself into the film

image, violating the boundary of observer and observed. She references the material conditions of production, and reveals the intrusive but constitutive role of the filmic apparatus, whether showing herself in a mirror with a camera or having the microphone wires visible and allowing technical commentary (normally edited out) remain in the finished piece. Her subjects directly address the camera, talking to it (to us). Sometimes it seems as though they are directing Ahwesh herself. Thus, as in autoethnography, we see as much of the subjective vision of the filmmaker as we do the social actors on screen; frequently she conspires to dissolve boundaries of the filmic text all together.

In *Pittsburgh Trilogy*, she also highlights marginal groups that mainstream audiences normally do not or wish not to see, but in doing so Ahwesh does not allow for a classical kind of epistemic relationship to take place. She mobilizes a range of techniques of visual mistakes and “errors” that make the apprehension of the social actor fraught, challenging. She favors a mobile camera, in contrast to a static gaze. This camera often “lops off heads,” it zooms for zoom’s sake; it distracts easily and lapses out of a disciplined neutrality. The effect is to acknowledge Otherness beyond our comprehension.

She also demonstrates a decidedly Warholian or collage-like approach to the performances by her social actors. In Warhol’s films, his subjects frequently break out of character and shatter the narrative illusionism of the story. Ahwesh favors a presentation of the social actor that is similarly schizophrenic, cycling from acting to authenticity, not just a one-to-one relationship of subject and their social milieu. Ahwesh favors jump-cuts, elliptical editing patterns, and forms of visual discontinuity that make it awfully difficult to see her subjects as though we were observing them from afar. As in *Verité Opera*, she frequently abbreviates dialogue or social behaviors, so that we do not see conversations begin or end, but we see an action unfolding indefinitely. She

also edits the presentation of dialogue so that we get direct access to the thoughts, the psychic texture of the social actor. The dialogue we get access to is often jokes, secondhand anecdotes, or word play. Ahwesh favors repetition, repeating dialogue to the point of meaninglessness. Words often stop making sense, and the one-to-one relationship of signified and signified, on which ethnographic film depends, breaks down.

In Chapter 6, we consider the ways in which portraiture can utilize sound design and multiple voices to make feminist arguments about media history. Pittsburgh Filmmaker Stephanie Beroes made numerous portraits about women and gender politics across her multifaceted film career. This chapter centers on Beroes' *The Dream Screen* (1986), her longest and most formally sophisticated work, which utilizes multiple voice-over narrators to "re-voice" Louise Brooks, the troubled silent movie star who played LuLu, in G.W. Pabst's Weimar film, *Pandora's Box*. This portrait-film dissects the sexist myth of "Pandora" offered up by Pabst's original work, and supplements Brooks' biography to reveal how the actress was, in many ways, a feminist pioneer in a male-dominated industry. I show the historical and conceptual insights generated by the experimental film's layering of found footage, scripted footage, and documentary images, and consider the latent power of women's voices in film portraiture.

6.0 LISTENING TO THE MULTI-VOICED FEMINIST FILM: STEPHANIE BEROES'

THE DREAM SCREEN (1986)

In the 1980s, women filmmakers and feminist film scholars working in the US and Britain added to the critique of images of sexism begun in the 1960s and 1970s by asking how can and should women construct their own media culture of resistance that contains its own representations and politics.³⁹⁸ One of the possibilities explored at this time was making films with female voice-over narration, where voice-over (specifically a woman's voice) could have a prominent, dynamic relationship to visual material.

Visual imagery had already been thoroughly analyzed as a battleground where sexual difference was reified and women devalued, and numerous studies exposed cinema as an important ideological institution serving patriarchy and capitalist society. Most influentially, Laura Mulvey's work identified how the imagery of women in classical cinema is imbued with "to-be-looked-at-ness" in a regime of visual pleasure, in which women are treated as primarily visual, passive objects.³⁹⁹ Claire Johnston observed with perceptive detail how women characters were imbued with a mythic quality, such that they were not agentic or substantive beings within a historical

³⁹⁸ British filmmaker and film theorist, Laura Mulvey, signals the overall critical direction of avant-garde filmmaking in 1978's "Film, Feminism, and the Avant-Garde," where she writes, discussing her own film *Riddles of the Sphinx*, "What recurs overall is a constant return to woman, not indeed as a visual image, but as a subject of inquiry, a content which cannot be considered within the aesthetic lines laid down by traditional cinematic practice." See *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 125. For historical analysis of broad tendencies and contradictions within women's experimental filmmaking, after the first wave of documentaries in the 1960s, see Teresa de Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory," in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, eds Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 140-161; and "Experimental Filmmaking and Women's Subjectivity," in *Women and Experimental Filmmaking*, eds Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 1-18.

³⁹⁹ See "Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look," in Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 19.

world, but were more often abstract and recycled signifiers of the unknowable, a source of exoticism, and thus frequently “punished” in classical film stories (as in film noir, the fallen women narrative, melodrama, and so on).⁴⁰⁰

In addition to visual and narrative dynamics within classical cinema, the technology of sound was also exposed in the subjugation of women in visual media. Mary Anne Doane describes how, in narrative film, one finds a regime of sound synchronization where bodies and voices are rigidly linked up.⁴⁰¹ Concealing the representational nature of the cinematic medium, synchronized sound mystifies the fact that recorded images and recorded sound are assembled, and nothing is ever natural about them. This concealment of the heterogeneity of the filmic medium extends to a reification of misogynistic stereotypes about women and men, and contributes to filmic illusionism’s imaginary cohesion, a “fusion of the child with the mother.”⁴⁰² In the classical cinema, women’s voices are depicted and used in ways that differ from those of men, but which at the same time support the visual spectacularization of women’s bodies: in Kaja Silverman’s analysis, “Hollywood requires the female voice to assume similar responsibilities to those it confers upon the female body. The former, like the latter, functions as a fetish within dominant cinema, filling in for and covering over what is unspeakable within male subjectivity.”⁴⁰³ Voice and voicelessness are thus related to gendered ideological dynamics within a broader analysis of power in society.

⁴⁰⁰ Claire Johnston, “Women’s Cinema as Countercinema,” in *Notes on Women’s Cinema*, ed. Johnston, London Society for Education in Film and Television (1973): 24-31.

⁴⁰¹ Mary Anne Doane, “The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space,” in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, eds Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press:1985), 162-176.

⁴⁰² Doane, 170.

⁴⁰³ Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 38.

With advances in synchronized sound technology and 16mm film equipment during the 1970s and 1980s many feminist artists attempted to resist the synchronization process, and the fetishization of women's voices as contiguous with the fetishization of their bodies. Artists worked with voice and strategies of vocal recording, such as postdubbing, voice-off, sound collage, polyphony, sonic counterpoint, and more. In a break with classical cinema, where sound was subordinated to the visual, sound itself was treated in materialist and anti-illusionistic ways, producing new cinematic structures. These new forms allowed for a multiplicity of voices and nonsynchronous audio effects to emerge in relation to the visual, destabilizing women's equation with spectacle.

This auditory experimentation led to a rich vein in women's countercinema. Filmmakers played with techniques of vocal recording and voice-over, building on voice-over as a way to intervene on the spectacularized, voyeuristic treatment of women's imagery. The use of women's voices could be a way of negating spectacularization of women's bodies. In the words of Doane, the voice-over turns human bodies (and their attendant ideological attributes) "inside-out."⁴⁰⁴ Silverman evocatively remarks that "[t]he voice in question functions almost like a searchlight suddenly turned upon a character's thoughts; it makes audible what is ostensibly inaudible, transforming the private into the public."⁴⁰⁵ In this respect voice-over could be a way of relating to a visual field differently, challenging viewer's stereotypical notions while revealing forms of women's experience.

The presence of female subjectivity, in the form of an "acousmatic" voice, creates a potentially thought-filled gap between a usual synchronicity of image/sound. For Michel Chion,

⁴⁰⁴ Doane, 168.

⁴⁰⁵ Silverman, 53.

the acousmatic voice, or *acousmètre*, refers to an all-powerful, all-knowing, but invisible voice that exists both inside and outside the diegetic world of a film, citing the example of Fritz Lang's *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933, Fritz Lang), where the spectator hears but does not see the voice of the mysterious villain.⁴⁰⁶ The *acousmètre* in a feminine cast is not analyzed by Chion but is pivotal within the historical trajectory of feminist avant-garde filmmaking. The female acousmatic voice makes an appearance in a number of feminist films, such as *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen), where a strategic weaving of voice and image allows viewers to think about and experience their own spectatorship anew by “actively listening,” making these films “paradigms of a radical auditory cinema.”⁴⁰⁷ *Make Out*, for instance, centers on footage of a woman kissing a man, while a female narrator describes her disgust at being forced to kiss the man.⁴⁰⁸ The audio track ironizes the meaning of the visuals, which (thanks to the preponderance of Hollywood romance films) otherwise might be taken to be romantic and sentimental. The viewer, listening to the frenetic inner monologue, sides with the woman character (typically figured as a romantic passive conquest), resists identifying with the (mute) male character, and thus feels sensations of dread, concern, anger, curiosity, even laughter. Such filmmaking activity attempting to fuse feminist dialogics and sound design, as a critical avenue of expanding women’s representation on film, reinforces one of the principal objectives of the

⁴⁰⁶ Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press: 1999), 23-4.

⁴⁰⁷ For a detailed discussion of 1970s-era “theory films” by feminist filmmakers which prioritize, in her words, women’s “listening, as much as speaking,” see Sophie Mayer, “Listening to Women,” in *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture, and Experimental Film in the 1970s*, eds Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 41-55.

⁴⁰⁸ Made in 1970, *Make Out* is a narrative short showing a couple in a romantic moment with a woman’s voice expressing what she is feeling. The film made by the Newsreel Collective was conceived by Geri Ashur, who co-directed, (with Peter Schlaifer), the filming of the actors. The voice-over script was created collectively by Ashur, Andrea Eagan, Marcia Salo Rizzi, Deborah Shaffer and a few other women, and was taken from the transcript of their “conscious-raising group” discussions.

Women's Movement: the need for having women's voices heard as a means of consciousness-raising, fostering a receptivity among men and women so that political solidarity could be created.

In the rich filmmaking context of the postindustrial city of Pittsburgh, one filmmaker in particular, Stephanie Beroes(1952--), was interested in developing a critical auditory cinema that was able to "audit" a broad range of voices, in which sound might "deviate from and expand the realm of the visible."⁴⁰⁹ Beroes was the exhibitions programmer at Pittsburgh Filmmakers media arts center, taking inspiration from visiting artists who traveled to the city in the 1970s, such as Carolee Schneemann, Jean-Luc Godard, Yvonne Rainer, and others; and she worked between San Francisco and Pittsburgh in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Her films blend critical theory and modernist poetics with her own autobiographical experience, constantly referring back to personal conflicts she had in a male-dominated film scene, thus fusing the formal and emotional.⁴¹⁰

In her body of films, Beroes concentrates not on a singular female voice, but many voices, and is thus emblematic of the projects around audiovisual feminism in the period. Her use of voice produces temporal and historical connections, creating rich time-/sound-images. Her film *Valley Fever* (1979), for instance, takes the form of a disjunctive conversation between an unnamed man and woman debating the phenomenology of perception.⁴¹¹ Her acclaimed film, *Recital*, is structured as a series of monologues by nine women who read from texts such as personal letters,

⁴⁰⁹ For more discussion on how the usage of acousmatic voice can challenge the visual construction within narrative cinema, see Hye Jean Chung, "Cinema as Archeology: The Acousmetre and the Multiple Layering of Temporality and Spatiality," in *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture*, Vol 1 (2011): 109.

⁴¹⁰ Beroes writes, "In my films, I am principally concerned with image-making. This involves a concern with form; an attention to the fundamental components of cinema – time, space, light, color, sound – with formalist strategies. But I am also, more so, concerned with the emotive effect of the images I create – image-making in the sense of creating images which reflect whatever I feel about being alive. I can only reflect on the reality of my own experience, which is about loving, hating, fearing, being in despair, being excited, dreaming, imagining, and always under self-scrutiny." Stephanie Beroes, Artist Statement, "Recent Directions in American Independent Cinema: a program of films by West Coast film artists," Stephanie Beroes Artist File, Carnegie Museum of Art, Film and Video Archives.

⁴¹¹ *Valley Fever*, 1978, color/sound, 25 minutes.

critical theory, artist statements, and feminist manifestoes.⁴¹² Like her colleague Peggy Ahwesh, Beroes was involved in the local punk music movement. Beroes is best known for *Debt Begins at Twenty*, a 1980 documentary film-fiction hybrid about punk bands in the Oakland neighborhood of Pittsburgh.⁴¹³ The film is “dialogic” in its assembly and content: it spotlights a group of young women punk singers, and features humorous captions and subtitles as counterpoints to the stark visuals. The singers’ plain and coarse vocal delivery challenges the notion that women should be seen but not heard. With “crude” and nonvirtuosic instrumentation, they sabotage feminized concepts of musical composition (harmony, melody, and so on), and they clearly intend to shock and offend audiences with lyrical content ranging from men’s genitalia, to stealing, to murderous and anarchic impulses to destroy property. Here, the woman’s voice becomes weaponized.

Beroes’ 1986 film *The Dream Screen*, 45 minutes, black-and-white, on 16mm, manifests this ongoing commitment to articulating women’s voices on film, but also evinces a new interest in multiple layerings of temporality, and draws upon theoretical strands of psychoanalysis, feminism, semiotics, and personal experience, thereby standing as the most complex work in her career. The movie is a “feminist remake” of the G.W. Pabst film, *Pandora’s Box*.⁴¹⁴ It contains re-edited scenes, documentary footage and new scripted footage, featuring a cast of women characters who look nearly identical to Lulu, the central protagonist of Pabst’s film played by Louise Brooks.

⁴¹² *Recital*, 1978, color/sound, 20 minutes. For an interesting discussion positing this film as a “powerful liberation from the illusions of traditional heterosexual romance,” see Lucy Fischer *Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women’s Cinema*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 125-131.

⁴¹³ *Debt Begins at Twenty*, 1979, black-and-white/sound, 40 minutes. For more on *Debt Begins at Twenty*, see: Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Barcelona Boogie and Pittsburgh Punk,” *The Soho News*, June 4, 1980, 36; Evanne Weirich “A Day in the Life of Bill Bored,” *The Vanguard Press*, Vol VIII No 6, February 24-March 3, 1985; Elfrieda Pantoga, “Discovering local filmmakers,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Friday September 7, 1984; Lucy Fischer, program notes for one person show at Carnegie Institute, Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Sept 1980; Gina Chetti, “Documenting Punk: A Subcultural Investigation,” *Film Reader Journal*, Northwestern University Press, 1982: 269-280; Stephen Locke, “Aufregende Konzeption” in *Tip*, West Berlin City Magazine, June 20, 1980, 46.

⁴¹⁴ *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora’s Box*), 1929, black-and-white, silent, 109 minutes. Director Georg Wilhelm Pabst, screenplay co-written by Frank Wedekind and Ladislaus Vajda.

Interspersed within the variety of visual material, the film contains voice-over narration spoken by female narrators. As we see Lulu in familiar scenarios from the original film, the audience also bears witness to a rich tapestry of quotations on the soundtrack, all spoken by different women. These quotations span 1970s feminist theory, Greek mythology, R&B song lyrics, personal diary entries, and Brooks' own autobiography, giving new meaning and depth to Lulu's character.⁴¹⁵ These audio elements are interwoven and juxtaposed together almost seamlessly, as they alternate from being original written material to quotations from pre-existing works.

The presence of voice-over narrations function "acousmatically," in the terms defined by Michel Chion; with "one foot in the image," women's voices are synched with women's bodies on screen.⁴¹⁶ For instance, a new voice is given to the figure of Lulu: a woman reading from the autobiographical text restores the flesh-and-blood identity of Louise Brooks to Lulu, while also delving into the making of the film and her fraught career in Hollywood. Conversely, the voice/voices operate nonsynchronously with "one foot *outside* the image," that is, the female voice-over narration often appears to be all-powerful and all-knowing, commenting on and weaving together the visual strands, as though it were floating specter-like above and detached

⁴¹⁵ I have identified 5 strands of voice-over narration in the film: 1. An omniscient, female narrator who recounts the Greek mythological story of Pandora's box. 2. Louise Brooks' autobiography, *Lulu in Hollywood* (originally published in 1982), from which sections are excerpted at precise points in the film. 3. The 1973 feminist work, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, by Shiela Rowbotham, which provides critical observations on the politics of make-up, costume and dress in maintaining women's oppression. 4. The recurring musical score, "Deep in the Night" sung by Etta James. Soulful and sultry, the song's African American voice bookends the beginning and end of the film. 5. The final voice is represented by the original, written material by Karyn Kay, which provides meta-commentary that stitches together connections across these strands, pointing to parallels in the three personae.

⁴¹⁶ Chion writes: "The acousmète.... cannot occupy the removed position of commentator, the voice of the magic lantern show. He must, even if only slightly, have *one foot in the image*, in the space of the film; he must haunt the borderlands that are neither the interior of the filmic stage nor the proscenium – a place that has no name, but which the cinema forever brings into play." See *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 161.

from the visual field.⁴¹⁷ At the same time, Beroes allows her images to retain an opacity which is not entirely explained away by the voice-over commentary. This in turn produces fascinating ambiguities and unresolved gaps within the critical argument about gender relations she puts forward, and this inherent opacity differentiates Beroes' practice of voice-over as not being a form of "authoritative speech."

Beroes raises the main problem of the film halfway through *The Dream Screen*: "Who created Lulu?" Asked another way: is Lulu a creation of G.W. Pabst and writer Frank Wedekind? Is she a creation of the star, Louise Brooks, who put herself, her body and personality into an iconic performance? Is "Lulu" a further iteration of the Greek mythological figure, Pandora? Or is she something else? In raising the question, the film draws precise distinctions from Pabst's film, showing that it fails to answer that question in its implicit suggestion that women are to blame for their mythologized stature.

By engaging in an "intertextual dialogue" with canonical narrative cinema, and by employing archival methods of feminist research-- such as citation, quotation, and juxtaposition-- Beroes works like a researcher or film archivist as much as an artist. The film writes back otherness into a male-created film text, expanding the range of women's voices and identities on film. In turn, the original male film auteur G.W. Pabst no longer monopolizes the "power to mean." His characters are able to speak for themselves, even against the author. It is as if the characters speak directly through the film to us.

In this essay my argument follows several steps. First, I use a critical framework drawing on feminist explorations of sound and voice in cinema, drawing heavily on Doane, Silverman, and Mulvey. Second, because Beroes reworks existing filmic imagery, I also draw upon Lucy Fischer's

⁴¹⁷ Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 24.

method of intertextual analysis. This method contrasts a marginalized, woman-centric film text with a hegemonic, male-authored text, analyzing differences on multiple levels of production, reception, aesthetics, and meaning. Fischer describes the method's impact in sonic terms: "I aspire to recoup not only woman's vision but her discourse – to provide a cinematic 'voice-over' for the canonical track."⁴¹⁸ In this spirit I begin with a brief analysis of *Pandora's Box*, how it was created and received. I recount the dominant readings attached to the Pabst film that have given it a conflictual but prominent place in the canon. I rehearse how the film, on the one hand, is considered formally dazzling and expertly made, and is elevated into a metaphor for filmic signification itself; and how, on the other hand, it is seen as hostile to women's subjectivity, an unselfcritical glorification of the male gaze. This section concludes with several reasons why Beroes may have thought to work with this film as source material.

I then show that, in terms of content, form, production, and reception, *The Dream Screen* should be considered a feminist remake and a recuperation of the Pabst film. My main claim is that the uncritical allegory of female spectacle in *Pandora's Box* is altered through Beroes' feminist remake. Through the use of multiple voices, and through the strategies of Eisensteinian associational montage, the problematic allegory of Woman-as-Mythic-Other becomes culturally specified as a trope, rather than a natural explanation of gender. Through an exploration of the critical potentials of female acousmatic voice-over, the visual spectacle of Lulu becomes an occasion for analyzing masculine domination, feminine resistance, and the broader conditions (and limits) of feminist filmmaking in the 1980s.

Ultimately, I show that the recovery of Lulu is emblematic of Beroes' belief that women avant-garde artists need to work with existing images, rather than aspire to a separatist sphere of

⁴¹⁸ Fischer, 24.

feminine poetics. She teaches us that we can productively engage and rework our understanding of the past, by using historiographical techniques of juxtaposition and collage, and by expanding the female acousmatic voice into several areas: personal experience, artistic/writerly agency, and psychoanalytic criticism.

6.1 LULU AS “PURE IMAGE:” COMPARISON OF *PANDORA’S BOX* TO *THE DREAM SCREEN*

G.W. Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box* is a 1929 Weimar-era film, starring Louise Brooks in what is considered her most important role as a silent movie star.⁴¹⁹ In the film Brooks plays Lulu, a beautiful but frivolous young woman who depends on the generosity of (typically male) strangers and patrons. The story is based partially on playwright Frank Wedekind’s cycle of “sex tragedies” *Erdgeist* (Earth Spirit, 1895) and *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1904)⁴²⁰, that takes place across several historical period settings, including Berlin and London. Alan Berg previously composed an opera based on Wedekind’s story, written in 1935, which premiered incomplete in 1937 and complete in 1979.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ Brooks starred in 21 Hollywood films, though none of them as sensational as *Pandora’s Box*, a production which essentially assisted “in withdrawing her from the limelight in Hollywood.” For more on Brooks’ complicated cinematic career and how scholars have treated it in the economy of scholarly discourse, see Amelie Hastie, “Louise Brooks, Star Witness,” *Cinema Journal* 36 No 3 (Spring 1997): 4-5.

⁴²⁰ Thomas Elsaesser has identified several important changes Pabst made in adapting the source material, such as removing or combining several characters, combining the original plays into a single work, and giving Lulu a more prominent place in the storyline. Originally the lesbian character Countess Geschwitz, of *Erdgeist*, was the principal antagonist, with Wedekind himself writing of Lulu’s minor status: “Lulu is not a real character, but the personification of primitive sexuality who inspires evil unaware. She plays a purely passive role.” See Elsaesser, “Lulu and the Meter Man: Louise Brooks, G.W. Pabst and *Pandora’s Box*,” *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 264-267.

⁴²¹ For extensive analysis on Berg’s twelve-tone opera, *Lulu*, see Patricia Hall’s *A View of Berg’s Lulu Through the Autograph Sources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

The film's plot hinges on Lulu's ill-fated affair with a wealthy newspaper publisher, Ludwig Schön (Fritz Kortner). The two could not be more poorly matched. A prostitute, thespian and dancer, Lulu regularly associates with gamblers and out-of-work musicians. It is also hinted that Lulu may have a protean sexual identity, thanks to her romantic friendship with Countess Geschwitz (Alice Roberts), in what Vito Russo describes as "probably the first explicitly drawn lesbian character."⁴²² The wealthy and upstanding Schön, meanwhile, is a stoic and antisocial patriarch who never smiles and is already engaged to another woman. He is nevertheless taken in by her beauty.

The unlikely coupling of Schön and Lulu ends in tragedy on their wedding night. Schön loses his temper at Lulu for her refusal to stop associating with the other, low class men. Outraged and humiliated, Schön gives her a gun, demanding that she kill herself. In the end, she kills him and flees.⁴²³ At the murder trial, the judge sentences Lulu to five years for manslaughter. The prosecutor makes an impassioned speech comparing Lulu to Pandora, a being created by Greek gods who use her feminine wiles to unleash ills upon the world.⁴²⁴ Lulu's male associates, Schigolch (Carl Goetz) and Quast (Krafft-Raschig), spirit her away before she can be imprisoned. She is later sold to a brothel. The film ends with Lulu destitute in a London garret. Moral certainty

⁴²² Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harpers and Row, 1981), 22.

⁴²³ Bram Dijkstra observes that Lulu's unexpected killing of Schön ramifies the Manichean gender politics of the film, further positioning her as a timeless agent of Evil: discussing the cultural meaning of the confrontation and Schön's death, she writes "The death of the sexual woman meant life to the Aryan man of steel, for it would save woman's place in the evolutionary order as mother of us all. Pabst knew exactly what he intended to convey with this scene and was confident that his audience, too, would understand its significance...But the phallic woman in Lulu – Diana of Ephesus, the pagan predator – rebels. She turns the gun barrel away from her body and fires. Instead of letting herself be slain by the phallus as a good woman should, she appropriates the phallus to kill the man." Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 414.

⁴²⁴ The prosecutor's speech:

Your honors and gentleman of the jury! The Greek gods created a woman...Pandora. She was beautiful and charming, and versed in the art of flattery. But the gods also gave her a box containing all the evils of the world. The heedless woman opened the box, and all evil was loosed upon us. Counsel, you portray the accused as a persecuted innocent. I call her Pandora, for through her all evil was brought upon Dr. Schön!

is restored, and the *femme fatale* “properly” punished, once Jack the Ripper murders her on Christmas Eve.

Pabst’s film devotes considerable attention to Lulu’s beauty and charm. She is frequently shown in close-up and soft lighting, her face enveloping the frame. These facial close-ups evoke the “absorptive” and obsessive look of the beholder that Béla Balázs championed in the early cinema.⁴²⁵ Lulu is often equated with Weimar’s commercial culture of surfaces and light. The character has been variously described as a “pure image”⁴²⁶ (Lulu is equated with a framed photographic image from the film’s beginning); an art object⁴²⁷; a “pagan idol”⁴²⁸; and even a “lunar landscape.”⁴²⁹ Lulu is framed so close-up in some shots that “her whole head looks like the planet Saturn.”⁴³⁰

Lulu’s beauty becomes the principal source of conflict within the narrative dynamics of the film: she is entrancing, but nobody really knows who she is or what motivates her. Lulu is a consummate performer, cycling through many identities and personae. She is shown applying makeup in the mirror, trying on a variety of outfits. She tricks men as to suggest a certain status of wealth; in her stage performances, she captivates and distracts her audience with illusion. Lulu’s tendency toward the theatrical produces a strong association of the *femme fatale*, leading men to ruin. Thus, despite her innocent, empty and entrancing smile, she holds many secrets and dangers.

⁴²⁵ Béla Balázs, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, Trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 31.

⁴²⁶ See Elsaesser, 81; and Mary Ann Doane “The Erotic Barter: *Pandora’s Box* (1929),” in *The Films of G.W. Pabst: An Extraterritorial Cinema*, ed. Eric Rentschler, 1990, 67.

⁴²⁷ Andrew Burkett, “The Image Beyond the Image: G.W. Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box* (1929) and the Aesthetics of the Cinematic Image-Object,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 24:3 (2007): 239.

⁴²⁸ Lotte H. Eisener, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, Trans. Roger Greaves (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 296.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 299.

⁴³⁰ Margaret McCarthy, “Surface Sheen and Charged Bodies: Louise Brooks as Lulu in *Pandora’s Box* (1929),” in *Weimar Cinema*, ed. Noah Isenberg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 224.

After an initially cool reception upon release – one reviewer wrote “Louise Brooks cannot act!”⁴³¹ – the film was rediscovered in the 1950s as a lost classic.⁴³² Brooks would not receive positive recognition in the States until many years later.⁴³³ The film, meanwhile, cemented Pabst’s noteworthiness as a director and playwright Wedekind as exemplary of the *Autorenfilm*, films in the Weimar era noted for a strong authorial presence.⁴³⁴ Creation, creativity and ownership, in other words, are at the heart of the film, and they imbue the layers of reception and production that continue to emanate from it.

In the critical literature since its release, scholars have taken the film to be a problematic depiction of Weimar-era gender relations. The treatment of Lulu as a manifestation of Pandora during the murder trial is taken to task by many feminist analyses. Lulu’s quasi-mythological status serves as evidence of the filmmaker’s blatant antipathy toward women, as demonstrated in Mary Ann Doane’s influential critique.⁴³⁵ The dominant understanding of Lulu is that, within the logic of the film, she represents a chameleonic, almost demonic signifier of womanhood, a source of Otherness that (in the narrative’s logic) deserves containment, death and moral judgment from the community.

⁴³¹ See Louise Brooks, “Pabst and Lulu,” in *Louise Brooks: Portrait of an Anti-Star*, ed. Roland Jaccard (New York: Zoetrope, 1986), 88.

⁴³² Elsaesser notes that “for several decades after 1945, the film was practically unavailable, except as one of the very special treasures of Henri Langlois’ Cinematheque in Paris.” According to Elsaesser’s account, James Card, curator of film at the George Eastman House, Rochester, found Louise Brooks in New York, “found her in almost squalid circumstances and brought her to live in Rochester on a small Eastman House stipend.” Card tracked down and restored *Pandora’s Box*, leading to a revival of interest in the film. See Elsaesser, 259.

⁴³³ See Hastie.

⁴³⁴ As Paul Cooke notes, one of the defining features of German narrative film in the 1910s and 1920s was the rise of films developed by screenplay writers, whose form and generic status departed radically from the typical early forms during the era. Cooke writes, “*Autorenfilm*, a term usually thought to have been invented by critics in the 1950s and 1960s associated with the French New Wave, who talked about auteur films. However, whilst the French critics used the term to differentiate films which bore the thumbprint of a specific film-maker, *Autorenfilm* were generally defined by their screenplay writers....The film credited with being the first *Autorenfilm* is *Der Andere/The Other* by Max Mack.” Cooke, *German Expressionist Films* (London: Pocket Essentials, 2002), 9.

⁴³⁵ See Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 142.

I will show in the next section the aspects of the original work that receive reconsideration, amplification in Stephanie Beroes' *The Dream Screen*, and those aspects that are omitted as well. I also analyze the significance of newly created scenes in her film which are interwoven as an "intertext," a parasitic but productive addition to the original, rendering *The Dream Screen* into a feminist remake. In particular, sound/voice is used in various ways to repel negative meanings and lacunae associated with Pabst film and masculinist classical cinema in general. This negation is not necessarily negative, but rather productive, allowing the recognition of speaking human subjects in the image.

6.2 FILM ANALYSIS: *THE DREAM SCREEN*

6.2.1 THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL VOICE AS A MEANS TO RESTORE COMPLEXITY TO LOUISE BROOKS

The dominant, masculinist interpretation of Lulu-as-Mythic-Other is challenged by Stephanie Beroes' *The Dream Screen*. The main way she does this is by editing and reforming the original footage with audio voice-over. The inclusion of voice-over provokes a new empathy and curiosity about the performer, Louise Brooks, who starred as Lulu. Brooks went through tremendous psychic and physical distress before, during, and after the role. Further, the film supports Louise Brooks, who, as other scholars have noted, struggled over how she and her "voice" was portrayed during her career.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁶ Hastie has done excellent work analyzing the dynamics of voice and agency, pointing to the inherent performativity of Brooks' autobiographical texts. Hastie argues that Brooks should be seen as "a witness of cinema

The Dream Screen features key segments from Louise Brooks' autobiography, *Lulu in Hollywood*.⁴³⁷ Beroes selects the parts of the text focusing on the tense, and oftentimes dysfunctional, relationship between Brooks and Pabst during the film's production. Voiced as if to imply Brooks herself speaking directly to the audience, this strand of narration recounts a particularly traumatic incident involving Brooks' favorite dress.

Pabst, against Brooks' wishes, forced her to use a white dress in shooting the film's climactic scene in which Lulu is brutally stabbed to death by Jack the Ripper. No amount of pleading could change Pabst's mind about which dress was most appropriate for the act of killing. The dress was, in Brooks' account, irreversibly ruined. On top of this, the autobiographic voice stresses that Pabst was "controlling and rigid" in nearly all areas of Brooks' self-presentation in the 1929 film: "Pabst chose all my costumes with care. But he seemed motivated by sexual hate. He chose them for their tactile as well as visual seductiveness."⁴³⁸ These anecdotes reveal complexity in the figure of Louise Brooks, uncovering the private struggle that she faced against the director, a manipulative and controlling force in her life. Pabst emerges from the testimony as a sort of puppet master treating women like props for his imaginative designs and sexual gratification. The voice later quotes the *Autobiography* again, cementing an image of Pabst as a manipulator and puppet master: " 'Your life is exactly like Lulu's,' he said [to Brooks], 'and you will end the same way.' "

history rather than just a pure cinematic image." While I agree with this sentiment, what makes Beroes' film interesting is that it moves beyond a biographical investigation of Brooks (though it does provide that) and instead imagines, through the figure of Julie (a Lulu lookalike), a third position: not merely a witness – one who "*looks* rather than is simply *looked at*" – but a creator of images and a historiographer, actively creating and extending women's role in cinema history.

⁴³⁷ *Lulu in Hollywood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

⁴³⁸ Louise Brooks elaborates on the incident concerning the dress in the section of her autobiography titled "Pabst and Lulu," 103-4.

The voice-over also reveals Lulu's beauty to be a construction, a product of makeup and artifice that contributes to women's social control. The use of voice challenges a voyeuristic position on to-be-looked-at-ness, since it interrupts the viewer's tendency to view women's appearance as a fetishistic object for consumption. Clips from *Pandora's Box* depict Lulu applying makeup in the London hideout before her murder by Jack the Ripper. On the audio track, a voice-over narrator describes makeup from a feminist-theoretical lens as manifesting a form of women's oppression. She states, "Make-up. That's what women do in the mirror. Make better. Taking the natural and ornamenting it...A splitting of self. Taking the woman you are and the woman you are transformed into - what magic!" Converging with Silverman's notion of female voice as an "acoustic mirror," makeup is thus exposed as one of the vectors by which women are expected to construct an idealized image of femininity and be consumed by a male gaze.

The voice stresses autobiography and personal history as a way to challenge the mythic time of Pabst's film. The mythic discourse of *Pandora's Box* positing Lulu as a timeless villainess, established by the prosecutor at the trial scene, is put in a new relation. This time narrated by a female voice-over, the mythic story is put in ideological-critical scare quotes. Beroes notably leaves out the murder trial scene from the original where the prosecutor tells the story (incorrectly) claiming that Pandora herself – not Prometheus's brother – opened the box and "loosed evil upon us." This strategic omission is corrected with the voice-over narration explaining it was the brother's impulsiveness – his choice to open the box in the first place – as the founding act that corrupted the world.

Through the activity of voice-over commentary Beroes "creates" Lulu anew, and her cinematic legacy is transformed. No longer a passive spectacle or stand-in for mythic Pandora, the machinations of the men around her are revealed as constraining and shaping her behavior. These

revelations add psychological complexity – and sympathy – to Lulu’s cinematic image. The biographical experience of Louise Brooks shatters the “sovereign spectacle” figuration of Lulu, as has been discussed in the critical literature.⁴³⁹

Beroes’ mobilization of disparate voices and discourses seeks to “undo,” borrowing William Wees’ term, the misogyny of Pabst’s original depiction of femininity.⁴⁴⁰

6.2.2 CHALLENGING FEMALE NARCISSISM: WRITERLY VOICES

Another reexamination performed by *The Dream Screen* centers on the role of women’s supposedly narcissistic visual appearance, and the spectacular images of desire associated with Lulu. In this respect, a highly charged visual motif that recurs in both *Pandora’s Box* and *The Dream Screen* is images of women shown absorbed in their own self-reflections in mirrors, or shown consuming other images of women in mass media forms, such as women’s fashion magazines. This familiar stereotype of female narcissism is resignified in Beroe’s film as something positive and creative, rather than negative.

The activity of women’s self-reflection in mirrors is ambiguous and can be read in various ways. Within the Weimar culture of Germany, modern art and visual culture positioned the New Woman as a figure of narcissistic self-absorption and poor morals.⁴⁴¹ Some critics have argued that Lulu attains a level of self-control and self-fashioning when she is at work on her self-image.

⁴³⁹ McCarthy, 225.

⁴⁴⁰ Wees writes of found-footage essayistic filmmaking, “To ‘undo’ an image means to loosen its connections to the cultural and ideological assumptions that lie behind its production and intended reception, so that it becomes available for ... re-production and alternative reception...” Wees, “The Ambiguous Aura of Hollywood Stars in Avant-Garde Found-Footage Films,” *Cinema Journal* 41.2 (Winter 2002): 3.

⁴⁴¹ McCarthy, 221.

Yet, this kind of agency contrasts sharply to scenes later in the film where pictures of Lulu are traded among men.⁴⁴²

In *The Dream Screen*, the Lulu lookalike, Julie, finds herself reflected in many mirrors -- in the train station lobby, in her apartment bedroom, and in the vintage clothing store changing room. However, unlike *Pandora's Box*, the mirror is often fragmented and partially shattered. The mirror's fragmentation suggests that the creation of an idealized image of femininity is partially damaged, incomplete, revealing splits at the seams.

This shattered sign acquires further meaning in relation to gender expression in the 1980s punk music subculture, of which Beroes and her character Julie are a part. The punks, after all, took a cue from dada and Surrealist historical avant-gardes in their conception of identity. They refashioned selfhood as a junk pastiche of different sources and bits of cultural detritus assembled together. *The Dream Screen* has numerous scenes of photo collages decorating Julie's home. Julie finds inspiration in the artistic practice of photocollage, as used by John Heartfield and Hannah Höch, where multiple images are extracted and recontextualized in a new arrangement.

In a key scene, we see a photocollage of German New Women from the 1920s and punk women arranged like a wreath around Julie's bedroom mirror. Julie puts on makeup, combing her bob haircut and putting on mascara. These shots are mixed with inserts of Lulu doing the same: putting on lipstick, makeup, and so on. We are given an intertitle of the old man Schigolch dialogue from *Pandora's Box*, addressed to Lulu: "Why the painting? We like you as you are." Cutting back

⁴⁴² McCarthy signals an equivocation around whether Lulu should be seen as agent or object of visual culture, or both, writing that while "Lulu retains her edge by micromanaging her men," she also acquires "specular sovereignty" in scenes where she is depicted in the presence of mirrors or fashion magazines, absorbed in images of femininity which seem to charge/light her up like a light bulb. However, this specular sovereignty becomes threatened and falters, when Lulu is rendered into images later in the film, "as circulated images facilitate the more concrete exchange of sex meant to follow." For McCarthy, "Louise Brooks the actress seems a much less powerful presence when her filmic alter ego becomes an object of exchange." See McCarthy, 227 – 231.

to the present day, Julie holds up a copy of Brook's autobiography, *Lulu in Hollywood*, and raises the book to her face as she brushes her hair in the mirror.

Layers of irony and artificiality run through this particular shot. In bringing Lulu's face to her own, Julie claims the image of Lulu for herself; and, in doing so, she seems to reject the view that she is composing an idealized image for men exclusively. After all, she is alone in the room and looking at herself, for herself. She abolishes, in other words, the patronizing words of the old man that "we like you as you are."

Julie is indeed fascinated by Lulu, with becoming her. In another fictionalized scene, we see Julie speaking to an old man in her bedroom. Julie asks: "Do you think I look like Lulu?" The old man laughs, muttering something incomprehensible. Julie: "Maybe I could name myself Lulu instead of Julie." This dialogue can be read a number of ways. However, one implication is that Julie's self-image is informed by past histories of gender androgyny and radical aesthetics associated with modern art in Germany and with the present-day punk subculture. Gender is reconstituted as a mask. Julie sees Lulu as a subversive model for how to recreate her image into a trickster, a *femme fatale*.

However, the most significant scenes of women partaking in self-reflection, in *The Dream Screen*, tend to feature the presence of a diary, opening up a new kind of acousmatic voice: the voice of the woman as creative writer. The diary challenges the previous film's idea of womanhood as being reducible to an image. Julie is frequently shown in a train car or sitting by the window, writing notes. Through the diary, an intertextual echo is formed with Louise Brooks. Brooks, after her career in Hollywood ended, became a skillful writer and produced her popular and erudite autobiography. *The Dream Screen* links Julie with real-life Louise Brooks in their turn toward the activity of writing as a means of refining upon and defining their lives, asserting control over the

project of selfhood. The figure of the diary revises the tendency in which masculine culture had taken women to be objects, surfaces of visual pleasure exclusively.

The diary suggests, additionally, a possible linkage between the voice-over narration and the visuals. Is Julie the real author of *The Dream Screen*? Put another way: is Julie the narrating agent who is composing and weaving quotations from multiple literary sources that appear on the audio track? Just as plausibly, Julie's writing may be a response to diegetic events that have happened to her, so that writing gives them a semblance of meaning and structure. In any event, Julie is not merely an object of the narration, nor is there any moment in the film where the acousmatic voice is threatened with "deacousmatization", where it is fully equated with an actor's body. In this way, Julie remains a highly mysterious figure, neither a feminist heroine nor a passive victim to patriarchal domination. The extraordinary autonomy given to Julie indicates Beroes' deep interest in the Bakhtinian, multi-voiced potential of film art.

With Pabst's film, the question of women's authorship over self-identity is highly ambivalent. It is never clear who is controlling whom; Lulu enjoys images of women, and images of herself, but she herself does not always author them. Lulu is a performer of *scripted* roles. As Thomas Elsaesser observes, "...in so far as Lulu is characterized by her *expressivity*, it is in response to the *repressivity* she experiences on a social level. This means that she is less an artist than a performer, and the space where her expressivity can best articulate itself is in the theatre."⁴⁴³ Likewise, while Lulu exercises choice over how she dresses and applies makeup, it is questionable how much she displays a creative attitude toward these activities. As a performer, these are roles provided to her by the theatre performances and the social situations she finds herself in. Lulu follows a script.

⁴⁴³ Elsaesser, 264.

In Beroes's film, these activities reappear but they are significantly changed by the fact that Julie is a creator in the sense that she is a writer. The viewer is not privy to what she writes. Even when her punk boyfriend confiscates her diary, we are not shown what words it contains. Therefore we cannot determine the status of this writing--is it political, private, or otherwise? Nevertheless, through the act of writing and journaling Julie has made a space of her own within the symbolic economy of a patriarchal society. This is precisely what was missing from Pabst's film: instances of women shown creating or narrating their own thoughts, for themselves, in an artistic and reflective way.

6.2.3 PSYCHOANALYZING THE UNCONSCIOUS OF THE PATRIARCHAL MEDIA CULTURE

The figure of the father is manifested as a major interest *Dream Screen*, particularly in the therapy session segments centered on a young woman, Jennifer Canaga. Off-screen, Beroes asks Canaga open-ended questions concerning her relationship with her father. These scenes recall the psychoanalytic model of the "talking cure" that Sigmund Freud favored, and they point to the wider interest in the feminist project of revising psychoanalytic theory as was prevalent in 1980s independent film culture.⁴⁴⁴

Canaga is shot and framed in a fairly static, clinical way, as she sits in a sparse, sun-dappled a room similar to that of a therapist's office. The head-on view of Canaga invites an analytic

⁴⁴⁴ Sophie Mayer writes of feminist filmmaking in US and Britain during the 1980s, that many of these films "reflexively and critically adopt the unconscious processes of psychic formation identified by Sigmund Freud, such as traumatic repetition, parapraxis and screen memory, in order to formulate a Marxist feminist political aesthetics." Mayer, 41.

scrutiny of her as the confessional patient. The viewer, placed in the position of analyst, attends to her body language, choice of words, her relationship to the camera, as well as the stumbles, accidents, errors, slips she makes as she speaks. The documentary segments of the film are thus engaged in an epistemological pursuit of truth: What is the relationship of daughters to fathers? And what is the role of repressed childhood trauma in shaping women's self-identity in the past, present, and future?

Importantly, however, this therapeutic segment does not reproduce the problematic power dynamic of the confessional woman, as noted by Kaja Silverman. The point is not to individualize a woman but to make an inquiry into patriarchal culture. We see this when Canaga relates aspects of her childhood in response to the director's questions, while footage from *Pandora's Box* is interspersed and edited throughout the conversation. The first question, "Can you talk about your father?" draws Canaga into a reflection about the father and how he appears in her memory. He is "charismatic...sort of a theatrical person and mentor-like." Her father instilled in her a sense of discipline, docility and a love for high culture. Canaga explains, however, he was controlling in his devotion to her aesthetic education. Canaga states that "one could never be over-educated, it was a never-ending process;" an insert of Lulu, dancing and spinning in circles, appears. This insert of frantic dancing is a visual match for the undertones of control, power, and discipline hinted at in the verbal description of aesthetic education as "a never-ending process." In the insert, at one moment the old man stops playing harmonica, gets off his chair, and walks over to yell at Lulu. The old man threatens to hit her with his instrument, raising it above his head; then, rather unexpectedly, he lowers his arm. By clip's end, they reunite, resuming a happy calm with each other as though nothing ever happened.

The incorporation of appropriated footage, and the use of voice-over narration, acts as a sort of “dream screen,” a projection triggered by words from Canaga’s testimony that creates a newly dynamized relationship between viewer and filmed content. In this way Beroes’ film does not merely explicate and visualize the psychology of her documentary subject; but also she makes an argument about the nature of women and men on a wider transhistorical scale. Canaga’s conflicted relationship with her father stands in for any number of relationships, in which the father-daughter situation is partly violent, partly loving, schizophrenic. On a deeper level, the investigation into abusive, fatherly paternalism reveals the fundamentally controlling nature of heterosexual masculinity in general, as noted by Jacques Lacan and Freud.⁴⁴⁵

Tragically, Canaga can only comprehend her self-identity in relation to her father. In a later interview segment, she suddenly recognizes the absence of her mother from the development of her sense of self, all along: “My father is my role model...I thought she [my mother] was a maid. The important thing to me was talking about things, and learning about far-away places and books and things, not going to brownies and ballet and whatever else you do. I didn’t realize the impact she had on my life, until my father went away for war. Then I realized maybe she had ideas, too.”

As is evident from the testimony, the paternalism of the father cultivates a particular image of the woman, an image that seeks to control femininity for its own self-preservation. The masculine culture around her isolates her from others, as well. The so-called education of the father is the miseducation of patriarchal culture, as noted by Mulvey et al., a pedagogy that strays women away from solidarity and critical thinking. This pattern informs Beroes’ critical treatment of G.W. Pabst. The film posits Pabst as a father-like figure toward Louise Brooks, who, like Canaga’s

⁴⁴⁵ Silverman provides a helpful description of Freudian and Lacanian models of the masculine subject in relation to cinematic signification, in *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 132-150.

father, had an outsized role in a woman's life. He created her psychology and orchestrates her as a figure in a story he controls.

At this point in the film, the voice-over narrator asks, "Who is Lulu? Maybe that is not the question. Who created Lulu?" The question's obvious answer – Wedekind/Pabst – suggests Lulu is not created out of thin air, but that she is a projection on the part of male auteurs. The aggressive creativity of Pabst is the "unconscious" dimension of the original which Beroes uncovers. Thanks to the juxtaposition of voice-over narration, appropriated footage, and the filmed interview, psychoanalytical analogies are formed between the film and the activity of dreaming. *Pandora's Box* is analyzed as if it were a dream of the patriarchal mind.

Contrary to critical accounts, the remade *Pandora's Box* becomes less a triumphant metaphor for the cinematic medium, than an exemplary "dream screen" for men's fantasies and fears about women. Beroes' construction of multi-voiced acousmatic female personae is revelatory, exposing misogynistic power across multiple domains: in the story world, in the wider media culture, and in the very making of Pabst's film.

6.3 THE DREAM SCREEN AND WOMEN'S AUDIOVISUAL PRACTICE

So far I have examined the interplay of sound and imagery, how they interact and counterpoint each other in a dissonant yet harmonious structure, in Beroes' film. Through this detailed analytical case-study, we have been able to glimpse the major thematic areas that define Beroes' career: the focus on women's psychology; the critique of men's spectacularization of women in the cinema; and the use of sound to initiate new forms of listening to women, and new ways of relating to women's experience across space-time.

By way of conclusion, I would like to highlight several more distinctions between Pabst and Beroes based on the contexts of creation and reception for both films. In *The Dream Screen*, a great deal of cognitive dissonance and critical distance is created for the viewer thanks to the use of three types of visual material (documentary, fiction, and original film footage). In contrast to Pabst's acclaimed use of fluid, continuity editing, Beroes edits the material to emphasize cuts as gaps, rather than the sutures. This approach prioritizes the intellectual and historiographical possibilities of editing, in the tradition of essayistic filmmaking. By working with and re-editing a narrative film as raw material, Beroes produces a "split" within the enunciative discourse of the original work.

Significantly also, Beroes retitles her work away from Pabst's. As many others have pointed out, the "Box" in Pabst's title is suggestive of female genitalia.⁴⁴⁶ Retitling it to "Dream Screen" shifts us out of this voyeuristic position. Our attention moves away from anticipating the erotic, the unknown pleasures hidden beneath the shining surface, and onto a critical awareness of the filmic activity of dreaming/fantasy, as well as the double-sided notion of a "screen:" a screen is that which blocks or hides vision, and is a flat surface on which a series of pictures is projected or reflected.

Since *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud likened the process of dream-work in the mental apparatus as a series of inscriptions written on a mystic writing pad.⁴⁴⁷ However, the psychoanalytic theorist Bertram Lewin has suggested reconsidering the process of dreaming with

⁴⁴⁶ One of the more interesting interpretations of Pabst's title is a psychoanalytic study that considers "box" as connoting containment and social repression (given Lulu's fugitive status), as well as medical discourse around female hysteria. The womb of the hysteric was considered, quasi-mythologically, a "volatile energy set free...by women's sexuality." See Webber, 278.

⁴⁴⁷ See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1913); and "A Note Upon The 'Mystic Writing Pad (1925),' " in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 211-216.

reference to the cinematic apparatus.⁴⁴⁸ During sleep, dream-images are projected upon the flat surface of a “dream screen.” In a similar way, Beroes’ film signals her intent to analyze a particular apparatus, a machine of cinematic desire.

The Pandora myth from Pabst’s film returns and is indeed retold, albeit in a different key. Rather than being voiced by the male prosecutor as “evidence” of Lulu’s wrongful character, the Pandora myth is described clinically as a mythologic text by a female voice-over narrator across several sections of the film. The female voice-over pulls the myth of Pandora out of the diegetic realm of the source material, treating it not as natural but as a rhetorical trope that shapes the depiction of women in Western culture.

There are other differences between Pabst and Beroes’ versions. Pabst utilized a big budget, international cast and crew, and enjoyed wide recognition of *Pandora’s Box*. Stephanie Beroes made her film on a budget of \$20,000, depended mostly on art and filmmaking grants, and utilized nonprofessional actors from Milwaukee and San Francisco. As we learn from the final credits, Beroes had to secure permission from media archives in order to source images from the original film print. Her film enterprise was framed and undertaken in the language of a critical study, suggesting that Beroes adopts the role of a researcher and media archeologist, as well as visual artist.

Existing as a work of independent or avant-garde media, the film did not screen in theatrical movie houses. Instead it was shown in independent media centers, art museums, German- and

⁴⁴⁸ Lewin writes, “The dream screen, as I define it, is the surface on which a dream appears to be projected. It is the blank background, present in the dream though not necessarily seen, and the visually perceived action in ordinary manifest dream contents takes place on it or before it.” Lewin argues that dreaming aims at reproducing the activity of the infant’s breast-feeding. In subsequent pieces, he elaborates on the concept of dream screen, expanding it beyond a receptive surface while describing the nature of dream-images as emotionally charged visual projections. See Lewin’s “Sleep, the Mouth, and the Dream Screen,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* Vol 15.4 (1946): 419-434; and “Reconsideration of the Dream Screen,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* Vol 22.2 (1953):174-199.

London-based film cooperatives, and in women's film festivals that highlighted women's experience and imagery on film.⁴⁴⁹ The context of reception defining *The Dream Screen* therefore shifts from one of voyeuristic consumption (Pabst) to critical appreciation and understanding (Beroes).

The film's synthetic composition has additional meaning, for it reflects Beroes' own ambivalent social position as an independent filmmaker. Though she was committed to a career in experimental film, Beroes often complained about the difficulty of subsisting financially and socially as an independent filmmaker. In interviews she discusses, with a tinge of bitterness, the general public's disinterest in the sorts of films she made.⁴⁵⁰ These comments reveal her ongoing battle to be seen, recognized, and accepted for her work, which is not unlike Brooks' own dialectic of visibility and invisibility in her career as a performer. *The Dream Screen's* composite portrait of Lulu/Louise Brooks/Jennifer Canaga/Julie is enriched by acknowledging the personal life of Beroes: the women in the film can be seen as aspects of the same consciousness, and is suggestive of the schizophrenic dynamics of being a socially conscious female filmmaker in the 1980s.

The collaborative nature of the film's creation – its reliance on women's texts, its inclusion of women's performances, its use of “found” footage – points to a dimension of artistic critique: the redefinition of a unitary film author. The filmmaking tradition in 1970s Pittsburgh, in a microcosm of avant-garde film as a whole, was largely conceived as a collaborative enterprise. Much, though not all, filmmaking activity was organized around the notion of a heroic, implicitly

⁴⁴⁹ Besides being exhibited at international festivals and independent venues, the most significant screening location of *The Dream Screen* was its inclusion in the 1987 Whitney Biennial, March 31-July 2, 1987.

⁴⁵⁰ Beroes states, “One thing I find an awful lot, more so in Pittsburgh than in other areas, is as soon as people hear the word ‘independent’ they don’t want to see the film. That’s something that scares me very much.” She also hints at the desire for a wider audience and recognition, despite the inherent complexity of her work, when she says, “We are interested in breaking out of the incestuous, closed-circuit situation we find ourselves in. And yet I don’t want to compromise any of my own artistic, creative decisions.” Beroes is interviewed by Marilyn Uricchio in “Frustrations of a Filmmaker,” *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 11 1979, Page 21.

male Romantic figure who dominated all aspects of production.⁴⁵¹ However, the most significant women working in Pittsburgh's film scene, such as Peggy Ahwesh, largely rejected this position of self-imposed isolation, seeking collaborative structures of artistic experimentation that were proudly social in nature.

Like other prominent female experimental filmmakers – Joyce Wieland, in particular – Beroes was not afraid to decenter herself as the locus of meaning in her own films. Beroes, through collaborative filmmaking, redistributing the roles of film production, editing and creation of materials to other colleagues, highlighted the creativity of many women. This practice pointed to her belief that the film text could operate, in Bakhtinian fashion, as a polyphonic “dialogism” of creative sources.⁴⁵² The film's dedication to Louise Brooks suggests Brooks herself could be considered a collaborator in the film's genesis: Brooks' biography as a woman who sought self-ownership and the power to narrate, within and against a visual culture that was attracted to her as a fetishistic image of sexuality, is a precursor for the figure of the contemporary female artist.

The Dream Screen should be recognized as a pioneering feminist film. To borrow the words of one perceptive critic, speaking to the interplay of texts, voices, and critique, *The Dream Screen* is not a diary film or film diary, but a “diary of ideas.”⁴⁵³ In its innovative working methods, and in its palimpsest of women's voices and experiences (placed over silent-film segments, which

⁴⁵¹ Feminist scholar B Ruby Rich describes the sexist notions of artistic genius that pervaded the 1960s and 1970s experimental film world, in *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998/2012), 111.

⁴⁵² Martin Flanagan, writing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of language and voice transposed to the context of film, contrasts monologism with dialogism. The former, in his words, “is the general ‘situation wherein the matrix of values, signifying practices, and creative impulses that constitute the living reality of language and socio-cultural life are subordinated to the dictates of a single, unified consciousness or perspective’.” Dialogism for him resists this desire for unity, but is not simply the appearance of multiplicity but rather, “the distinctiveness of dialogism is its sensitivity to context.” This context-specific quality of dialogism appears in the highly archival aspect of Beroes' filmmaking in *The Dream Screen*. Flanagan, *Bakhtin and the Movies: New Ways of Understanding Hollywood Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 7-8.

⁴⁵³ Sandra Maliga, qtd in *The Dream Screen* advertisement, Stephanie Beroes Artist File, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York, Folder 1, Box 3.

essentially “revoice” the past), *The Dream Screen* performs a genuine contribution to the study of gender relations and patriarchy.

In Chapter 7, we consider the relationship between film portraiture and political organizing through the work of Steffi Domike. Domike was a steelworker and feminist union organizer who turned to art-making after being fired from her job during the mill closures across Southwestern Pennsylvania. Her film *Women of Steel* (1985) draws on portrait-like imagery of steelworkers, as well as the consciousness-raising tactics of the Women’s Movement, to tell a positive story of women fighting for employment in the manufacturing industry, and remind us of the need to develop strong unions and political consciousness to protect women’s precarious professional standing. Domike utilizes portraiture to portray her working class subjects as heroic, “ordinary experts” who mastered the technical fields they work in. She also links together images of women of different ethnicities and familial configurations to show the benefits of forming solidarity with fellow workers. In all, Domike illustrates how portraiture can be a tool for political education.

7.0 REFASHIONING GENDER IN THE POSTINDUSTRIAL RUIN: STRATEGIES OF WORKING-CLASS FEMINISM IN STEFFI DOMIKE'S *WOMEN OF STEEL* (1985)

Emerging from the crisis of US deindustrialization in the 1980s, Steffi Domike's long career is a remarkable effort to merge art and activism. After graduating college in 1975 she moved across the country and sought a fresh start in Pittsburgh, in order to learn about "working class culture" and to seek identification with the conditions of the industrial worker.⁴⁵⁴ Employed for five years as an electrician's apprentice in US Steel's Clairton Coke Works, she confronted a sexist hierarchy of labor in the factory. She became an active member of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), Local 1557, and created a range of artworks that display a class-oriented politics toward re-shaping the gendered battlefields of the workplace and the organizing domain.

In the mid-1980s, she enrolled in art courses at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Filmmakers media arts center. In 1997, she received an MFA degree from Carnegie Mellon University. Since then, she has extended her political activity beyond the union hall into many distinct settings, while utilizing multiple artistic formats – oral history, photography, TV broadcasting, video, computer games, and installation art. She has been regularly cited as a key source in sociological studies of deindustrialization for her prominent role in working-class organizing.⁴⁵⁵ However, with few exceptions, Domike has received scant attention for her work in

⁴⁵⁴ Steffi Domike, interviewed by Bob Mast, *Pittsburgh Oral History Project*, undated. Material accessed from the Archive Services Center, University of Pittsburgh, October 5 2016.

⁴⁵⁵ Kimberly Marie Jones, "Pittsburgh Ex-Steelworkers As Victims of Development: An Ethnographic Account of America's Deindustrialization" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2003); David L. Rosenberg, "Pittsburgh in Revolt: Sources and Artifacts of the Struggle Against Deindustrialization From the UE/Labor Archives at the University of Pittsburgh," *Pennsylvania History* Vol 68, Issue 3 (July 2001): 367-382; and Ken Silverstein, "Labor's Last Stand: The Corporate Campaign to Kill the Employee Free Choice Act," *Harper's Magazine*, July 2009: 38-44.

film and media.⁴⁵⁶ This chapter highlights what made her filmic work distinctive by locating it in the context of women's filmmaking and the local labor movement in the 1980s. The aim is to illuminate the intersections between her political praxis and her film and media aesthetics in the late 1970s and mid-1980s, which has not been attempted before. Through a close reading of *Women of Steel*⁴⁵⁷, 1985, and her involvement in media projects for local social movement organizations (SMOs), I show that she was a powerfully catalytic figure.

I delineate and identify several major features that characterize her boundary-crossing activities in art and politics. I relate her art-making to what Walter Benjamin posited as the "author-as-producer." This model refers to a special sort of artist who intentionally sides with the masses by embedding herself in what Karl Marx named "the mode of production."⁴⁵⁸ Writing in 1934, and influenced by the avant-garde artwork of Bertolt Brecht, John Heartfield, and the Russian Constructivists, Benjamin argued that every artist was shaped by the dominant modes of production, although could act to a degree to against them. The political status of art, for Benjamin, is not simply determined by choice of content or style; rather, the politics of art relates to, in

⁴⁵⁶ Discussions of Domike's work in film, media, and art overwhelmingly discuss her 1993 documentary, *The River Ran Red*. See: Jeannette Bastian, "Flowers for Homestead: A Case Study in Archives and Collective Memory," *The American Archivist* Vol. 72, No. 1, (Spring/Summer 2009): 113-132; Edward Slavishak, "Ten Days that Unexpectedly Changed America: The Homestead Strike," *Journal of American History* Vol 93, Issue 3 (December 2006): 975-76; Walter Licht, "Reviewed Work: *The River Ran Red* by Steffi Domike, Nicole Fauteaux," *Public Historian* Vol. 17, No. 4 (Autumn, 1995): 146-148; Domike, Steffi, Michael Mateas, and Paul Vanouse, "The Recombinant History Apparatus Presents Terminal Time," in *Narrative Intelligence*, ed. Michael Mateas and Phoebe Sengers (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2003): 155-173.

⁴⁵⁷ *Women of Steel*, produced by Beth Destler, Steffi Domike, Allyn Stewart and Linny Stovall, directed by Randy Strothman, 28 minutes, color, VHS video tape. Distributed by Women Make Movies and Mon Valley Media.

⁴⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin set out to transform debates around art and politics in the mid-1930s, by asserting that the role of revolutionary intellectuals and artists is to identify themselves with the actual conditions of life of the working classes, rather than simply demonstrate sympathy for them in their attitudes, from afar. Benjamin goes on to argue that the author-as-producer is an artist who forms a genuine solidarity with the proletariat and, in so doing, redefines and adapts the apparatus of his own creativity "to the purposes of proletarian revolution." He posits Bertolt Brecht's epic theater as an example of this new way of art-making. See "The Author as Producer," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility And Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008): 79-95.

Benjamin's terms, its overall "organizing function."⁴⁵⁹ Political artwork intervenes directly on the structural inequalities in which it exists. Political artwork performs this intervention by utilizing advanced technology offered by the productive apparatus of capitalist society, in order to push back against the pacifying social barriers that the productive forces, and the industrial division of labor, were set up to enforce. The artist aims at *Umfunktionierung*,⁴⁶⁰ that is, a forceful reorganization of structural relationships set up between artist, artwork, and audience, toward creating new, democratic forms of participation in the political arena.

In a characteristic passage, in which the "mode of production" from the economic realm is deliberately blurred and confused with the tools of art-making, Benjamin redefines the ontological character of art, stating,

What matters...is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first, to induce other producers to produce, and, second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, reader or spectators into collaborators.⁴⁶¹

For Benjamin, art is not a rarefied, autonomous sphere of activity cut off from the domain of material struggle, but instead it is coextensive with the wider capitalist order of "production." In the above passage, his curious replacement of the word artist with *producer*— a term which we normally associate with economic processes — suggests that the artist is, paradoxically, both subject and object of the productive apparatus, a figure caught inside larger material forces which they can nonetheless work to change.

⁴⁵⁹ Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 89.

⁴⁶⁰ In the context of Benjamin's essay, this refers to reordering, remodeling, transformation, or redirection.

⁴⁶¹ Benjamin, 89.

Benjamin describes the artist-producer as one who practices “conduct that transforms him from a supplier of the productive apparatus into an engineer who sees it as his task to adapt this apparatus to the purposes of proletarian revolution.”⁴⁶² Rather than creative self-expression, the artist is recast in economic terms as an operator, engineer, and supplier. Some exemplary tools that aid the artist’s project of “engineering” revolutionary change are the technical innovations that, in themselves, embody the relations of industrial production; namely, the reproducible technologies of photography, radio, newspapers, and of course, the moving image. These forms are, in capitalist society, inflected as commodities or fine-art objects; for instance, Benjamin cites the example of New Objectivity street photography negatively, calling it a conservative mis-use of a radical technology that “supplies a productive apparatus without changing it,” by producing images of poverty and suffering as “objects of enjoyment.”⁴⁶³ However, at the same time he asserts that the inherent reproducibility of mass media forms in fact works against the hierarchical tendencies of traditional, “auratic” art. Harnessing the aspects of technical reproducibility, such as the ability to broadcast information widely, the relative ease of use, art has the capacity to render the spectator of artwork away from being a passive consumer, toward being an active producer, interrupting power hierarchies and inserting them in the act of creation. As a consequence, the spectator-participant that is interpellated by this higher art is able to “reflect on his position in the process of production”⁴⁶⁴ – an important precondition for the revolutionary politics to which Benjamin alludes.

In tandem with Benjamin’s ideas, Domike describes herself as a “producer” making artistic “interventions” within and against the corporate media apparatus that commodifies stories, images,

⁴⁶² Benjamin, 93.

⁴⁶³ Benjamin, 88-89.

⁴⁶⁴ Benjamin, 91.

and histories about working class struggle.⁴⁶⁵ In her remarkable career, Domike created over ten films, and a range of media projects that span media installation, photography, and oral history forms, all toward creating a more “improved apparatus” that empowers ordinary people. Unlike other filmmakers in the Pittsburgh scene, her original impetus for creativity was not aesthetic interest or self-expression, but as a way to cope with her own unemployment and as an extension of the organizing work she had done in milltowns along the Steel Corridor.

As a documentarian and social historian, the main subjects in Domike’s work consist of working people, specifically, women industrial workers based in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Women industrial workers are among the most marginalized and exploited individuals in the industrial apparatus: they are not only exploited for their labor power but they are also treated as disposable objects through a pervasive atmosphere of sexism, racism, and classism. Further, women industrial workers are subject to extreme marginalization through the heteronormative ideology that requires them to exist as mothers and reproducers of the household, doing vital (yet unpaid) roles which sustain the capitalist apparatus as a whole by supplying healthy, functioning and docile workers into the productive apparatus. Domike realized, early on, that the interlocked nature of these commitments to public/private forms of work uniquely position industrial women to intervene within multiple apparatuses of production: the public space of industrial production as well as its oft-concealed shadow, the domestic space of social reproduction.

⁴⁶⁵ Domike writes, “In my work I create ‘interventions.’ These interventions are situated where breaches in the hegemonic control of culture occur, creating new spaces, that, for a brief time, are not being colonized or exploited in the interests of dominant social forces. Such unmonitored spaces are a rich ground for artists to intervene. By initiating an uncensored dialog between the art and the artists and the public, such art can challenge the hierarchies that define culture and control media.” From Steffi Domike, “Development & Directions in My Work: Interventions”, 1, Archive Services Center, Steffi Domike Papers, October 5, 2016.

Through a concept she describes as “self-reference,” Domike attempts in her media practice to draw upon these multiple realities of production in which she herself is embedded as a storyteller and image-maker.⁴⁶⁶ Her notion of self-reference refers not to modernist stylistic reflexivity, where the artwork devolves into a self-questioning about the nature of signification. Rather, self-reference articulates a sharing process and a close identification between Domike and her documentary subject, as was common in socialist feminist documentary in the era. While in her projects the documentary subject of the industrial worker often lacks the cultural, technical, or educational capital of Domike herself, this asymmetry is mitigated through a variety of techniques.

For instance, in Domike’s early work as a newspaper editor of *Women of Steel*, the industrial worker is elevated to the status of a collaborator through sections of the newsletter that broadcast personal stories about women’s exploitation by steel mill companies and management. The proverbial woman worker, ordinarily silenced by the dictatorial nature of industrial workplaces, is here given an authorial presence. Where before, women industrial workers were seen as less productive or less knowledgeable than male workers, Domike allows them to inhabit a position of an “ordinary expert” by discussing the very topics on which they are experts: not only steel work, but activities of child-rearing, maternity, and emotional labor relegated to the domestic sphere. In effect, Domike’s own authorial presence recedes, while the worker discusses and broadcasts her own self-attitudes and outlook. At the same time, each story is complemented by the presence of other stories of women, both similar and different in terms of social identity. This

⁴⁶⁶ In opposition to what she calls the “cookie-cutter documentary” format of PBS Ken Burns productions, Domike argues that independent media artists must explore representational strategies of what she calls “self-referentiality”: forms of “media which intentionally expose the background and perspective of the producer within the body of the program.” She cites Tony Buba’s *Voices From a Steeltown*, in which the “social condition” of Braddock is marked with “Tony’s imprint and perspective.” Another example cited is her own film, *The River Ran Red*. The film tells the story of the 1892 Homestead steel strike “from the point of view of the striking workers as opposed to the historically over-represented points of view of the rich and powerful Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick.” See Domike, “Development & Directions in My Work: Interventions”, 6-7.

sharing of creative capacity, and of the tools of knowledge-making, powerfully shapes the design of Domike's work, and is a through-line in her intermedial art practice.

In the next section, I give a brief sketch of the gendered author-as-producer ethos that shaped her factory organizing efforts in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In particular, I focus on three such projects: the *Women of Steel* newsletter, published in the late 1970s; *Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions*, a 1979 advice pamphlet for steelworkers navigating the sexist environment of the mill; and *Crashin' Out: Hard Times in McKeesport*, an oral history project created in 1983, featuring the testimonies of residents in a deindustrial town facing waves of lay-offs. In analyzing these projects, I note the novel forms of artistic creation and collaboration that result from her "interventions," where the documentary subject becomes co-creator of the project. This co-creative aspect is highly significant. The authorial presence of the worker as a collaborator ensures that meaning is not ideologically monolithic, as is typical of most documentary projects; but it also positions the worker as a producer, seizing control of reproducible technologies and rendering the sphere of technical production "politically useful," in Benjamin's words.

Then, in a close reading of *Women of Steel*, 1985, I show how in form and content, Domike advances the project of feminist documentary film by utilizing a wide variety of techniques from film (editing, mise-en-scène, voice-over) and photographic portraiture (framing, lighting, identification with the sitter) that aim to extend her activist sentiment to the audience. The *Women of Steel* film is historically significant for several reasons. It is a film made by a group of relatively inexperienced and untrained working-class women in an effort to understand their own situation of exploitation. In multiple ways, it represents aspects of what archivist Ben Blake describes as

the “emerging genre of independent feminist documentary films made about women at work.”⁴⁶⁷ The film’s focus on domestic and professional realities of women workers highlights their structural position of being caught between multiple systems of power and exploitation. The film is embedded in the relations of production, by providing rare footage of women’s work in mills, testimonials positioning factory women as “ordinary experts,” and images of collaboration between men and women steelworkers that push back against the dominant ideology that women do not belong in mills. Finally, in an aspect of Benjaminian democratic art-making, I highlight the results for the participants and producers in sharing the filmmaking process, leveling the power hierarchy of authorship. This collaborative structure of creation echoes the words of Blake: “In a truly democratic process [of filmmaking], control of production in this new generation of film is in the hands not only of the filmmakers, but also the subjects of the medium.”⁴⁶⁸

Drawing on historical and contemporary feminist film scholarship, I argue that the political aesthetics of Domike’s *Women of Steel* functions ideologically to recreate the “consciousness-raising” group associated with socialist strains of the Women’s Movement. Like consciousness-raising affinity groups in the 1970s that “politicized” conversation among women of different backgrounds, Domike in the film “seek[s] to create new structures to facilitate women’s entry into the public sphere of work and power, and to make that public sphere one they would want to inhabit.”⁴⁶⁹ Steelworking women emerge from the process of filmmaking with new knowledge and awareness of forms of political agency that can transform their lives.

⁴⁶⁷ Ben Blake, “Recommendation for the Nomination *Women of Steel* for the National Film Registry,” unpublished essay, 2007, 10.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Julia Lesage identifies the structural correspondence between the conscious-raising women’s group, and the various textual characteristics of 1970s feminist documentary films. Among the most salient characteristics of such filmmaking, Lesage cites: the prioritization of cinema vérité and autobiographical storytelling; a personal identification with documentary subjects; and the depiction of “politicized conversation” among different women.

7.1 DOMIKE'S AUTHOR-AS-PRODUCER ETHOS: ORGANIZING WOMEN IN THE MILLS

After graduating Reed College with a bachelor's degree in Economics in 1975, Domike and several other student socialists decided to move to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in order work in the industry as part of the wider social phenomenon among activists of "turn[ing] to the class."⁴⁷⁰ Domike recalls of this period,

All the [student] groups were doing that. Across the left, people were doing it... The group that we were organizing [on campus] was temporary. We had no long lasting kind of relationship to society that was going to really have any kind of a long term impact.⁴⁷¹

She also notes that she "didn't want to be an observer, but a participant" in the struggles of ordinary people.⁴⁷²

In August 1976, she got a job in US Steel Clairton Coke Works, first working as a janitor in the coke ovens. Domike was the first woman to hold that job at the mill: "I knew I had to start somewhere. I knew I didn't want to go to grad school. I was interested in doing something else. What I wanted to do was to experience another culture. To learn the culture of working class America."⁴⁷³ Over time, she finally was able to enter the wire gang, working as an electrician's apprentice for five years, while steeping herself into technical processes of steel making. At the

Domike fits squarely into this pattern. See Lesage, "The Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Fall 1978): 507-523.

⁴⁷⁰ Steffi Domike, interviewed by Bob Mast, Pittsburgh Oral History Project, undated. Material accessed from the Archive Services Center, University of Pittsburgh, October 5 2016.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Domike qtd in Ellie Wymard, *Talking Steel Towns: The Men and Women of America's Steel Valley* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon Press, 2007), 82.

same time, she found herself becoming more interested in women's issues as she saw the dynamics of men and women on the job.

7.1.1 WOMEN OF STEEL NEWSLETTER

In 1979, she co-founded the *Women of Steel* newsletter with other women workers based at Clairton and nearby mills in the Mon Valley. The *Women of Steel* newsletter provided writings on women-centric issues, alongside more general work-related articles about unionization, lawsuits, grievances, labor conferences, and problematic supervisors. Unique to this gender-focused publication is the high presence of articles examining social reproduction as a dimension of women's experience. This emphasis is seen in the inaugural issue, dedicated to maternity and the need for paid parental leave for expectant mother-steelworkers.⁴⁷⁴

For women workers, the newsletter gave vital warnings and guidelines about how to navigate a potentially hostile, dangerous space. For instance, one issue contains reports of discriminatory physical tests that foremen at the Irvin Works had given women only, such as lifting extra heavy objects; if they failed the test, the women were belittled and not promoted or given less desirable forms of work.⁴⁷⁵ Another report describes how a foreman at Homestead Works gave a speech about the superiority of whites to blacks, in front of a group of black women.⁴⁷⁶ Still another discusses physical/sanitation-related problems with women's facilities in a mill whose management allege they did not anticipate the influx of new women workers after the Consent

⁴⁷⁴ *Women of Steel* newsletter, first issue, March 1979. Steffi Domike Papers, Box 1, Folder 10, Archive Services Center, University of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

⁴⁷⁵ *Women of Steel* newsletter, first issue, March 1979, page 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

Decree.⁴⁷⁷ The newsletter additionally reveals that women not only struggled against sexist management, but also sexist members within the union, and sought to develop women's committees toward "a more democratic and responsive union."⁴⁷⁸ Still, despite these problems with unions, the editors of the newsletter work to preserve the idea and project of the labor movement, advising women to seek leadership roles toward transformation from within.

In a creative extension of the newsletter, Domike wrote *Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions*,⁴⁷⁹ a small pamphlet containing witty retorts for women to use in response to common, sexist questions from male co-workers. Her design playfully undercuts the cartoon imagery and corporate tone-deafness of the industry's own official newsletters. Such documents were pitched to managers and investors, presenting a sanitized and optimistic vision of profit with little to no mention of the intense conflicts on the job.

Domike's pamphlet, with its stark, two-part layout, reveals a contrary view of the workplace, one borne of cognitive dissonance, of a gendered double consciousness: On the one side, a list of statements from boorish men suggests a dehumanizing view of their female colleagues; on the other side, a list of women's "snappy" answers to them, a handy toolkit for feminist resistance that belies the genuine frustrations and potentially divisive working environment women faced.

Modeled after the *Mad Magazine* column by the same name, Domike wrote this piece of instructional satire to call out and critique gender oppression through tactics of humor, self-

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ *Women of Steel* newsletter, second issue, May 1979, page 6. Steffi Domike Papers, Box 1, Folder 10, Archive Services Center, University of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

⁴⁷⁹ *Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions*, Steffi Domike Papers, Box 1, Folder 15, Archive Services Center, University of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Web address: https://www.library.pitt.edu/labor_legacy/SnappyAnswers1.htm

deprecation and directness. The piece is not meant to alienate or antagonize her male coworkers, but rather “to encourage women to defend our rights to our jobs.” Indeed, Domike herself suffered forms of sexist harassment, including an incident where a male coworker threatened to tie her up with wire straps.⁴⁸⁰ However, she never lost sight of the fact that men were as important to the anti-capitalist struggle as to the feminist struggle, and so she did not turn to (or at least publicly espouse) forms of separatist feminism that might have figured working men as monolithic agents of oppression.

7.1.2 CRASHIN’ OUT: HARD TIMES IN MCKEESPORT

In October 1981, following a wave of mill shutdowns at Duquesne, Irvin Works, National, and Homestead, Domike was laid off from Clairton Steel. Domike saw the silver lining in her job loss being the opportunity to pursue new creative projects, an area of her interests which she had longed to develop, but was unable to do so while working full-time as a steelworker. In 1983, she joined up with two other women writers, Linny Stovall and Beth Destler, from the *Women of Steel* newsletter. Together they started work on a media project that culminated in *Crashin’ Out: Hard Times in McKeesport*.⁴⁸¹

Crashin’ Out existed in various forms – a slide presentation, a training program, a photo essay – but the final, remaining form is the photo book. The book is broken up into several sections:

⁴⁸⁰ This incident is dramatically recounted in Domike’s autobiographical essay film, *Wire-Woman Memory*, 1996, color, sound, digital video, 8 min.

⁴⁸¹ Over a seven-week period, the principal organizers of the project researched, interviewed and photographed thirty-five McKeesport residents “in an effort to compare the community’s response to economic depression in the 1930’s and the 1980’s.” Fourteen youth participants from the CETA-sponsored Summer Youth Employment Program worked with the project. See *Crashin’ Out: Hard Times in McKeesport*, by the McKeesport Oral History Project/Mon Valley Unemployment Committee, 1983. Box 2, Folder 12, Archive Services Center, University of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

lengthy oral history interviews with two generations of McKeesport residents discussing the Great Depression (1930s) or the deindustrial depression (1980s); photographs of the town's landmarks and people, taken by CETA youth participants⁴⁸²; and a conclusion with policy recommendations. The book at various times encourages forms of “familial looking”, as in Fig 6, which features an image depicting CETA photographer Miracle Davis with her mother (and interview subject) Bernadine.

Following Domike's early interest in industrial imagery, the photographs present a rich sense of the landscape and the populations who are brought together, and separated, in the town. There are images of the historic National-Duquesne Works and the US Steel National Tube mills, in McKeesport. There are photos of the homeless, which not only testify to the rising hardship and lack of state support for the unemployed, but also give a sense that homelessness is a pervasive, shaping force in the town. Most images of McKeesport give an overall impression of postindustrial ruin, a ghost town largely empty. Old buildings with faded signs indicate the architectural scars of economic depression. Discarded cars and closed storefronts are some of the markers of a cityscape where “unruly and abandoned objects [are] enmeshed within processes of degeneration.”⁴⁸³

The most populated photographic image depicts a long line at the food bank. Homeless individuals are shown throughout the McKeesport town, laying on benches and occupying public space like unwanted guests. Several children pictured appear like they might be homeless as well. All these depicted individuals seem to lack a social support system, giving a sense of the town's inhabitants as forming what Tim Edensor calls a “phantom network” of isolated individuals lacking ties to a world in- or outside.

⁴⁸² The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (Later renamed the JEPTA Job Partnership Training Act).

⁴⁸³ Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (New York: Berg/Oxford Publishing, 2005), 113.

More positively, images of unions and community organizations appear throughout, and unionism is portrayed as a historically evolving project with relevance to the current situation of joblessness. Photographs of recent union events and marches organized by the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee⁴⁸⁴ (MVUC) -- such as March for Survival, on July 27, 1983 -- are coupled with photos of steelworkers who, in the captions, anticipate their jobs will disappear but look ahead to the work of union members. One photograph shows the elderly unionist Rocky Doratio standing in front of a banner for MVUC, forming an implicit historical connection across different generations of organizers in the past and present. Doratio states, "Every time we would hear one of our members was getting evicted, we would have the whole 300 people down there. We all stood there and waited for the cops. They didn't get out of the car."⁴⁸⁵ The underlying point is that unions historically provided strength in numbers, and that the same aggressive protection they gave members should be occurring in the current crisis.

Highlighting the area of social reproduction – vital but unpaid domestic work –we also see photographs of and captions for women, wives, and mothers who have become volunteers for Mon Valley Unemployed Committee, revealing the feminist outlook that complements the book's unionism. Discussing the importance of social reproduction in the Depression era, an elderly woman, Wilda B. Ketchum, recalls, "We had a mother's club. One of our projects was to make soup every day and take it to school so each kid could have a bowl of soup."⁴⁸⁶ More generally,

⁴⁸⁴ From 1982 to 1996, Mon Valley Unemployed Committee was a social-movement organization based in several Mon Valley milltowns, where local people worked together collecting food and resources for the unemployed, as well as pressuring politicians to improve and lengthen unemployment pay for people who were out of work and seeking new jobs. Domike served as an organizer for MVUC in 1983. For critical literature discussing this community organization, see Cynthia Deitch, "Collective Action and Unemployment: Responses to Job Loss by Workers and Community Groups," *International Journal of Mental Health*, Volume 13, Issue 1-2 (1984): 139-153; and David Dobbie, "Evolving Strategies of Labor-Community Coalition-Building," *Journal of Community Practice*, Vol. 17, Issue 1-2 (2009): 107-119.

⁴⁸⁵ *Crashin' Out: Hard Times in McKeesport*, 10.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

networks of local women cooperating on basic domestic tasks are shown as necessary for survival, for they provide services where the state and capitalist enterprise refuse to help. There are numerous images of women/single mothers as community organizers proudly working on behalf of MVUC.

The book's photographic imagery tends toward documenting spaces of the household as playing an important role in the postindustrial era, whereas images of the mills show the mills to be empty, derelict, and no longer operational. The household is revealed to be a key space where the struggle for survival will be played out, as federal government programs supporting welfare and unemployment benefits continue to shrink.

In terms of familial looking, and the gendered "author-as-producer" ethos manifested in the project, it is worthwhile to consider the involvement of Miracle Davis, a young photographer participating in the CETA program. Davis provided images of a social documentary nature – images of people on the streets, the homeless, and so on. A form of familial looking is created in the book in a photograph featuring Miracle Davis standing beside her mother. Davis, as we learn from the captions, has authored many of the photos depicting streets and urban environments ravaged by deindustrialization.

Her mother Bernadine's interview, meanwhile, discusses the financial crisis she has faced lacking a regular source of income.⁴⁸⁷ The inclusion of her mother's testimony against the backdrop of the broken network of homelessness and poverty, provides for Miracle Davis (and by extension the reader) a contextualization of her present circumstances. The private struggles of the family, and of the wider sphere of production are given a bond, a new visibility. Miracle Davis in her productive capacity becomes a Benjaminian co-collaborator. By using the reproducible tools

⁴⁸⁷ Davis qtd in *Crashin' Out: Hard Times in McKeesport*, 113-118.

of photography, by mapping the streets and spaces where she lives, she is able to see her marginal position within a globalizing system of steel production that leaves behind only poverty, depopulation, disinvestment for local milltowns. Art becomes a means of critical self-education, resulting in a human atlas of deindustrialization that situates the individual story in a broader topography of experience.

Crashin' Out documents the unfair social burdens placed on mothers during times of crisis, as well as the ongoing de-formation of families in the Steel Valley. Family composition and stability are negatively impacted, as adult breadwinners report moving back in with families or families dissolving because parents leave the state for new work. While many men suffer from job losses, it is women who are disproportionately affected. The authors write, "Once traditional breadwinners lose their jobs, wives who haven't been working are forced out into the labor market."⁴⁸⁸ The fate of these women forced to work outside of the domestic sphere, is Domike's focus in *Women of Steel*.

Turning to Domike's important "video leaflet," *Women of Steel*, I discuss how the connections between household and factory workplace are placed front and center. Social reproduction is also put at the fore, focalized through the daily activities of women industrial workers who happen to be mothers. Techniques of photographic portraiture are juxtaposed with realist aesthetics of testimonials, framing, and voice-over narration. I point to the rhetorical characteristics of feminist filmmaking, such as the "the filmmakers' close identification with their subjects" given that the producers were women ex-steelworkers all coping with joblessness.⁴⁸⁹ Domike maximizes the productive capacity of film as an organizing tool, portrays how working-

⁴⁸⁸ *Crashin' Out: Hard Times in McKeesport*, 4.

⁴⁸⁹ Lesage, 521.

class women and women of color are disproportionately and negatively impacted by the closure of the mills, and shows that unionism and feminism must be wedded together to improve the situation of women.

7.2 FILM ANALYSIS: *WOMEN OF STEEL*

Women of Steel, a 28-minute documentary video made in 1985, explores the lives of three women steelworkers in light of recent economic changes. As Domike later recounted, “In discussions about what to make our film about, we realized that our story, the women of steel, was unique.”⁴⁹⁰ The production was led by an all-female crew— Beth Destler, Domike, Allyn Stewart, and Linny Stovall – nearly all former industrial workers, with a director hired to shoot the film. It was shot in ¾ inch SP videotape, using porta-pack technology, and featuring high quality, color footage of several steel making processes. The making of the film was, significantly, shared by participants as well as the producers.⁴⁹¹ While twelve women initially were fielded as possible subjects, the team chose three – Patty Turnell, Sheryl Johnson, and Sherry Ortallono. Domike invited the subjects to provide comments on the film and restructure it based on criticisms about the content or how they were portrayed, a choice that had significant impacts on the subjects.

With a Donna Summer inspired disco soundtrack, and testimonies from three steelworking women, the film takes as its broader subject the historic entry of women into the steelworker labor force. The major focus is the Consent Decree, which in 1974, was established in response to systematic discrimination against women and minorities from job advancement and hiring

⁴⁹⁰ Domike qtd in Blake, 3.

⁴⁹¹ Blake, 5.

opportunities in the industry.⁴⁹² The Consent Decree required steel companies to hire women to fill 20% of all new openings in non-traditional jobs, leading to a new era of equal opportunity.⁴⁹³ By 1979, women comprised 5.8% of the steel work force, and were employed as craft workers, technicians and laborers.

Much of the film centers on the social benefits that came out of this short-lived affirmative action moment, related to us by women who were not only workers but single mothers raising families. Pat Turnell, who worked a waitress after she divorced in the 1970s, was accepted into a boilermaker apprenticeship program through the Consent Decree. She went from earning \$6 an hour to over \$23 dollars an hour, achieving a new state of financial independence. African American Sheryl Johnson indicates her interests in science and engineering were deepened by the opportunity of working in the trades.

Many shots enframe women in front of, or inside, steel factories – giving a visual redefinition of factory labor as male. In fact the film downplays the presence of sexism – which was a widespread problem. It does so in order to focus on the collaborative nature of work and how many men actually helped women fit into the routine of an urban steel mill.⁴⁹⁴ Also noteworthy are the shots where the women are shown doing domestic work, cleaning, cooking, playing with their children, without the presence of fathers. This results in an intertwining of

⁴⁹² On April 15, 1974, nine steel companies and the United Steelworkers of America signed a consent decree establishing goals for the placement of women and minorities in trade and craft occupations in steel mills. A second consent decree required the companies to set goals for hiring women. See *Study Guide for Women of Steel*, 1985, written by Beth Desler, photographs and layout by Steffi Domike.

⁴⁹³ Sociologists Kay Deaux and Joseph Ullman provide the most comprehensive study of the Consent Decree and its structural effects upon the industrial workplace. Five years after women and minorities were given the opportunity to work in manufacturing, the authors surveyed two Midwestern steel mills to evaluate the costs, tradeoffs, and socioeconomic impacts of women's entry into the workforce. See *Women of Steel: Female Blue-Collar Workers in the Basic Steel Industry* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

⁴⁹⁴ Deaux and Ullman confirm that lower ranked male workers who collaborated with women on specific tasks in the mills tended to rate their interactions with women positively. *Women of Steel*, 122-23.

maternity and steel productivity. The suggestion is that the entry of women into steel work was not a separation from, but a reinforcement of, social reproduction at home.

The producers affirm their own close connection with the lived struggles of the documentary subjects. This occurs principally through the figure of Beth Destler. Destler, as one of the co-producers, appears in the film as an ally and a participant. She too is a woman *of* steel, not simply an outsider narrating about this community from a distant vantage point. In an early sequence, Destler is identified with the title “former steelworker” and directly addresses the audience:

Two and a half years ago, when we were laid off from our jobs in the steel industry, we decided to tell the story of women of steel. So together we produced this documentary about our friends we used to work with. My name is Beth Destler and I drove a steel carrier for US Steel for 5 years. Today that mill is shut down virtually like so many others in Buffo, Youngstown and Birmingham...

Destler’s narration focuses on a rhetorical “we” that includes subject and documentarian on the same plane. It highlights the do-it-yourself mentality of the film, which was a broader feature of feminist realist documentary at the time, where synch sound film and video were being explored and exploited as an inexpensive tool to make sense of personal circumstances.⁴⁹⁵ Her narration here connects Destler’s personal experience to women’s larger social standing and to structural issues affecting steel mills across the US.

Destler is later featured in sequences at the Chiodo Tavern, where the documentary subjects debate and argue openly about possible political action. In these bar scenes, Destler is visible in

⁴⁹⁵ Discussion on the centrality of first-person experience in feminist documentaries of the 1970s and 1980s can be found in Jennifer L. Borda, *Women Labor Activists in the Movies: Nine Depictions of Workplace Organizers, 1954-2005* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2011): 78-81.

the frame, quietly nodding and supporting the others, though not dictating the path forward to them. Her neutral but affirmative presence signals the filmmakers' reduced authorial presence and their co-involvement with the subjects in learning how best to politicize plant shutdowns. The economic vulnerability of the filmmakers becomes a further layer defining their bond with the women of steel. This is revealed when, halfway through the film, we see Destler washing laboratory equipment, her gloved hands handling and cleaning beakers. She states in voice-over:

The last three years, just like Sheryl and Patty, I've only been able to find low paying work. Today I'm supporting myself by washing bottles in a biology lab while I go to school through a displaced workers program. The decline of the steel industry is only part of why we are back where we started...

The documentarian "voice" of *Women of Steel* is thus closely tied up with the voices of the depicted social actors, indicating how the filmmaking process was energized by the personal connection of the documentarians to the subject. As Domike would later write in an essay about her documentary practice, her work is enriched by such techniques of "self-reference", that is, when she herself highlights a personal connection to the work, to the people involved in its making, rather than concealing traces of herself. This high degree of self-reference was unusual in films about industrial women. As Blake notes, *Women of Steel's* "first-hand treatment of steelworkers' lives contrasts with the staged and rather distant portrayal of steelworkers in earlier government, corporate or union documentaries on American heavy industry by professional film makers. Even the newer radical documentaries, such as [*Voices from a*] *Steeltown* and *The Business of America*, are not as effective in capturing an intimate view of how the steel industry crisis impacted the entire range of the lives of steelworkers and their families."⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁶ Blake, 5.

Women of Steel presents its three central subjects as “ordinary experts,” as though they have special knowledge in their professional-technical expertise in steelworking. The women’s testimonials are structured as before-and-after developmental narratives, where they move from a position of ignorance and vulnerability to a position of technical mastery and agency. This format is evident in the treatment of Sheryl Johnson. In a sequence of images depicting factory production, we hear Johnson on the soundtrack discuss her first day on the job. She emphasizes her difficulty at being visually orientated, recalling that the mill space appeared to her dark and dirty. When she turned her head up, down, left or right, she felt she would fall down, experiencing feelings of spatial vertigo.

However, after this sequence a highly composed shot depicts Johnson proudly standing against an open sky; and behind her we see the imposing structure of the Wheeling-Pittsburgh plant. Johnson, in the shot, describes how being in the mill changed her life for the better. In her role as a steelworker, she was able to gain access to scientific information, knowledge and skills that she had always wanted to explore. She also gained financial support and medical coverage through the job’s high pay and benefits. That Johnson narrates this experience herself is part of what I am calling “ordinary expertise” – the filmmakers do not intervene and make sense of her on her behalf, instead, the viewer is meant to take her at her word. Scholars Barbara Halpern Martineau, Sonya Michel, and Alexandra Juhasz argue that the appearance of working-class women’s speech in feminist realist documentaries challenged the dominant convention where men, as figures of authority, spoke on behalf on women in talking head testimonials.⁴⁹⁷ In Domike’s

⁴⁹⁷ Barbara Halpern Martineau, “Talking About Our Lives and Experience: Some Thoughts about Feminism, Documentary, and ‘Talking Heads,’” in *“Show Us Life”: Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary*, ed. Thomas Waugh, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1984): 252 – 273; Sonya Michel, “Feminism, Film, and Public History,” in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 238-249; and Alexandra Juhasz, “They Said We Were Trying to Show Reality – All I want to Show is

film, such spoken expertise does not impart any specific technical information, per se. Instead it works, rhetorically, as an illustration that the mill generally functioned as a site of knowledge production that women were able to make use of. Johnson thus appears in the portrait shot, rather fittingly, as though she has a powerful sense of agency and purpose, and she controls her representation of knowledge.

This developmental narrative of professional advancement is followed by a narrative of political radicalization. Johnson's experience, she tells us, was one of radicalization. She started work in the mills as a single mother of five children; she was not into "women's issues," she was into "survival." Over time, she no longer saw herself, individualistically, as a cog in the machine, but as part of a collective political subject. She got involved in union efforts to protect workers; and, after getting laid off, Johnson carried this new awareness forward. She became a social worker and a community activist working for MVUC on behalf of the poor and other unemployed steelworkers in the area. The crisis of deindustrialization produced for her, as well as other women, an opportunity for collectivization. A mid-shot of Johnson, shouting slogans, sporting political pins and wearing the suit of an MVUC social worker, testifies to the spirit of "proletarian positivity," in Claire Johnston's words, that persisted during the period.⁴⁹⁸

Through visual imagery depicting women in mills, *Women of Steel* stands in contrast to other working-class documentaries made about women workers in this era, such as *Harlan County USA*, 1976; *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, 1980; and *We Dig Coal: A Portrait of Three Women*, 1982. The frequent enframing of women and mills in *Women of Steel* suggests that women

My Video: The Politics of the Realist Feminist Documentary," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 190-215.

⁴⁹⁸ Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen, "Brecht in Britain: *The Nightcleaners* and *The Independent Political Film*," in *"Show Us Life": Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary*, ed. Thomas Waugh, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1984): 195.

are in control of their destinies when they are working at the mill. This positivity contrasts with other media images of women steel workers. From *Norma Rae*, 1979, to *North Country*, 2005, images of women factory workers have long suggested women do not belong; that inside the mill, they are lost, isolated beings in a dark and strange place, detached from a feminine social identity.⁴⁹⁹

This skepticism around women workers arises even in critical and independent documentary portraits, such as *We Dig Coal*, which contains scenes where men and women alike discuss how coal mining is “un-lady-like,” saying that women are too feminine for such work. Both independent and Hollywood productions visually depict manufacturing as existentially dangerous work, with dirt itself functioning as the symbolic abjection of women’s bodies. The woman in the factory finds herself losing credibility and power. In contrast, the pro-filmic factory imagery in *Women of Steel* is well lit, relatively crisp and easy to follow for the viewer, thanks to new video technology that capture women working on the job. Further, the presence of dirt on women’s work clothing in these sequences is not a degradation of womanhood, but a dignifying sign of perseverance.

Dirty factory clothing in *Women of Steel* also signals the wider range of gender expression that steelworking women had access to. One unnamed woman worker is shown wearing a Sylvester Stallone T shirt, covered in a grime. The hypermasculine movie star reminds us that

⁴⁹⁹ For instance, consider *North Country*, a Hollywood drama *film* directed by Niki Caro, starring Charlize Theron and Frances McDormand. Set in 1989 Michigan, after women are granted permission to work in coal mines, the film dramatizes workplace sexism to a fault, such that to be a woman in a mine – or any industrial space – is to have one’s femininity, one’s capacity as a mother and spouse, completely negated. The wider masculinism of the workplace, and of the union – beset by what Nancy Hewitt labels “virile unionism” – is seen as rigid and essentially fixed. For more on *North Country* and the problematic politics of Hollywood’s labor heroines, see Borda, 164-188. For more discussion on the discourse of masculinism within unions, see Hewitt, “The Voice of Virile Labor: Labor Militancy, Community Solidarity, and Gender Identity among Tampa’s Latin Workers, 1880-1921,” in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. A. Baron (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 142-67.

factory work culturally connotes traits of strength, machismo, and endurance, as in folk heroes like Joe Magarac. As it happens, sociologists like Anne Balay have found that many working class women have been fascinated by factory labor in large part because they are attracted to the culture of toughness, the sweat and back-breaking physical exertion.⁵⁰⁰ Though the film itself does not make this point explicit as part of its core argument about professional opportunities for women, the imagery of women's bodies in the mills gives a refreshing representation of what Jack Halberstam calls "female masculinity" on the shop floor.⁵⁰¹

All the women presented display a decidedly female-masculine form of gender expression, wearing jeans, T shirts, and safety helmets. Turnell most of all expresses gender nonconformity through her harsh attitude and aggressive sense of humor, always joking and appearing tough. Turnell's frequent sarcasm and competitiveness reveals the toughness that women were able to latch onto and express, which in some cases became a source of admiration among male workers. We hear from Johnson that when male coworkers teased her, she pushed back on them harder, resulting in more respect for her.

The presence of an original pop music soundtrack defends that women have earned the right to work in mills, while it also collectivizes the discouraging experiences some workers may have endured on the job, transforming negativity into a powerful, spirit-raising anthem. An important musical interlude appears in the segment after Sherry Ortallono, a millwright helper, discusses the difficulty of learning to burn metal. This difficult task, she tells us, was lessened by "two guys from work" who "took the time to show me." Ortallono calmly and steadily burns, shown in goggles and similar posture to the iconic male steelworker featured in the Eugene Smith

⁵⁰⁰ See Anne Balay, *Steel Closets: Voices of Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Steelworkers* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014): 97.

⁵⁰¹ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

photographs of Pittsburgh from the 1950s. After this, we hear music begin playing over a montage of mill imagery. The lyrics powerfully condense the challenges of “breaking into a man’s world”:

Had a job in the mill, learned how to burn hot iron

I was proud of my trade, and the bills got paid.

Hot days and long nights

Working close to the fire.

Riding the steel to buy my kids’ meals,

I had to be strong, I had to learn to get along.

People kept saying, Hey lady, you don’t be-long...

The musical lyrics, by mentioning qualities of strength, familial support, and cooperation, stand in contrast to the prevailing sexist discourse of the era that questioned the woman worker’s desire to work in the public sphere. As shown in sociological reports from the era, male workers, company owners, and outsider observers frequently claimed that women were not up to the task of millwork, on the basis of innate biological reasons.⁵⁰² This sexist discourse around work is replaced in the film by an interest in cooperation and collaboration, woman’s resiliency as well as forms of knowledge and organizing made possible by the presence of women and minorities in the mill space. The film in this regard echoes the findings of sociologists Deux and Ullman, who write about 1970s steel mills that “women in the blue-collar environment have more relative power than

⁵⁰² In their interviews with male supervisors and workers at mills, Deux and Ullman found a common list of complaints and arguments against women’s participation in the industry, including: women’s perceived lack of physical strength and “toughness,” inability to cooperate with men, low self-esteem. They found no evidence verifying these complaints. Interestingly, low ranked (non-supervisory) male workers often reported that if women had the right attitude toward their work, then they would succeed. For the full range of responses, positive and negative, toward women workers, see *Women of Steel*, 120-123.

women in many occupations, and also have more direct ways to cope” with possible forms of abuse.⁵⁰³ The protest music reaffirms a vision of the factory as a site of worker power.

The second part of *Women of Steel* depicts the fall of these secure professional careers and women’s re-entry into the so-called “pink-collar” sector.⁵⁰⁴ This transformation and regression of women’s work is vividly depicted through the opening sequence of the film. A lone worker is shown undressing, putting away welding gloves, worker boots and pants. The tough, independent woman seamlessly transforms, putting on lipstick and feminine attire. This hints at the sexualization and disempowerment of women that occurs in the service sector. For instance, after being laid off Turnell is shown in her new role as a Pizza Hut waitress, earning two dollars an hour and serving her family the pizza that forms part of her pay. In an interview, Turnell is shown applying makeup and fixing her hair before a work shift. She states, with palpable frustration, that her new job duties go far beyond the stated position of waitress. She receives a fraction of her former pay and no benefits, falling short of the job security she enjoyed at the mill.

In the latter half the viewer sees dilapidated homes, partially destroyed store fronts and faded signs as material traces of depopulation and disinvestment. But just as women appear isolated, fragmented and alienated in this new world, the film highlights spaces of collectivity and intersectional agency where they are able to advance the fight against unemployment together. After losing her job, Johnson joins the MVUC as an organizer; so we see that while the crisis may have taken away her sense of financial security, she has adopted a new role as activist. Similarly,

⁵⁰³ *Women of Steel*, 134.

⁵⁰⁴ “Pink collar jobs” refers to job categories often held by American women which tend to be poorly paid clerical and service sector occupations, such as: textile operative, retail sales clerk, house cleaner, or waitress. The concentration of jobs with low wages, combined with many women serving as the sole supporter of their family, has resulted in a process called the “feminization of poverty.” See *Study Guide for Women of Steel*, 1985.

after relying on services as a recipient of the food bank, Turnell becomes a worker and advocate for the food bank.

Later on, we see the women meeting in the Chiodo Tavern across from the Homestead Works US Steel factory. Inside, we watch the women forge connections across racial lines as they discuss forming unions to address changes in their new workplaces. The Chiodo Tavern is where the film most clearly resembles what Julia Lesage describes as the formal structure of the feminist documentary and its consciousness raising function. These scenes feature additional women steelworkers, such as Linda Cable, who are not central figures (they are not featured in testimonials) but whose presence reinforces the film's quest in creating a semi-public space to support and extend women's discourse. This semi-public space of the documentary is both distinct from and related to the larger public sphere of US society, creating, in Borda's words, a world which women would want to inhabit and exercise ideas.⁵⁰⁵

Pictured in the tavern with the other women subjects, Destler the producer tells us in voice-over: "Sheryl, Patty, Linda, Carol and I shared many hard times in the mill. We learned to laugh at ourselves. But we also learned how to fight together to improve our lives." The tavern is here positioned as a place to treat and analyze social issues, a workshop-type space (standing in for the documentary itself) for learning "how to fight together to improve our lives."

The tavern, treated as a consciousness-raising site, is markedly different from the mill in that it allows for diverse forms of conversation to take place, with topics ranging from the personal

⁵⁰⁵ Discussing the spatial aesthetics of the consciousness-raising group that arises in similar realist feminist films, *Union Maids*, 1976, and *With Babies and Banners*, 1978, Borda writes, "The films' formal style creates an environment similar to the consciousness-raising group by using familiar settings, such as a kitchen or living room, and by using camera work to provide a view of each woman in close-up as she tells her story. As they watch these women, spectators are invited to experience the film as if they were sitting in a circle listening to these women along with other members of a larger, unified group." A similar textual positioning occurs in the Chiodo Tavern, which is shot and edited to emplace the spectator as participant-listener in the group. Borda, *Women Labor Activists in the Movies*, 96.

to the political. For instance, Cable discusses the popular misconceptions around gender and the stereotypes about women working in steel mills: “I think there is a misconception about women in the mill: that she is a big, loud broad.” To this Pat Turnell jokingly replies, “Hey! Are you talking about me? [laughs]”

Hinting at the potential social consciousness that arises in this unique setting, Johnson discusses the need for women to see and talk to each other. She notes it is important for steelworking women not to retreat into the locker room, whenever they face problems with sexism or employer exploitation. For their part, Johnson and Turnell’s comments look toward the future. Even with the decline of millwork, they discuss the need to preserve affirmative action programs in all professions in order to protect women and minorities. Johnson summarizes the mood of the group, stating: “Temporarily, we’re going to be down. But I think as we unite, you know, our eye on the frontlines, there’s still fight left in us. US Steel might have stopped, but other things are getting started...”

Johnson was given the chance to view the filmed segments of her interviews and provide editing notes to film’s team of producers. The act of being involved in the filmmaking became deeply self-reflective for Johnson. It made her mad, for instance, to see how important the mills were at the time of their closing. More positively, through her participation in the movie, and in making editorial suggestions behind-the-scenes, she became knowledgeable about larger processes going on. She began “seeing” reality differently. Involving the ordinary person in the film process became a form of self-education, changing how she sees herself in structures of knowledge, vision, and power.

Johnson highlights the consciousness-raising effect of making the film, saying:

I will never forget the first time I saw it. When you are doing something, you don’t

think about it much. But the first time I saw it, I cried. I will never forget it. I had never stopped long enough to look at what happened, and when I sat and looked at that video, I saw it...it really upset me, it made me madder than I was before.⁵⁰⁶

Her powerful words reveal that direct involvement in filmmaking was potentially transformative, not just for the producers but for subjects of the film as well.

The film premiered in Pittsburgh at Carlow College, to a packed auditorium of 400 attendees. Subsequent showings were organized at union halls and community centers around the city. By the mid-1980s, the film became part of the local union education programme. Blake notes, “the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) distributed the film to educate its membership on the crisis in the steel industry,” and the film won numerous accolades from festivals and the Museum of Modern Art.⁵⁰⁷

For union feminists such as Domike and the other producers, the ruined steel mill was not a nostalgic relic. It was a means to an end, a space of creating power for ordinary people across racial, ethnic, gender, and class lines even after a form of work disappears. Domike today works as an organizer and educator for the United Steelworkers, in downtown Pittsburgh, making “the women’s struggle part of the union struggle.”⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ Johnson qtd in Blake, 5.

⁵⁰⁷ In 1985, *Women of Steel* won the following prizes: First Place in Economics, History and Government Category at the National Educational Film Festival; First Place award in the TV Public Affairs/Documentary category by the National Commission of Working Women; won overall first place award at the Tucson Women’s Video Festival; a Certificate of Merit at the Chicago International Film Festival; Honorable Mention at the Global Village 11th Annual Documentary Festival; third place in the Film and Broadcasting Competition of the International Labor Communications Association. New York’s Museum of Modern Art also featured the film in its New Director’s series.

⁵⁰⁸ Domike qtd in Blake, 10-11.

7.3 WORKING-CLASS FEMINISM THROUGH PORTRAITURE

In *Women of Steel*, Domike and her collaborators engendered an aesthetic of working-class feminism. They utilize formal and realist aspects of the moving image for the aims of “consciousness raising, mutual support and collective action.”⁵⁰⁹ The factory imagery of *Women of Steel* adds up to a montage of multiple factories along the Steel Valley, telling a broader story of deindustrialization in America.⁵¹⁰ These images have a definite consciousness-raising function: spaces such as the mill are populated with women, and such imagery alters perceptions and gender essentialist stereotypes.

Domike taps into the coalition-building power of film, photography, and other technologies of reproducibility, recognizing that visual media can cross over boundaries of class, gender, race, and sex that divide the workplace. Filmic images have the power to create new constituencies of people who otherwise do not coincide or intersect. Filmmaking can empower people – steelworking women – who may lack the symbolic capital to advance their lives. By juxtaposing images of home life and work life, she evokes the multiple realities of social (re)production, the dual commitments of women as homemakers and as steelworkers. Meanwhile, the film’s use of protest music and the close connection of the documentarian to the subject, generates a composite image of steelworking women that deftly combines disparate experiences into the body of a single, collective subject.

⁵⁰⁹ Mary Margaret Fonow, *Union Women: Forging Feminism in the United Steelworkers of America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 4.

⁵¹⁰ The women in the documentary worked at four mills near Pittsburgh: US Steel’s Clairton Works (where Patty worked); US Steel’s Irvin Works (Sheryl Johnson’s mill); US Steel’s Duquesne Works (Beth Destler); and Wheeling-Pittsburgh’s Monessen plant (Sherry Ortallono’s place).

A Benjaminian author-as-producer, Domike breaks down hierarchal divisions of labor and gender in the art-making process. Rather than operate as an auteur with a single authorial vision imposed from on high, she strives to democratize the relations of media production by involving many ordinary actors as agents in the creative process. This is seen in the democratic creation of the *Crashin' Out* photo book as well as *Women of Steel*. A mix of anonymity and specificity results in Domike's projects. This is because she wants the viewer to identify with those who are in the depicted situation, allowing for moments of radical subjectization, where the spectator sees themselves as/in a political subject.

After making *Women of Steel*, Domike founded a nonprofit organization, Mon Valley Media, supporting women-centric local productions. She went on to create several union-sponsored short films,⁵¹¹ and became the producer for a local television program called *Labor's Corner*.⁵¹² Her interventions into historical imagery of the labor movement continued in later films, such as *Out of this Furnace: A Walking Tour of Thomas Bell's Novel*, 1990; *The River Ran Red*, 1993; and *Wire-Woman Memory*, 1996.

Domike continues to work as an artist and activist. More recently she has evolved her art-making into the realm of participatory, digital projects and games. She co-created an installation work called *Terminal Time*, weaving together historical, environmentalist, and unionist themes.⁵¹³

⁵¹¹ Domike produced *Caring...with a Contract*, a 20-minute video commissioned by United Steelworkers UWSA, 1985; and directed *Lockout*, 15-minute documentary commissioned by UWSA, 1985.

⁵¹² *Labor's Corner* was a weekly TV show on WQEX, 1987.

⁵¹³ Inspired by the montage theory of Sergei Eisenstein as well as the open-ended interactivity of the Internet, *Terminal Time* is a "history engine," a digital project and collaboration between computer scientist Michael Mateas, video producer Domike, and electronic artist Paul Vanouse. *Terminal Time* uses inputs from the audience to generate interventions into different historical eras.

In 2004, she made a board game with public defender Lisa Freeland that takes a critical look at the Patriot Act.⁵¹⁴

Domike deserves to be re-centered in the film/media studies literature as a militant feminist filmmaker, in the mold of Barbara Kopple⁵¹⁵ or Esfir Shub.⁵¹⁶ Her working-class visual media offers an invaluable record of women's experiences during deindustrialization in the Rust Belt, and reveals the powerful knowledge production that can occur in mills. As she says in an interview,

...the mill filled out my education. I had been raised in a world of books and ideas, but the mills gave me a better sense of how ideas are also stratified. How working people are really just as smart as academics; that it's not about intelligence but about having an opportunity.⁵¹⁷

Domike's relevance only grows as, today, movements around socialism and socialist feminism re-emerge to fight back against the spread of neoliberalism. Her fusion of art and politics greatly enriches our understanding of Pittsburgh's film history, and the wider genealogy of labor-oriented US filmmaking.

In Chapter 8, we consider portraiture and sexuality through the hand-processed films of Roger Jacoby. Partly inspired by the films of Andy Warhol, Jacoby created portraits that

⁵¹⁴ The Patriot Act Game is discussed in Mackenzie Carpenter, "Game shows how to play by new rules," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 2, 2004, <http://old.post-gazette.com/lifestyle/20040202patriotact0202p2.asp>.

⁵¹⁵ US documentarian Barbara Kopple (b. 1946) worked with Albert and David Maysles, and made Academy Award winning documentary *Harlan County, USA*, 1976, about a Kentucky miners' strike, and *American Dream*, 1991, about the Hormel Foods Strike in Minnesota in 1985-86. Kopple made a PBS miniseries called *We Do the Work*, based on steelworker unions. Kopple's vision of film as organizing tool is discussed in E. Ann Kaplan, "Theory and Practice of the Realist Documentary Form in *Harlan County, U.S.A.*" in *"Show Us Life": Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary*, ed. Thomas Waugh, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1984): 212-222.

⁵¹⁶ Constructivist filmmaker Esfir Shub (1894-1959) worked in the Soviet film industry and was known for a journalistic style of film that influenced Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein. Her film *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, 1927, composed entirely of appropriated newsreels, archival and amateur footage, is credited as originating the found footage/compilation film. Shub's career and proto-feminist politics is discussed in relation in Walter Benjamin's notion of "author-as-producer," in Martin Stollery, "Eisenstein, Shub, and the Gender of the Author as Producer," *Film History* 14.1 (2002): 87-99.

⁵¹⁷ Domike qtd in Wymard, 82.

illuminated gay identities, particularly focusing on his partner Ondine. Jacoby visually alters the cinematic depiction of people's bodies and sexual identity, thanks to the photochemical processing that makes his images appear like Abstract Expressionist paintings. Jacoby's filmic images are always in a state of vibrational flux, suggesting that sexuality, too, is constantly in change and never static. Jacoby made numerous portraits for friends and local patrons, but his self-portraits in which he deals with his struggle with HIV/AIDS are given attention.

8.0 'THE THEATRICALITY OF THE EMULSION!': REASSESSING THE HAND- PROCESSED FILMS OF ROGER JACOBY

Roger Jacoby (1945–1985) integrated himself into the Pittsburgh film scene, becoming both a major player within it, and a fiercely independent artist. As the creator of fifteen films, he worked across multiple modes of filmmaking: experimental animation; operatic melodrama; and the personal, diaristic film. With the encouragement of film curator Sally Dixon, he utilized the *Travel Sheet* bulletin that connected filmmakers to exhibitors. He went on to organize several major screenings at museums, such as the Carnegie Museum of Art and MoMA, and widely toured the US to lecture on what one critic called his “total formal approach” to film.⁵¹⁸ Through Jacoby’s connection to Ondine (Robert Olivo), his lover and a “Superstar” from Warhol’s Factory, Pittsburgh film audiences were given a rare opportunity to witness Warholian Pop Art in the flesh. Ondine served as the main protagonist in Jacoby’s films, and the two men exhibited their work as an artistic power couple.⁵¹⁹

More than anyone else, Jacoby embodied Dixon’s model of the filmmaker as an “artisan.”⁵²⁰ He resisted commercial film in terms of content, distribution, exhibition and production, and lived in a condition of perpetual poverty in pursuit of his creativity. He relied on

⁵¹⁸ Carmen Vigil, Cineprobe, Museum of Modern Art, “An Evening with Roger Jacoby,” Jacoby Roger/Correspondence 1974-1980, Box 10, Folder 1, Carnegie Museum of Art Film and Video Department Archives.

⁵¹⁹ In terms of Ondine’s work, he performed as a character in a number of Warhol-authored films, such as *The Loves of Ondine*, *Vinyl*, and *The Chelsea Girls* that he and Jacoby screened around the US in the early 1970s. After these films were pulled from circulation Ondine was the only authorized exhibitor of Warhol’s work. My chapter, however, mainly focuses on Jacoby’s creativity.

⁵²⁰ Dixon argued for a model of the experimental, independent filmmaker based on the artisan or film-poet, during her tenure as coordinator of the Film Section, 1969-1975.

grants and a loose patronage system to support his filmmaking, and he made the Carnegie Museum of Art's Film Section his refuge. A longtime, active member of Pittsburgh Filmmakers, he championed the media center as a key foundation for the creation of a new independent and democratic cinema. Today, many of his works have been lost due to deterioration, but some have been collected in museums around the world where they are valued for their unique visual and material qualities as handcrafted objects.

In this chapter I argue for an interpretation of Roger Jacoby as a “queer modernist,” a radical artist who manipulates and alters the audio-visual field in order to create sensual, haptic expressions of queer desire. To make this point, I analyze his main innovation, the technique of hand-processed film.⁵²¹ I view hand-processed film, in Jacoby's case, as a conceptual metaphor for thinking about abstraction, sexuality, and modernism in new ways.⁵²² This analysis can expand our appreciation of Jacoby but also enhance the historiography of gay, lesbian, and queer artists in American avant-garde film, as there is very little analysis to date of what the hand-processing technique might mean in the broader context of queer experimental media.

In order to elaborate the features of Jacoby's queer hand-processing, the chapter focuses on his major film shorts *Aged in Wood*; *Dream Sphinx Opera*; *Floria*; *L'Amico Fried's Glamorous Friends*; and *How to Be a Homosexual Parts I and II*. My purpose is to consider how, in Jacoby's

⁵²¹ “Film processing” refers to the chemical processes applied in the correction and cleaning-up of celluloid film once it is ready to be assembled into a finished work. Kathryn Ramey discusses black-and-white and color film processing in *Experimental Filmmaking: Break the Machine* (Burlington: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

⁵²² For terminological clarification, I understand the word “abstraction” in light of the theoretical work by scholars such as Lex Lancaster, Renate Lorenz, and David J. Getsy. For them, abstraction in art has to do with the deliberate resistance to normative imagery of the human body that would fix sexual and gendered identities to bodies. “Queerness” I understand from the work of literary scholar Scott Herring. Herring compellingly asserts that queerness refers to a process of *spoilage* – the spoilage of stable and binaristic systems of sexuality, gender, race, and class. See Lancaster, “Dragging Away: Queer Abstraction in Contemporary Art” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017); Lorenz, *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (New Brunswick: Transcript Verlag, 2012); Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); and Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

hands, filmic processing transforms ideas of sexual identity; and how it advances filmic avant-garde modernism through novel forms of abstraction, perceptual shock, and color. This approach links the biographical and the formal aspects of his work. It also invites us to think more broadly about forms and effects of audiovisual abstraction. Following the work of transgender art historian Lex Lancaster, I assert that filmic abstraction can be understood as a vehicle for expressing nonnormative sexualities outside the confines of traditional representations.⁵²³ While many practitioners previously used filmic abstraction for spiritual, political, and other social purposes, Jacoby reveals how abstraction can also redefine, remake, and revalue bodies, physical sensation, intimacy, and our sense of mortality.

8.1 ON ROGER'S PROCESS

In 1972, Jacoby moved from New York City to Pittsburgh, with his partner Ondine, in order to escape an increasingly dangerous drug scene. Once he settled in Pittsburgh, he became famous for investigating an area that was relatively unexplored at the time: the photochemistry of celluloid film processing. Independent filmmakers in the 1970s were forced to send raw footage to a commercial film lab. At the film lab, the film would be “corrected,” that is, the colors and qualities of the image would be treated according to a standard model established by Eastman Kodak.⁵²⁴ It was fairly expensive and time consuming. In addition, it resulted in a fairly standard

⁵²³ Lancaster’s work considers how artists from minoritarian populations have used visual abstraction as a tactic of queering. See Lancaster “The Wipe: Sadie Benning’s Queer Abstraction,” *Discourse* 39.1 (Winter 2017): 92-116; and “Feeling the Grid: Lorna Simpson’s Concrete Abstraction,” *ASAP/Journal* Vol 2 No 1 (January 2017): 131-155.

⁵²⁴ Several critics have written about Jacoby’s resistance to the Eastman Kodak guidelines on commercial lab processing. See, for instance, Edward Burns, “Memorial Program for Roger Jacoby,” January 22, 1986, Film in the

visual look.

Jacoby decided he could process film himself, as many others did. While he did so initially for budgetary reasons, he realized the potential artistic uses. Instead of striving for the crisp, clean image that was ubiquitous on TV or Hollywood film, he decided to subvert the uniformity of Kodak processed film. Trained as an abstract painter at Mercedes Matter's New York Studio School in the mid-1960s⁵²⁵, he often remarked that he was preoccupied with the spontaneous results of chance operations once the artist let go of conscious control. In a parallel to photography whereby art photographers processed their own negatives, Jacoby said about hand-processed film: "It's actually better than taking your film to a commercial processing lab. With them you always get out exactly what you put in. You don't get the unexpected."⁵²⁶

With his own film processor set up in his apartment bathtub, he produced a range of visual and textural effects on the celluloid material. Critics and reviewers marveled at the sense of dynamism generated by Jacoby's chemically bathed film stocks. The material substrate of film came alive in a state of flux, always changing. As one admiring viewer put it,

The sometimes lovely, and sometimes not beautiful, but nearly always exquisite collisions of light and shadow upon the screen seduces us and takes us into a whole new world...With a quickness of breath and dryness of the throat one is apt to say 'What is that!' as if peering into some exotic fog, not sure if one may trust his own

Cities, Jacoby Roger/Correspondence 1974-1980, Box 10, Folder 1, Carnegie Museum of Art Film and Video Department Archives.

⁵²⁵ In 1963, he studied painting with the action painter Raymond Hendler; and in 1964, figure drawing with Mercedes Matter. From an undated CV, Artist file for Roger Jacoby containing correspondence and ephemera, 1974-1986, Box 10, Folder 1, Carnegie Museum of Art Film and Video Department Archives, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

⁵²⁶ Jacoby quoted on hand-processing in Mike Vargo, "Don't Shoot Roger: He's the Film Maker," *Pittsburgh New Sun*, September 9, 1976.

eyes...⁵²⁷

He started using a simple and cheap Morse G3 developing tank, intended for the amateur and home-movie market. Then, upon receipt of his first NEA grant in 1974, for \$10,000 he purchased a more sophisticated Cramer film processor commonly used by schools and hospitals. Jacoby and Ondine would sit at home and watch television for hours while winding film, back and forth, through a variety of chemical soups.

Jacoby became well known for two unreproducible aspects of his hand-processed technique.⁵²⁸ First, the appearance of black dots or amoeba-like specks, which were the remains of the anti-halation backing on the film. The anti-halation layer absorbs light that passes through film; without it, a distracting halo-like effect appears around bright points or edges in the image. When he processed film, Jacoby applied a weak, incomplete wash to the anti-halation layer. Instead of a smooth, clean, and well-lit image, hundreds of tiny black particles remain visible on the film's surface.

Another effect Jacoby achieved was *reticulation*, a sort of “crackling” or wiggly-worm texture that makes the film resemble stained glass. Jacoby discovered that by simply putting film in hot water and then cold (and vice versa), the gelatin of the emulsion enlarged or contracted, and a series of ridges and valleys appeared on the surface of the film. He realized he could edit portions of film treated with or without reticulation to stunning effect. In his film *Floria*⁵²⁹, 1974, for instance, live-action footage of Betty Aberlin (the character Lady Aberlin from *Mister Roger's*

⁵²⁷ See Carmen Vigil, “Roger Jacoby’s Films, and *Aged in Wood*,” *Field of Vision* 5 (Winter 1978–79): 4–5.

⁵²⁸ I have described Jacoby’s technical processes, in greater detail, for a Carnegie Museum of Art *Storyboard* blog post. Portions of that discussion appear here. For the original text, see Ogrodnik, “Unreproducible: The Life and Work of Visionary Filmmaker Roger Jacoby,” *Carnegie Museum of Art Storyboard*, January 10, 2018, <https://blog.cmoa.org/2018/01/unreproducible-the-life-and-work-of-visionary-filmmaker-roger-jacoby/>

⁵²⁹ *Floria*, 1974, 16mm, color/silent, 15 minutes.

Neighborhood) is juxtaposed against large segments of green, purple and blue reticulation. The pattern resembles chunks of coral reef with complexly interlocking bumps and grooves.

Hand-processing has a queer-ing potential. Film processed in this way results in “aural garbage”⁵³⁰, scratches, biomorphic color fields, gaps, and broken images. When processing is combined with footage of human figures, as they are in Jacoby’s work, the processing causes these bodies to blur and blend together. This creates transgender depictions with men and women’s bodies conjoined together, as in *L’Amico Fried’s Glamorous Friends*.⁵³¹ Human figures are covered in amoeba-like specks, while objects bleed in and out of solarized landscapes. With the loss of figure-ground distinctions, the human body becomes coextensive with physical matter, not separate from it.

Though artists have used processing for different reasons, in Jacoby’s case processed film becomes queer because it cannot “stay put;” it constantly changes the audiovisual field without resolving into a fixed form. In the words of Ara Osterweil, hand-processing is part of 1970s avant-garde film’s “corporeal mode of address,” a tactic for “swerv[ing] sexuality from its normative aims.”⁵³² In various ways, hand-processing resists entrenched patterns of heterosexist cinematic illusionism, for it places stumbling blocks to the forms of identification and the absorptive spectatorship associated with the narrative cinema. As a result, these films generate what Elena

⁵³⁰ According to Juan A. Suarez, queerness manifests in experimental film principally through the use of audio distortion and a variety of “aural garbage” techniques: “accidental scratches, pop and fizz, distorted hum, glitches, radio static.” For Suarez, “the strangeness, artificiality, heterogeneity, intermittence and sensuousness of these aural atmospheres [can] amplify the queerness of the images.” See Suarez, “The Sound of Queer Experimental Film,” in *The Music and Sound of Experimental Film*, ed. Holly Rogers and Jeremy Barham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017): 248.

⁵³¹ *L’Amico Fried’s Glamorous Friends*, 1976, 16mm, color/silent, 12 minutes.

⁵³² See Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 17.

Gorfinkel suggestively calls a “corporealized spectator” who attends to the matter or *thingness* of film.⁵³³

In the next section of close readings, I identify key moments in Jacoby’s films where processing has a queer-ing effect. I focus on how processing forms links between film and abstract painting. And, how for Jacoby it operates as a countercinematic strategy that demystifies the illusionistic diegesis. Likewise, in his use of aural noise, filmic sound becomes strained, and destabilizes the synchronization of voices and character.⁵³⁴ Finally, I focus on implicit signifiers of queerness embedded in his work, such as operatic music, campy over-the-top acting, or drag. Following Juan A. Suarez and other scholars, I show that not only filmic content but also the wider practice of process/ing is queer.⁵³⁵

8.2 COUNTERCINEMATIC USES OF THE AURICON: *AGED IN WOOD*

Originally trained as a painter, Jacoby maintained a critical and distanced relationship to film orthodoxies. He resisted the idea of film as a narrative spectacle, organized by character and plot; indeed, he often said he found narrative films “boring.”⁵³⁶ Instead, he wanted audiences to see the ways that a film was constructed. He pursued the goal of demystifying the film apparatus

⁵³³ Elena Gorfinkel, “Arousal in Ruins: *The Color of Love* and the Haptic Object of Film History,” *World Picture* Vol 4 (2010): 11.

⁵³⁴ John Belton argues that in narrative cinema “the goal of sound technology in reproducing sound is to eliminate any noise that interferes with the transmission of meaningful sound.” See Belton, “Technology and Aesthetics of Film Sound.” In *Film Theory and Criticism*. 5th Edition. Ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 379.

⁵³⁵ For Juan A. Suarez, queerness is not, as some once thought, an “isolatable property” but is a dynamic process that must be thought through in specific instances. Filmic queerness need not refer to content of images, but can arise in the wider mode of film practice (how cinematic images are made, presented, and circulated). See Suarez, “The Sound of Queer Experimental Film,” 240.

⁵³⁶ Jacoby quoted in unpublished article by Teresa A. Marshall, “Film maker – Roger Jacoby,” winter 1975, 8.

through a variety of deconstructive techniques (rapid cuts, superimpositions, flash color changes, and processing) whose effect and intention fell in line with the broader aim of 1970s-era “countercinema.”⁵³⁷ To borrow Jacoby’s own description of his art practice, cinema was like an “exploded clock,” and so the filmmaker’s role was to disassemble and examine the essential pieces of its functioning.⁵³⁸

Aged in Wood, a black-and-white, sound film created in 1975⁵³⁹, encapsulates Jacoby’s modernist interest in self-referentiality (film-as-film). However, it also reveals his clever subversion of the seriousness this posture often implied. For the film Jacoby set up an Auricon camera inside the Carnegie Museum of Art auditorium. He filmed Sally Dixon with a male patron watching *All About Eve*.⁵⁴⁰ With the camera turned away from the movie screen, onto the auditorium, we cannot see the Hollywood film. Instead, we only hear bits of dialogue, the dramatic musical score. We witness the movie spectators’ reactions and informal chatter, their laughter and snarky commentary on what they see.

Due to the processing, the film has an overall gray, monochromatic look, not unlike that of petrified or aged wood. Most of the imagery is devoted to Dixon and her companion. At times, Jacoby’s camera, evidently bored, pans weakly back and forth across empty seats. Occasionally, chemical distortions crash into the frame. Like wild tsunami waves, abstract imagery floods in and out of the visual field. The filmic image alternates from representational content to large segments

⁵³⁷ Associated with independent and politically radical practitioners, such as Jean-Luc Godard, Peter Wollen, and feminists such as Laura Mulvey, countercinema broadly aimed at extracting and distilling the various codes of filmic representation. Peter Wollen describes the project and aesthetic-critical methods of countercinema in his essay, “Godard and Countercinema: *Vent d’Est*,” *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (New Left Books: London, 1982): 79-91.

⁵³⁸ “When I was a kid I took a watch apart and busted it, and that was the first time I realized that there was a craft to this sort of thing.” Jacoby quoted in Jay Suszyuski, “Review: On Roger Jacoby,” Jacoby Roger/Correspondence 1974-1980, Box 10, Folder 1, Carnegie Museum of Art Film and Video Department Archives.

⁵³⁹ *Aged in Wood*, 1975, black-and-white/sound, 10 minutes.

⁵⁴⁰ *All About Eve*, dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, featuring Betty Davis, 1950.

of painterly, gestural dots and lines, twisting like a dancer— and reverts back to representational content again. In these moments, garbled static on the soundtrack (audio damaged from the chemical bath) obliterates whatever dialogue is taking place, like radio noise turned to max volume.

As Jerry Tartaglia explains in his technical analysis of Jacoby's film technique, sound and image are married by his use of the Auricon camera, which by the mid-1970s, was already seen by many artists as "obsolete." Despite this, the Auricon retained a potent, countercultural aura, for it was Andy Warhol's camera-of-choice for many of his early 1960s sound productions.⁵⁴¹ The Auricon also contained a novel system of combining sound and image that suited Jacoby's purposes. Tartaglia argues: "Since the image and the soundtrack were both optical phenomena in this [recording] system, it naturally occurred to Roger that it could work with his self-processing technique. By running the exposed film through his processor, both the image AND the sound would be subjected to the varieties of soups with which Roger would experiment."⁵⁴² The Auricon treats sound like a visual, and physical, material, by fusing it with the optical track.

Once subjected to Jacoby's technique of processing, the result is a paradoxical separation of sign and signifier in the presentation of speech. In his Auricon films, words no longer sync up with mouths, as it does in synchronized-sound film; one hears instead "shimmering" static.⁵⁴³ In a manner that resembles the self-analytical, Brechtian project of countercinema, the viewer is faced with displeasing noise, nonsynchronous voices, and thereby comes to notice that sound synchronization in film is an effect, a trick. Curator Bill Judson explains the demystifying effect

⁵⁴¹ Graig Uhlin discusses the Auricon in "Sound and Speech in Andy Warhol's Films," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 26:4 (2009): 322-323.

⁵⁴² Tartaglia, "Remembering Roger Jacoby," unpublished essay, December 31 2016.

⁵⁴³ Bill Judson, "Reflections on the Films of Roger Jacoby," *Field of Vision* 2 (Summer 1977): 17.

of this technique: the “chemical distortions of the film emulsion [...] heard on the sound track one second after the same distortions are seen on the screen, wedding the two perceptually and intellectually [...] subvert the deceptions of synchronized sound and image in conventional cinema.”⁵⁴⁴

Meanwhile the materialist texture applied to the visuals creates a sort of force-field that prevents viewer identification with the characters. Peering through the beautifully decayed film emulsion, we can only glance at them from a distance, as though they were locked inside a photograph. All of these unusual traits affirmed film as film, drawing on the literal meaning of “processing,” “[t]o register or interpret;” referring to whenever we subject a person, place, event or thing to analysis, examination, study.⁵⁴⁵ Jacoby draws our attention to film’s heterogeneous materiality, and dispels the illusionism and compulsory identifications associated with Hollywood storytelling.

As Jacoby explains, *Aged in Wood* is intended to be a movie-within-a-movie-within-a-movie. “Strictly speaking, the structure of the film, my movie, is a movie about woman who seeks to be a star although she is not a star; and she’s in a film, although it is not a film... it seems to go on into infinity and we’re looking at three people who would be stars and some are in their own right, stars, this sort of thing.”⁵⁴⁶ To wit: Sally Dixon (woman 1) is in a film watching a film about Eve Harrington (woman 2). Harrington in turn seeks to emulate an actress, the Broadway megastar Margo Channing (woman 3). And Bette Davis was, of course, often considered a gay icon given the highly dramatic style of her acting.

⁵⁴⁴ Judson, 17.

⁵⁴⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “processing,” accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.oed.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/237449?rskey=tC0VMt&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

⁵⁴⁶ Jacoby quoted in transcript, “Independent Filmmaker, Roger Jacoby, Lecture,” recorded January 11 1977, transcribed November 2015. Carnegie Museum of Art Film and Video Department Archives.

The integrity of the melodramatic universe of the Hollywood source film is replaced by the fluid, interstitial space of the Carnegie Lecture Hall auditorium. Placed inside the theater, Dixon and the spectator oscillate between distinct viewing positions, just as the audiovisual material oscillates between figurative realism and abstraction. Dixon's own shifting of position, between bored distraction and hypnotized absorption in the depicted film, encapsulates the model of the "corporealized" viewer created in Jacoby's films – a new spectator capable of moving fluidly from enchantment to critical detachment. This corporealized spectator is explored in his subsequent films.

8.3 HAPTIC AND OPTIC LOOKING: *DREAM SPHINX OPERA*

His best known and regularly shown work, *Dream Sphinx Opera*, 1974,⁵⁴⁷ (sometimes incorrectly titled *Dream Sphinx*) illustrates Jacoby's fusion of the materialist exploration of film with an exuberant love for the feminine, the playful, and the simple pleasure of watching bodies in motion, captured on film.

There are three sections (by my count) in the film. The first begins by showing a long shot of an attractive woman, dressing and undressing herself in some kind of bedroom space. She exhibits herself for the camera; her gaze looks back at the viewer. She smiles and laughs, waving her hand longingly. On the soundtrack, we hear soft operatic music, featuring the Warhol favorite, Maria Callas, singing a composition by Rossini. The music lulls us into a dream-like state. Then, in the first of many instances of filmic processing, an eruption of pastel color appears, as if to

⁵⁴⁷ *Dream Sphinx Opera*, 1974, 16mm, color/sound, 8 minutes.

signal a curtain or transition effect. We cut to another woman, similar but different, performing in the same room.

Thanks to the color processing and the solarization effects, a bright halo obtains around the woman, giving her the unnatural but beautiful profile of an angelic being. At other times, the color field gets so intrusive and chaotic that the human figure fully submerges in a vortex of black dots and swirling fields of color. The radiant, purplish-blue halo around her flesh is reminiscent of Sonia Delaunay or Henri Matisse.

The middle section of the film giddily proliferates the gestures, performances, and art forms linked with a queer sensibility. Roger was what his friends called “an opera queen.” He spoke of his films as operas and film scripts as librettos.⁵⁴⁸ Fittingly, the single, overriding emotion he wished to share in his work was one of excessive sentiment. To this end, the rest of the film depicts a *pas de deux* between Ondine and Sally Dixon. Dressed in theatrical 19th century costumes, they explore the exotic gardens of the Phipps Botanical Conservatory, and its Victorian-inspired rooms such as the Palm Court.

In this section, the camera’s frame rate is altered; motion slows down. In multiple shots, Ondine and Dixon are shown running in slow motion, in and out of the frame. A mass of specks and roving dots overwhelms the couple as if locusts, dust or some other apocalyptic scourge is raining them upon. It is almost as if they are running from death.

This sequence of processed film is a modernist metaphor of the hand-processing method. Jacoby treats film as something fragile that decays. In its degraded state, the image itself is in danger of disappearing completely. This idea of a beautiful image fading away and disappearing, culminates in the couple running into the darkness. Their visage is overtaken by ever-increasing

⁵⁴⁸ Janis Crystal Lipzin, interview by Ben Ogrodnik, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 3, 2017.

visual noise, until it dissipates into nothingness. In a dramatic cut, a pink-orange light leak signals the end of the 16mm roll of film.

In the third and final section, or *stretto*, we watch Ondine and Dixon frolic, play and kiss in the flowery surroundings of the Phipps Botanical Conservatory; they sit and watch a group of school children pass by and wave for the camera. All the while, fields of color – blue, purple, orange – offer a visual correspondence of the feelings they must have felt: joyousness. As Gorfinkel suggests, such segments of filmic processing, with their drips and stains, refer to sexual fluid, the orgasmic release of erotic pleasure.⁵⁴⁹ It is both interesting and contradictory that Jacoby chooses a male and female pair to film in a queer film.

In the film, Jacoby creates homologies between physical intimacy and visual perception, creating in particular a “kiss” effect. In *Dream Sphinx Opera*, Ondine and Dixon are shown kissing. The same shot is repeated multiple times. Simultaneously, black dots crawl all over their faces, all over the surface of the film in a pulsing motion, growing more intensely concentrated. Under these circumstances, our eye is faced with a choice: to look (in vain) for depth, or to study the film’s surface, the movement of the black dots. This simulates an in-and-out, near-and-far movement of visual perception.

The kiss that is presented in the virtual space of the diegesis, is thus replicated in the viewer’s own grappling with the material composition of the processed film, triggering a collapse of tactility and vision. In this way the spectator is corporealized: feeling as though they are being kissed. The film kisses us, caressing the eye.

Queer theories of filmic materiality, offered by Laura U. Marks, Hito Steyerl, and Elena

⁵⁴⁹ Gorfinkel, 1.

Gorfinkel, argue that direct encounter with the physical aspects of film carries an erotic impact.⁵⁵⁰ Encounters with surface textures, hairs, scratches, cracks, holes – echo the erotic encounters we have with real beings. Similar to a surprise flirtatious meeting, a dance, or a wrestling match, Jacoby’s treatment of filmic materiality encourages ways of looking that bring us closer, or farther away, in relation to the object of our interest.

Laura Marks argues that this back and forth movement of what she calls “haptic,” as opposed to “optic,” looking, is inherently sexualized, romantic. Marks riffs on the art-historical dyad of optic/haptic, in order to discuss the social significance of “poor images”, decaying film or damaged videotapes made by artists. This idea of the haptic Marks contrasts to the optical clarity in mainstream cinema. Hollywood film asserts a stable image where character, setting, and action are clearly visible. In all its beautiful perfection, such films valorize high-production values and standardized ways of perceiving visual space. In contrast, the haptic viscosity of experimental media complicates our perception of space-time in such clear-cut ways. Marks asserts that experimental media that is processed creates an oscillation between optical (clear) and haptic (poor) images. Though most “optic” Hollywood film is intended to eroticize action, character and narrative space, Marks emphasizes this oscillation of visual registers in experimental media as fundamentally flirtatious, erotic.

In works of haptic viscosity, the spectator does not simply “read” art as a text; rather, the “body” of film and of spectator both engage in a dance of agency and passivity, sight and nonsight, physicality and immateriality, recognition and nonrecognition that gives way to a mutually

⁵⁵⁰ Laura U Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of Poor Images,” in *The Wretched of the Screen* (New York: Sternberg Press, 2013): 31-45; and Elena Gorfinkel, “Arousal in Ruins: *The Color of Love* and the Haptic Object of Film History,” *World Picture* Vol 4 (2010): 1-19.

transformative interaction. *Dream Sphinx Opera* fits in this paradigm of an oscillating movement of haptic to optic visuality. The use of hand-processing introduces an aesthetic blockage to the perception of bodies and spaces in film.

Jacoby's pastoral and dream-like portrait is richly informed by two gay experimental films of the era worth considering before we move on. *Eaux d'artifice*⁵⁵¹, a 1953 film by Kenneth Anger, shares a lot in common with *Dream Sphinx Opera*. Shot in the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, Italy, the film presents an opulent and sensual garden. There is no narrative per se; instead, we witness a passage through a lush, exotic place overflowing with water. A blue-colored filter renders the space alien and alluring, populated by fountains, baroque statuary, leaves and foliage. A mysterious woman (Anger cast a little person for the role) wanders the premises that seem to overwhelm her diminutive size, recalling Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.

Anger's film articulates the space of the gardens through optical effects. Variable frame rates capture the individual water droplets in mid-air, giving them a balletic feel. Like *Dream Sphinx Opera*, Anger's film involves a high degree of abstraction, despite the optical clarity of the scenery and the very linear and precise Hollywood-esque composition/distribution of shots. At times, the figure-ground distinction collapses, as though the entire image were purely decorative, an abstract field of mesmerizing color.

Anger's decorative imagery does not freeze or disrupt the narrative flow, for the editing seems motivated purely by aesthetic concerns. Anger achieves an excessive feeling of joyfulness not by haptic visuality of poor images and processing, but by strong color and subtle manipulation of motion within the film frame, and the play of light and darkness on the water's surface. The result of the approach is the creation of painterly visuals; indeed, the static shots of water bursting

⁵⁵¹ *Eaux d'artifice*, 1953, 16mm, color/sound, 13 minutes.

from fountains give the impression of a moving painting. Anger's film seems to give agency to natural forms - water droplets flowing from fountains - over any character or plot. Also similar to Jacoby is the use of operatic music set to calm visuals, featuring individuals in 17th-18th century costume.

Yet, the most remarkable similarity between Anger and Jacoby's films is how they stage the spectator's immersion into a dynamic, alluring image. In the climactic final scene of Anger's film, the protagonist is shown colliding with a superimposed burst of water droplets from a fountain. Her figurative body thus merges with an abstract, vital force of nature. The dissolution of self in the diegesis is meant to mimic the spectator's own absorptive experience of the dazzling imagery – the protagonist's metamorphosis models for us a Romantic, almost self-annihilating way of beholding the work of art.

Another subtly queer film to which Jacoby's work can be profitably compared is Gregory Markopoulos' early work, *Christmas USA*.⁵⁵² In Markopoulos' film, a young boy performs mundane tasks in his suburban home: shaving, vacuuming, and setting the table. Although we see the world from his eyes, the film at times takes us outside the home and intercuts footage of the "Little Harlem" carnival, with scenes of dancing and festivity that are at odds with the placidity of the sterile, suburban world. The young man is later shown taking a bath; he emerges from it almost naked, and his facial expression appears curious or troubled, with something seemingly on his mind. He wanders the house and comes upon a moving toy. This apparently was the object of his interest all along.

Both Jacoby and Markopoulos utilize a parallel editing system where inserts of exotic or magical imagery are intercut with the mundane activities and spaces of daily life. Both artists

⁵⁵² *Christmas USA*, 1949, 16mm, black-and-white/sound, 13 minutes.

demonstrate a penchant for the prohaptic features of film: out-of-focus images and shots of long duration, mixed with the home-movie-like recording of daily living. Finally, in Jacoby and Markopoulos, there is a homoerotic dimension that is implicit but never shown. From the UBUWEB description of Markopoulos film: “The theme seems to be the discovery of the fantastic and the wondrous amid the trappings of the everyday.”⁵⁵³ The same description could apply to Jacoby’s personal films.

8.4 ABSTRACT DRAG AND “GENDERFUCK”: *FLORIA* AND *L’AMICO FRIED’S GLORIOUS FRIENDS*

Floria, 1974, consists of black-and-white footage of a man and woman in a darkened room. The off-kilter, low-angle position of the camera suggests surveillance footage, recording the ordinary interactions. The footage is blurry, out of focus, and silent.

After several minutes, the live action footage is subjected to processing. A series of black dots, almost menacing, float around and on top of the surfaces of the man and woman. Like a deadly acid chemical, the hand-processing dissolves their bodies into nervous droplets, forming a contrast of black against white. The high contrast of dark and light eventually obliterates into a solid white frame, and the effect suggests the mortality of the human body, of the filmic body itself – a quality of danger suffuses the image.

The dissolution of the human body in *Floria* is another way of manifesting a queer way of seeing that braids the tactile and the optical. Queer art historian Renate Lorenz argues that the

⁵⁵³ “Christmas USA,” UBUWEB, http://ubu.com/film/markopoulous_christmas.html

absence of bodies in visual art is a key feature of what she calls “abstract drag.” Lorenz writes, “Abstract drag can [...] be characterized as the paradox of a presence of human bodies and their activities in absence;” or, to put it more succinctly, “embodiment without bodies.”⁵⁵⁴ As an example of abstract drag’s “embodiment without bodies,” Lorenz points to the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and his installation artwork “*Untitled*” (*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*), 1991, which consists of a mound of wrapped candies and sculpted cellophane, weighing 175 pounds, the same weight as the artist’s deceased partner, Ross Laycock, who succumbed to AIDS in 1991. Abstract drag is also found in Zoe Leonard’s *Strange Fruit (for David)*, 1997, in which the artist has sewn up pieces of an orange and other fruits in a process akin to taxidermy. Leonard removed the contents of the fruit and stitched them up, so that the content has been emptied out, but the external husks remain, which for Leonard is a way of marking the “residue of loss” in honor of community members and friends who were lost during the AIDS epidemic.⁵⁵⁵

For Lorenz, both pieces signify a way of grappling with human mortality and the inevitability of death. There is a further meaning in that the artworks have a temporal/cultural proximity to the 1990s AIDS crisis. Given this proximity, the absence of a direct body refers to the destructive toll of AIDS on the gay, lesbian, queer and trans community. The physical degradation of the body, and loss of human life, necessitates the creation of new ways of relating or thinking about body through abstraction.

In Jacoby’s film, the melting away of the bodies into bright, white light is an instance of abstract drag. In abstract drag, the obliteration of human figures works toward the cancellation or deferral of identification between spectator and what is contained in the artwork. Lorenz states,

⁵⁵⁴ Lorenz, 134-36.

⁵⁵⁵ Leonard quoted in Lorenz, 135.

“this abstraction [in abstract drag] produces a gap or a deferral; it impedes identification, just as it impedes the possibility of immediately averting one’s eyes from the work in a counter-identificatory act.”⁵⁵⁶ To borrow Lorenz’s words, abstract drag “cuts ties” – it cuts the enforced connections between figurative subjects and beholders. This notion of the viewer being pulled back from protocols of cinematic identification is felt strongly in the processed segments of the *Floria* film.

L’Amico Fried’s Glamorous Friends, 1976, begins with the image sideways. We are at a concert or talent show on a stage. A man wearing a top hat and a suit made of sparkling sequins plays the piano. Several modern dancers engage in flowing, interpretive dance choreography. A male and female dancer are shown dancing in a duet; briefly, men and women’s bodies merge due to the framing and the processed film’s flattened depth.

While the actions and gestures of the figures are relatively clear and crisp, the performance environment is rendered flat and indistinct, awash in “hot” Pop Art color tones: neon pink, drained-out saturated blue, purple. The effect gives the appearance that the figures have emerged from a pool of paint, or arisen from a piece of stone as in relief carving. The heavily processed imagery undermines the illusion of realistic, deep space which optical representation so often depends. Solarization from the hand-processing makes the figures’ bodies glow and shimmer, as they blend in and out of the backdrop.

The second section is a portrait of Jacoby’s Lover, Ondine. He is shown singing and mugging for the camera in a sound booth. The camera pans back and forth, as the booth flickers with evanescent, solarized colors: ethereal vibrations of red, blue, and pink. Ondine is then shown in various rooms of his apartment. In a close-up, Ondine’s eyes are closed, while footage from

⁵⁵⁶ Lorenz 133.

Jacoby's first film, *Futurist Song*,⁵⁵⁷ 1972, is projected onto his face, creating a film within a film, briefly. The image of Ondine – appearing pensive, playful – is a far cry from the explosive, deranged “Pop Ondine” of Warhol's films.

The film's latter half consists of a *pas de deux* between Ondine and Dixon. The couple is dressed in dark, muted colors, and they enact a flirtatious encounter at the concert piano in the Carnegie Lecture Hall. This culminates in a dizzying excursion to the Museum of Natural History in the spooky corridors of dinosaur exhibits. Shot in shaky handheld camera, Dixon and Ondine appear like floating apparitions, their darkened silhouettes contrast with the harsh lights of the habitat and dinosaur scenes. The final section opens with an indecipherable mass of wiggly-worm texture, the reticulation from heavily processed film. Then, a procession of male drag queens move gracefully across a stage. Dressed in flamboyant cabaret attire, men enter and exit the frame, one by one. The film's final image, positioned sideways instead of right-side up, is of a tall bearded man wearing women's clothing. He stands stoically, statue-esque, appearing in a state of pure control and contentment, even as the emulsion renders his visage translucent, and perverse tendrils of color encircle him like a cyclone.

L'Amico Fried offers numerous examples of “genderfuck” and androgyny, two major features of 1970s gay experimental film. Tartaglia writes in his article, “The Gay Sensibility in American Avant Garde Film,” that there exist several categories of sexual iconography in avant-garde film since the Stonewall riots. These include: the erotic; political confrontation; genderfuck (“in which the traditional male and female roles and the traditional sexist relationship between genders is parodied”); and coming out.⁵⁵⁸ Jacoby's film demonstrates the third. This is seen in the

⁵⁵⁷ *Futurist Song*, 1972, 16mm, color/silent, 7 minutes.

⁵⁵⁸ Tartaglia, “The Gay Sensibility in American Avant Garde Film,” *Millenium Film Journal*, Vol. 4 Issue 5 (Summer/Fall 1979): 54.

prominent depictions of transgender identity (the mixing of male and female dancers' bodies) and of drag queen performers.

Tartaglia writes of this gay sensibility, "When one violates the dress or language or other cultural codes of one's own sex, one is said to be engaged in genderfuck... [This is] clearly encountered ... in drag & cross dressing."⁵⁵⁹ One of the most striking filmic examples of genderfuck is Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, 1963,⁵⁶⁰ where genderfuck content and style are staged as an artificial spectacle. Similarly, the mixing up and bending of gender identity in *Jacoby*, shown as strange alluring exotic and yet familiar, is an impression enhanced and reinforced by the expressive use of hand-processed film. Processing itself can be considered a kind of visual genderfuck. In the film, images are loosely linked together in a way that suggests fluid bodies of water (or chemicals). This visual fluidity is related to the gender fluidity of the portrait's subjects. Identity is never static, and bodies appear to shift, change, and reform within the altered visual field. In the live action segments of the film, *Jacoby* focuses his subject matter on surfaces: fleeting romantic trysts, flirtation, operatic dancing, theatrical gesture, and overt emotionalism. Color is liberated; it acquires materiality, becoming a character all its own. In turn, film itself becomes a synesthetic celebration of androgynous subjectivity.

⁵⁵⁹ Tartaglia, 55.

⁵⁶⁰ *Flaming Creatures*, 1963, 16mm, black-and-white/sound, 45 minutes.

8.5 JACOBY'S DISAPPEARING IMAGE(S): *HOW TO BE A HOMOSEXUAL*, PARTS I AND II

The final work Jacoby made, before he succumbed to the AIDS illness and died at the early age of 40, is the lengthy two-part film *How to Be a Homosexual Part I and II*. In no way the instructional film that the straightforward title seems to imply, this work instead presents an epic domestic diary of Jacoby's creative life (in the first part). It then takes a rather depressing and claustrophobic turn, showing the decay of his physical body through the appearance of lesions and other symptoms of illness (in part two).

Part I,⁵⁶¹ 1980, opens with a gathering of white gay activists in a consciousness-raising group. Due to the use of exhausted film developer, the image cuts in and out, and frequently fades to white. The camera roves around, while men talk about gay rights protests in NYC. One man says, "you have to wear women's clothing, if you're gay."

The remainder of the film consists of: a woman and a man communicating through sign language; Jacoby shown talking (in an out-of-focus image) with a deaf or hard-of-hearing man; Jacoby driving a car; an operatic singing recital; a dramatic performance in the Hall of Sculpture in the Carnegie Museum of Art; and a visit to the dark interior of Jacoby's mother's house.

For the most part, the imagery appears ordinary and inconsequential. But, the long-durational aspect of each sequence, and the use of long takes and the variety of images taken from different times and days, gives one the impression of an entire encyclopedia of a person's life. It is a diary film in the fullest sense: no detail left out.

⁵⁶¹ *How to Be a Homosexual, Part I*, 1980, 16mm, color/sound, 35 minutes.

How to Be a Homosexual, Part II,⁵⁶² 1982, is a silent, color film. The color palette is frankly austere, monochromatic, and the image very “thin.” As opposed to the dense colors of his previous work, there is a single, unyielding white opacity to the entire work. Both under- and over-exposed, the film appears processed using curdled milk.

In a series of close-ups and medium shots, we see Jacoby at home in his bathroom, wearing a red sweater but otherwise naked. He inserts medicine into his rectum. He then picks at a lesion on his skin. He touches a nasty scab on his buttocks. Intercut with this domestic footage, we see glimpses of an editing room. Jacoby and a younger man operate a flatbed editing table; this scene features the only bursts of colorful hand-processing.

The final section shows Jacoby taking off bandages from his behind and legs. He squeezes blood out of a wound; he puts a big Q-tip inside it, as white foaming material seeps out. The footage has an ever-thickening, pale-white opacity. While his wounds are shown in extreme close-up, this opacity makes the image difficult to see. In a repetition of the filmic content (Jacoby observing his own dying body), the body of the film, too, appears to be dying. The partially visible content is similar to the symptomatic lesions that appear on the skin over the course of the illness.

This technique of using a single, overriding color as a way of dealing with the incomprehensible reality of death, occurs in Derek Jarman’s *Blue*,⁵⁶³ 1993. *Blue* is a televised BBC broadcast that contains an epic monologue written by the well-known artist. Jarman describes the loss of his vision as AIDS works its way through his body. At the same time, his monologue resists being a straightforward description. Narrated by a handful of speakers (including Tilda Swinton), the monologue contains a dense weave of numerous episodes, anecdotes, poetic asides and cultural

⁵⁶² *How to Be a Homosexual, Part II*, 1982, 16mm, color/silent, 15 minutes.

⁵⁶³ *Blue*, 1993, 79 minutes. Jarman himself would succumb to AIDS on February 19, 1994 at the age of 52, just months after the film's premiere.

tirades. For his part, Jacoby prefers deafening silence to Jarman's exhausting verbosity. This silence is meant to intensify, and distance, our relationship to the experience and imagery of death.

The use of close-up, point-of-view shots resembles the activity of looking at oneself in the mirror. In narrative film, the use of such first-person shots works with the overall invisibility of the filmic apparatus and the concealment of film's material body, and encourages a child-like desire in the spectator for a fantasmatic, unified self, reproducing Lacan's mirror-stage in the formation of identity.⁵⁶⁴ By contrast, the use of damaged film and haptic visuality denies the creation of a unified self. As Laura Marks writes, it instead "is a kind of reverse mirror stage: we identify not ('jubilantly') with a self that is more unified than we are, but with a self that is aging and disappearing."⁵⁶⁵

In Jacoby's final film, we are forced to identify with the perspective of a gay man dying of AIDS. As Marks points out, the look of decayed film does not lead to a more secure and unified ego-ideal for the spectator. Instead, the milky opacity and first-person viewpoint decenters and corporealizes the spectator; the film's body is equated with the spectator's body, both united in a path toward death and disappearance. In this way, *How to Be a Homosexual Part II* is an ironic instructional text on the perils and injustices of marginalized selfhood: homosexuality, for Jacoby, involves a process of bodily decay, subjective confusion, and visual disorientation. The refusal of optical legibility, caused in the film's visual abstraction, indexes the wider inability of the full formation of gay subjecthood in the era of AIDS. It is an abstract self-portrait of the artist's own undoing.

⁵⁶⁴ Jean-Louis Baudry discusses the ideological impression of unity, and the notion of a transcendent "self" that gets generated out of a multiplicity of technical devices in the cinema. See Baudry's "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 1974-1975): 39-47.

⁵⁶⁵ Marks, 105.

8.6 “TO MAKE A LONG, CHEMICAL STORY SHORT...”

As we have seen, Jacoby’s hand-processed film creates a productive tension by opposing crisp images of diegetic action with their opposite, abstract fields of color. The varying effects (reticulation, solarization, and so on) form an unpredictable pattern that threatens to obliterate the unity of the visual field, while reminding us we have bodies.

Jacoby’s foregrounding of the prohaptic aspects of film causes us, to borrow the words of Marks, to “celebrate the uniqueness of the other,”⁵⁶⁶ by engaging with his films in an erotic, distanced, and sensorial orientation. By getting close to/far from the images and the people depicted, we mirror and reenact the flirtatious play of romantic encounter, as in *Dream Sphinx Opera*. Alternatively, a dimension of loss and lack underlies this haptic visuality. In *How to Be a Homosexual Part II*, our confrontation with filmic materiality leads to associations with death and the artist’s own bodily mortality. In both cases, the viewer is corporealized as an object “with and for the world.”⁵⁶⁷

In reassessing Jacoby’s work as a whole, it is helpful recall Marks’ observations on the fundamentally erotic nature of haptic visuality. She writes,

the oscillation between the two [optic and haptic] creates an erotic relationship, a shifting between distance and closeness. But haptic images have a particular *erotic* quality, one involving giving up visual control [...] the viewer gives up her own sense of separateness from the image.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ Marks, xii.

⁵⁶⁷ Marks, xvi.

⁵⁶⁸ Marks, 13.

Jacoby's queer modernism forces us to give up control. His hand-processed film critiques the illusory "reality effects" of the filmic apparatus. His Auricon films, similarly, reveal how sound in conventional cinema is often deployed to create stable identities and to mask the constructed nature of film, a lesson revealed in the use of audio "garbage" in *Aged in Wood*. Jacoby's surrender of authorial control, in using the home processor against the literal grain, results in new creative processes, leading to the liberation of color, and the exploration of film as a mortal and physical handcrafted object with a definite lifespan. Jacoby's disappearing images restore an aura to the reproducible image, and their spotlighting of abstraction forms links between film and modernist visual art.

Far beyond being a curious technical effect, Jacoby's hand-processing offers a model of social relationality that does not organize the world around normative and heavily policed divisions of gay/straight identification; instead, it dissolves borders of body, of identity, of artistic media into a chemical soup. Jacoby's hand-processed film champions qualities of chance, flux, and potentiality; it envisions subjectivity as a matter of fluid, Deleuzian Becoming, rather than the ego's identification with sameness.

His fierce independence influenced many younger artists, both working in the city at the time—Stephanie Beroes, Peggy Ahwesh, Margie Strosser, and others—and beyond. Ahwesh, in particular, stresses that Jacoby served as inspiration for her own thematic exploration of queer subjectivity in her Pittsburgh films.⁵⁶⁹ Like other cutting-edge artists who sought to make art outside the system, Jacoby tried to break free from the "tyranny" of the commercial film

⁵⁶⁹ Ahwesh recalls that in the 1980s "Many of us [Super 8 filmmakers] were influenced by the Pittsburgh triumvirate of Warhol, Ondine, and Jacoby." She adds that "Jacoby [was] an incredible presence and a very active presence in the Pittsburgh film community." See Ahwesh, "Film, Baby," in *Big as Life: An American History of 8mm Films*, ed Steve Anker (San Francisco: MoMA/San Francisco Cinematheque, 1998): 82. San Francisco: San Francisco Cinematheque.

laboratory. He treated film as precious and time-bound, a handmade artifact instead of an industrial product. By challenging photographic realism as the basis of film, he also anticipated today's return to painterly approaches to the moving image, as reflected in digital special effects and computer-manipulated animation.

Jacoby was, in filmmaker Janis Crystal Lipzin's words, "a true renegade and original."⁵⁷⁰

In Chapter 9, we consider portraiture as it concerns the depiction of the dead. The influential avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage visited Pittsburgh in the early 1970s. He created a series of documentary films that depicted a handful of institutions – the city morgue, the hospital, and the local police force. The resulting *Pittsburgh Trilogy* (1970-71) is significant not only because he trained his lens on institutions, rather than specific individuals, but also because he portrays, with unflinching realism, the vital role that the dead play in modern, industrialized urban societies. Brakhage utilized a fifteen-inch telephoto lens in making these films, which adds a shaky, heart-beat quality to the fly-on-the-wall observational images of cops and doctors at work. With the shaky camera reflecting his own fears and personal difficulty shooting these subjects, Brakhage imbues the *Trilogy* with his subjectivity, and generates new insights about how powerful institutions see and control the human body through processes of documentation. This *Trilogy* is both a portrait of the artist, and of institutional power.

⁵⁷⁰ Janis Crystal Lipzin, interview by Ben Ogrodnik, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 3, 2017.

9.0 OPEN-EYE VISION: ON DECOMPOSING BODIES AND SUBJECTIVE VISION IN STAN BRAKHAGE'S *PITTSBURGH TRILOGY* (1970-71)

9.1 "AN EARTHQUAKE INSIDE THE IMAGE": BRAKHAGE'S TURN TO THE 'FILM DOCUMENT'

Stan Brakhage (1933-2003) is widely regarded as the central figure in American avant-garde film. He aimed for a new, personal cinema that synthesized features of modern art (especially Abstract Expressionism and Surrealism), dance, visual science, and poetry, among other fields. His nearly three-hundred-fifty films present previously unseen worlds, depicting microscopic processes of insects and animals; seasonal cycles of nature; and celestial movements of the sun, clouds, and moon. Across his films, lectures, and writings, he articulated forms of visual perception that escape everyday awareness, such as: "closed-eye" or hypnagogic vision (the visuals that appear in a sleeping state); "moving visual thinking" (the flickers of indistinct light underneath our eyelids); and "phosphenes," forms of barely perceptible visual "noise."⁵⁷¹

Viewing Brakhage's work is a dynamic, exhausting, and thrilling experience. In works like *Dog Star Man* (1961-64), he weaves segments of footage from multiple sources, arranged in a cosmic narrative logic. In *The Text of Light* (1974), he shoots the physical world through a prismatic ashtray that fractures light and shadows, revealing and obscuring our (trained) desire for optical clarity. In his "cameraless" film *Mothlight* (1963) bits of detritus, such as moth wings, dirt

⁵⁷¹ The distinct modes of seeing, in Brakhage's oeuvre, are analyzed in Paul Taberham, "Bottom-Up Processing, Entoptic Vision and the Innocent Eye in Stan Brakhage's Work," *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind* 8.1 (2014): 1-22.

and twigs, are pressed onto clear film leader. Once projected in the theatre, the result is a constantly changing visual field with fleeting glimpses of the objective world. Existing as two-dimensional film and a semi-sculptural object, *Mothlight* abolishes the distance of the thing itself (the moth's material body), and its represented image (the moth's illusory movement in space).⁵⁷²

Brakhage trained for hours to coordinate his camera movement in perfect synchronicity to his own bodily gestures. He practiced shooting with diverse light sources and camera stocks in order to illuminate new colors and link camera motion with the biological rhythms of the body.⁵⁷³ As a result, Brakhage's camera becomes "a *living-camera* that shakes, trembles, and darts to and fro with a sense of autonomous conviction...a physical and emotional extension of the person holding the camera [that], in turn, invites the spectator to dwell in this world as if he or she is viewing the world directly through the filmmaker's third organic eye."⁵⁷⁴

In a frequently cited passage from his *Metaphors of Vision* (1960), Brakhage expresses his lifelong quest for a pre-linguistic, pre-representational form of visual expression, one that would be rendered through his innovative cinematic practice. This he termed an art of "the untutored eye;" or, in the words of Michael F. Miller, "a form of seeing *before* seeing."⁵⁷⁵ In his opening paragraph, Brakhage writes:

⁵⁷² For more on the porous boundary between representation and object in *Mothlight*, see J. Hoberman, "Direct Cinema: J. Hoberman on Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963)," *Artforum* 51.1 (September 2012): 480-481.

⁵⁷³ Brakhage claimed that he practiced "every conceivable body movement with camera-in-hand almost every day" to "awaken my senses, and to prepare my muscles and joints with the weight of the camera and the necessary postures of holding it so that I can carry that weight in the balance of these postures through my physiological reaction during picture taking and to some meaningful *act* of edit." Brakhage, "film:dance," *Essential Brakhage: Selected Writings on Filmmaking*, ed. Bruce R. McPherson (New York: McPherson & Company, 2001), 132.

⁵⁷⁴ James Magrini, "The Philosophical Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes: The Silent Films of Stan Brakhage," *Film-Philosophy* 17.1 (2013): 432.

⁵⁷⁵ Michael F. Miller, "Stan Brakhage's Autopsy: *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*," *Journal of Film and Video* 70.2 (Summer 2018): 48.

Imagine an eye unruléd by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of ‘Green’? How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye? How aware of variations in heat waves can that eye be? Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and innumerable graduations of color. Imagine a world before the “beginning was the word.”⁵⁷⁶

This “visual cinema” (echoing the ideas of classical film theorist Germaine Dulac⁵⁷⁷) was a trajectory that evolved in fits and starts over the years. After his breakthrough film, *Anticipation of the Night* (1958), Brakhage found a new focus in exploring dynamics of perception rooted in the everyday, eschewing protocols of story and character altogether. From 1964, he lived in a secluded cabin in the mountains of Lump Gulch, Colorado, and redefined cinematic production to fit the confines of his domestic environment. He posited the “home movie” as his creative domain, and utilized his wife and children as the foci of his investigations.⁵⁷⁸ This focus on family resulted in many pioneering films. *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959) shattered taboos (and Hays Code film industry restrictions) around the presentation of the female body, by depicting his then-wife

⁵⁷⁶ Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, ed. P. Adams Sitney, (New York: Film Culture, Anthology Film Archives, Light Industry, 1963/2017), 96.

⁵⁷⁷ Germaine Dulac, a Surrealist filmmaker and theorist active in the 1920s, proposed an influential theory of “visual cinema” that would emphasize rhythm, form, and nonfiction/quasi-scientific explorations of the material world. This theory is discussed in greater detail in Tami Williams, *Germaine Dulac: A Cinema of Sensations* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 180.

⁵⁷⁸ David E. James identifies Brakhage’s principal innovation in the domain of production, in his shifting the area of filmmaking to the nonalienated domain of the home movie and the director to the role of amateur. See James, “Stan Brakhage: The Filmmaker as Poet,” *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 29-57.

Jane's childbirth at home (the hospital he sought to film in at first permitted then rescinded their approval to document the sequence).⁵⁷⁹ In *Cat's Cradle* (1959), Brakhage's marriage is explored through close observation of the erotic-domestic dynamics of Carolee Schneemann and James Tenney. In *23rd Psalm Branch* (1967), Brakhage turned his gaze outward. In this film, news broadcasts of the Vietnam War, intermixed with footage of his remote Colorado cabin, suggested that one world of images interpenetrated the other, mediating upon the era's schizophrenic relationship with televisual images of war.⁵⁸⁰ Brakhage's investigations also resulted in sincerely felt examinations of childhood. His *Scenes from Under Childhood* series (1967-1970) brought into view the inner lives of his children, showing them at play but also in authentic or "unstaged" states of sadness, isolation, and anger at home.

However, even when his films contained referential content, they were mediated by his overt presence as artist, signaled through the use of expressive techniques. In Brakhage's films large segments of footage were edited and re-arranged in a God-like fashion, reminding the viewer, always, of the authorial control over what he saw and recorded; and as intended, this creative dimension weakened their purchase as pure documentary works or what he rather disparagingly called, in 1963, filmic "absolute realism."⁵⁸¹ In this respect, it is fitting that the film critic and art historian Annette Michelson compared Brakhage to the great Soviet montagist Sergei Eisenstein. Both artists elevated montage editing as the primary force of film, for its capacity to rearrange

⁵⁷⁹ For more on Brakhage's difficulty working with hospitals to film *Window Water Baby Moving*, see Kirsten Osther, "From The Avant-Garde to Experimental Television: Mid-Century Technologies of Medical Perception," *Medical Vision: Producing the Patient Through Film, Television, and Imaging Technologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119-120.

⁵⁸⁰ Brakhage, "On 23rd Psalm Branch," *Brakhage Scrapbook: Stan Brakhage Collected Writings 1964-1980*, ed. Robert A. Haller (New York: Documentext, 1982), 110-111.

⁵⁸¹ Throughout *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage criticizes the bland and clichéd approach to filmic style as "absolute realism." It does not follow, however, that he rejects the indexical power of film.

space-time coordinates according to the filmmaker's will.⁵⁸² In both cases the artist conveyed external concepts, themes and feelings that transcended, modified or counterpointed the raw material gathered by the camera's eye.

However, all this changed when Brakhage visited Pittsburgh, in September 1970. Visiting at the invitation of the Film Section's curator, Sally Dixon, he found the camaraderie and the enthusiasm for film to be genuinely infectious.⁵⁸³ He screened the *Weir-Falcon Saga* and other work at the Museum of Art to a large, eager crowd. Shortly thereafter, Dixon and Michael Chikiris, a photographer for *The Pittsburgh Press*, helped him gain access to several public institutions that he had wanted to film for years.⁵⁸⁴

The result was a trio of films titled the *Pittsburgh Trilogy* (also called the *Pittsburgh Documents*). Of Brakhage's *Trilogy*, and the immediate reverberations it had on Pittsburgh's profile on a national stage, Leon Arkus, director of the Museum of Art, later wrote: "We are becoming known as a city in which one can make films."⁵⁸⁵ Brakhage's fateful trip led to a chain reaction of visiting artists who made images in or of Pittsburgh, including Hollis Frampton, Ed Emschwiller, Ken Jacobs, Storm de Hirsch, and more.

Focusing on the police (*eyes*, 1970, 16mm, 35 min), open-heart surgery (*Deus Ex*, 1971, 16mm, 33 min), and autopsies at the city morgue (*The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes*, 1971, 16 mm, 32 min), the *Trilogy* is Brakhage's only work of "film portraiture," as he admitted in his

⁵⁸² See Michelson, "Camera Lucida/Camera Obscura," *Artforum* 11.5 (January 1973): 30-37.

⁵⁸³ Letter from Stan Brakhage to Sally Dixon, October 27, 1970, Artist File for Stan Brakhage, Folder 1, Box 3, Carnegie Museum of Art Film and Video Archives, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

⁵⁸⁴ Brakhage relates the story of making the films in "Independent Filmmaker, Stan Brakhage, Lecture," Department of Film and Video archive Lectures and interviews with artists, transcript, date of recording September 12, 1971.

⁵⁸⁵ Leon Arkus to James M. Walton, October 14, 1971, Box 1, Folder 10, Department of Film and Video Archive, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

own words.⁵⁸⁶ The *Trilogy* chronicles the artist's traumatic encounter with the brute realities of life and death. Indeed, the filming and editing of the footage affected Brakhage profoundly. As he wrote in a letter to his wife, in discussing what became the third work, "I've faced something terrible here."⁵⁸⁷ In describing the filming of dead bodies that filled the morgue, he continued,

Oh Jane, it is... I just don't know how to write about it. The dead, cut open in autopsy, look like two incongruities: dress dummies and meat. The scalp is cut, pulled down over the face. The face, like a mask, retains its features even when loosened from the bones. The body gapes. It is a chasm attached to model limbs.⁵⁸⁸

The films all give a hard, unflinching look at the human body. They probe the liminal zone of death and life, stripped of the expressive and montagist devices that defined Brakhage's style up to that point. The experience affected him deeply, but it also generated extraordinary artworks of an exceptional theoretical and aesthetic caliber, making them vital outliers in his oeuvre.

To faithfully render the emotional impact of the events he witnessed, Brakhage pursued a new way of filming reality. He called it the "film document."⁵⁸⁹ As he wrote to artists and critics, the film document would be designed like a report or abstract. Utilizing an "invisible container" visual style, the document was more objective than Griersonian documentary, which he found propagandistic.⁵⁹⁰ Toward realizing this goal, Brakhage expanded the tools, the visual language of

⁵⁸⁶ Brakhage quoted in Suranjan Ganuly, "Stan Brakhage: The 60th Birthday Interview," *Experimental Cinema: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 140.

⁵⁸⁷ Brakhage letter to Jane Brakhage, "2nd Tues in Pittsburgh Sept 1971," Stan Brakhage Collection, University of Colorado Boulder.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Brakhage distinguished between "Old Doc" – "In a word, documentARY is always careful to tell us HOW TO FEEL about what we see" – from what he termed *document*, "which reposes complete faith in the perfect fullness and sufficiency of the unrehearsed film image itself." Brakhage quoted in Marie Nesthus, "The 'Document' Correspondence of Stan Brakhage," *Chicago Review* Vol 47-48 (Winter 2001-Spring 2002): 154.

⁵⁹⁰ "Document is 'as distinct, as I can make it, from Documentary' in that 'the images and the orders/rhythms/tones of their 'gathering' tend to make all references terminate in the film, thus bouncing energy back only on the Viewer..." Brakhage quoted in Kenneth Levicoff Simmons, "All There Is, Is Light: Stan Brakhage's Documents," *Field of Vision* 4 (Fall 1978): 18.

observational film. He employed a range of techniques – multiple film stocks of varying speeds, color filters, nonnatural light sources – that give, in his words, “a track of my disturbances.”⁵⁹¹

In the process, he also employed the fifteen-inch telephoto lens camera, a film technology that was unfamiliar to him. Intended for recording at long distances, Brakhage brought along the camera for the Pittsburgh shoots.⁵⁹² He exploited its long range to capture restricted areas in his encounters with cops, heart surgeons, and forensic pathologists. He redefined and “physicalized” the camera, so that it became an extension of his own person. The telephoto camera, he observed, “quaked” with movement at the operator’s slightest motion.⁵⁹³ This imprint often appears as a “heartbeat” effect that jiggles and shakes the camera frame, and it subtly separates the artist’s subjective vision from the prescribed and abstract ways of seeing associated with medical science and the law. His film documents thus retain traces of the energy and vitalism of the kinetic camera frame, which Adam Hart has called Brakhage’s “gestural expressionism.”⁵⁹⁴

Brakhage’s films, I argue, should be seen as documentary portraits of “biopolitical institutions” that reveal the bureaucratized ways of seeing associated with powerful institutions. They visualize what sociologist Erving Goffman called the “dramaturgical” aspects of power⁵⁹⁵: the ways in which police, doctors, and forensic pathologists organize institutional space and the forms of seeing in them; how the public sees; and how they (the professionals) are seen, in turn.

⁵⁹¹ Brakhage, “Selected Film Talks—1970s,” *Millennium Film Journal* Nos. 47/48/49 (Fall/Winter 2007-08): 21.

⁵⁹² See Brakhage, “Interview with Richard Grossinger,” *Brakhage Scrapbook: Stan Brakhage Collected Writings 1964-1980*, ed. Robert A. Haller (New York: Documentext, 1982), 192.

⁵⁹³ Brakhage: “The instructions on it said: you do not use this lens without a tripod. Because a fifteen-inch lens is such a telephoto that if you stand stockstill, just your heart beating will create an earthquake in the image; it will look like the whole scene is shaking.” *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁴ Hart: “By gestural expressionism, I mean to describe a mode of cinematography- and an understanding of handheld camerawork- that emphasizes the expressive, indexical connection between camera operator and the image.” See Hart, “Gestural Expressionism and Its Discontents: The American Avant-Garde’s Theories of Handheld Subjectivity,” unpublished paper, 2018.

⁵⁹⁵ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959): 15.

The *Trilogy*'s exploration of the dramaturgical dimensions of power has been critically neglected. After initial gestures of support for this new creative direction, Brakhage's intellectual champions, Annette Michelson and P. Adams Sitney, ultimately viewed the *Trilogy* as a failure.⁵⁹⁶ More recently, David E. James called it derivative of the cinema vérité/Direct Cinema movements of the 1970s. The practitioners of observational cinema, such as Frederick Wiseman, D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, and others, eschewed the creative treatment of reality for a pretense of objectivity.⁵⁹⁷ Other critics have pushed back against the claim that the *Trilogy* is a failed departure from his cinematic project. Marie Nesthus, Juan Carlos Kase, Ara Osterweil and others link Brakhage's *Trilogy* with his ongoing investigations into the untutored eye and the physicalized visual cinema, finding in it instances of continuity with his other body of work.⁵⁹⁸

Toward recovering the political and epistemological dimensions of seeing that have been overlooked in his *Trilogy*, I perform close readings of each film. I elaborate on his innovative and intuitive use of new technology, the fifteen-inch telephoto lens camera. His camera movement often transgresses the boundaries of "appropriate" looking established by authorities, and it isolates his own way of looking from institutional gazing, because the telephoto lens magnifies any bodily movement on the part of the camera operator. The *Trilogy* also depicts Brakhage's most feared subject, the subject of death; and those figures he called the "bogeymen" authorities that directly

⁵⁹⁶ For instance, Sitney characterized the *Trilogy* as a "quasi-documentary" responding to "a felt danger of solipsism," and concluded that they were "far less significant" than his autobiographical work. Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000*, 3rd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 388.

⁵⁹⁷ In an otherwise sensitive review of his work, James describes the *Trilogy*, and *eyes* in particular, as Brakhage's "least successful work." See "Stan Brakhage: The Filmmaker as Poet," 51.

⁵⁹⁸ See Marie Nesthus, "A crucible of Document: The sequence films of Stan Brakhage, 1968-1984," unpublished dissertation, New York University 1999; Juan Carlos Kase, "Encounters with the Real: Historicizing Stan Brakhage's *Act of Seeing with one's own eyes*," *The Moving Image* 12.1 (Spring 2012): 1-17; and Ara Osterweil, "Stan Brakhage: Acts of Seeing," *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film* (London: Manchester University Press, 2014): 93-135.

control the conditions of life and death, or what Michel Foucault terms “biopower.”⁵⁹⁹ To consider the role of death in stimulating his creativity, I concentrate on the visual depiction of bodies and the dead. I argue that the corpse recurs as an organizing motif across all three works, and becomes a basis for modernist aesthetic experimentation.

9.2 WORKING BY EYE: BRAKHAGE’S ENCOUNTERS WITH POLICE AND POLICE WORK IN *EYES*

Shot mainly from the back of a police car, *eyes* depicts the city of Pittsburgh as a jumbled visual mosaic. It explores the panoptic perspective of the police, their bureaucratic labor, their encounters with various citizens and urban locales, and the tense moments in which they classify certain bodies as threats or not. Some of the encountered citizens include: a prostitute, a number of African American men, the elderly, vagrants, drunk drivers, and some children. In *eyes*, the economically depressed neighborhood of the Hill District becomes visualized, in the words of Tim Edensor, as “a constantly evolving temporal collage.”⁶⁰⁰ In editing, Brakhage reportedly only made thirty cuts, in an act of respect for the chronology of the original shooting conditions.

Brakhage offers a glimpse into the historical crisis that rocked the Hill District at this time. For most of the twentieth century, the Hill District was a neighborhood of neighborhoods. With its

⁵⁹⁹ In a series of lectures at the Collège de France in 1975 and 1976, Foucault describes “biopower” as the ability to control “man-as-species” in terms of childbirth, population growth, mortality rate, and overall quality of life. This form of power, as opposed to sovereign or disciplinary powers, is exercised in the domains of medicine and government. See Foucault, *“Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976* (New York: Picador, 1997), 242–247.

⁶⁰⁰ Tim Edensor, “Mundane hauntings: commuting through the phantasmagoric working-class spaces of Manchester, England,” *Cultural Geographies* 15 (2008): 324.

diverse, and predominantly black population, it was a world-class gateway for jazz music and creative expression.⁶⁰¹ Many steelworkers of color resided there, even though the mills were far from it. Yet, during the time of filming, the area experienced a period of rapid decline and social displacement. In the mid-1950s, a top-down program of urban renewal, known as the “Pittsburgh Renaissance I,” was initiated. City planners argued the Hill District was “blighted” and in need of more logical, business-friendly, efficient and safe design. Through a whitewashed discourse of safety and sanitation, they demolished entire city blocks that were deemed a threat to Pittsburgh’s redefinition as a livable place.⁶⁰² The creation of new highways and a sports arena cut off residents’ access to the downtown; as a result, the social and business environment was radically disrupted, and from 1960 to 1970 the Hill District saw a 30% drop in population. In April 1968, riots took place in the Hill, in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and in response to three social issues: education, poor housing, and unemployment.⁶⁰³

This backdrop of crisis and urban change is visually signified, through the appearance of dilapidated buildings, homelessness, poverty, and above all, in the obvious racial divide between the white police and the black residents who are predominantly working class. However, rather than offer us contextualization, or critical analysis on the struggle of social groups and their shifting life conditions, our view is tied to the police who act as the guardians of peace.

⁶⁰¹ For more on the twentieth-century cultural history of the Hill District, see Colter Harper, “‘The Crossroads of the World’: A Social and Cultural History of Jazz in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920–1970,” PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2011.

⁶⁰² This project of urban renewal and its consequences for Hill District residents, is examined in Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 2004).

⁶⁰³ For more on the 1968 Hill District riots, and the struggle of black civil rights in Pittsburgh, see Monica Haynes, “MLK riots: When patience ran out, the Hill went up in flames,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 2 2008, <https://www.post-gazette.com/life/lifestyle/2008/04/02/MLK-riots-When-patience-ran-out-the-Hill-went-up-in-flames/stories/200804020235>.

Yet, from the first minutes, the police are shown in a manner far different from that of the observational cinema or the mass media. Visual techniques like the silhouette, asymmetrical framing, and the fragmenting close-up render Pittsburgh into a strange place. For Kenneth Levicoff Simmons, this fragmentary manipulation of form defamiliarizes the familiar subject of the street cop:

The first shot of the police is of a single hand gently curved and bathed in a gold light... The silhouette of a man's face is balanced on half the screen; the arc of the steering wheel from upper left to lower right, and the dark blue dash-board at the bottom of the frame, form a dynamic composition. Diagonal lines run like a motif through the film: dark utility wires across a grey sky are followed by a close-up of harmonizing wrinkles in a white shirt; a hand with its thumb resting on the figure's belt extends fingers diagonally across the belt; the bar separating the windshield from the door section of the car cuts the screen diagonally.⁶⁰⁴

Operating as an embedded reporter, Brakhage's tight framing and tendency to abstract objects visually, lends itself to the perceptual challenges of police work. As sociologist David Perlmutter writes, "the cop world is a riot of variables and input data." The street cop "must make rapid life-and-death decisions based on scant data and Delphic reports- especially about the people they encounter or are about to encounter."⁶⁰⁵ Brakhage's fragmenting close-up, whip-fast edits, and quick glances at objects and events, correspond to the "palimpsest impressions" of police work.

⁶⁰⁴ Simmons, "All There Is, Is Light: Stan Brakhage's Documents," *Field of Vision* 4 (Fall 1978): 18.

⁶⁰⁵ David Perlmutter, *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 2000): 30.

Matching Brakhage's desire to "get a naked fix" on the city, we witness the police engaged in various acts of documentation: filing reports, recording observations, managing and weighing testimonies, and separating truth from falsehood. Cops interrogate urban dwellers. At the station, the police give an intoxicated man a series of balancing tests. Meanwhile, the police car becomes a toolkit of perceptual devices. The rear-view mirror; the side mirrors; the sides of the car; and the police medallions, in their shimmering, reflective metal, seem to mirror and contain the whole city. This arsenal is enhanced by forensic technologies used for uncovering "unseen" evidence: in a brief, night-time section of complete darkness, a search light appears, revealing a brick wall, as well as the "fog of war" which the police typically work in.⁶⁰⁶

In several instances, the police orchestrate to the public how to see the world. This occurs with the discovery of a dead body. After the police car comes upon a corpse in the street, they surround the body, drape it with tarp, and prepare it to be taken away to the station to be identified. Simultaneously, a crowd of people begins to gather around; an African American community leader extends his hand, his gestures try to put the public in a state of calm and order. As this happens, the police form a shield around the corpse by using their own bodies as curtains. From their stern faces, they direct people's gaze away from the dead and toward them.

Tools like lights and sirens also manage and discipline the way the public sees. In an encounter with an adult black male, a red police light flashes; the next shot is a closeup of an officer's hand. The hand rotates and waves to traffic, which creates a rhythmic, graphic match with the red light. The officer's gesture reveals that police work relies on quasi-theatrical "sign-equipment" of authority, and that police power is connected to managing our vision.

⁶⁰⁶ Perlmutter, 30.

Through Brakhage's abrupt editing, and the "delicate focus"⁶⁰⁷ of the fifteen-inch telephoto lens, the Hill District is infused with a fluid sense of crisis and precarity. The omnipresence of death is revealed as a persistent aspect of police work. By the same token, we are often reminded of the asymmetry of power that the police have over the public. In *eyes*, as in the rest of the *Trilogy*, the public is figured as a chaotic mass that needs to be shaped and disciplined; in response, the rationality and methodical surveillance by the police recreates the social body of the Hill District into being more docile, legible, "safe" to itself, and a unity.

Another dimension of *eyes* involves how the police manage their appearance as enforcers of law and order. As Jerome Hill writes of the police officer's body in *eyes*, "there is an array of badges, nameplates, chevrons, wrist watches, tattoos, coke cans, countless other identifying details." He frequently shoots the cops at low, waist-level mid-shots. This offers a micro-inspection of their attire, in which Hill observes "an overall curtain of blue shirting and dark whipcord [that] frames the scenes."⁶⁰⁸ In the Cubist-style portraiture of the police, the police's bodies "are fragmented, abstracted and depersonalized." Hill writes:

...the subtle potency of Brakhage's camera viewpoint results in his catching most of the time not the full figures and faces (the usual vehicles of expressiveness) of the officers, but their midriffs, -- their pelvic region complete with belts and holsters, handcuffs, and wrist watches and their hands, -- hands familiarly at rest, thumbs hooked in pocket tops; hands caressing fire-arms, lighting cigarettes, writing out summonses, polishing visors, giving directions, adjusting rear-view mirrors, picking noses.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁷ Nesthus, "A Crucible of Document," 261.

⁶⁰⁸ Jerome Hill, "Brakhage's 'eyes,'" *Film Culture* 52 (Spring 1971): 46.

⁶⁰⁹ Hill, 46.

Thus the police are not humanized as solitary, heroic rebels. Rather, in the chaotic and trembling arrangement of body parts, eyeballs, and surveillance equipment, *eyes* presents a vision of the police not as human, so much as “a well constructed, well-oiled impersonal machine.”⁶¹⁰

Brakhage resists identification with the disciplinary gaze of the police. He makes sure that his vision is distinct from theirs, and the tension between the two ways of looking offers much of the drama in the film. At times Brakhage’s vision is blocked, and certain people do not want their identities shown. A cop turns his back to the camera, acting as a shield to a woman who desires privacy. Another time, a white female prostitute approaches the car. She appears annoyed by the movie recording. Yet, rather than step outside the car or look away, Brakhage continues to shoot her from inside the car. There is a voyeuristic and invasive element here, to be sure, but Brakhage’s vision also transgresses the boundaries of vision established by the cop’s physical presence. Without looking away, he transgresses the boundaries of seeing/not seeing. This results in an “unauthorized stare”⁶¹¹: Brakhage shows what the cops do not want us to see.

From the cops’ point-of-view, the Hill District citizens appear as a mass needing to be controlled, but Brakhage makes sure to lend individual residents a degree of empathy and complexity. For instance, we see an elderly man hide in an alley. His face is bruised and bloody. Through a progressive series of shots, Brakhage brings us closer to him, emotionally. First, a long shot glimpses the man from inside the police car’s backseat. Then a mid-range shot captures the man’s expression clearly and directly, as if we were outside in the street talking with him. Finally, after glimpses of the police officers talking to him, a closeup shot concentrates down on the man’s hands. His right hand clutches and rubs the left one.

⁶¹⁰ Hill, 46.

⁶¹¹ The politics of staring at the police is explored in Tyler Wall and Travis Linnemann, “Staring down the state: Police power, visual economies, and the ‘war on cameras,’” *Crime, Media, Culture* 10(2) (Spring 2014): 133–149.

The close-up on the elderly man's hands suspends the surveillant, bureaucratic gaze of the police. The hands suggest mortality. While this man, in his semi-delirious state, could fall dead at any moment, the lines, grooves, and abstract quality of his flesh evoke the time and the experiences he has had. Even though his life, to the stranger's eye, remains unseen and unknowable, Brakhage's stare is an acknowledgment of the transients who live in city spaces.

This episode with the elderly man reminds us of moments when we encounter extreme poverty and homelessness. In these moments, the observer is likely to look away. Brakhage's refusal to look away bestows an empathic interest in the person's humanity. Despite our awareness that we can never truly know who they are, the film goes on.

eyes contains many minor surprises that startle the viewer. Because of their brevity, these fleeting, revelatory moments can be missed if one does not look closely or attentively enough. In this sense, the film encourages an ethical relation, an impossible *open-eye* seeing (in contrast to Brakhage's much-discussed closed-eye vision). To blink is to miss the whole point.

The encounter with the man typifies Brakhage's defamiliarization of the humdrum and workday lives of street cops. It also shows his subtle separation of their way of seeing from his own. *eyes* testifies to his overriding quest: to revivify our visual experience of the everyday world in and against technological modernity, as James Magrini argues.⁶¹² At the same time we see the suitability of the police as a subject: Where their gaze of the world is instrumental and at times rigidly oppressive, his gaze is frenetic, and self-reflexive, about what and how we see.

⁶¹² Magrini, 430-31.

9.3 “SUPER REALITY:” MEDICALIZED BODIES AND LYRICAL OBJECTIVITY IN *DEUS EX*

Shot over a week and a half in September 1971, *Deus Ex* takes place in the Western Pennsylvania Hospital. Located in the Italian neighborhood of Bloomfield, the hospital retains regional importance for being a large facility that historically serviced injured steelworkers.⁶¹³ Brakhage depicts the “circulatory system” of bodies, technologies and activity inside. Shots lead us through hallways and corridors, revealing an ethereal combination of darkness and lightness. In one memorable shot, the camera wobbles into an operation room. Shimmering in the room’s blue-white light, a group of doctors and nurses converse with each other. Chikiris, in a letter to Brakhage, describes this setting as “super reality,” and something beyond mere realism.⁶¹⁴

The people that occupy West Penn hospital often seem both alive and dead. This liminal zone between life and death is not dramatized, but treated with a prosaic indifference. Thus, in a typical shot, an indistinct blob of beige, brown, and dark colors gradually cohere into a shape, to reveal the skull-like face of a man with a tube in his nose; we cannot tell if he is sleeping or awake. In such moments, the piece’s title, “Deus Ex” —a reference to God in the machine—gains new significance.⁶¹⁵ The half alive, half dead patient hints at the inevitability of death, a sensation Brakhage had while filming. Simultaneously, we notice the presence of medical devices, expertise, and other components of the life-giving apparatus on which the human patient depends.

⁶¹³ William J. Horvath and Raymond J. Cristina, *West Penn Heritage: 125 Years, 1848-1973* (Pittsburgh: Albert E. Deeds Associates, 1973).

⁶¹⁴ Chikiris quoted in Nesthus, “A Crucible of Document,” 233.

⁶¹⁵ Brakhage came up with the title, *Deus Ex*, as an abbreviation of *Deus Ex Machina*, to evoke the idea of “god operating through the agency of machines.” Nesthus, “A Crucible of Document,” 230.

The cellular structure of the hospital space is matched by the frequent presence of grids, bed railings, and windows. Shot compositions are organized by a rigid geometry of squares, rectangles, transparent screens, so that the hospital becomes a space rich with sources of visual abstraction. Meanwhile, the patients are not depicted straightforwardly, but framed in such a way that they look like large undulating landscapes. The patient's body is simultaneously reduced and monumentalized by the use of the telephoto lens. We peer at them like a hidden surveillance camera (Brakhage appears to have shot most of the film at far distances from his subjects).

Deus Ex dramatizes the human inter-dependence on technology to sustain life. Images of medical equipment intertwine with the human figure. Fragmentary compositions make it difficult to see and separate out where the body is; frequently, the only visible object is the patient's hand.

The human body has a recurrent but minor role within the larger medical system. In one shot, an elderly man appears on his back on a gurney. His supine body is surrounded by indistinct metallic surfaces and hard edges. An electronic health monitor obstructs our view. The effect is that the patient's body merges with technological devices and appears dependent upon them. Through his modernist visual style, Brakhage reaffirms the tendency in medical operation films, from the 1950s to the present, which offer patients as "helpless surgical objects."⁶¹⁶

In one moving episode, a black baby is shown in an isolette. The circular device frames the baby like an object in a magnifying glass; meanwhile, white light seems to protect the child forming a shield. A heart monitor, neon-blue wires and the bedframe support, follow the baby's visage. The sequence underlines life's transitory and fragile nature, and the necessary presence of modern machinery that sustains us in major events, such as childbirth and illness.

⁶¹⁶ Jose van Dijck, "The Operation Film as Mediated Freak Show," *The Transparent Body: A Cultural Analysis of Medical Imaging* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005): 40.

Deus Ex also depicts medical professionals in various acts of stabilizing the patient's body. As a result, medical providers appear to us as emblems of order and rationality, as in one sequence where a doctor carefully bandages a hand. The rationality of the medical providers is reinforced through strong visual contrasts of light and dark, and through the uniform appearance of the hospital staff, in which they appear as white silhouettes in constant motion, and nurses ferry food and medicine. In contrast, the patient's presence is felt, but rarely shown directly, so that we become aware of their bodily confinement and dependency within this environment.

Brakhage evokes the mechanical-clinical gaze of medical science in instances where doctors treat patients. A female doctor aids an elderly patient. The doctor wears a white lab coat, symbolic of her authority and clinical detachment. Though we cannot hear what she says, we can read her face: she speaks words intended to diagnose, explain, and provide calm. The medical practitioner mediates between his various bodily and psychological states. In this sequence, the spectator borrows the viewing orientation used by nurses, doctors, and therapists. Like them, we use "clinical reasoning" as we watch the action – applying judgment and reason as a medical practitioner would to understand medically what is going on – without looking at their chart.

Despite its fragmented editing, *Deus Ex*'s linear chronology suggests a surgical process. Brakhage peels back layers to penetrate into the hospital's core, cutting into layers of relations between patients and doctors, technology and the human body, as if Brakhage styled himself after Walter Benjamin's notion of the cameraman-as-surgeon.⁶¹⁷ In this way, the climax of *Deus Ex* is the operation. A team of doctors appears to us like an orchestra preparing for a concert:

⁶¹⁷ Benjamin describes the relation of painting to film through an analogy between the figures of the magician and the surgeon: "Magician is to surgeon as painter is to cinematographer. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cinematographer penetrates deeply into its tissue." Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings: Volume 4: 1938-1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 263.

...the great thing in *Deus Ex* was the operating room, where there are seventeen nurses and surgeons and this anesthetized man laid out...Once in there I kept backing up and finally I was in the far corner of that room on a ladder hunched against the ceiling photographing this open heart surgery. We weren't interfering because I was shooting through glass and we were totally removed sound wise from the operation. And I kept unscrewing this fifteen-inch lens and holding it in hand.⁶¹⁸

The doctors wield lights, knives, and diagnostic devices. They prepare translucent sheets over the patient. Through the flattened depth of the telephoto lens, the bodies of the nurses, doctor, and patient all jumble together. The only illumination comes from the doctors' own light sources; and the baroque play of shadows and light create a sense of depth that counteracts the flatness, producing a lyrical objectivity. The body of the patient is more or less obscure, except for spots of blood that appear as they cut into him. As the operation continues, motion slows down. Because of Brakhage's distance from the action, the heart is never shown completely. Chikiris noted that the heart does not "look human to me, it looks like a separate creature."⁶¹⁹

In the frantic jumble of lab coats, facemasks, scissors and devices, Brakhage suggests an almost violent aspect to the surgeon's handling of the patient's body. The surgeons appear methodical and mysterious to him:

HOW they hide the flesh in the hospital until they rip it open, expose the beating heart, dance hands over it as graceful as ballet and as precise as Aztec ritual, precise as hell.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁸ Brakhage, "Selected Film Talks—1970s," 14.

⁶¹⁹ Chikiris quoted in Nesthus, "A Crucible of Document," 232.

⁶²⁰ Nesthus, "A Crucible of Document," 232.

Deus Ex's surgery reaches outward to the long tradition of medical portraiture in Western art. The spectacle of heart surgery, the emphasis on the controlled hands of medical professionals, and the theatrical staging of the procedure, recalls the late nineteenth century paintings by Thomas Eakins (such as *Portrait of Dr. Samuel D Gross: The Gross Clinic*, 1875; and *The Agnew Clinic*, 1889). Eakins practiced a style of "scientific realism."⁶²¹ Like Eakins's images of surgery, Brakhage produces a synthesis of careful observation and theatricality; the contrast of lightness and darkness create a strong mood of drama, and the surgeons become our protagonists.

Brakhage inserts his presence into the depiction (just as Eakins did in *The Gross Clinic*). However, rather than portray himself directly through an act of mise-en-abyme (in Eakins' portraits) we feel his presence, indirectly, in the energy that is transmitted by use of the fifteen-inch telephoto lens camera, and in the technique known as "free-lensing," the act of uncoupling the lens from the camera body and hand-holding it in front of the body. Brakhage states:

I was not hand-holding the camera with a fifteen-inch lens; I was hand-holding the lens by itself, anywhere from a quarter inch to an inch-and-a-half away from the gate...To focus it by moving my hand ever so slightly forward and back and around I had a tremendous control of focus [...] and the best footage came from that, really, what anyone would say is a totally impossible photographic situation.⁶²²

He leaves his imprint in the operation, in the act of free-lensing, in the trembling, heart-beat-like shifts from in-focus, to out-of-focus, images. This visual signature reminds us of his reduced directorial control in the *Trilogy*. He is "a part of life rather than [...] a controller of life,"

⁶²¹ For more, see Peter Schneck, "Cognitive Style and Perceptual Skill in the Realism of Thomas Eakins: Pragmatism, Cognitive Science, and Art," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 58.2 (2013): 213-234.

⁶²² Brakhage quoted in "Interview with Richard Grossinger," 194.

argues Simmons.⁶²³ He carefully manages his position as participant observer, not being invasive but getting as close as possible; and he departs from Eakins, in highlighting visual obstructions and distance, as features of the camera. Our inability to see the operation fully elevates the activity of medical providers, as we can only focus on the intensity, focus, and determination they demonstrate in their movements. Though Brakhage's own sight falls short of what they see, he is able to render a document that testifies to their labor. The shaky, trembling camera is also a formal device that separates Brakhage's way of seeing from that of the medical professionals.

If *Deus Ex* is a promotional film for the medical establishment, then it accomplishes this goal by unusual means. It avoids the visual clichés and resists the desire for visual “transparency” which is typically accorded to medical science and medical imaging. For Brakhage, seeing is always laborious and transformative. *Deus Ex* documents, too, the difficulty of caregiving, the dependencies of the medical patient, and the presence of death and injury that pervades the hospital environment. The film's resistance to “the picture post card” optical clarity of commercial cinema “reteach[es] the spectator to see and feel again, as if for the first time.”⁶²⁴ According to Craig Dworkin, Brakhage's tendency to focus on “the obstructions and impediments that the eyes themselves present...frustrate the idealization of vision.”⁶²⁵ Frustrated vision keeps the viewer in a state of laborious wonderment and enchantment, while it reaffirms the special role of medical providers as mediators between the zones of life and death.

⁶²³ Simmons, 19.

⁶²⁴ Magrini, 430-31.

⁶²⁵ Craig Dworkin, “Stan Brakhage, Agrimoniac,” *Stan Brakhage: Filmmaker*, ed. David E. James (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 136.

9.4 FILMING THE ZONE BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD: *ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES*

A ruler measures a man's nose, then his penis. As a finger presses into the man's flesh, the skin resists the impression. After noticing little details-- like the white cloth over the table, and the fact that the man before us is lying nude in a sterile and brightly lit space-- the viewer quickly realizes that the person they are watching is dead, lifeless. At the edge of the frame, a team of examiners appears. They move the corpse's arms and hands, closely studying every limb. They engage in a kind of macabre dance, which gives a fleeting impression of life being returned to the lifeless. In heavy and harsh lighting, the environment appears to us sterile and spectacular. Though we are inside a morgue, the dramatic light and frontal presentation of the dead recalls the tradition of autopsy theatre, which presented corpses to the public as spectacle.

Act of Seeing with one's own eyes is an investigation of Brakhage's deep fears of dying. For this reason, and the extreme nature of the imagery, this document is the most dramatic, emotionally charged of the three. As Bart Testa notes, "due to its gruesome subject matter and unflinching directness, it seems to offer nowhere to hide from its raw literalness."⁶²⁶ The film consists of six autopsies. It features the presence of Cyril Wecht, one of the nation's most recognized and respected autopsists.⁶²⁷ (Brakhage previously made a portrait of the coroner titled simply *Wecht*, 1970, 16mm, 3 minutes). Wecht's role is similar to the other professional protagonists in the *Trilogy*: he anchors the visual world. He wrangles with, and subdues, the unruly,

⁶²⁶ Testa, "Seeing with Experimental Eyes: Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*," *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, eds Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 288.

⁶²⁷ Wecht served as city coroner from 1970 to 1980, and again from 1996 to 2006. Over his career, he was involved in several high-profile cases: the JFK assassination, Sharon Tate, Patty Hearst, Elvis Presley and Tammy Wynette. Today, he performs around 300 autopsies a year.

fleshy matter that Brakhage captures in his visual field. But he and his team serve another subliminal function. As Nesthus observes, the team of autopsists alleviate the disgust, fear, shock, or nausea that viewers may feel seeing bodies dissected.⁶²⁸ In using the autopsist as a curtain, or shield, the professionals mediate our psychic and affective reactions, regulating the spectator's emotional response like a radio dial.

Operating in the observational-ethnographic mode, the film's subject matter is death, and what society does with the dead via the processes of examination. Whereas many filmed ethnographies of funerals and burials explore public symbols, Brakhage shows us the "back stage" of death, as it were⁶²⁹: a private and restricted "medicolegal procedure."⁶³⁰ As Testa notes, the dissection activity goes on without rhetorically motivated shaping of content.⁶³¹ Instead, autopsy is revealed to be a mechanical, objective process that catalogues, classifies within a bureaucratic regime. Brakhage avoids the results, instead training his eye on the dissections.

Despite the stated aim of giving an objective treatment of reality, the film has been analyzed for its formal sophistication and stylistic intensity, described both as a "symphony of color"⁶³² and an "expressive-constructivist" document.⁶³³ In one dramatic instance, when the first skull is cut opened and the brain inside released, the interior skull contains a shockingly vibrant array of electric-green-blue color, almost like a watery cavern. It glows. In another closeup shot, a cavity drip, drip, drips bright-red blood onto white cloth. In these ways, the film contrasts the rich dark

⁶²⁸ Nesthus, "A Crucible of Document," 264.

⁶²⁹ Goffman states that back regions are typically out of bounds to members of a society. See Goffman, 124.

⁶³⁰ Elizabeth Klaver, *Sites of Autopsy in Contemporary Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 2.

⁶³¹ Testa, 287.

⁶³² Brakhage uses this phrase, which later is repeated by Kenneth Anger, and then other critics. See Brakhage, "Selected Film Talks—1970s," 16.

⁶³³ Miller, 51-52.

colors of the body's interior, to the lifeless and sterile white of the morgue, and to the drained-out flesh tones – gray, yellow, black, beige – of the body's exterior.

The treatment of color, lighting and contrast is highly reflective of Brakhage's subjective state; and so the work represents, in the words of one critic, an "avant-garde autobiography."⁶³⁴ Camera movement, color filters and harsh lighting, fuse with his emotional state. Brakhage hints at this interpenetration of feeling and filmic apparatus, in a lecture about the film:

The rhythm [of editing, of images being recorded] reflects directly my feelings, my movements, my heartbeat, my aversions at times. In this case [*Act of Seeing*], I use seven kinds of film, EF daylight, EF tungsten, MS, Kodachrome tungsten, Kodachrome daylight, commercial Ektachrome...that's about it as you know in this country in terms of film stocks...plus two filters, plus three light sources.⁶³⁵

The subjective states of Brakhage – which included nausea, fear, speechlessness - are registered most forcefully through handheld camera. He states in interviews that the filming had made him physically ill. Through the presence of corpses, the smells and sounds caused him discomfort. But it is his handling of the camera that reflects this feeling: "it was sickening to me and I felt very often at first like I would faint in this autopsy room, I barely made it. I was gripping the camera the more fervently than I ever had before."⁶³⁶

As the department staff led "me gently into this process of cutting open the human body,"⁶³⁷ the camera alternates from fixed shots, to vertiginous zooms, to careful pans, and jittery bounces that dissolve his observational lens into indefinite blurriness. For Miller, modernist

⁶³⁴ Miller, 51.

⁶³⁵ Brakhage, "Selected Film Talks—1970s," 15.

⁶³⁶ Brakhage quoted in Colin Still, "Interview with Stan Brakhage," disc one, *By Brakhage: Volume I*, DVD (New York: Criterion Collection, 1996).

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

aesthetics and autopsy become linked in the methodical cutting of flesh, the prismatic fluidity of blood, and the sculptural manipulation of body-as-material at the hands of autopsists.⁶³⁸ But as before, the dynamism and subjectivity of camera movement also drives a wedge between Brakhage's way of seeing, and the seeing of the practitioners that he locates in his lens, marking a distinction between his orientation in the world and theirs.

Apart from the corpses, which tend to occupy and overwhelm the cramped visual space of the frame, we see Wecht shown in acts of visual knowledge-making, using technical images to identify and evaluate the ramifications of wounds, articles of clothing, tears and incisions in determining cause of death. There is a clear matching of hand and eye in the work of autopsy. In the film's early part, the autopsists search and arrange bodies according to clothing, and their working methods affect and imbue certain objects with meaning. Wecht holds up a victim's bloody bra, which he rotates suspended in the air, suggesting a number of narrative possibilities: struggle, romance, murder. In the next shot, the pathologist appears with a camera, photographing grisly parts; in this, the doctors mirror back, and distinguish their gaze from, Brakhage's gaze, and we are reminded of the multiple ways of looking in the morgue. Later on, they cut segments of organs and weigh them on scales. The liver and lungs resemble still lives.

Picking up a thread from *Deus Ex*, the bodies of cadavers often do not look human at all, but instead are rendered into alien forms. Machines and metallic surfaces collide and merge with organic flesh, as a result of dizzying shot compositions. During the dissections, Brakhage's camera hovers around, but frequently at the top of the body. These top-down shots place the camera right above the dissected, so it seems as though we are inside the head of the dead person, looking down

⁶³⁸ Miller: "Layers upon layers of flesh are examined and removed, not unlike the layers of paint heaped on the celluloid of films such as Brakhage's *Night Music* or *Black Ice*." See Miller, "Stan Brakhage's Autopsy," 52.

at ourselves. According to Osterweil's analysis of the film, this first-person proximity to the dead inspires moments of "radical identification with the corpse."⁶³⁹

The visual style of the body clashes with the gaze that organizes meaning in medical spaces. Instead of a typically "transparent" illustration of the body, as in x-ray, which delineates parts from the whole, in *Act of Seeing* everything bodily is collapsed together, producing a modernist collage in which the body is the raw material, and which disrupts the epistephilic, will-to-transparency that drives legal medicine.⁶⁴⁰ In one example of bodies being treated as modernist collage, the depth of field is so reduced, and the framing so odd, that a woman's mouth is at the bottom, and her legs at the top, like a vortex went through her body and reshaped it. Elsewhere, Brakhage's shots play with compositional depth: three corpses arranged in foreground/midground/background, recalls the serial motif of Minimalism, and depicts the body not as a fully-realized individual, but as a repeating commodity on a factory assembly line.

The jagged and jerky camera adds a sense of violence to the work of the doctors. Osterweil writes a passage that makes explicit the doctors' wanton treatment of corpses:

Innumerable bodies of all hues and vintages are sliced, carved, and disemboweled. Flesh and bone are cleaved with steel scissors, scalps are peeled and brains removed. Flesh falls away like heaps of gelatinous fabric under the surgeon's knife, intestines are unfurled squid-like, fluids are extracted with pumps and tubes.⁶⁴¹

Especially in those moments when a corpse's face is being pulled off, the shaky and blurry quality of the corporeal image almost gives the impression that the people are being murdered in

⁶³⁹ Osterweil, 128.

⁶⁴⁰ Jose van Dijck identifies transparency as the idea that medical imaging technologies and the medical-clinical eye can "simplify our universe" and provide neutral documents of the body, apart from any culture, ideology, and industry pressure. For more, see van Dijck, 7.

⁶⁴¹ Osterweil, 126.

a documentary reenactment. The “savage eyes” of the doctors – an effect created by mobile camerawork – subtly undercuts the profession’s claims to sober rationality.⁶⁴²

While camera movements during some of the dissections suggest that doctors can be cruel and violent, undercutting the sober detachment that is associated with autopsy, there are moments of stillness that perform a similar critique of medical practice. In one shot, the coroner appears to pose for the camera, standing beside the body; as a result, the corpse’s stillness is doubled by the living professional’s. The stillness of the corpse, and the stillness of the coroner, seem to imply that the living and the dead are the same. In such instances the filmed autopsy performs a renegotiation of the subject/object division of the living and the dead, so that the agency of the examiner-as-subject appears momentarily suspended. In a further undercutting of the pretense of scientific seriousness, Brakhage inserts surprise moments of casual obscenity, like in a close-up when the coroner lifts up a body and reveals the buttocks for us.

As literary historian Elizabeth Klaver argues, autopsy should not be seen as a neutral process but as a discursive performance in which every “act” of the forensic pathologist exists in a complex dramaturgy of knowledge production. In Brakhage’s film, the desire for knowledge, and the idea of autopsy as performance, is reflected not only in the behaviors of pathologists, which appear dramatic and theatrical, but more explicitly in the corpses themselves.

In *Act of Seeing*, the corpses become creators of meaning who actively intervene in relations of knowledge production. Amongst pathologists, autopsy is regarded as a performance, a speech act and performative gesture that generates truth.⁶⁴³ As Klaver argues, the corpse functions as an audience member in the performance of autopsy: corpses want and expect a good

⁶⁴² Klaver discusses the “savage eyes” of autopsists and the dead, in “Autopsy and the Subject; or, What the Dead Saw,” *Sites of Autopsy in Contemporary Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005): 71-102.

⁶⁴³ Klaver, 66.

performance, and they watch what is being done to them.⁶⁴⁴ They want to know the truth of themselves, by virtue of whatever the medical professional does and discovers about them.

Michel de Certeau explains that the role of discourses such as law and medicine is making the resistant body into a legible, transparent sign. As de Certeau writes: “My body will be no more than the graph that you write on it, a signifier that no one but you can decipher. But who are you, Law who transforms the body into your sign?”⁶⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Klaver suggests that, in terms of corpse agency, the extent to which the body is not knowable/legible is a sign of its power. The resistance that a “wayward” body presents to pre-existing knowledge, is where the creativity of the corpse comes into play. The wayward body which escapes total analysis and understanding is something portrayed in Brakhage’s innovative and dizzying camerawork, in which shot framing serves to duplicate the agency of the pathologist as well as the corpse.

Several moments evoke what Osterweil calls “death’s egalitarianism,”⁶⁴⁶ or the leveling of power between the corpse and the pathologist. Klaver’s idea of the corpse being a spectator, a subject, and a co-creative participant, occurs through unusual depictions of the human body; most dramatically, through the example of the blond woman, who, by virtue of how she was killed, has her eyes open the whole time. Brakhage was not allowed to shoot the faces for fear that it would identify the dead.⁶⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the blond woman’s face is partially shown, and she appears to look out of frame- up and sideways- giving the sense that she has a living-dead agency, or what Erin Edwards calls “corpse-power,”⁶⁴⁸ that plays a role in authorizing the truth.

⁶⁴⁴ Klaver: “To other pathologists, the dead body constitutes an important member of the audience; the autopsy is done for him or her as much as for the live viewers. In this sense, the dead want ‘to see’ a good performance from the pathologist.” Klaver, 69.

⁶⁴⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 140.

⁶⁴⁶ Osterweil, 126.

⁶⁴⁷ Brakhage, “Selected Film Talks—1970s,” 19.

⁶⁴⁸ Edwards, *The Modernist Corpse: Posthumanism and the Posthumous* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 36.

The blond woman, who presents as performative, star-like, and photogenic, is shown with Dr. Wecht. In one sequence, Wecht partially obscures her body, but we see her cut open torso. As he speaks into a microphone, he occasionally moves back and forth in front of her body, which allows a glimpse not of her full face, but her open mouth. The juxtaposition of the corpse's open mouth and Wecht speaking into a microphone suggests a "dialogue," just as many pathologists believe that a metaphorical dialogue occurs between the living and the dead.⁶⁴⁹ With her open mouth, it is almost as though the dead body is speaking. This challenges the stereotype of the dead as inert matter, by showing the life force of the body continuing in the afterlife. The female corpse, in a silent performance with Wecht, thus shifts from spectator to participant.

The wayward body's resistance occurs again when Brakhage depicts a top-down view of her torso; a cut by the autopsy's blade bisects the frame and the body simultaneously. On the left side, her breasts and the flesh of youthful woman recalls the female nude; on the other half, a ravaged, bloody chest cavity. Outside and inside, life and death, exist on the same plane. This equality dramatizes the conflict between scientific authority and knowledge, versus the matter and waywardness of the body. This "metafictive corpse" (Tamara Slankard's term⁶⁵⁰) reflects critically on Western depictions, and problematizes the autopsy portrait's sensual calm tranquility in invocations of the nude. It makes visible the loss of self, the presence of abjection.

In *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage argues that when filmmakers finally let go of prescribed narrative conventions, and resist the familiar "picture post card" look of mainstream cinema, they can discover alien ways of seeing. He writes, "Once cartoon sight has been utterly removed, the

⁶⁴⁹ Klaver writes, "While a 'conversation' is not quite what is going on ... in the usual sense of the word, there is undoubtedly a dialogic quality to autopsy." Klaver, 69.

⁶⁵⁰ Tamara Linn Slankard, "Limber Corpses: Subjects, Objects, and the Remains of History in American Literature and Popular Culture," PhD dissertation, Stony Brook University, 2013.

internal movement of each once-object subjectively reveals itself- an effervescence, an as-if bubbling up-out for viewability of spaceless timeless entities.”⁶⁵¹ He adds that his project of the untutored eye seeks out nonhuman forms of perception within “the realm of the humanly imaginable.”⁶⁵² As the culminating chapter of the *Trilogy*, *Act of Seeing* achieves this discovery of nonhuman forms of perception. It does so by having the viewer identify with the corpse, and by rendering a visual space that centers on overflowing and obscene deathly matter, “a darkly radiant power that *cadaverizes* and *corporealizes* space.”⁶⁵³ He puts into question the sobriety of scientific discourse, through manipulations of frame rate, and the quasi-savagery of autopsists, even though he has obvious respect for their work. To paraphrase Foucault, Brakhage elevates death as the ultimate protagonist over life.⁶⁵⁴ In turn, we see that autopsists and medical science in general depend on death to obtain knowledge. Medical practitioners constantly fight with the wayward body, but, in *Act of Seeing*, Brakhage never shows the results, never gives us the documentation or abstract information that would pacify the intensity of the experiences; instead, we have to sit with the intensities of the decomposing body, with open eyes.

⁶⁵¹ Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, 120.

⁶⁵² Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, 117.

⁶⁵³ Edwards, 36.

⁶⁵⁴ Foucault: “Death is the great analyst that shows the connexions [of life] by unfolding them, and bursts open the wonders of genesis in the rigour of decomposition.” Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 144.

9.5 OPEN YOUR EYES

Brakhage's *Trilogy* was hotly debated upon release. However, it was successful enough that Sally Dixon toured the films with the USIA, in 1973, to six European cities.⁶⁵⁵ Brakhage went on to teach and lecture on the film document at School of the Art Institute, Chicago, from 1973 to 1974. But during the 1980s, he abandoned the concept of film document, and turned his attention to hand-painted animated films.⁶⁵⁶ He would never return to such “mimetic” image-making again, perhaps discouraged by the overwhelmingly negative response to the films by his once-ardent supporters in the New York art scene.⁶⁵⁷ Brakhage continued to visit Pittsburgh more than any other artist in the 1970s. Then-executive director of Pittsburgh Filmmakers, Robert Haller, facilitated subsequent Brakhage presentations, technical workshops and screenings, and Brakhage's film document became closely tied to the city in which it was made.

The *Trilogy* represented a major shift because they were the most observational and expressively restricted documentary works he had made up until that point. As film historians Kase, Nesthus and others point out, they represented a major modification in style. The documents were theorized as a new direction by Brakhage, one which shifted the prioritization of his aesthetic system away from post-exposure editing to the “Event” of profilmic recording.

But more significant, yet little examined in the critical literature, was the fact that these films examined and elaborated forms of institutional power tied up with sight. As a testament to the efficacy of Brakhage's visceral explorations in Pittsburgh, a variety of audiences beyond the

⁶⁵⁵ Donald Miller, “European Trip Proves: U.S. Leader in Art Films,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 3, 1973.

⁶⁵⁶ Nesthus, “The ‘Document’ Correspondence,” 156.

⁶⁵⁷ As Brakhage told the audience after screening the *Trilogy*, in 1972, at the Millennium Film Workshop: “Many people considered that I betrayed something in making *Eyes*, *Deus Ex* and wait till they see the one you just saw [*Act of Seeing*]. What could one have betrayed? Only the narrowing considerations of a particular clique at this time in New York City.” Brakhage, “Selected Film Talks—1970s,” 23.

art-world viewed these films, evidently seeing utility in them. In particular, the Black Panther Party and the No. 2 police force in the Hill District watched the police film *eyes* (for radically different reasons), but both groups found it thoroughly instructional in how the police treat citizens.⁶⁵⁸ Brakhage was an outspoken critic of “committed” art, and found it impossible to make art with any kind of overt, political position. For him, doing so destroyed art.⁶⁵⁹ And yet, the Pittsburgh film document retains a political charge. The *Trilogy* depicts with extraordinary rigor and seriousness how professionals and the state view and interpret the human body, and it visualizes the porous boundaries between the living in the dead, in sites as diverse and socially restricted as the hospital, the morgue, and the police-surveilled city street. Brakhage’s *Trilogy* enacts what Jacques Rancière calls “a distribution of the sensible,”⁶⁶⁰ blurring boundaries between life and death, subject and object, matter and idea, seer and the seen. The film document extends Brakhage’s project to convey visual knowledge of our sensible, material world.

The connecting thread of the *Trilogy* is how institutions create knowledge through encounters with different kinds of bodies, how they seek to control bodies, and how the visual perception and classification of bodies is tied to power, and cultural boundaries that get constructed through encounters with the public. In the first film, *eyes*, the police preserve law and order through their encounters with different bodies; they perceive and organize reality through snap judgments and classifications, such as determining when a person is a victim or a perpetrator. They keep the peace by organizing how the public sees and limiting what they see, for the purpose of social

⁶⁵⁸ See Scott MacDonald, “Stan Brakhage,” *A Critical Cinema 4: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 93.

⁶⁵⁹ In a lecture he delivered at the Boulder Public Library in 1973, he stated, “From my viewpoint, where art is most practical is in its balance. And art really should grind no axe one way or another. It should make, as I understand it, something visible so that all can use it.” Quoted in Nesthus, “A Crucible of Document,” 214.

⁶⁶⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 12.

control. In *Deus Ex*, human bodies are linked with medical technology and machines, and we see how bodies within a medical context collide with processes of analysis, examination, and documentation. The bodies of patients are at the mercy of the rationality and supremacy of doctors and medical professionals; a clear hierarchy is presented as patients are shown having vulnerable and out-of-control bodies. The final film, *Act of Seeing*, inverts the institutional power hierarchy of the last two films, in a subtle critique of the line dividing the living and the dead. At times, the presentation of corpses suggests the dead are as “alive” as the living. As we see, autopsists have a curiously egalitarian relationship with the dead. Likewise, Brakhage exposes cultural assumptions we project onto the dead, such as the fetishization of the dead female body, racial assumptions attached to minority bodies, and values of wellness and comportment attached to overweight bodies. All these films dramatize how the body becomes a legible sign, through acts of documentation, but also how it resists being treated as a legible sign.

The film document was critically rejected, partly because of the starkly observational depiction of reality, and the lack of epic scope; as Nesthus puts it, Brakhage had traded the infinite for the specific.⁶⁶¹ But, in recent years, frequent screenings of the *Trilogy* suggests that this period of his work has aged better than any other.⁶⁶² Why? The reasons for newfound attention on the film document are numerous. The grittiness of the Hill District, the subjective intensity of the camera, the rigid and controlled spaces, the gratuity of the corpse, all have special currency as

⁶⁶¹ Nesthus, “The ‘Document’ Correspondence,” 146.

⁶⁶² For a far-from-representative sampling, some recent screenings include: November 8, 2006, *The Pittsburgh Trilogy*, The Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, presented by Robert Haller, Berkeley, CA; July 20, 2013, *Stan Brakhage: The Pittsburgh Documents*, UCLA Film & Television Archive and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, presented by Werner Herzog, Los Angeles, CA; September 14, 2017, *Stan Brakhage: The Pittsburgh Documents*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia; and October 18, 2017, *Pittsburgh’s Avant-Garde Pt. 1 - Seeing With Experimental Eyes: Stan Brakhage’s Pittsburgh Trilogy*, Pittsburgh Filmmakers, Pittsburgh, PA.

American film culture has become more interested in the collision of art and medical science, the conduct of police, and aspects of labor and infrastructure on film.

Further, in our era where the ideology of the egotistical, Romantic artist is in decline, if not obsolete, the *Trilogy* represents in Brakhage's career, except *Window Water Baby Moving*, a moment where he gives himself up to the world outside, and accepts his lack of authorial control. In this sense, one commentator rightly called the *eyes* a "small masterpiece in dispassionate compassion," praise that could apply to the *Trilogy* as a whole.⁶⁶³ Testa evokes what I call a notion of open-eye seeing, when he emphasizes the morality of Brakhage's decision not to look away from the dissected corpses, in the *Act of Seeing*:

We are never allowed to get used to the film's imagery, to watch it as part of a procedural routine, and so *not* see it. The act of seeing, its shock and troubling power, is constantly renewed. Indeed, the images are so relentlessly literal and, in the main, so clearly shot that all there seem to be in this film are successive acts of seeing, and seeing this. And this seeing is itself, Brakhage seems to imply, the film's moral end.⁶⁶⁴

In the *Trilogy*, the corpse thus becomes an occasion that allows Brakhage an expansion of his visual style, an analysis of social power, and the creation of an open-eyed seeing that acknowledges the world outside, and the artist's radically modified place within it.

In the Conclusion Chapter, I consider the legacy of the Pittsburgh portraitists, and the institutional resources that made independent filmmaking possible in the 1970s and 1980s. I consider the importance of museum film programs, and film curators such as Sally Dixon, in

⁶⁶³ Hill, 46.

⁶⁶⁴ Testa, 296.

sustaining audience interest in alternative film choices, and furnishing material support for independent film communities. I also reflect on what the Pittsburgh films might tell us about realities of deindustrialization.

10.0 CONCLUSION: VOICES FROM A FILMTOWN

This dissertation has surveyed the independent film scene of Pittsburgh during the effervescent decades of the 1970s and 1980s. It has argued for “film portraiture” as a valuable category that captures many aspects of the work made by the filmmakers and media artists, accommodating their distinct aesthetic goals, as well as the polyvalent meanings they generated. It has identified the Carnegie Museum of Art and the Pittsburgh Filmmakers media arts center as two critical institutional resources that supported the development of regional cinema in Pittsburgh and Southwestern Pennsylvania. And it has considered the role of the wider socioeconomic context of the city as a powerful agent shaping the content and style of films. In this conclusion, it will be useful to take stock of the intellectual consequences of the study for several subfields of research, which I have organized into three sections: film portraiture, film in art museums, and the media art center movement.

10.1 PORTRAITURE IN FILM AND BEYOND

Scholarly writing on film portraiture centers on filmmaking activity in the world’s urban centers in the 1960s, seeing this form re-emerge from a long hiatus as an expression of that decade’s youthful exuberance and counterculture. Consequently, historians and critics have argued that film portraits tend to have a simplistic relationship to time; that they are atemporal, existing in the present tense. Unlike autobiographies or film diaries, which explore the past life of a person,

portraits render the here and now. According to Paul Arthur, film portraits reject history as such.⁶⁶⁵ Scholars such as David Curtis and Sarah Neely also regularly make a distinction between artist/avant-garde portraits and documentary portraits, although they acknowledge that these traditional divisions are not always stable.⁶⁶⁶

In response, my study has been able to innovate upon some assumptions of this still nascent subfield, revealing new aspects of film portraiture in Pittsburgh's regional cinema, and inflecting the study of portraiture with several fresh dimensions, notably, a focus on space/place, a focus on temporality/temporalities, and on gender/sexuality.

The significance of space and place is often overlooked in the critical literature on film portraiture. Scholars, perhaps informed by literature on painting and the photo portrait, tend to emphasize (to the exclusion of everything else) the importance of the depicted person.⁶⁶⁷ But in Pittsburgh, relevant spatial concerns — the city's economic troubles, the racial and cultural conflicts among displaced communities, and the fading landmarks of the built environment— all impact and imprint themselves in the content of the portraits from the local film scene.

Physical landmarks of Pittsburgh figure prominently in film—such as the steel factory in Steffi Domike's work, the Braddock Public Library in Tony Buba's films, the hospital or morgue in Stan Brakhage's *Trilogy*, or the Carnegie Museum of Art in Roger Jacoby's films. Indeed, the

⁶⁶⁵ Arthur stresses that film portraits “do not rehearse a subject's past life,” a quality of present-ness that is associated with the general sixties ethos of “living in the moment” and the rejection of the “assumed authority of History.” Arthur, “Identity in/as Moving Image,” *A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film Since 1965* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 27.

⁶⁶⁶ See Curtis, “Portraits,” *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain* (London: British Film Institute, 2007): 103-112; and Neely, “Film Portrait: History and Definitions,” *Between Categories: The Films of Margaret Tait: Portraits, Poetry, Sound and Place* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2017): 42-53.

⁶⁶⁷ Portraiture is distinguished from other artistic genres, such as landscape. This generic distinction separates, or at the very least downgrades, issues of place from many accounts of the portrait. For art-historical accounts of the portrait, see Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991/2008); *The Portrait in Photography*, ed. Graham Clarke (London: Reaktion Books, 1992); Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); John Berger, *Portraits: John Berger on Artists*, ed. Tom Overton (London: Verso, 2015); and Hans Mac, “What is a Portrait?” *British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 55 No. 3 (July 2015): 303-322.

city became, sometimes inadvertently, sometimes intentionally, the central filmic character, a chameleonic figure with multiple personalities and guises. The urban environment appeared to be in decline, in a state of flux and transformation, by being associated with its historical landmarks, such as the steel mills that were rapidly disappearing. As historian Christian B. Long writes, “In its role as Steel Town, Pittsburgh figures a grim city full of burly white male heavy-industry workers who live and work in a city covered in the haze of industrial pollution.”⁶⁶⁸ Long adds that “The sense of an old city crumbling, its population leaving, recurs in Pittsburgh films.”⁶⁶⁹ But the city was never reduced to this single meaning, but rather was cinematically “reforged” as was done in business-friendly promotional materials or news reports on the Steel City.⁶⁷⁰

Within the independent media sector, women artists like Domike challenged the overbearing media presence of white male heavy-industry workers by making films that redefined the space of the steel factory as vital, if not welcoming, to women, figuring it as an intersectional platform for women’s collectivity, raising professional power and political consciousness. In so doing, she destigmatized women’s industrial work and utilized film to further the political education of women steelworkers. Ahwesh, meanwhile, treated Pittsburgh like a chaotic playground.⁶⁷¹ Through her small gauge camera the semi-abandoned spaces of the South Side and

⁶⁶⁸ Christian B. Long, “Imagining More for Medium-Sized Cities, 1975-2000,” *The Imaginative Geography of Hollywood Cinema 1960-2000* (Bristol: Intellect Publishing, 2017), 188.

⁶⁶⁹ Long, 189.

⁶⁷⁰ For instance, Tracy Neumann discusses the business community’s idealized depiction of Pittsburgh in the 1970s and 1980s, stating “national media, like [the city’s] boosters, presented white-collar workers as ‘real’ Pittsburghers, while the city’s blue-collar workers were symbols of bygone days who added local color.” Neumann, “Reforging the Steel City: Symbolism and Space in Postindustrial Pittsburgh,” *Journal of Urban History* Vol 44.4 (2018): 587.

⁶⁷¹ Ahwesh puts a different spin on deindustrial Pittsburgh, in writing that “we realized that the town offered a rich context for Super 8 film production. It was a social landscape of post industrial fatigue and hopelessness with a host of discoveries to be made.” Ahwesh, “Film, Baby,” *Big as Life: An American History of 8mm Films*, ed. Steve Anker (San Francisco: San Francisco Cinematheque, 1998): 79-80.

Oakland became the anarchic stage for her explorations of minoritized ethnicities and sexual identities.

These portraits acquire, almost naturally, a “regional voice,” in which the filmmakers, the characters and the filmed environments express authentic, local identities.⁶⁷² The regional multivocalities (identified by accent, language, costume, and setting) distinguish these portraits from those made elsewhere, while also linking them to portraiture from spatially similar contexts, such as the Super 8 mm portrait scene in deindustrialized New York City, represented in works like *She Had Her Gun All Ready* (1978), *London Suite* (1989) and *New York Conversations* (1991), by Vivienne Dick. At the same time, as I have indicated, local filmmakers were critical of the city’s public-image in the mass media, and their work sought to expand the reductive meanings assigned to the city.⁶⁷³ Buba’s films reflect the artist’s sense of dislocation and displacement from the cinematic capitals, which manifests in an inherent melancholy about the perceived provincialism of making film in a dying steel town. Alternatively, in the case of Ahwesh’s “Super 8 Chic,” such regional specificity was positively refashioned as “outsider status” in her exhibitions that toured Europe. Ahwesh and city filmmakers branded themselves as Rust Belt artists. Their branding efforts brought newfound attention to the scene, benefitting other local artists by having the Rust Belt city of Pittsburgh promoted and recognized elsewhere.

The portraits, when they were focused on specific residents, probed larger questions around time, history, and memory. In the films of Tony Buba, his subjects stand in distanced relation to

⁶⁷² For a list of regional cinema characteristics that go beyond the geographical setting of a film, such as “the presentation of a specifically regional theme,” see the early essay by Peter Lev, “Regional Cinema and the Films of Texas,” *Journal of Film and Video* 38 (Winter 1986): 61.

⁶⁷³ Brooke Jacobson, in her linguistic approach to regional cinema, offers examples of double voicing in regional films, including the instance of character speech that exists on “a relatively equal plane with that of the [film’s] authorial voice.” For more on strategies of voicing, see Jacobson, “Regional Film: A Strategic Discourse in the Global Marketplace,” *Journal of Film and Video* 43.4 (Winter 1991): 23.

the milltown of Braddock and contemplate its fading glory. This prototypical framework uses the subject's body and the landscape to express his characters' feelings, their sense of time passing, the loss from deindustrialization they still remember and which imbues their being.⁶⁷⁴ Buba's sensitivity to personal experience and the emotional turmoil of deindustrialized communities recalls what Sherry Lee Linkon describes as the almost imperceptible "half-life" of deindustrialization. Linkon writes:

Deindustrialization ... is both toxic and still active in the lives of many working-class Americans. Like radioactivity, deindustrialization may be losing influence over time, but it has not yet dissipated, and its continuing effects are problematic. Like the diseases caused by exposure to radiation, the injuries of deindustrialization are shared, as we see in the varied social costs of deindustrialization that scholars have identified as common across locations: population decline, the deterioration of buildings and infrastructure, toxic waste, long-term unemployment, mental and physical health problems, rising rates of addiction and suicide, distrust of institutions, and political resentment.⁶⁷⁵

Within this existential half-life of economic restructuring, Linkon notes further that "the conditions of the present include the remnants of the past," such that "although social networks fray when some people leave the [affected] area, those who remain often feel even more deeply tied to each other, in part because they draw on shared memory to remind themselves of why they

⁶⁷⁴ As Maren Stange beautifully puts it, "Tony's stories loop and weave like celluloid itself." Cited in LaToya Ruby Frazier and Tony Buba, *Inheritance: Documentary Work on Braddock Pennsylvania (1974-2012)* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012): 5.

⁶⁷⁵ Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 6.

stayed.”⁶⁷⁶ The interpenetration of past and present, and the prominence of memory in social relations, mark Buba’s films as a means of resisting the “symbolic annihilation” of working communities.⁶⁷⁷ This emphasis on dynamic, multidirectional temporality forms a key part of Pittsburgh portraiture more generally, and is at odds with the continuing belief among some film-portrait scholars who assert that the portrait rejects history, in favor of the here and now. Such a conceptualization of the present flattens time so as to exclude history. Yet historical reflection was unavoidable in a city-setting that retained so many overt visual signs of the past.⁶⁷⁸ Besides taking inspiration from the immediate environment, certain filmmakers were expressly interested in excavating aspects of media history. These include Stephanie Beroes, whose *Dream Screen* analyzed historic images of women on film, “re-voicing” silent film starlet Louise Brooks and remaking her from tragic figure into a punk-feminist icon. Others, like Domike, constructed sweeping historical arguments on behalf of the feminist labor movement from the personal images and recollections of ordinary women.

The other reason that this portraiture contains history is that, as works of film, it could not be any other way: all films contain, reflect, and are produced by the forces of history operative at the time of their making. As Gianluca Fantoni writes, “cinema does not exist *per se*, in a separate

⁶⁷⁶ Linkon, 4.

⁶⁷⁷ For archival historian Michelle Caswell, symbolic annihilation “describes what happens to members of marginalized groups when they are absent, grossly under-represented, maligned, or trivialized by mainstream television programming, news outlets, and magazine coverage.” This concept was a major motivation behind much of the subjective and politically inflected filmmaking in Pittsburgh. Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation,” *The Public Historian* Vol 36 No 4 (November 2014): 27.

⁶⁷⁸ Allen Dieterich-Ward observes that one distinction of Pittsburgh from other US deindustrial cities was the local civic leaders’ desire to preserve, rather than completely demolish, signs of its architectural past during recent phases of urban renewal, so that “industrial age infrastructure [was adapted] to serve the needs of post-industrial society,” particularly in “revitalizing deindustrialized riverfront as sites of consumption and using heritage-based building renovation to create more attractive communities and lure visitors downtown.” This interest in renewing and cultivating the past has resulted in a city whose architecture retains signs of its working-class industrial legacy perhaps more than most. See Dieterich-Ward, *Beyond Rust: Metropolitan Pittsburgh and the Fate of Industrial America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 256.

sphere. Cinema, rather, is like a piece of blotting paper, absorbing ideas, cultural influences and controversies emanating from the world in which it was produced.”⁶⁷⁹ In this regard it should strike us as odd that some critics would find explicit historical content at odds with portraiture, as if portraiture strives for an overcoming of the passage of time. The impulse to historical construction or revisionism is not downplayed, but instead is an overt feature of Pittsburgh regional portraiture. The filmmakers understood their films as records, while their subjects often adopted the posture of historiographers, as individuals who were critical of their representation and the images of the past that they had inherited.

Pittsburgh’s regional cinema was not isolated from other academic disciplines or cultural discourses that defined the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. In being a medium-sized city experiencing economic hardship, growing into a cosmopolitan transit zone with its cultural resources like the Carnegie Museum of Art Film Section, Pittsburgh was a node connected to many other communities. In each chapter, I have embedded significant local films in their surrounding context, and sought to make clear the connections between the portraitists and the discourses surrounding them that inflected their filmmaking. Some of these discourses included: the Women’s Movement, Gay Liberation, observational cinema, aesthetic modernism, Brechtian counter-cinema, visual ethnography, New Documentary, cinefeminism, the female nude, and the labor movement. These discursive communities all make various cameo appearances in my chapters.

The ability of film portraits to forge connections between disparate fields of praxis and intellectual disciplines refutes a previous understanding of Pittsburgh filmmaking (offered by historians like Robert Haller) that sees it reductively as reproducing the work of high modernism

⁶⁷⁹ Fantoni, “A Very Long Engagement: The Use of Cinematic Texts in Historical Research,” *Film, History, and Memory*, eds. Jennie M. Carlsten and Fearghal McGarry (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 27.

from cinematic capitals.⁶⁸⁰ My turn away from seeing the Pittsburgh film in terms of modernist values such as originality, purity, and specificity is in keeping with the trend of other recent scholarly accounts of independent/avant-garde film communities in the 1970s, such as Patti Gaal-Holmes' *A History of 1970s Experimental Film: Britain's Decade of Diversity*; or John Sundholm, Lars Gustaf Andersson, and Astrid Söderbergh Widding's *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture: From Early Animation to Video Art*.⁶⁸¹ I follow these historians in adopting an expanded, place-based conception of independent and experimental film practice that branches out from the traditional locus of medium-specific, high modernism. This intertextual connectivity also challenges the literature on portraiture, which often only finds relevant contextual sources for portraiture in 1960s documentary and avant-garde film traditions, such as cinema vérité, Direct Cinema, or visionary film. The radical interdisciplinarity of feminist portraitists like Ahwesh and Sharon Green remind us that portraiture is an enticing and generative medium, because it can be used for different purposes and agendas. Portraiture is not, as others have narrowly defined it, simply personal expression, the spontaneous, uncritical images of ordinary people.⁶⁸² It is this -- but it is also potentially multidisciplinary and, in the hands of activists or conceptualists, it can oppose the very narrowness of individualist ideology, despite often taking off from a highly personal and subjective frame of reference. This is nowhere more evident than in the work of

⁶⁸⁰ Haller's study, *Crossroads: Avant-Garde Film in Pittsburgh in the 1970s*, overlooks the work of documentary practitioners like Buba or Domike who evinced a sharp political orientation. As I've discussed elsewhere, Haller's masculinist adherence to high modernism, and its narrow preoccupation with film as metaphor for consciousness, led him to overlook the incipient feminist politics of local artists such as Stephanie Beroes and Sharon Green.

⁶⁸¹ Patti Gaal-Holmes, *A History of 1970s Experimental Film: Britain's Decade of Diversity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); and John Sundholm, Lars Gustaf Andersson, and Astrid Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture: From Early Animation to Video Art* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2010).

⁶⁸² Before his passing, Jonas Mekas defined the genre as "small films," and "films among friends." Mekas cited in Vera Dika, "Pastiche or Critique: Reworking the Canonical Avant-Garde, and the Female Body," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* Vol 36 No 3 (2019): 157.

Domike, whose socialist-feminist outlook always sought to embed the individual in the wider collective, encouraging links between the individual and a larger, political subjectivity.

If Pittsburgh film portraits not only show us individual subjectivity but also, inevitability, the social dynamics and the historical conjuncture of which individuals are a part, we should also recognize the intimate form of spectatorship that they can engender. Portrait films, according to many commentators, resist closure.⁶⁸³ Like photographs, they open up a powerful form of looking that sustains our interest for a long time; what Roland Barthes called “the insistent gaze” in his writing on the photograph.⁶⁸⁴ Unlike narrative-driven commercial film, whose story is meant to be consumed and forgotten, replaced by the next spectacle, film portraits unleash a multitemporal viewing space, absorbing the spectator in a thick, recursive experience of time. Particularly when the filmic images appear brittle or visually incomplete, due to chemical changes, as Laura Marks points out, they can engender a “devotional” spectator, sensitized to the reality of death and also attuned to hand-wrought textures of film.⁶⁸⁵ Portraits require inaction on the part of the sitter to be made, as one commentator has observed⁶⁸⁶; but once projected, they also require a temporal commitment on the part of the observer who looks at them. This absorptive commitment differs from other ways of watching film.

Furthermore, serial portraiture is capable of constructing new, complex relations to time. Buba’s serial portraits inscribed the gaps and absent-presences of deindustrialized communities that suffered job losses, suicides, and loss of basic resources, by rendering death (as gap) into their

⁶⁸³ Arthur, 32.

⁶⁸⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 49.

⁶⁸⁵ As Marks writes, “Engaging with a disappearing image invites a kind of compassion and open-ended love that can also be a way to engage with people and with death.” Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 109.

⁶⁸⁶ “The time of portraits is the time of temporary inaction.” Paolo Spinicci quoted in Hans Mae, “What is a Portrait?” 308.

form. Buba records the same characters across different works until they no longer appear, signaling their death; for example, the titular subject of *Betty's Corner Cafe* (1976) who passed away soon after the film's completion. Similarly, street gangster Sal Carulli (or Caru, as his name changes across film portraits) visits his father's gravesite in *Sweet Sal*, an event that triggers an emotional monologue and terminates the film without warning. We can also think of Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes*, in which a succession of grisly dissections terminate without a resolution that might mitigate the shocking imagery. As Arthur points out, the tendency for portraits like these to "end suddenly" is a formal inscription of the suddenness of biological death.⁶⁸⁷ Thus, Paul Tarrant argues, film portraiture should be seen as an agent of death.⁶⁸⁸ Serial portraiture's creation of both gaps and temporal connections is a formalization of a particular experience of time, transferred from the subject and shared with the viewer. Like a faded photograph of a long-lost family member, film portraits accrue more meaning and richness the more one looks at them.⁶⁸⁹ Powerful feelings of nostalgia or emotional intensity can become attached to the portrait, as if the human subject is made real for the observer. And this real being is made more real, more vital, the more we look at them. Borrowing critic Melissa Gronlund's generative term "time-portraits," these artists "record and exhibit 'blocks of time' not for their narrative quality but as representations to be contemplated."⁶⁹⁰ Death underlies the fetishistic looking of such film portraiture, just as death is (temporarily) suspended in our viewership.

⁶⁸⁷ Arthur: "the 'arbitrary' gesture of closure instates a condition that is both a formal necessity and, symbolically, universal biological fate," 42.

⁶⁸⁸ Patrick Tarrant, "The serial portrait and coeval time on the cable car up Manakamana mountain," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* Vol 15 No 1 (2017): 50.

⁶⁸⁹ Barthes discusses the Winter Garden photograph, an 1898 image of his mother as a child that transforms his memory and relationship to her the more he looks at the details of it, causing him "to move back through Time." His reflection is exemplary of the possible meanings that are mined the more time the spectator commits to the portrait-object. See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 71.

⁶⁹⁰ Gronlund, "Observational Film: Administration of social reality," *Moving Image Review & Art Journal* Vol 1 No 2 (2012): 172.

Certainly, other, non-portrait kinds of film were being made at this time in Pittsburgh. I have not considered the contributions of several artists in the area of experimental animation, such as ethnomusicologist-turned-structural filmmaker Victor Grauer⁶⁹¹ or painter-animator Paul Glabicki.⁶⁹² Prolific filmmakers Brady Lewis and Greg Gans also made important work. For the most part, these artists did not make portraits (with some exceptions, like Gans' *Self Portrait, December 1972*; Lewis' *Colliding*, 1977; or Grauer's portrait of a fellow filmmaker, *Portrait 5*, 1979). These difficult omissions and exclusions were the result of seeking out the most singular and place-specific films that typify the cinema of Pittsburgh, contributing to the cinematic expression of Pittsburgh-as-place and its independent film community. Since the work of these omitted artists have been discussed elsewhere, I have opted to analyze artists whose work shares certain essential characteristics, and which offer a social vision of the city that marks them as belonging to a group or movement, even if individually they may reject this description for various reasons. The portraitists in this study have used film expressly for some constructive purpose: to build a potential community, correct negative stereotypes or reductive images of populations, rewrite the past, or explore new forms of visual perception and redefine the medium of cinema itself. Pittsburgh portraiture blends the social and the experimental, and it generates a new kind of realism fitted to the portrait. As a visual archive of life and creativity of the city, this work takes on the quality of historical evidence as we move further away from the past.

Filmic portraiture continues to be an important visual means for navigating the entangled layerings of the past and the present, and a social medium for maintaining community cohesion

⁶⁹¹ For an overview of Grauer's career, see Brett Kashmere, "'If We Could Grasp It with the Mind': The Obscure Cinema of Victor Grauer," *Carnegie Museum of Art Storyboard* April 8, 2016, <https://storyboard.cmoa.org/2016/04/if-we-could-grasp-it-with-the-mind-the-obscure-cinema-of-victor-grauer/>.

⁶⁹² Lilly Ann Boruszkowski, "An Interview with Paul Glabicki," *The Velvet Light Trap* No 24 (Fall 1989): 86-98.

across generations and physical distances, capable of withstanding the effects of economic and cultural upheaval. As critics and historians have noted, such portraiture proliferates under the present moment, taking shape under new names, formats and viewing conditions, such as “selfies” or installation art. Buba has added film portraits to his ever-growing catalogue of the *Braddock Chronicles* (of which a third DVD volume is due out soon). He makes portraits on digital cameras and exhibits them on venues such as YouTube, such as his *Reflexions* (2016), a self-portrait in which Buba exchanges the handheld camera for a full-sized mirror which he carries around Braddock capturing reflections of people and places; or *The Barber of New Kensington* (2019), made in essentially the same, stripped-down home-movie format, featuring present-day characters from milltowns. Buba has found new audiences in the dematerialized realm of YouTube, leaping over the restrictions of the film festival or independent media circuit of yore. Domike shifted from filmmaking to site-specific installations that explore “industrial archaeology.” Her investigative works *Mapping the Heap* (1997) and *Bearing North* (1998) consider how unremarkable landscapes like slag heaps and abandoned mills retain traces of deindustrialized communities and indicate shifts in the global capitalist system, if one closely studies the surface of raw materials and the “unbuilt” environment around us.⁶⁹³ Likewise, Ahwesh’s portraiture endures, albeit in altered form, in *Martina’s Playhouse* (1986), *Philosophy in the Bedroom, Parts I and II* (1987), *Strange Weather* (1993), *The Color of Love* (1994), or *She Puppet* (2001). *Inside Circle* (2012), a memorial to her creative collaborator, Nataalka Voslakov, exists as a sound and photo installation that draws upon voice mail recordings collected over twenty years. Ahwesh states:

⁶⁹³ Detailed descriptions and artist statements on these pieces can be found in “Curriculum Vitae and Resume Materials,” Box 72, Folder 7, Steffi Domike Papers, 1946-2009, University of Pittsburgh Archive Services Center, Pittsburgh, PA.

I have a collection of voice recordings from answering machines- left for me by my friend Nataalka—who is in *From Romance to Ritual* and several other of my films from the old days. She left me messages over a 20 year period. She is now deceased so the collection has become an archive. I have done some projects with the recordings—a couple of things, but I will continue to work with them as opportunities come my way to dig into the collection. So it's an ongoing work in progress, or for me, really, an un-finishable project, an ongoing dialogue with her.⁶⁹⁴

In *Inside Circle*, two turntables play Voslakov's messages simultaneously, expressing (via the playback devices facing each other) Ahwesh's notion of "ongoing dialogue," as well as enveloping the visitor in the theatrical, larger-than-life personae that Voslakov adopted in the 1980s Pittsburgh films. Voslakov's unique regional voice multiplies, expands. Like Giuseppe Arcimboldo's imaginative portrait heads made from fruits, vegetables, and books, Ahwesh assembles an auditory collage of Voslakov that stresses the importance of artifice in forging a likeness of the subject. She highlights the role of recording technology – the voice-mail device – and Warholian self-exhibitionism, as critical dimensions of Voslakov's creative identity. Operating with a related sense of rotation, repetition, and distortion, and fleshing out the devotional space created by the installation itself, are a series of photographs inspired by the two friends' shared rust-belt backgrounds. In these photographs, Ahwesh employs anamorphosis, "a technique

⁶⁹⁴ Ahwesh qtd in "An Excerpt from Peggy Ahwesh's "Inside Circle,"" *Canyon Cinema*, January 29, 2015, <https://canyon-cinema.tumblr.com/post/109514380680/an-excerpt-from-peggy-ahweshs-inside-circle>.

historically used to obscure objectionable content such as the erotic, scatological, occult, or religious – to create the images, but has omitted the mechanism needed to decode them.”⁶⁹⁵

After the 1980s, the city’s film scene changed dramatically. Many of the filmmakers discussed here continued making work, while others quit filmmaking entirely. By the decade’s end, the Film Section and the Pittsburgh Filmmakers grew more specialized, more business-like, and gradually shed the countercultural ethos that inspired them. At present, the media art scene enjoys far greater racial diversity than in the 1970s and 1980s. Artists of color, such as Chris Ivey, Alisha Wormsley, LaToya Ruby Frazier, and Vanessa German lead the field, utilizing the same resources of the local media arts organizations; furthermore, they make new art in the independent spirit that preexisted them. Many of them generate local portraits like their predecessors did, with documentarians Ivey and Frazier citing figures like Buba as a major influence,⁶⁹⁶ offering powerful evocations of African American life that center on issues of affordable housing, access to healthcare, rapid gentrification, and environmental (in)justice.

Further research on artistic portraiture can be extended beyond my single-city approach. Scholars ought to identify and compare representational practices from other deindustrialized contexts, such as London, Detroit, Youngstown, and New York City, and thereby produce a more comprehensive understanding of the global visual culture of deindustrialization. Besides

⁶⁹⁵ From the event description for “INSIDE CIRCLE: New Works by Peggy Ahwesh,” *Rhizome*, March 14, 2012, <http://rhizome.org/community/19901/>. The solo exhibition was held March 18 – April 16, 2012, Microscope Gallery, Brooklyn, New York.

⁶⁹⁶ Award-winning social documentary photographer, LaToya Ruby Frazier, makes photographs of Braddock and deindustrial communities around the world. Frazier regularly identifies Buba as a mentor in her artistic development, citing his 1996 film about African American steelworkers, *Struggles in Steel*. In 2012, Buba and Frazier collaborated on a photo exhibition in Indianapolis that presented portraits of Braddock reflecting the two artists’ unique visual sensibilities, and distinct generations and demographics of Braddock: Frazier’s recent black and white large-format photographs of African American residents and family members, alongside Buba’s older, color photographs of Italian American residents from the 1970s and 1980s. See LaToya Ruby Frazier and Tony Buba, *Inheritance: Documentary Work on Braddock Pennsylvania (1974-2012)* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012). For more on Frazier’s photographic work, see Benjamin Ogradnik, “Blue Ruins: LaToya Ruby Frazier in Two Parts,” *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture* Vol 7 (October 2018): 123-127.

investigating portraiture in the domain of independent film and media art, the relatively new sector of industrial heritage museums, which are historic sites that commemorate forms of working-class history and protect vulnerable industrial environments, also participate in forms of remembrance and multidirectional temporality that are of a piece with my study. More work needs to be done on working-class artists who work within and against industrial heritage aesthetics, with its ties to tourism, urban renewal, industrial businesses, heritage discourse, and the labor movement.

10.2 FILM PROGRAMS IN ART MUSEUMS

Film historiography is filled with numerous studies exploring unconventional spaces and venues of film exhibition. However, with few exceptions, historians still mischaracterize or simply ignore the art museum, viewing it as a place indifferent to film altogether; or one that corrupts independent media via institutionalization, deadening the vitality of underground art.⁶⁹⁷ Historians Erika Balsom, Jonathan Walley and Gregor Stemmrich characterize film and art institutions as fundamentally separate in the 1970s; Walley uses the dramatic phrase “an unbridgeable gulf” to describe their separation.⁶⁹⁸ Balsom erroneously argues that film only enters the museum as an artwork in the 1990s, a claim that neglects the nationwide explosion of film programs in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁹⁹ Meanwhile, scholarly work on recent moving-image practice often erases the legacy

⁶⁹⁷ In a frequently cited article, Fred Camper laments the migration of underground filmmakers into universities and art museums, in “The End of Avant-Garde Film,” *Millennium Film Journal* Vol 1 Issue No 16/17/18 (Fall/Winter 1986): 99-124.

⁶⁹⁸ Jonathan Walley, “Modes of Film Practice in the Avant-Garde,” *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London: Tate Publishing, 2008): 184.

⁶⁹⁹ Balsom argues that the moving image only enters the art museum in the 1990s, in the form of the film-based installation artwork, through the convergence of several factors: the obsolescence of celluloid film, the digital revolution, and the ubiquity of sophisticated projection technology and equipment. While this account provides a partial justification for film installations in galleries and museum spaces, it erases the vast legacy of film programs

of curators and their efforts to build collections of film and video, and to regularized screening series, among other institutional devices that represented a historic cross-fertilization of film and art.

My study shows that, contrary to this received wisdom, in Pittsburgh and elsewhere during the 1970s and 1980s the art museum became a hub of film art, providing critical services to the burgeoning media art field. As I describe in the first chapter, the Film Section of the Carnegie Museum of Art became the primary exhibitor of independent and commercial film in the city during these decades, offering a veritable college-level education in world cinema through multiple streams of programming that included repertory and canonical film (in The History of Film Series), works by international auteurs (The Director Series), and new work by avant-garde and independent filmmakers (The Independent Film Maker Series). The museum, in an extension of its preservationist role as repository for artifacts from the past, organized distinct temporalities and historical constellations for engaging with the moving image. It served as a vital clearinghouse for information that connected exhibitors with artists, through the *Film and Video Maker Travel Sheets* that it published for thirteen years, and through its close relationship with the local press that shined a public light on homegrown film activity. It built up a large and eclectic film study collection, purchasing major works of North American avant-garde film (around 200 titles) that gave locals access to experimental media and provided much-needed financial remuneration to traveling artists who subsisted on modest incomes from “one-man shows” and temporary stints teaching at universities and art schools. Finally, Sally Dixon’s remarkable emphasis, in the early years, on leveraging the museum’s cultural stature as a way to gain access to shooting locations, technical

and film museums that collected, exhibited, and disseminated film/video art decades prior. This reductive narrative, repeated elsewhere, is given expression in Balsom’s “A cinema in the gallery, a cinema in ruins,” *Screen* 50.4 (Winter 2009): 411-427.

personnel, and equipment, remade the art museum into a movie studio, feeding directly into the production of new films. Nowhere in the US did any other art museum so fully commit itself as a “major media center,” in accordance with Ron Green’s six media functions of production, exhibition, distribution, preservation, study, and financing. The Film Section was arguably the most culturally advanced and institutionally transformative museum film department to emerge since the establishment of MoMA’s Film Library in 1935.

Pittsburgh’s Film Section forces us to question those who depict the art museum using uncritical stereotypes, as well as the inaccurate claims that the 1970s art world had no interest in film, whether experimental or commercial. Indeed, what does it mean to the conventional thinking in the field that the Film Section, and many other art museums in the US, regularly showed *commercial* film? Their deep investment in broad and diverse forms of the moving image has implications far beyond a commitment to avant-garde art. My institutional study of the Film Section is not meant to be definitive (it only covers five years), but it stands as a provocative case study that, in its level of detail and archival materials, makes a leap forward in the research on museum film exhibitions. It also suggests that many other models for exhibiting film in museum settings likely existed during these decades, which require additional study. Part of this dissertation’s contribution, then, is the argument that the museum film program must be taken seriously and considered expansively, in terms of its built architecture, its marketing materials, and its discursive strategies of framing film. It should be seen as an iteration of the historically variable *dispositif* of cinema—an “other place” distinct from, although related to, the pleasures of the movie theater, forming a key landmark in the era’s varied exhibitions landscape.⁷⁰⁰

⁷⁰⁰ Drawing on Michel Foucault, Bregt Lameris conceptualizes the Nederlands Filmmuseum—and art museum film programs more generally—as an “other space,” fusing modern aesthetics, community, and upcoming screenings into a distinct cultural activity: “As with film theatres and cinemas, film museums are ‘other spaces’, with very different

Film curators like Sally Dixon are undersung heroes in the story of independent cinema. Partly this is because curatorship in film studies is much less developed than the extensive body of literature on curatorship in art history (the exception here being film festival studies). This scholarly neglect is changing with new work that sheds light on the mid-century pioneers, such as Amos Vogel at Cinema 16⁷⁰¹ and Frank Stauffacher at Art in the Cinema Film Society.⁷⁰² Recent studies – often led by doctoral students – have begun to theorize film curatorship as an intertextual practice of bricolage,⁷⁰³ or curating as a form of montage that positions the curator-as-director, and the film program as a collision of dissimilar film-utterances, while bringing to light the conceptual and cultural work of the written materials and “verbal architecture” that curators generate beside or behind the movie screen, such as screening calendars, program notes, and more.⁷⁰⁴

rules, customs and time dimensions to those we are accustomed to in daily life.” See Lameris, “Film Museum Exhibition Spaces,” *The Film Museum Practice and Film Historiography: The Case of the Nederlands Filmmuseum (1946-2000)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 131.

⁷⁰¹ For studies on Amos Vogel, see: Scott MacDonald, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward History Of Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); and Raymond J. Haberski, *Freedom to Offend: How New York Remade Movie Culture* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

⁷⁰² See Scott MacDonald, “Art in Cinema: Creating an Audience for Experimental Film,” *Radical Light: Alternative Film & Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-2000*, eds. Steve Anker, Kathy Geritz, and Steve Seid (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010): 30-34; and MacDonald, *Art in Cinema: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

⁷⁰³ Marc Francis Newman offers a historically rich and provocative exploration of film curating, based on close studies of US queer film programmers in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Newman’s method deliberately de-emphasizes audience reception (a common methodology in exhibition studies) and instead uses linguistic and intertextual methodologies to see how meaning is made in the paratextual documents around film exhibitions (ads, calendars, program notes), and in the curator’s pairing of like and unlike films in double features in underground and gay/lesbian oriented moviehouses. See Newman, “Deviant Programming: Curating Queer Spectatorial Possibilities in U.S. Art house Cinemas, 1968-1989,” PhD diss., University of California Santa Cruz, 2018.

⁷⁰⁴ Andy Ditzler provocatively argues that Vogel’s curatorial approach at Cinema 16 was a form of curating-as-montage. Vogel viewed his programming calendar as a “huge film,” and arranged events with six or seven film shorts, drawn from experimental, documentary, narrative, and scientific-educational genres, producing strange and unique insights for each viewer, a strategy comparable to Eisenstein’s theory of montage which collided two or more images to produce a third meaning in the spectator’s mind. See Ditzler, “Curation and Cinema,” PhD diss., Emory University, 2015, 111.

Alongside these promising new directions, women curators who emerged during the 1970s and 1980s and operated moving-image exhibitions deserve more scrutiny. Dixon's career reveals a larger professional opening in the museum world that many women took advantage of. Some women curators who led museum film programs at this time include: Camille Cook, Chicago Film Center; Barbara Smith, Film and TV Study Center in Los Angeles; Barbara London, curator of Video at MoMA; Melinda Ward (and later, Sheryl Mousley), the Walker Arts Center; Adrienne Mancina, MoMA, Department of Film; Kathy Rae Huffman, the Long Beach Museum; Lisa Durkan, Brooks Memorial Art Gallery in Memphis, Tennessee; and Nicole Holland, Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas. Not to mention many others in the U.K., Europe, and Canada.⁷⁰⁵ Women film/video curators were critical bridge-builders and cultural intermediaries who forged discursive and infrastructural connections between film and art, art makers and audiences, government/policy makers and art communities. Their work had immeasurable impact on generations of scholars, cinephiles, and aspiring artists. Highlighting women's valuable curatorial work, and the particular struggles they faced in the museum and other art spaces, helps to undo the androcentrism of much experimental media historiography.

The Pittsburgh film community repeatedly vouches for the singular importance of Dixon. As her successor Bill Judson said, "a cultural nexus formed around Sally Dixon and the Film Section." He added, "Sally was the driving force; it was her idea, her initiative, her contacts that made the Film Section at the Museum possible."⁷⁰⁶ Dixon's words and actions crystallized a sympathetic view of the city that remains unmatched, infectious. She made locals and outsiders

⁷⁰⁵ Non-US examples of women media art curators include: Dorine Mignot, a curator in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, who, since 1974, organized the museum collection of video tapes and installations; and Christine Van Assche at the Pompidou Centre, Paris, a curator who specializes in new audiovisual art.

⁷⁰⁶ Personal interview with Bill Judson, September 26, 2017.

fall in love with the Steel City and its curious topography of bridges, hills, mills, skyscrapers and green foliage – what she called “fantasies in concrete.”⁷⁰⁷ Curators like Dixon and later, Judson, generated a thick exhibitionary environment that fed into new filmmaking in the city as its industrial basis. This dissertation has affirmed the extent to which continuous and adventurous exhibitions programming was a core driver of new and socially important filmmaking. The first chapter exhaustively detailed the programming schedules, the marketing devices and the philosophical outlook the Film Section, and the effects these had on film. It revealed the surprising truth that the art museum can, and once did, sustain/energize film production. Emanating from their professional embedding in museums as centers of learning, curators exercised pedagogical work on audiences, boosting the public’s awareness of historical and contemporary trends in cinema, but they also facilitated new kinds of social interaction. As Marc Francis Newman suggests, “Perhaps the space of the theater itself can be framed as a contact zone, where spectators not only meet the screen, but also the bodies of other spectators gathering together in a dark space to watch the projected image.”⁷⁰⁸ As a result, the art museum produced a new kind of spectator, it expanded our idea of cinema, it incorporated and positively valued avant-garde film as part of the totality of cinema, and it sustained an audience interest in independent and alternative forms of film. The Film Section affirms the important role played by art museum film programming, in transforming the art museum into a *material base* among others (the university, the workshop, and the film cooperative) that sustained the *superstructure* of independent cinema. We might amend

⁷⁰⁷ Almost creating an abstract montage of the city through words, Dixon once said of Pittsburgh: “The topography is never dull. There’s so many textures, the rivers, cliffs. Pittsburgh can never be wall-to-wall concrete. Artists come through here and the colors blow their minds. Many artists stay here. No other city has such organic, funky architecture - fantasies in concrete.” She concluded, “The cities that Pittsburghers look to as seats of culture have been. Pittsburgh is becoming.” Dixon qtd in Michelle Pilecki, “Pittsburgh is Now A Place to Make Films,” April 9, 1975, 3.

⁷⁰⁸ Newman, “Deviant Programming,” 17.

Michael Zyrd's claim that "avant-garde film depends on the academy" to say that avant-garde film also depends on the art museum.⁷⁰⁹

In the current moment, both the Carnegie Museum of Art and Pittsburgh Filmmakers (renamed the Pittsburgh Center for Art and Media in 2019) have much reduced profiles in the local and national scene. The infrequency of innovative film programming in the city; the atomized, random nature of contemporary media production; and the indifference of the general public to experimental or independent art all point to the absence of meaningful curatorship in Pittsburgh. The inertial film scene forces us to recognize that a truly successful curator is what Mari Carmen Ramírez calls a "cultural power broker," a visionary who connects structurally disparate communities, sustains rapport between artists, institutions, and the public, and builds the very ground on which art is made and apprehended *as art*.⁷¹⁰ Such people are extraordinarily rare. The 1970s generation of curators such as Dixon, Jonas Mekas, Gerald O'Grady, and John Hanhardt had an intellect, charisma, and ambition that hardly exist in today's media art field.

As a cultural power broker and compassionate visionary, Dixon displayed an "ecologic" perspective where images and audiences were interconnected. The stasis of the local population could be counteracted by the mobilities of film images of the people, and by images of the wider world, activating their deepest thoughts and wildest imagination. Dixon's media ecology was propped up by and linked to other comparable "film cities"⁷¹¹ throughout the nation. In 1970s and 1980s Pittsburgh, the independent cinema, like the rest of the nation, functioned as a kind of

⁷⁰⁹ Michael Zyrd, "The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance," *Cinema Journal* Vol 45 No. 2 (Winter 2006): 17.

⁷¹⁰ Ramírez defines the curator-as-cultural-broker in "Brokering Identities: Art curators and the politics of representation," *Thinking About Exhibitions* eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996): 21-38.

⁷¹¹ "Film cities" is Rick Pioto's term to describe the ubiquity of grass-roots filmmaking and film exhibition across US cities in the 1970s and 1980s. This phrase perfectly captures, for me, the urban impact of the interconnected media ecosystem of the era. Personal interview with Rick Pioto, March 3, 2016.

democratic public sphere. As the early media art theorists envisioned, citizens within the broader, not-for-profit ecosystem would potentially be makers, receivers, and exhibitors of media that mattered to them. The public was not a passive consumer in this model, but an active component of the full cycle of media art, which contained the seeds of a new kind of participatory democracy, supported by new technologies, and new institutions that facilitated their agency.

It is necessary to delve more deeply into the art museum's formative relation to the study and creation of film, as the "disciplinary unconscious" of film and media studies. Moving past simplistic treatments of museums, more archivally driven studies should be conducted to compare and contrast film programs in regional versus metropolitan locales, and programs in regions outside the familiar EuroAmerican contexts. Microhistorical local studies could identify the synergistic practices interlinking media arts centers and art museums, as seen in collaborative partnerships between Pittsburgh Filmmakers and the Film Section in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷¹² Along these lines, more work can be done on museum film collection practices, as suggested by Emily Davis' work on the Carnegie Museum of Art collection⁷¹³; and on the infrastructural praxis of film curators, especially those operating outside the cinematic capitals with a "regional frame of mind."

⁷¹² During Judson's tenure, Pittsburgh Filmmakers and Film Section developed a synergistic relationship where they jointly provided lecture and workshop opportunities for visiting artists. For instance, Taka Iimura presented on September 19 at the Film Section, and on September 20, 1978, at Pittsburgh Filmmakers. Visiting filmmaker Tim Bruce from England, was co-sponsored by Film Section and Pittsburgh Filmmakers in March 1980. The cooperative relationship between the museum and Filmmakers exemplified the vision of intra-regional cooperation among media art centers, first postulated by the theorists of the media art center in the 1970s.

⁷¹³ Emily Davis focuses on the film collection of the Carnegie Museum of Art, and the difficulties of preserving multiple visual formats of the moving image, in "Stewarding Time-Based Media Collections into the Future: Challenges and Opportunities," paper presented at College Art Association Annual Conference, New York Hilton Midtown, February 16, 2019.

10.3 MEDIA ARTS CENTERS

This dissertation has highlighted the institutional form of the media arts center, and considered its specific centrality to the regional cinema of Pittsburgh. The media arts center reveals that during the 1970s and 1980s, independent cinema throughout the country was sustained by the formative idea of film as “noncommercial, creative self-expression.” This idea was the result of interaction between policy and art makers, tremendous effort and campaigning, and advocacy by a broad coalition including filmmakers, curators, arts administrators, and scholars. Through the media arts center, filmmaking and film exhibitions were able to expand through “regional development” beyond the cinematic capitals in the US, providing tools and training to people in rural, suburban and urban locales. They offered a meeting ground for traveling and local artists to congregate and mingle, forming a transnational public that led to fruitful encounters and partnerships that enriched the global media arts. Yet, the media arts center, with few exceptions, has not been fully recognized as a worthy object for study in film studies. This could be because the designation, “media arts center,” gestures toward the amorphous domain of “media” and away from the moving image. Indeed, the media arts center had implications that went beyond film itself—these centers were particularly important venues for making and distributing video art—but this dissertation has mainly focused on how the media arts center has benefitted the historical development of film.

The exemplary media centers in 1970s and 1980s Pittsburgh reveal important insights. First, contrary to the conceptual divisions that orient much art-historical and film-historical writing on these decades, if we view history from the standpoint of the media arts center, we gain a different perspective: we see how much cross-fertilization and inclusiveness existed amongst distinct practitioners who relied on their services. Within the multipurpose space of the media arts

center, documentarians interacted with structural filmmakers; narrative filmmakers encountered and collaborated with experimental animators. Political agitators rubbed elbows with film poets; hippies and steelworkers sat together in film screenings and debated ideas well after the credits rolled. Equipment exchanged hands from the staff to artists of varying abilities, distinct backgrounds, skills and commitments. In place of the divisions that separate groups out as we find in retrospective critical accounts, there was a lively and vibrant fluidity in the independent media circuit and an attitude of openness that cut across distinct working methods and intellectual pursuits. Additionally, the independent media sphere generated hybrid artworks immanent to the diverse concerns and demographics of the people who lived where the center was based.

Noncommercial meant funding from granting institutions, and it meant reliance on others. “Interdependence” and “cross-institutional synergy” were the driving principles in the independent media sphere. This study drives home theorist Ron Green’s claim that *independent* filmmaker is a misnomer; what we are dealing with is a class of people who share interdependency amongst themselves and amongst the organizations they navigate and that help sustain them. The media arts field in this era was permeated with an ethos of collective support, seeing oneself as part of a bigger system. This is what “non-commercial” meant—media centers supported a society not based on private competition and consumption, but one based on creating forms of solidarity and generating a participatory culture around media. The media center provided a robust backdrop for sharing and debating ideas on organizational governance, film aesthetics, and civic affairs. Such centers were found in nearly every state in the US, so that artists had a broad level of awareness of what was going on in the field even if they did not have great resources, elite education or lived outside a large metro area that was deemed a cultural capital. Simply put, without the presence of media art centers as the beating heart of the independent media art field, the postwar avant-garde

and independent film movements likely would have been smaller, shorter lived, and therefore less culturally significant. The media arts organization expanded the bounds of what was possible.

How should scholars regard and assess these organizations and their impact? One starting point is this: Media art centers were primarily interested in how to provide professional occupations and financial sustainability to practicing artists. These centers, from the get-go, were informed by recognizing the difficulty of making art while also making a living. This is what distinguishes them from prior institutional forms, such as cooperatives, which were often volunteer-run organizations that required work for free. The media arts centers sought to create a counter image to Hollywood, so that industry roles of exhibitors, artists, writers, archivists, were more equitably distributed, accessible, and fairly compensated. And, in adopting the theory of the ecosystem, they were implicitly involved in holistic thinking about making art sustainably, through time and space. They offered a variety of roles to artists; in nearly every case, the artists in my dissertation would not have been able to make art without the technical, financial or social support given by these centers.

Centers shared information, personnel and resources with other centers. This interconnectedness was by design. Each center was a node in a coordinated network. As O'Grady and others correctly predicted, centers relied on each other when certain resources could not be met to support a particular activity.⁷¹⁴ For instance, Pittsburgh Filmmakers never invested in film preservation, since it recognized that other centers like Anthology Film Archives could fulfill that function. Thanks to this cooperation, Filmmakers could devote attention and resources elsewhere. The coordinated network ensured that the needs of audiences and artists could be met locally,

⁷¹⁴ O'Grady, "Structure," a paper prepared for the National Committee on Film and Television Resources and Services, date unknown, 4.

while the organizations solved problems by working with other organizations. Significantly, this cross-institutional cooperation was one of the factors that allowed organizations to survive when audience interest in media art declined, as it did in the 1980s.

Another outcome of media arts centers was to create more opportunities for minorities and artists from marginalized populations to create, exhibit and finance their work. The lack of barriers to entry, the acceptance of outsiders and misfits, the access to symbolic resources, formed a refuge from Hollywood and the commercial TV industries that have long been elitist and repressive toward political dissent, minority communities, and sexually nonnormative identities, because they were organized around the contrary principle of the profit motive, which justified all kinds of hierarchies and exclusions. In Pittsburgh, as elsewhere, there was a potential oppositionality to be found in the openness toward forms of difference in the independent media sphere. As I have shown, women carved out a space of their own within the creative sphere, despite the prejudices of local men; and in turn, it was women who most often were leaders of independent media, from Sally Dixon to curator-filmmaker mavericks like Ahwesh, Strosser, Voslakov, and Beroes. Pittsburgh was one of the richest laboratories for the potentials of the media art center –and it was on the cultural margins that one found the most robust media centers.

Today, in the midst of shrinking government involvement and public funds for art, and the privatization of nearly all spheres of life, the media arts center may appear vulnerable partly by the fact it is premised on a fragile divide between profit and nonprofit media, a distinction which has been muddled beyond recognition. During the Culture Wars in the late 1980s that targeted and defunded the NEA, the belief that media art could exist in a sealed space, reliant on the sole support of public funds and government aid, became untenable. Media arts centers since the 1980s have had to rely increasingly on private income and philanthropic support. To finance themselves they

reformed into business-like entities. The weakening of the nonprofit-profit distinction recast the organizational DNA of the media arts center, even though many continued to thrive well past the decade.

Media centers today face many challenges. Annual conferences hosted by the Alliance (formerly National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture, or NAMAC) discuss and debate the challenges facing media centers, often focusing on issues of new technology, fund-raising, audience creation, and organizational management. In recent years, the historical model of a not-for-profit ecosystem, in which centers operate in a coordinated network that is mutually supportive of each organization within the field, has been replaced by a contemporary understanding of the media center. In the contemporary view, the center exists within and as an oceanic wave, where multiple forces push and pull the center without controlling its destiny. The wider field, envisioned as the opaque ocean itself, is defined by instability, constant change, precarity and indeterminacy. The media arts center has a largely defensive posture toward the seismic changes wrought by new technology and the entertainment industry. The media art center is no longer an enemy of the entertainment industry, but rather is a training ground for it. The original subject of the media arts center – the filmmaker, the independent artist— has been supplanted by the flexible model of the “creative” or the “maker,” and few centers see themselves as spaces for artists primarily. In various diagrams and models shared at these conferences, the contemporary media center appears without any reference to other centers; the original values of interconnection, mutual support, and shared information have been minimized as intrinsic features of sustainability. As a result, O’Grady’s McLuhanite dream of a global village of centers has fallen away, and the robust national network of the 1970s and 1980s has been replaced by the lopsided organizational archipelago that existed

before media arts centers appeared in the 1970s. The coastal cities and the cinematic capitals have once again assumed dominance as the places where people make and consume art.

Is there a still place for regional media arts centers, in a world of YouTube and digital technology, increasing privatization and scarce resources? Pittsburgh artists seem to think so.

Reflecting on the contemporary situation of independent cinema, Ahwesh observes, “It’s important to note, especially in our current political climate, the incredible importance that [Pittsburgh] Filmmakers held as an equipment-access cooperative and a hub for local filmmakers. It was also a gathering place for creative exchange and discussion.”⁷¹⁵ Beroes affirms that Pittsburgh Filmmakers and the Carnegie Museum of Art are both “vital to democracy,” providing communal venues to develop ideas and artforms that are not accepted in the commercial sphere.⁷¹⁶ Bob Gaylor, the Executive Director of Pittsburgh Filmmakers in the early 1970s, recalls about the media infrastructure: “It was a formative environment where we worked on our art, met other artists and saw their work, and met and saw the work of artists of historical significance (acknowledged or not).”⁷¹⁷ Victor Grauer, contemplating the altered status of media centers in the present and future, notes “I think an effort should be made to connect with resources in such a way that would open creative members of the Pittsburgh community to technology usually limited to industry and university insiders...I see no point in attempting to revive the old PFMI model, which is not only outdated, but no longer very interesting. To move forward we need to find ways to get inspired and inspire others to join us in building something Truly Great (to borrow a phrase from

⁷¹⁵ Peggy Ahwesh, “Bored in Pittsburgh: The Obscure Film That Immortalized 1980s Punk,” *Carnegie Museum of Art Storyboard* (January 31, 2017): <https://blog.cmoa.org/2017/01/bored-in-pittsburgh-the-obscure-film-that-immortalized-1980s-punk/>.

⁷¹⁶ Personal interview with Stephanie Beroes, June 6, 2016.

⁷¹⁷ Personal interview with Robert Gaylor, July 11, 2018.

Steve Jobs).”⁷¹⁸ Pittsburgh filmmakers have very different, sometimes conflicting ideas of how to use media arts centers, but they all affirm the need to serve artists as well as adapt to the realities of the current environment. They see the vital role played by spaces that are designed to be accessible to the many, and not just the privileged few.

To support media arts centers as vital sites of democratic access, new artwork, the exchange of ideas, and technical training, it is essential to continue studying nonprofit film, and media art centers, because the independent film community does not exist as it once did. Contemporary studies have tracked features of the altered landscape, finding silver linings amid many dangers. As scholars have found, the loss of public funds, the ever-changing technological environment, the expanding range of entertainment choices and fickle audience interest in programming, have meant that independent artists are forced to realize that they have more in common with each other, and with for-profit entities, than they might want to admit. The current paradigm of unfettered privatization has led to new organizational opportunities as well. Media arts centers are arguably more reliant on cooperation than before. The lack of funds has given way to new partnerships with universities and other host sites that can be used to grow and enrich the audience for media arts center exhibitions and educational programming. Similarly, a historical perspective on the media art center movement, its achievements and its failures, can help professionals in the field. The careers of individuals like Dixon offer important blue prints for replicating success, and their philosophical principles should be integrated into the missions of media arts centers, to balance out the desires of business-minded corporate leaders who populate the board of directors and exercise top-down control.

⁷¹⁸ Personal interview with Victor Grauer, July 11, 2018.

It is the responsibility of historians to look back on the communities from this era, to show how they functioned and to separate the failures, the missteps from the values and the practices that worked and which, collectively, inspired a regeneration of film and moving-image art. Following in Dixon's footsteps, advocates for independent media must argue for enhanced public and philanthropic support of the arts; for the creation of new media that document our distinct realities and teach us about the struggle of ordinary people; and for increasing art access to disenfranchised populations. Like the film portraits from this time, our institutional memory of the film scene, its key figures and accomplishments, form a bulwark against forgetting. And it is by returning to the past that we might imagine a better, more co-operative future.

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