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Social Media:
The News in Experimental Film, Video Art, and Performance after 1960

By

Erica Levin

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Film and Media Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Kaja Silverman, Chair
Professor Jeffrey Skoller
Professor Anne M. Wagner

Fall 2014

Social Media:
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by Erica Levin

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Media Studies

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In 1974 artist and filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek identified the rise of what he called "a new social media consciousness." This dissertation, *Social Media: The News in Experimental Film, Video Art, and Performance After 1960*, begins with VanDerBeek's statement in order to excavate a history of social media that predates the online platforms that have been associated with that phrase since the mid 1990s. It traces the development of new forms of filmic montage and media appropriation in VanDerBeek's multi-channel "information concerts," Bruce Conner's found footage films, and Carolee Schneemann's "kinetic theater." Taken together, these examples reveal the emergence of a network imaginary bound up with television's increasing importance as a source of daily news. Recognizing television's unprecedented capacity to bring national audiences together, particularly during moments of political crisis and violence, the artist-filmmakers at the center of this study began to question how it might operate differently, and in doing so articulate alternatives to the social form of the mass audience. Each chapter looks at works that cull news images from various sources and employ experimental forms of montage to imagine networked relations that pose a challenge to broadcast's modes of address. Feeling out the complexities of life lived in and through social media, this work offers a surprisingly prescient sense of the way networks both enliven and delimit social life.

The figures at the center of this study—VanDerBeek, Conner, and Schneemann—each invest cybernetic feedback with the capacity to redefine social life. A pattern emerges in the case studies I consider: a prevailing concern with formal relations configured through networked feedback—on screen, on stage between performers, or in some instances between members of the audience—starts to falter once historically embedded forms of social difference come to the fore in works that respond to the pressing news events of the day: assassinations, street protests, and war. As a result the capacity of feedback to fully mediate antagonism begins to break down. Social conflict appears as something that cannot be adequately addressed by recourse to feedback or form alone. In these moments, tension arises between gestures that figure social life primarily through physical arrangements between bodies and directives for their interactions, and social life defined by historically bound contradictions, conflicts, and codes. This work invites us to reconsider what it means to understand media as social, which is to say, as something that inflects our experience and understanding of social life in profound and affecting ways.

For DJM

It can be done.

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Introduction
Social Media

In 1974 at *Open Circuits*, a conference on the future of television sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art, the artist and filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek identified a "new social media consciousness" in the air. He told his audience, "I believe that artists today are seeking a new social aesthetic, on a new social scale of art and communication." To underline the point, he recalled that the biggest news event of the previous year, Princess Anne's wedding, had been broadcast live to an audience of 500 million viewers, nearly 1/7 of the world's population. For VanDerBeek, the magnitude of this audience signaled the arrival of "new orders of social forms."[1]

In the decade preceding these remarks, VanDerBeek and a number of his contemporaries, among them Anthony McCall, Bruce Conner and Carolee Schneemann, had started to work with news media (newsreels, radio bulletins, newsprint, etc.) as found material in films and live performances incorporating moving images. Each of these figures achieved some measure of recognition as an artist and avant-garde filmmaker in the 1960s and early 70s, while departing from the dominant aesthetic modalities of the day; which is to say, none can be easily classified as a pop artist or minimalist. While their individual styles diverge, they share an attraction to montage, particularly in its capacity to suggest new collective experiences, or what VanDerBeek calls, "social forms." The works that are the focus of this study can be understood in some sense to have grown out of experiences shaped by television, but also belong to a longer history of avant-garde aesthetics. They rework strategies of montage that first developed in the interwar period including those found in the early Soviet cinema of Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, as well as in the cut up collages of John Heartfield and Hannah Hoch. The distinctly personal montage aesthetics of Joseph Cornell's table-top assemblages and found footage film *Rose Hobart* (1936) provided another point of departure for this generation of younger artists.[2] Their work also developed alongside the rise of video art, which in its early years often left montage aside by necessity to focus on the effects of duration and feedback, making the most of the technical limitations of this newly available medium.

Video art's intimate relationship to television is well established, most memorably

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[1] VanDerBeek's presentation at *Open Circuits* was later published as part of the conference proceedings. Stan VanDerBeek, "Social Imagistics" in *The New Television: A Public/Private Art,* eds. Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 58-63.

[2] Schneemann knew Cornell personally and recalls their friendship in *Moon in a Tree*, first performed in New York on March 20, 1976 at Anthology Film Archives, and again at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis on January 23, 1979. See Joanna Roche, "Performing Memory in Moon in a Tree: Carolee Schneemann Recollects Joseph Cornell," *Art Journal*. Winter 2001, Vol. 60 Issue 4, pp. 6-15. Kevin Hatch notes that Conner claimed not to have seen Cornell's *Rose Hobart* until the late 1960s, but he may have known of its existence through his close friends Larry Jordan and Stan Brakhage, both of whom worked with Cornell directly. See Kevin Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), p. 312. Conner's assemblages were often compared to Cornell's, and both artists were included in the Museum of Modern Art's landmark exhibition, The Art of Assemblage in 1961.

by the critic David Antin, who described it in familial terms, identifying television as video art's "frightful parent."[3] Less often remembered are the other ways television inflected an emerging and expanded field of moving image production. This study focuses not on television in general, but on its growing significance as an important source of daily news, which was one of the most effective ways it secured its prominent place in the media culture at large. As television gained new ground as a reliable news outlet, older news formats such as newsreel and newsprint yielded material for new forms of montage, live film performance, and multiple screen projection.[4] These new filmic forms explored structures of exchange and experiences of connectivity that were made possible, but also constrained, by the unidirectionality of television's mass address. Calling attention to the often untidy, emotional, and bodily dimensions of lived social life within media saturated environments, VanDerBeek and his peers threw the conventions of television news into sharp relief and moved toward a new conception of media as social. Said another way, their work was concerned less with the self-reflexivity of their chosen media than with terms by which media coordinate social relations and meaning.

VanDerBeek could not have predicted in 1974 that "social media" would in time come to serve as an umbrella term for a host of networked media platforms: photo and video sharing applications, bookmarking boards, live streaming, news posting networks, user-generated wikis, and so on. This dissertation begins with his early use of this phrase to uncover an idea of social media with a longer and more varied history than the one claimed for it by the corporate executives and entrepreneurs of Silicon Valley who associate it with the development of instant messaging platforms and the online communities in the 1990s.[5] VanDerBeek's conception of "a new social media consciousness" in 1974 poses a challenge to these received histories of social media. It provides a much-needed opportunity to explore how that term has come to implicitly define the social, begging the question of what it means, has meant, and could mean to describe media as social. At the same time it points to contradictory tendencies, tensions, and conflicts internal to the idea of social media that might otherwise recede from view.

*

[3] David Antin, "Television: Video's Frightful Parent," *Artforum* (December 1975) pp. 36-45.

[4] In 1964, a poll found that for the first time more respondents named television than newspapers as their primary source of news. See David Randall Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers 1945-1965* (Westport, CT: Praegar Publishers, 2006), p. 127.

[5] Former AOL executives date the emergence of the term to the early 1990s, associating it with the development of online communities and communication platforms such as iVillage and AOL Instant Messenger. See Jeff Bercovici, "Who Coined Social Media? Web Pioneers Compete for Credit," Forbes.com, December 9, 2010. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbercovici/2010/12/09/who-coined-social-media-web-pioneers-compete-for-credit/> Michael Mandiberg links the term "social media" to concepts that have played a significant role in the conceptualization of these platforms in both corporate and scholarly contexts, including: "user-generated content," "convergence culture," "participatory media," "Web 2.0," each placing different emphasis on platform, process, and content production. "Introduction," *The Social Media Reader* ed. Michael Mandiberg (New York: New York University Press, 2012), pp. 1-8.

Anthony McCall's installation *Circulation Figures* (1972/2011) offers an opportunity to revisit a media experiment from the early 1970s in light of the practices that define contemporary social media [Figure 1]. Entering into the enclosed gallery where McCall staged the work in 2011, the viewer makes her way through a sea of crumpled newspaper. There, caught between two mirrors on facing walls she finds a large projection showing documentation of an action staged by McCall in 1972 within a similar space.[6] On screen, a group of ragtag figures make their way through masses of crumpled newspaper, their movements reflected and refracted endlessly by the large mirrors on both sides. Each participant holds some kind of camera, moving or still, and films or photographs someone else doing the same. The material recorded during the action serves as the documentation of the piece. There is no singular, stable, external view of the event. Everyone involved pursues someone or another with the awareness that they may also be recorded in turn. If pursued, each participant has the option to engage or turn away in pursuit of someone else. McCall explains,

> In today's installation the mirrors also incorporate and replicate the new visitors, combining them with the historical footage. The circle is closed — or perhaps opened — by the fact that many visitors pull out their phones and cameras to record themselves and their companions filming within the piece; and some email those images; and so it continues.[7]

Upon staging the work in 2011, it became clear to McCall that people would make use of cell phones inside his installation to take pictures of themselves and their friends to share online, by email, or even more likely, through popular social networks and photo sharing platforms.[8]

In *Circulation Figures* we glimpse a microcosm of social relationships.[9] The participants or "figures" who appear on screen are McCall's friends, other filmmakers and artists, including Carolee Schneemann, his partner at the time.[10] In an interview with Yanyan Huang, McCall reflects, "I see myself and old friends across a four decade divide. The newspapers—seen strewn across the floor in the original movie footage as well as on the floor of the installation in the present do, if anything, feel like a continuity,

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[6] In 2001, McCall undertook the task of editing all the raw material produced during the original action. Ten years later, in 2011, he began to show the 35 minute looped video documentation in a space that recreated the original conditions of its production: a room strewn with newspapers and multiplied as a mise en abyme by facing mirrors on two sides.

[7] Interview with Yanyan Huang, hauteliving.com July 9, 2012 <http://www.hauteliving.com/2012/07/haut-interview-with-artist-anthony-mccall/299268/>

[8] The original performance-action took place at the London Polytechnic Film School in 1972, but wasn't exhibited as *Circulation Figures* until 2011.

[9] While a student in London, McCall became involved with a small group of filmmakers who were increasingly interested in the relationships organized by the cinematic apparatus itself. He was an important participant in the London Filmmaker's Co-op. See Margaret Dickinson, *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film Making in Britain, 1945-90* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

[10] Importantly, this small world intersected with other circles of experimental filmmakers, such as those who participated in the Filmmaker's Co-op in New York.

where visually at least, little seems to have changed."[11] No doubt much *has* changed in the time since it was filmed; the work's title cannot help but betray that fact.[12] The title *Circulation Figures* plays on the relationship between bodies (figures) and the metrics by which the distribution of news is measured for the sake of selling advertising. However similar these two rooms separated by forty years may appear, newspapers have undergone a profound transformation in the time that has passed since the work was first staged. McCall's restaging of *Circulation Figures* draws out the tension between the everyday banality of news and the changing media ecologies we inhabit, tension that inflects the way we read the relationships that unfold between the figures that appear on screen.

This shifting media ecology is apparent to anyone who has picked up a newspaper and noticed that the old heft has gone out of its folded pages. Television and the Internet have contributed to the dwindling "circulation figures" that keep newspapers in print. Reporting has been impacted by widespread consolidation within the news industry and a diminished market for long form investigative journalism in the daily press. Efforts to compete with online entertainment "news" have cut into resources for reporting on local politics and events. Simultaneously, the local emphasis on the small events of everyday life reported as personal updates in newsfeeds through social media platforms online lures eyes away from the printed page. News is consumed in greater quantities than ever before, but now, it is typically found online, and often on the go, by way of mobile displays that provide access to "news feeds" full of updates and links posted by friends.[13]

Even as particular gestures and bodies are set off against a grey shifting field of crumpled newsprint in *Circulation Figures*, this media/medium/material proves an unstable ground. It not only gets tangled up between the feet, it is messy. It threatens to sully and stain. It has a smell and a unique and familiar tactility. The viewer surrounded by tattered newspapers, senses in a visceral way how news ages, not only as narrative, but also as material. The sheer volume of newsprint in McCall's installation registers primarily as background noise. At the same time, the figures in its midst on screen are constantly on the verge of disappearing. The angle and position of the camera shifts wildly without obeying the rules of continuity editing. There is no stable perspective on the action, no way to secure the figure/ground relationship the title of the work proposes.

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[11] Interview with Huang.

[12] Newspapers in this work might function as another "carrier for time," Anne Wagner's phrase for the role light plays in McCall's more well known projected light installations such as *Line Describing a Cone* (1973). Notably, the use of newspapers to create an environment is anomalous in McCall's installation work. Perhaps newsprint could not sufficiently mark time as an abstraction divorced from what Wagner describes as "its fundamental materialization in phenomena that come and go." If so, then one can see how light itself would prove a better medium for staging the kind of interactions in the gallery that he later pursed. Anne Wagner, "Time Lines: On the Drawings of Anthony McCall," presented at the School of the Visual Arts on February 14, 2012. <http://vimeo.com/41863743>

[13] A Gallup poll published on July 8, 2013 shows that most Americans still rely on television as their primary source for news (55%). The Internet is the source of news for 21% of Americans. 9% of Americans report newspapers or other print materials as their main source, followed by radio at 6%. See Lydia Saad, "TV Is Americans Main Source of News" www.gallup.com <http://www.gallup.com/poll/163412/americans-main-source-news.aspx>

The screen sometimes pulses with lens flares or lingers over a still frame. At other moments, unsteady footage brings out the surprising tactility of encounters mediated by the camera. Certain participants catch the eye briefly, their bodies betraying signs of indecision about where to turn or how to maneuver through the space. Unsure about where to stand or sit while watching this jerky footage in a chaotic space devoid of benches or chairs, the viewer's own sense of weight and physical bearing is activated, echoing the self-consciousness of the figures on screen. All the while, mirrors tempt the gaze away from the documented action. A viewer may glimpse herself awkwardly assembled among other viewers before the screen, caught in the infinite regress of the double reflection. Camera phone at the ready, she might even feel the urge to steady herself by making her own record of the scene before heading to the exit.[14]

Circulation Figures puts pressure on abstract notions of "the media" or "the social." The materiality of the newspapers cuts against the tendency to figure the media as a vague totality. At the same time, spread out across a space echoed endlessly by mirrors, newspapers produce an utterly totalized illusory extension of space that is more than material. Within such a space, actions also take on a doubled status—they are present, proximate, and at the same time multiplied as pure image. For McCall, "the figures recorded in 1972, circling round one another and assiduously producing images only of themselves, looked, then, like some kind of hallucination." That strangeness reads differently with time: "re-visited today (in the era of the smartphone camera and social media)" he concludes, "those same figures, acting the way they do, seem almost familiar."[15]

Like *Circulation Figures*, this dissertation revisits "hallucinatory" filmic encounters from late 1960s and 1970s that now seem familiar, or *almost* familiar, in light of contemporary forms of social media. The new social media consciousness identified by VanDerBeek appears in a work like *Circulation Figures* as an emphasis on the bodily dimensions of social life, even as it begins to imagine networked forms of experience and affiliation that no longer depend on immediate physical proximity. *Circulation Figures* invites questions that could be put to any of the other experimental films, performances, and videos I discuss in the chapters to follow: What role is news called upon to play in this work? What are we to make of the emphasis on its materiality? How do bodies inhabit or move within environments pervaded by news? What does this bodily movement throw into relief about the appearance of social life at a particular historical moment? I have described *Circulation Figures* as a social world in miniature, but what makes that fact appear on the screen?[16] Are some actions or relationships inherently

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[14] Evidence of this phenomenon can be found posted on online. For example, a blogger at *Limitless Pulse* posted one such image on March 16th, 2013. <http://limitlesspulse.com/anthony-mccall-at-sean-kelly/>

[15] McCall's exhibition "Face to Face" (which included *Circulation Figures*) was installed at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City from February 16 through March 23, 2013. McCall's statement comes from the Gallery's press release. <http://www.skny.com/exhibitions/2013-02-16_anthony-mccall/pressrelease/>

[16] One dimension of the increased aesthetic attention to the structures and lived experiences of social life must be understood as having to do with the difficulties of making and showing experimental moving images without established institutional support. This problem extended beyond the American context and opened up important connections and networks beyond its

social? Or does that term only apply to the particulars, of a gesture for example, or the quality of how a certain body reacts to a situation that involves others? When these actions or details are amassed what do they add up to or perhaps fail to generate?

These questions should remind us how spectacularized bodies have come to function as the locus of social dissent, and nowhere more vividly in 1972 than on the nightly television news. Television had by that time more than proven its capacity to animate feelings of social connectedness and belonging or a lack thereof. Television news had become a powerful mechanism of political containment and liberal consensus, even as it provided new means for agitating against the prevailing social order. While commercial programming promoted consumerism and status quo values, the growing significance of network television news was yoked to moments of social upheaval and crisis, often conveyed through images of bodily violence.[17] Moments of crisis amplified by television coverage registered challenges to the status quo and fueled further eruptions of social unrest. At the same time, network news outlets participated in efforts to reinforce or restore a sense of order through the coverage of carefully planned media

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borders. In order to make, distribute, and screen their work, avant-garde, underground, and experimental filmmakers increasingly recognized they would have to self-organize and create supportive structures, spaces, and associations that did not yet exist. This entailed working through conflicts, facing financial uncertainty, and finding ways to claim a space for work that might otherwise disappear from view. Incredible resourcefulness was demanded of anyone invested in this project and it yielded many organizations and informal networks of exchange that have had a lasting influence on experimental filmmaking and media production. The friendships, strong alliances, and even bitter disagreements born of these efforts provide a concrete and meaningful social context for the explosion of aesthetic experimentation that is my focus here. Scott MacDonald's interviews with filmmakers and his publication of primary materials from institutions such as Canyon Cinema and Cinema 16 have helped to bring these histories to light. See Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema,* Volumes 1-5 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988-2006); *Canyon Cinema The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); and *Cinema 16: Documents Toward History Of Film Society,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010). Another excellent resource has been provided by the curators of the Pacific Film Archive, Steve Anker, Kathy Geritz, Steve Seid (editors), *Radical Light Alternative Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). These collections of interviews and primary sources supplement important histories of avant-garde cinema provided by A.L. Rees, *A* History of Experimental Film and Video (London: British Film Institute, 1999); Malcolm LeGrice, *Abstract Film and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1977); and David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[17] In the American context which is my focus, there are numerous examples: the police brutality put on view at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, the shootings at Kent State in 1970, or the violence that took place on the Edmund Pettus Bridge over the Alabama River in 1965 caught on film and broadcast on the nightly news. See Andrew Uroskie "The Past inside the Present: Selma Last Year (1966) at Lincoln Center" in *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Post War Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 202-231 for an insightful discussion of Ken Dewey's *Selma Last Year*, a work that used this footage and other images recording during the Civil Rights marches that followed. His work provides another example of the new social media practices I identify with VanDerBeek's statement.

events, such as the aforementioned royal wedding or the state funeral for President Kennedy, the subject of my second chapter.[18]

The films, broadcasts, and performances at the heart of this study emphasize reciprocal, changeable, and non-hierarchical relational structures and forms of unruly or indeterminate signification, offering a dramatic counter-point to the conventions that govern television network news, such as the direct address of the news anchor or his evocation of neutrality and balance. Negotiating the messy banalities and surprising affective intensities of the news, this work underscores the increased pressure placed on the body to convey the meaning of social conflict.

With this point in mind, we can see how the use of found news materials by McCall, Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek marks the junction of two overlapping, but distinct ways of understanding the social dimensions of media. One defines social in terms of behavioral codes and abstract structures by emphasizing protocols for action (as in *Circulation Figures*). The other relates the term social to states of belonging and conflict that define society at large. The latter comes to the fore in works that shift the emphasis away from the mediation of news in general, toward social tensions provoked by reports of specific events. The limits of attending to the formal qualities that define relations between individuals (be they on screen, on stage, or within the audience) come into view when social conflict appears as something that cannot be adequately addressed by recourse to form alone. In these moments, tension arises between gestures that figure social life primarily through physical arrangements between bodies and directives for their interactions, and social life defined by historically bound contradictions, conflicts, and codes.

By looking closely at how media became social before the rise of contemporary social media platforms, I hope to address the unexplored potential and built-in limitations of that powerful idea in our own moment. The filmmaker-artists at the center of this dissertation find ways to reimagine the relational structures and forms set off or thrown into relief by the daily experience of the news in its banality, but also in moments of crisis precipitated by violence and war. Their experiments with film form challenge the centralized, hierarchical formats of commercial television news by developing arrangements structured instead by non-hierarchical, mutual forms of exchange. This pursuit of alternatives to the formal language of commercial television required imagining new, networked social structures and forms of affiliation that were mediated, but never entirely disembodied. Attentive to what it might feel like to inhabit or participate in such networks, these works call attention to the social significance of bodily affect and vulnerability, particularly during moments of political conflict or crisis.

To conclude, the pre-history (or even counter-history) of contemporary social media I offer here tracks the emergence of networked forms within an expanded field of post-war aesthetic practice. New forms of moving image collage and performance, born

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[18] The social function of this event was evident even to its primary participants. In an interview with the BCC, Captain Phillips (Princess Anne's husband to be) remarked that the overwhelming interest in the event "reflects a little bit the state of the world at the moment, in that every day people pick up the paper and read about some disaster or some new scandal, and I think they are really rather relieved to read about something that is genuinely happy and good." Cited in Charles F. Hunting, "A Happy Marriage—Only for a Princess?" *The Plain Truth*, March 1974, p. 2.

of the exploration of alternatives to the conventions of television in general and television news even more specifically, participated in a broad rethinking of aesthetic traditions organized under the sign of "medium." This study of the emergence of social media as an idea exploits the slippage between media as the plural of medium and media as it is used to designate the socio-technical complex we call "the media," a move, I want to suggest, that many experimental filmmaker-artists were themselves making during the 1960s. During this period new modes of staging moving images began to call forth descriptive terms like "multimedia," "intermedia," and "expanded cinema."[19] At the same time, profound social upheavals and a rising tide of political violence made it increasingly difficult to disentangle questions of media from questions of social significance. The appearance of the news in experiments with "multiple" or "expanded" media raises questions about how new social relations take form. Pursuing these questions in the chapters to follow, I show how networked media came to be understood as social, not simply as a function of technological change, but through an imaginary animated by political crisis and aesthetic experimentation with new forms of filmic montage.

[19] Dick Higgins used the term "intermedia" to describe work that crossed the divide between multiple disciplines in "Intermedia," *Something Else Newsletter* 1, 1966. For Stan VanDerBeek, "expanded cinema" named the changes networked culture would bring to moving images. See "Culture: Intercom and Expanded Cinema: A Proposal and Manifesto." *The Tulane Drama Review* 11, No. 1, Autumn 1966. Gene Youngblood's book *Expanded Cinema*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970) also helped popularize the term. For a recent exposition on expanded cinema's disruption of ontological approaches to medium-specificity see Andrew Uroskie, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014), pp. 9-15.

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Chapter 1
Open Circuits

Stan VanDerBeek first spoke of a "new social media consciousness" in 1974 at the Museum of Modern Art as part of Open Circuits, a conference convened to discuss "the future of television." The meeting provided an occasion to reflect on the proliferation of artist and activist-produced video work since the late 1960s. The proceedings, which were later published in a volume entitled *The New Television* (1977), offer a useful snapshot of the prevailing preoccupations of the period. A number of the themes that emerged during Open Circuits also come to the fore in the case studies at the center of this study: challenges to unidirectional forms of address (epitomized most vividly in the figure of the news anchor, as I will argue) by new formal structures of networked feedback, a related consideration of the homeostatic social functions of media, and finally the role of symbolic images and social metaphors in that process. The focus of Open Circuits was primarily on video. Apart from VanDerBeek (who spoke about works he made for broadcast) the filmic work of Conner and Schneemann and their peers in the avant-garde filmmaking community went largely unacknowledged.[1] One of the aims of this study is to show how filmmakers exploring expanded and performative modes of production anticipated the concerns at issue during Open Circuits even before video became widely available.

Broadcast television's unidirectional mode of address was the subject of several presentations at Open Circuits. Vilem Flusser, for example, encouraged the audience to imagine a TV broadcast system "rendered more dialogical," open to "all the participants that make up present open systems like the telephone, thus transforming television from a broadcasting system into a true network."[2] Flusser, like a number of other conference attendees, including VanDerBeek, framed the potential social transformation that would result from a restructuring of television along these lines in language drawn directly from Marshall McLuhan. Flusser spoke of a "cosmic village" or what he also called "a true polis" in which "participants linked intellectually and existentially" would "elaborate new epistemological, ethical, and esthetic information."[3] Not everyone shared Flusser's enthusiasm for these McLuhanisms, but many agreed that bringing about this transformation in the structure of television's form would require political, and not simply technological change.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger offered a useful corrective to Flusser's assessment of this political situation. Flusser assumed the structure of television was determined by ruling class interests. Enzensberger challenged Flusser's implicit account of top-down repressive power by arguing that television is better described as a "servo-mechanism" maintaining social homeostasis that both expresses and contains contradictions that arise

[1] Hollis Frampton attended as the lone representative of this larger community. See his remarks, "The Withering Away of the State of the Art" in *The New Television*, pp. 24-35.
[2] Vilem Flusser, "Two Approaches to the Phenomenon, Television" in *The New Television*, p. 247.
[3] Ibid.

within the ruling class.[4] One of the most significant unifying threads of this study regards the way the exploration of network forms and related feedback mechanisms interrogates the homeostatic social function of television Enzensberger identifies. I am interested in the ambivalent tone these interrogations often assume. I find in each of the works I analyze moments where history, otherness, and unruly bodies return unexpectedly, throwing the homeostatic mechanisms of feedback into relief and often into crisis. This phenomenon, which I will track through the chapters that follow brings me to the third theme of Open Circuits relevant to this study, that of symbolic meaning.

The New Television concludes with remarks by John McHale, a member of the Independent Group (IG) in London, as well as a sociologist and futurologist with close ties to Buckminster Fuller. Rather than focusing on television in its current form, he anticipates "telefutures," emphasizing the development of electronic systems for the processing and transmission of information going forward.[5] McHale's account of television's social function differs significantly from the one endorsed by Enzensberger. (McHale's comments also echo statements by VanDerBeek that I will examine in depth in chapter four). Where Enzensberger focuses on the way television manages conflicts internal to the ruling class, McHale focuses on its role in managing individual (and more broadly human) anxieties and tensions generated by the rapidly changing conditions of everyday life. For him, the prime characteristics of such systems are their "swift, low cost dissemination of symbolic messages."[6]

McHale argues that human society is becoming more dependent on shared symbols. In his view, one of the prime social roles of television is to provide "the rich profusion of symbolic images and social metaphors which enable people to adapt to, and control, the frequency of changes in the human condition."[7] McHale identifies a special species of symbol, carriers of affect that organize social structures in the information age, which he calls "expendable ikons."[8] He defines this class of image as "secular […] but mytho-poetic in function."[9] The newscaster, along with "feature players" and "commercial characters," are his prime examples. These figures serve a social function, generating stability and ritualized predictability on television—a need which increases as social consensus declines.

The works I take up make use of news materials, but largely dispense with the organizing function of the news anchor as an "ikon." The new unruly forms of media assemblage found in Conner's densely edited found footage films, Schneemann's performances staged among projected images and urban debris including crumpled newspapers, and VanDerBeek's experiments with live multi-channel production displace the centrality of this figure. In these works, meaning gets distributed throughout a networked audience, which in some cases is able to respond and change the work as it

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[4] "On balance, television thus works as a servo-mechanism increasing the overall stability of a given social system." Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Television and the Politics of Liberation" in *The New Television*, p. 250.
[5] John McHale, "Telefutures: Prospective Observations" in *The New Television*, pp. 262-277.
[6] Ibid., 263
[7] Ibid., 276.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

unfolds. At the same time, these works look for ways to maintain or reimagine the social function McHale associates with the image as icon.

Though he does not make the point explicitly, there is a historical dimension to McHale's argument, in that shared symbols become even more important in a society where other forms of shared experience and identification, for example class solidarity, take on relatively less importance. McHale's remarks offer a counterpoint to what Herbert Marcuse had described as the "integration" of industrial society only a decade before. In Marcuse's account of the period following the Second World War, new forms of administered efficiency and higher standards of living start to produce a more stable status quo, while antagonisms delineated along class lines become increasingly muted by the compromised position of organized labor and the rise of consumer culture.[10] This analysis of the profound changes taking place within the post-war era gained significant traction in the years following the publication of Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* in 1964, especially among students, radicals, and other agents of dissent.[11] Often understood to underpin the emergence of the New Left, Marcuse's account of the retrenchment of the status quo, and with it the suppression of class-bound antagonisms in the boom years following the war suggests why it felt necessary to find ways to re-describe social relationships and the forces that drive social change—in other words, why something like a "new" social media consciousness might begin to emerge at this moment.

In 1964 Marcuse pointed to the rise of a "one-dimensional" society; ten years on, McHale saw signs of the erosion of consensus taking hold within an information society, noting that audiences were becoming highly diversified, mirroring a shift toward greater

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[10] "At its origins in the first half of the nineteenth century, when it elaborated the first concepts of the alternatives, the critique of industrial society attained concreteness in a historical mediation between theory and practice, values and facts, needs and goals. This historical mediation occurred in the consciousness and in the political action of the two great classes which faced each other in the society: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In the Capitalist world, they are still the basic classes. However, the capitalist development has altered the structure and function of these two classes in such a way that they no longer appear to be agents of historical transformation. An overriding interest in the preservation and improvement of the institutional status quo unites the former antagonists in the most advanced areas of contemporary society." Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 9. There are many other significantly more fine grained analyses of the ongoing struggles of the working class in American politics than the account offered in Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*. See for example of Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1986). I am interested less in the validity of Marcuse's arguments, than in their influence and widespread appeal.

[11] The American press regularly figured Marcuse as the "guru" of the student protest movement. See for example, Irving Kristol, "Improbable Guru of Surrealistic Politics," *Fortune,* July 1968, p. 191. For a revisionist account of Marcuse's influence on the New Left see Thomas Wheatland, "Marcuse's Mentors: American Counterculture and the Guru of the New Left" in *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009), pp. 296-233. In brief, Wheatland argues Marcuse was more of a prophet than a guru, concluding, "the New Left meant more to [Marcuse] than he meant to the New Left" (233).

social heterogeneity.[12] Under these conditions, social cohesion and shared social reality are, McHale claims, based increasingly on shared symbols. One way to frame the period under consideration in this dissertation is to locate it between the two descriptions of social life offered by Marcuse and McHale. As metaphors of one dimensionality give way to language of social heterogeneity, the signs and symbols that organize feelings of belonging and difference come under greater scrutiny and invite speculation about how the media they dominate might function otherwise.

Calls for reformulated accounts of society and its mechanisms for maintaining social order were pervasive throughout the decade of the 1960s. The aesthetic experiments that are the focus of this study developed alongside inquiries that expanded research in the social sciences, social theory, and social history. In the social sciences interest in interconnectedness and social networks led to investigations such as the famous "small world problem" explored by Stanley Milgram in 1967, which described social life in terms of links or "degrees of separation."[13] At the same time, the prevailing quantitative, empiricist, and positivist methods of social theory and social research were beginning to be challenged by a variety of new theoretical paradigms such as phenomenology, ethno-methodology, structuralism, Marxism, and feminism that aspired to analyze contemporary society and produce the critical tools for transforming it. Social history developed as the study of structures and processes privileged over and above actors and discrete events. As a field, social history defined new areas of research into gender relations, race, urbanization, family life, education, labor, leisure, migration, inequality, consumerism, and sexuality. The films, performances, and broadcasts that I

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[12] For an illuminating discussion of the period immediately following the one that is my focus, see Kris Cohen's dissertation, "Never Alone, Except for Now: Mediated Collectivity in Networks" (University of Chicago, 2010). Cohen tracks the rise of neo-liberalism since the early 1970s to describe new forms of intimacy experienced at distance. His analysis focuses on the increased overlay between what Foucault calls the management of "populations" and public life. He writes, "In a historical situation where electronic networks function as the medium of neoliberalism, and individuality is a privileged mode of personhood, mediated collectivity is forced to work across two previously distinct group forms, populations and publics." Read through this lens, McHale's remarks about heterogeneity point the way toward the historical situation Cohen describes where subjects are ever more insistently hailed as individuals, and fears about single-mindedness of mass society are replaced by a rhetoric that defines individuals as self-constituting entrepreneurs, diverse and free (in so far as they are always acting as free agents of the market).

[13] In 1967, American sociologist Stanley Milgram published a study in *Psychology Today* complete with web-like illustrations of social networks in order to address what he called "the small-world problem" or the idea that every living person is connected to every other through a certain number of links. To test this hypothesis, one that had previously been explored through fiction by the Hungarian author Frigyes Karinthy and mathematical models by Manfred Kochen, he randomly selected a sample set of participants living in the mid-West to send a package to a stranger in Massachusetts. The senders were supplied with the recipient's name, occupation, and general location and instructed to mail the package to anyone they knew on a first-name basis who they thought might know the target personally. If that person did not know the recipient, he or she was given the same directions, until the package could be delivered. On average, Milgram found it took between 5 and 7 connections for each delivery to be completed. Stanley Milgram, "The Small World Problem," *Psychology Today*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1967, pp. 61-67.

discuss in the pages that follow find their place at the edge of this larger field of investigation. Each tentatively engages with some variation or version of the idea of a network as a metaphor for social life, expressing varying degrees of uncertainty, enthusiasm, and consternation about what that might mean.

The network is arguably the most resonant and enduring formal and conceptual re-description of social life to emerge from the period that is my focus.[14] Pursuing a line of thought popularized by Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, I want to propose that network metaphors emerged in response to the attenuation of a distinct realm of experience defined as social. For Marcuse, "social" describes a domain of existence separate from the functions of the state or the market. He writes,

> The category "society" itself expressed the acute conflict between the social and political sphere - society as antagonistic to the state. Similarly, "individual," "class," "private," "family" denoted spheres and forces not yet integrated with the established conditions - spheres of tension and contradiction. With the growing integration of industrial society, these categories are losing their critical connotation, and tend to become descriptive, deceptive, or operational terms.[15]

Marcuse's account of the "integration of industrial society" tracks the erosion of social antagonism to political and economic ways of organizing human existence. His argument emphasizes the development of technological automations and management structures best described by the language of control, where the term refers to mechanisms that

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[14] Sociologists Jacques Ellul, Alain Tourraine, and Daniel Bell each provided important popular analyses of technological transformations of the economy and their social ramifications roughly contemporary with the works that are the focus of this study. The first sentence of Tourraine's text is a telling example of the reigning tone: "A new type of society is now being formed." See Alain Tourraine, *The Post-Industrial Society. Tomorrow's Social History: Classes, Conflicts and Culture in the Programmed Society* (New York: Random House, 1971). I am interested in how this claim was reformulated as a question in the works that are the focus of this study. Also see Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1964) and Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973). Manuel Castells's monumental study in three volumes, *The Rise of the Network Society,* provides one of the first significant attempts to account for the technological, social, and economic transformations that have taken place under the sign of the network. He writes, "as a historical trend, dominant functions and processes are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture." Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society Volume 1*, (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996) p. 469. Castells provides a relatively under-theorized account of what he calls the "end of the mass audience" which borrows liberally from Marshall McLuhan's highly techno-formalist account of media and perception. See Volume 1, Chapter 5, "The Culture of Real Virtuality: the Integration of Electronic Communication, the End of the Mass Audience, and the Rise of Interactive Networks." For another more recent account of network society written from a network analysis perspective see Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means for Business, Science, and Everyday Life* (New York: Plume, 2003).

[15] Marcuse, xlvi.

regulate the functioning of networked systems of production. The management discourse that emerged with the reorganization of production in the post-war era also provided a new way of talking about social life. New network metaphors signaled a flattening out that emphasized individuals and their specific connections to one another over and above collective identities. This change involved modes of production *and* consumption; rising consumerism, buoyed by post-war affluence animated the possibility that long-standing antagonisms could be ameliorated (though perhaps not eliminated) through a shared investment in dreams of the "good life" represented by greater access to new consumer goods. Marcuse's claims tell us as much about what American life felt like in 1964 as they do about why it might have felt that way. They also suggest why redescribing or even reconceptualizing social life at this moment felt so crucial.[16]

Under the conditions of technological and social integration outlined by Marcuse, mass media such as television gained an even greater capacity to shape the feelings of connectedness and belonging (or lack thereof) that define social life. As an organ of consumerism and status quo values, television provided sensible experiences that made it possible for its audience to register the shift to a "one dimensional" society described by Marcuse.[17] At the same time, moments of crisis amplified by television news coverage registered challenges to that status quo, functioning as an kind of cultural instrument for tracking social unrest, and increasingly a tool for perpetuating it through forms of spectacularized protest.

Television's role in the intensification and mitigation of social crisis spurred new ways of modeling social life in the works that are my focus here. Exploring alternatives to commercial television, VanDerBeek and his contemporaries imagined new, networked social structures and forms of affiliation. Each of the works that I take up in the chapter length studies that follow interrogates what it might feel like to inhabit or participate in such a network as a social being. These works reimagine the relational structures and forms thrown into relief by the daily experience of the news. Television served not only

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[16] Bruno Latour describes the social as an assemblage of elements or "trail of associations" rather than a unity that produces those associations. Bruno Latour, *Assembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 5. I am interested in the historical conditions that made it possible to reformulate a concept of the social along these lines and how it impacted the emergence of a "new social media consciousness" among experimental filmmakers.

[17] Marcuse focuses on the "functionalization" of language by the mainstream press, particularly in the use of phrases that attempt to reconcile contradictions. He highlights verbal constructions in which the "authoritarian character of this language" reveals itself within newspeak, what he calls the "telescoping and abridgement of syntax" that leads to the creation of "fixed images." He also describes forms of "false familiarity" attributed not only to modes of address, but also to constant repetition, which "relates itself to the recipient immediately." Familiarity established through personalized language has the effect of promoting the identification of individuals with the functions they perform. This "authoritarian identification of person and function" leaves little room for doubt or development. The immediacy and directness of the conventions of discourse popularized by the news media impede, in his view, conceptual thinking and thinking in general. For Marcuse, the one-dimensional thinking promoted by the media was already consonant with a reigning irrational rationality that promoted identification with society at large over and above individual and class-bound interests (Marcuse, 69-92).

as an organ of the integration of society described by Marcuse, but also as a site where violent political resistance to the status quo could erupt unexpectedly. Television's powerful capacity to convene mass audiences spurred ways of working with moving images that often implicitly challenged its centralized, hierarchical formats. These experiments explored formal arrangements structured by way of non-hierarchical modes of exchange, reciprocity, and participation.

"Network" has a different valence when it is used to modify "news media." The phrase "network news" evokes the image of a news anchor at his desk directly addressing the viewer at home. Though the major networks had been broadcasting news over the airwaves since the 1920s, first by way of radio, and later by way of television transmitter, the prominent cultural role of the network news anchor was only firmly established once the networks began broadcasting a full half hour program each evening in 1963.[18] At the same time, newsreels, which had provided moving images of the news to large audiences twice weekly for decades, were disappearing from the theaters.[19] The works by Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek at the center of this study each generate strange after-images of the primary form of moving images that television news replaced, namely the theatrical newsreel. The appearance of newsreels as found material in their work lends an important historical dimension to its attempts to reckon with era defining social and technological change.

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The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and National Broadcasting Company (NBC) were consolidated as radio networks in the 1920s, and found growing audiences during the years of the Great Depression.[20] It was in this context that news first began to

[18] In the fall of 1963 two of the major American television networks, The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) expanded from a fifteen-minute format to a half hour nightly news report. President Kennedy's assassination a few weeks later helped cement the cultural significance of the network news anchor, a subject to which I will return in the chapter on Bruce Conner's short film, REPORT.

[19] Newsreel providers in the United States began ceasing production in the 1950s. The March of Time ended production in 1951. Pathé News ran from 1910 to 1956, Paramount News from 1927 to 1957. Fox Movietone News ended production in 1963 just before the assassination of President Kennedy. Only Hearst Metrotone/News of the Day and Universal produced newsreels into the late 1960s. Both companies ended newsreel production in 1967.

[20] There were over 500 licensed radio stations operating in the United States by 1922. By the mid 1920s, stations began to join networks and broadcast programs simultaneously. The two major networks, NBC and CBS had importantly divergent origins, one as a means for increasing the market for radios and eventually television sets, the other as a means for increasing the reach of consumer advertising in general. NBC was created as a subsidiary by its parent company Radio Corporation of America (RCA) to help stimulate the market for the radios it manufactured. It originally encompassed two networks, one of which eventually became ABC. CBS, which began broadcasting as a network less than a year after NBC, was independently owned by the son of a cigar manufacturer keen to invest in radio as a new vehicle for consumer advertising. A fourth television network, DuMont, was also owned by a television equipment and set manufacturer. It

be broadcast over the airwaves. CBS radio began to build a news division in the early 1930s under the guidance of newspaper editors and reporters. As the war in Europe loomed, foreign correspondents started to play a new and significant role in the daily dissemination of timely news reports. Their contributions, foremost among them, those by Edward R. Murrow and his team, dubbed "Murrow's Boys" were widely seen as greatly improving the quality of radio journalism. This was the moment that broadcast newsmen went from reading stories straight from the newswires to reporting stories in depth.[21]

In 1941, both NBC and CBS started to license commercial TV stations. CBS immediately began broadcasting 15-minute news reports twice a day in New York City using footage contracted from the newsreel service Telenews. The company provided the network with news shot on 16mm footage, considered too low resolution for theatrical distribution, but well suited to television.[22] War temporarily delayed the development of television as a commercial enterprise and with it the growth of television newscasting. At the same time it lent newsreels new purpose and authority. They provided audiences a much-desired glimpse of the action unfolding across the frontlines and a strong, state-sanctioned message about the progress of the war effort. When the Second World War ended, there were fewer than 7,000 television sets in existence in the United States. By the late 1950s, a television could be found in over 90% of US homes.[23]

In the late 1940s, when the first nightly news television broadcasts began, they were relatively low budget productions, and a somewhat undervalued element of network-produced programming. Television news had neither the gravitas of radio journalism during the Second World War, nor the visual impact of newsreels shot on 35mm film. Nightly news at NBC began in February 1948 as a 10-minute weekday broadcast, *The Camel Newsreel Theater*. With few staff members and no correspondents or film crews until 1953, production values were low. The show was originally produced by an advertising agency working for R.J. Reynolds Tobacco. True to the program's title, the show featured Movietone newsreel footage. The host of the show, John Cameron Swayze, functioned much like a newsreel narrator; he read news copy over images that filled the frame. The following year the network took over the production of the broadcast, and the name of the program changed to *Camel News Caravan*. Swayze was now featured on camera sitting behind a large desk [Figure 1.1], and NBC News

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briefly broadcast news for a few years after World War II, but halted news programming in 1949 and eventually went out of business in 1955.

[21] The demands of television were at odds with the standards of broadcast journalism developed by Edward R. Murrow and his colleagues as radio correspondents during the Second World War. Murrow set a new standard, requiring extensive experience in print media for radio journalists. These requirements did not hold for early television newsmen where ease in front of the camera and an ability to connect with viewers was the top priority. On Edward R. Murrow and "Murrow's Boys" see Stanley Cloud and Lynne Olson, *The Murrow Boys: Pioneers on the Front Lines of Broadcast Journalism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996).

[22] 16mm equipment was light and easy to carry, and therefore not bound to the static camera set-ups characteristic of theatrical newsreels. Mike Conway, *The Origins of Television News in America: The Visualizers of CBS in the 1940s* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 271-4.

[23] James L. Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television, 1948-1961* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2007), p. 2.

cameramen became responsible for shooting all the news footage. Despite these changes, the program still took its cue from newsreel style reporting in the early years.[24] Much of the material provided by the Telenews service was still limited to "typical newsreel trivia" and often had to be cut out of the final broadcast script.[25]

Unlike NBC, CBS did not have a regular sponsor for its nightly news program. Douglas Edwards, the host of the show, spent most of the fifteen minute broadcast on camera, speaking directly to the audience [Figure 1.2]. In 1951 CBS Television began production on the news magazine series, *See It Now*, hosted by Murrow. It was through this magazine format, (and not the regular nightly newscasts) that the network began to develop standards for investigative reporting that would help cement its reputation and authority as a news source. Notably though, Murrow was never considered anchor material, and his provocative approach to charged issues such as McCarthyism and racial integration led to conflicts with network management, and eventually to the cancelation of *See it Now* in 1957.

The term "anchorman" first came into usage during the 1952 political conventions. The conventions were important events in the early days of televised news. A team of reporters worked the floor of the convention, but the strongest presence was needed in the booth where these reports were brought together. Walter Cronkite took on this role for CBS, which later put him in a position to replace Edwards as the face of the network in 1962.[26] Before Cronkite rose to prominence at CBS, Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, collectively known as the "Gold Dust Twins," were considered the first "stars" of nightly news. The two newsmen were paired together in 1956 for NBC's *Huntley-Brinkley Report*. Audiences responded to the dynamic that developed between the two figures, with Huntley playing the straight man to Brinkley's dry, sometimes, sarcastic wit. "One is glum the other quite twinkley," was the way Frank Sinatra and Milton Berle put it in a duet at President Kennedy's inauguration.[27] Later this formula was less appealing. Media historian, Barbara Matusow, puts it this way: the "flippancy, world-weariness and detachment" characteristic of the *Huntley-Brinkley Report* seemed sophisticated in the 1950s, but during the upheavals of 1960s, it was increasingly the "concern and reassurance" offered by Cronkite at CBS that audiences preferred.[28]

Extending the insights offered by Matusow, Margret Morse argues that in transition of the newsreader from a glorified announcer to what she calls the "supersubject" of the nightly news, television news came to depend on "a personality system employing virtual direct address to the viewer."[29] As objective forms of

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[24] Barbara Matusow supports this claim by citing the example of a broadcast from 1949 that includes footage of President Truman on Capital Hill. John Cameron Swayze tells the audience that president "always enjoys going back to the Senate, a place where he's spent so much time," but never discloses the purpose of the President's visit. Barbara Matusow, *The Evening Stars: The Making of The Network News Anchor* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), p. 58.
[25] Ibid., 57.
[26] Matusow, 65.
[27] Mary Ann Watson, *The Expanding Vista: American Television in the Kennedy Years* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 86.
[28] Matusow, 105. (Cronkite took over the top slot at CBS Evening News in 1962.)
[29] Margaret Morse, "News as Performance: The Image as Event" in *The Television Studies Reader* eds. Robert Clyde Allen and Annette Hill (New York: Psychology Press, 2004), p. 210.

storytelling inherited from print journalism were refined into subjective or discursive modes of address on television, news anchors came not only to present the news, but increasingly to seem responsible for its enunciation. The effect appears to be something owed to the persona of the person presenting the news, but is generated by a set of conventions that dictates his position vis-à-vis the appearance of other figures on screen. This performance of authority was highly gendered, with paternalism underlying the effect of authority and trust the networks sought to cultivate. The television anchor (in the first years of network news invariably male) addresses the viewer directly, while other speakers, such as commentators and reporters in the field address the viewer only by way of speaking to the anchor. The anchor speaks, moreover, as the representative of the network—which includes the larger collective of news professionals, producers, and crewmembers who together produce the news. He functions as a "symbolic representation of the institutional order as an integrated totality," Morse argues, a complex nexus that includes the news, the network, television as an institution, and the public interest.[30] These disparate roles are synthesized and naturalized by the news anchor, a process that depends on conventions developed and codified in the first decade of television newscasting, for instance, the use of temporal markers like today, yesterday, and tomorrow, the spatial arrangement of the news set, and the appearance of monitors on screen. Among these examples, Morse places special emphasis on the importance of the anchor's ability to appear convincingly sincere. Robert Stam, like Morse and Matusow, also emphasizes the significance of the anchor's performance of self, linking this sincerity-effect to a strict code "built on a series of negations, a willful non-acting which simultaneously implies the presence and the denial of normal human emotions and responses."[31] Again, gender norms underwrite the linking of authority to emotional restraint.

I have emphasized the shift away from newsreel conventions in early television news toward formats that put the anchor front and center because of the important role newsreel plays in the works by Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek that are the focus of this dissertation. Looking for ways to recast the potential (or probe the limitations) of television's collectivizing effects, they resist the direction taken by television as it broke from newsreel and developed its own formats and practices centered around the news anchor. They use news film footage, readily available at the moment, in part because it was on the verge of becoming obsolete.[32] Their work shares the impulse to dispose of (or significantly refashion) the function of a single anchoring figure in order to investigate the animating and sometimes chaotic dynamics of networks themselves.

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[30] Margaret Morse, "The Television News Personality and Credibility" in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture,* Tania Modleski, ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 66

[31] Robert Stam, "Television News and Its Spectator" in E. Ann Kaplan, ed. *Regarding Television*. (Frederick: American Film Institute, 1983), p. 28. For another art historical consideration of television at this moment that draws on Morse's argument in its discussion of early video art and media actions see David Joselit, *Feedback*: *Television Against Democracy*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

[32] Despite the reduced production of theatrical newsreels, novelty newsreel footage continued to be available in editions created for home viewing in hobby shops and camera stores throughout this period.

In the 1930s, Walter Benjamin recognized the potential of the newsreel to bring the masses "face-to-face with themselves" in "great ceremonial processions, giant rallies and mass sporting events, and in war."[33] But three decades later, these artist-filmmakers were ambivalent at best about collectivity figured this way. On the one hand, the appearance of newsreels in their work signals a submerged sense of the historical distance separating their own moment (mid to late 1960s) from the political potential invested in the masses in the build up to the Second World War. On the other, it betrays anxiety about the far-reaching consequences of television's powerful collectivizing effects in the present.

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In REPORT by Bruce Conner, the subject of the next chapter, one of the most important "ikons" of the period, President Kennedy, appears waving to onlookers from his motorcade in Dallas minutes before his death. The event of Kennedy's assassination brings images of unruly social bodies to the screen: crowds roaring at a bullfight, cheering at a military parade, and even agitating for civil rights punctuate this dense found footage collage. Kennedy's funeral was a media event carefully planned to help establish a sense of order following the chaos surrounding his death. (Enzensberger's description of television as a social "servo-mechanism" was perhaps never truer than during the coverage following the assassination.) In REPORT this return to order fails to hold. Images of the president's motorcade appear caught within mysterious feedback loops.

Conner's paranoid montage includes televisual junk excluded during the original coverage of the assassination, such as commercials for breakfast cereal and new appliances. A woman sitting at an electronic console appears as an enigmatic signifier of cybernetic control, an emblem of television's attempts to manage audiences as consumers and potentially disruptive moments of social unrest. The eruption of cheering populist crowds and civil rights protests on screen raises questions about how television mediates the appearance (or disappearance) of the social body during moments of crisis – how, in other words, the appearance of large groups of people on screen is mobilized to impact the experience of feeling oneself part of a vast, imagined collective of other viewers.

By contrast, Carolee Schneemann employs bodies in a performance mode she calls Kinetic Theater that aims to replace symbols and signifying networks with "energy systems." In *Water Light/Water Needle* (1966), she stages an event in which performers negotiate a series of encounters while moving along on a matrix of rigged up ropes. Here the emphasis is on the visibility of the exchanges that take place between performers and their environment. Once news images of the Vietnam War begin to make their way into

[33] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. Edited by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 54. For an extended analysis of this passage, see Samuel Weber, "Art, Aura and Media in the Work of Walter Benjamin," in *Mass Mediauras: Form Technics Media*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 76-107.

her Kinetic Theater performances however, this emphasis on immediate tangible feedback within a networked environment begins to break down.

Snows (1967), performed to protest the Vietnam War, directly incorporates the audience's responses to the work into its staging. Schneemann constructed an electronic circuit designed to respond to the movements of viewers shifting in their seats by triggering sensors that would signal cues for action taking place on stage. Ultimately *Snows* eschews the mechanisms of control that govern this technical apparatus for subtler and more associative forms of looking and linking. Where Conner over-codes signs with too many messages, Schneemann's early performances attempted to generate conditions where energy and affect could be conveyed non-symbolically, directly between bodies or mediated through ropes or electronic sensors. Staging *Snows* to protest against the Vietnam War required confronting the necessity, as well as the danger of working with the body as material in the context of dissent and confrontation in which vulnerable "othered" bodies were freighted with the responsibility of conveying the import of political violence. I read *Snows* as an inquiry into the conditions and limits of becoming "involved" in media, as a participant in protest, but also as an embodied subject responsive to the demands media make on one's attention and capacity to feel involved.

Stan VanDerBeek also explores new forms of affiliation and action born under the sign of networked social feedback. In the mid 1960s VanDerBeek built a dome-shaped theater designed for live multiple projection performances, a space he dubbed a "Movie-Drome." The project developed out of his concern with the perceptual and emotional capacity of individuals to manage massive amounts of information. It was to be a prototype for a new kind of collectively produced form, which VanDerBeek described as "newsreels of dreams" or "information concerts." Given the opportunity in 1970 to adapt this vision to television, he staged an event entitled *Violence Sonata* which incorporated live polls and audio from callers at home as an element in a multi-channel television happening dealing with news images of racially charged social unrest. With *Violence Sonata*, VanDerBeek aimed to transform public television into a cybernetic "nervous system" in order to address a specific social issue – urban unrest. However in the process of developing new formal forms of feedback for public television, VanDerBeek unexpectedly brought to light the nascent disciplinary codes governing this new network's management of discourse and behavior.

These works by Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek, which provide the primary material for this study, all eliminate the central figure of the anchor from the news as they incorporate its images into new filmic forms of montage. Notably, other works produced during the same period retain an anchor-like figure, but isolate it from the function of presenting the news. For example, Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*, often read as (minimally) animated film-portraits, produce a scenario that inverts almost all of the institutional supports that endow someone like Walter Cronkite exceptional authority. Produced by Warhol between early 1964 and late 1966, sitters for the screen tests sat before a camera loaded with a 100-foot reel of 16mm film and were directed to remain as still as possible for the duration of the filming, about 4 minutes [Figure 1.3]. This set up foregrounds the willful non-acting style of performance that Stam identifies with the news anchor's special status on screen. It might seem strange to link television news to the screen test, a format associated with Hollywood, used to test the screen presence of

potential stars of fiction film, but in 1964 those subjects who most regularly confronted the viewer directly were found on television, not at the movies, and as such the anchor could be thought of as one of the screen test's most proximate (if unconscious) "controls." Compared to the subcultural Warholian "superstars" featured in the screen tests, Cronkite's persona as network news "supersubject" appears no less carefully constructed. However without the nexus of institutional supports afforded by network television news," Warhol's subjects are left exceptionally vulnerable before the camera.[34]

Vito Acconci exploits this vulnerability in his early videos. In *Centers* (1971), he strains against exhaustion to point directly at the center of the monitor for as long as possible, an accusatory gesture directed toward a viewer who may or may not remain engaged by his self-exposure on screen [Figure 1.4].[35] In *Undertone* (1972) Acconci plays with the direct mode of address in ways that signal a connection to television news conventions even more explicitly. Here the artist sits at a large desk whose surface fills nearly half the frame [Figure 1.5]. He conjures a fantasy about a girl rubbing his legs under the table. Then he addresses the viewer directly; "I need you to be sitting there facing me, I need you to be sitting there facing me because I need to have someone to talk to, so I know I have someone to address this to." David Antin compares Acconci's visual style of address and his untrustworthy demeanor to President Nixon's appearance during a speech on television.[36] But the artist's performance could just as easily be measured against the acting style of "the most trusted man in America" at the time, Walter Cronkite [Figure 1.6].

Acconci's performance plays on the viewer's desire to gain access to the interiority of the figure addressing her directly from the screen. It could be read as a perverse exploitation of those moments on television when the smallest sign of the person behind the desk shines through. Stam recalls the "scandal and admiration" provoked by Cronkite's emotional on-air reactions to John F. Kennedy's death, for example, or the moon landing in 1969. Such moments, he writes, "quickly took on the status of myth" because they offered an "exceptional" hint of the man beneath Cronkite's otherwise strictly coded minimalist performance. Acconci inverts this minimal style, offering nothing but an uninvited (and yet strangely engrossing) performance of interiority exposed. Television fosters the desire to witness the emotional dispossession of a "supersubject" who would otherwise be endowed with unimpeachable (and gendered) authority, in response Acconci offers a presentation of self that calls the possibility of any and all dispossession into question.

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[34] See Hal Foster, "Test Subjects" *October,* Vol. 132 (Spring 2010), pp. 30-42. He argues that these films test the screen presence of the sitter in front of the camera, their capacity to endure the camera's (and by extension the spectator's) unrelenting stare.

[35] On *Centers*, see Anne Wagner, "Video and the Rhetoric of Presence" *October*, Vol. 91(Winter 2000) pp. 59-80. Unlike the videos discussed by Wagner, the works I consider aren't anxious about an absent audience, stolen away by television, as much as an audience made volatile and difficult to figure when television's subjectivizing operations are put under duress or re-imagined in some way.

[36] Antin, 44.

The works by Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek that are the focus of this study forgo the performance style explored by Warhol, Acconci, and others, and with it, the perverse imitation of the authority and sincerity that anchored daily (or more often nightly) encounters with the news. These artists produce works that report on the violent events of the hour, but in ways that abandon the "personality system" of television news, and with it the carefully monitored divide between interiority and exteriority. Unlike Acconci, or even Warhol, who play on the desire to know the subject on screen, these works plunge television news into an entirely subjective field of experience, without a stable point or figure to which that experience can be yoked. The absence of such a figure throws the presence of the audience into relief. It appears not as a coherent image, but rather as something assembled, and in that sense, inchoate, volatile, and fugitive in form.

Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek concoct all manner of strange and provisional systems to take the place of TV's personality system: sign systems, practices of visual relay, and highly technologized networks that involve the spectator as a physical body or media-respondent. The subjects they address are never already constituted as a collectivity, but must in some way be solicited, engaged, coerced, or even seduced into new configurations, risking (or in some cases courting) the aggression and violence that abounds when the psychic processes of identification and projection that underwrite television's personality system are upended.

What was at stake in these challenges to television's newly won authority and power incarnated by the news anchor? What made these efforts seem so urgent at the time? In 1970, VanDerBeek stated the problem this way, if somewhat ambiguously, particularly where authority and gender are concerned:

> If power is knowledge, father is becoming powerless because knowledge, his greatest weapon, can be had from TV sets, radios and magazines. The central pillar of Western society is being pulled down by electronic Samsons disguised as Walter Cronkites, Batmans, and animated television salesmen.

VanDerBeek misses here the extent to which the possession of knowledge is linked to the apparent self-possession of the one who disseminates it, but his blind spot invites us to ask what new conception of art's audience emerges from this scene of projected disaster.

The critic Leo Steinberg speculates that all works of art or stylistic cycles are "definable by their built-in idea of the spectator." He first formulated this proposal in 1968 for a lecture delivered at the Museum of Modern Art; later his remarks were published in essay form under the title "Other Criteria." In a passage worth quoting at length, he considers the "one shot" paintings of Kenneth Noland, thirty foot long stripe paintings, whose slick industrial coolness couldn't be further from the tactile, anarchic intensity characteristic of the media experiments at issue here. But the questions Steinberg poses to Noland's abstract pictures could (and I would urge, should) also be asked of these works as well. The task is to understood how art works "create their own viewer, project their peculiar conception of who, what, and where he is." He continues, "Is he a man in a hurry? Is he at rest or in motion? Is he one who construes or reacts? Is he a man alone—or a crowd? Is he a human being at all—or a function, a specialized

function or instrumentality[…]?"[37]

The newscaster's seemingly sovereign "I" stands in for a complex web of relations, conventions, and forms that produce the news. He is, in other words a subject standing in for a collective, one that plays a pivotal role in animating, but also delimiting relations between members of the viewing audience. David Joselit argues, "TV alienates viewers from their own images (or images through which they might make common cause with others) by aligning them with corporate personifications of commerce and law."[38] As this reality came more clearly into view, artist-filmmakers began to ask if television could generate anything other than a collectivity bound together by its identification with corporate authority and animated by the demands of commerce and state power. How might an art of moving images regard or even attempt to engender collectivity differently? Joselit offers an important account of the way media activists, artists, and filmmakers began to work through the politics of persona at this moment. On television, politicians work to appear sincere, while fictional characters must resolve conflicts internal to their role by the end of each episode. Joselit argues that video art installations like Bruce Nauman's *Lived Taped Video Corridor* (1970) offer a counter proposal to these forms of mediated personhood; in such works, "the contradiction between a person and her image is not short circuited but openly exhibited."[39] My argument is indebted in many ways to his analysis, but focuses on the question of how artists dealt with images of publically assembled bodies and crowds – and the relationship of these images to social forms of spectatorship (rather than on individuals, which is a category of spectatorship they no longer take for granted as primary).

The artist-filmmakers considered here each pursue these questions in divergent ways, and the chapters that follow look carefully at the rich and often conflicted forms these pursuits take. Each responds to the unifying modes of address embodied in the figure of the news anchor by exploring non-hierarchal networks and new forms of cybernetic feedback. These works privilege process by reworking appropriated material and soliciting open-ended associations between images, often as an element of a live performance. They imagine, and sometimes even take up forms of feedback from their audiences in ways that emphasize the redistribution of meaning over and above video art's play with promises of immediacy on the one hand, and the unidirectional address of the television news anchor on the other. The object of analysis here is not the news itself, but the potential of the news image as imagined and made over by artist-filmmakers of a generation reckoning with profound transformations of the public sphere. Their work invites us to ask not only what the news is or was at this moment, but what it could be, what potential for feeling oneself part of a social body might exist in experiences of being solicited by the news.

Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek each invest cybernetic feedback with the capacity to redefine social life, while at the same time attuning us to the (sometimes unanticipated) consequences of attempting to manage social antagonism and anxiety through mechanisms of networked control. A pattern emerges in each of the case studies

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[37] Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria" in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997 [1972]), p. 81.
[38] Joselit, 155
[39] Joselit, 152.

I consider. Networks are initially explored in terms of the formal configurations between subjects. These formal concerns begin to give way however as historically bound conflicts and social differences come to fore in various ways. As a result the capacity of feedback to fully mediate antagonism begins to break down or reveal its own limits. The thread that binds these disparate works together is their shared desire to reckon with media as social, which is to say, as something that inflects our experience and understanding of social life in profound and affecting ways.

Chapter 2
News Report

Bruce Conner began working on his first film, A MOVIE, long before he ever picked up a camera or spliced two pieces of footage together.[40] In an interview with Nancy Richards, he recounts how as a teenager in the mid 1940s he started fabricating A MOVIE in his mind, "all these bits and parts and combining soundtracks and pictures from all the movies [he] had ever seen."[41] He was living in Wichita, Kansas at the time, spending most afternoons at the movies. His uncle managed a few local theaters where Conner often went after school and even found part time work in the summer. The position afforded him the opportunity to watch the same program of trailers, newsreel, and feature multiple times, an experience that profoundly shaped his later career as a filmmaker.[42]

Conner's A MOVIE (1958), and two of his subsequent films, REPORT (1963-7) and LEADER (1964) are the focus of this chapter.[43] All three are found footage films that revel in the pleasures and psychic discomforts of movie-going, experiences thrown into relief by television's increasing prominence in American life during the years in which they were produced. Conner insisted on calling all of his films following A MOVIE "movies" or "home movies." He imagined they would provide a viewing experience suspended somewhere between going to the movies and staying at home in front of the television. His innovative montage style spans this divide by misappropriating and mixing the codes that govern fictional storytelling and news reportage alike. Over the course of producing this trio of films –A MOVIE, REPORT, and LEADER – Conner's approach to montage changed dramatically. This chapter interrogates that change as it intersects with the transformations taking place within moving image culture at the time.

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A MOVIE is anything but a movie. In other words, it is both more and less than a sequence of images that together make up a film with a coherent plot, characters, conflict and resolution. Conner completed A MOVIE while living in San Francisco, where he

[40] Conner did not learn how to edit film until his friend, the filmmaker Larry Jordan, lent him his wet splicer in 1958. Nancy Richards, Unpublished Interview with Bruce Conner. 1984 Dec. 6—1986 Oct. 30. Page 27. Carton 15, Folder 38. BANC MSS 2000/50 c, The Bruce Conner Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
[41] Ibid., 22.
[42] Johanna Gosse argues that growing up in Kansas Conner found refuge and inspiration at the movies. She notes that when asked about his major influences, instead of naming other artists, he responded, "My influences are mostly in Wichita, Kansas. Hanging out in the Orpheum Theater and the Miller Theater." Chuck Hudina, "Bruce Conner: Visitor in the World," *Release Print*, March 1986, cited by Johanna Gosse, *Cinema at the Crossroads: Bruce Conner's Atomic Sublime 1958-2008*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 2014), p. 26.
[43] The use of all uppercase letters and no italics in the titles of Conner's works follows a convention dictated by the artist.

continued to work as a movie-theater usher.[44] Though it has been compared to avant-garde films of the interwar period, such as Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), in the interview with Richards, he explains that wanted to make a film that would relate to what "everyone" (not just what he called "Art film people" attending foreign or avant-garde screenings) "would see at their neighborhood theater."[45] Conner has called A MOVIE "an anti-movie," while others have understood it as a meta-movie, or as David James describes it, an "anatomy of all previous movies."[46] Made entirely of footage that Conner culled from 16mm compilation reels available in the late 1950s at hobby shops and camera stores, cinematic condensation is both its method of production and its primary theme. Conner conceived of the work as an "assemblage of all sorts of elements."[47]

By the time he completed A MOVIE in 1958, Conner had established himself as a significant West-Coast assemblage artist, one of only a handful known in New York.[48] Before learning to splice found film footage, he worked primarily with other scavenged materials: bits of wood, pilfered costume jewelry, feathers, wax, and cut up magazines. Often he would wrap or bind these found materials with lengths of torn nylon stockings, producing "fugitive" surfaces that Conner's friend, the legendary curator Walter Hopps once described as "mellow" and "dreamy," but could just as easily be seen as sinister and grotesque (a fundamental tension that persists in his films as well).[49]

While discussing the origins of A MOVIE in the interview with Richards, Conner offers this account of his approach to assemblage:

> An assemblage to me - I would think that it'd incorporate everything that you might use in collage, work that's called assemblages and sculptures, performance pieces, theater…I mean, you have an assemblage of people, you have an assemblage of events of one sort or another…[50]

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[44] "Biographical Information: Bruce Conner: 1933 -1957, 8/20/2000," Carton 13, Folder 19, MSS 2000/50c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[45] Interview with Richards, 29. For a comparison with Léger's film, see David Bordwell, *Film Art: An Introduction,* 9th edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), pp. 376-381.

[46] Interview with Richards, 27. David James, *Allegories of American Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 156. Julian Myers offers another compelling account of A MOVIE: "The film is "a comedic archaeology of progress and an elegy for American modernity. The twentieth century is pictured, first comically, then with increasing sadness, as doomed charge, a monumental hubris – a zeppelin exploding in midair." Julian Myers, "'Works by the Late Bruce Conner' – (Part 2)," July 11, 2008. <http://blog.sfmoma.org/2008/07/works-by-the-late-bruce-conner-part-2/>

[47] Interview with Richards, 4-5.

[48] Conner's first solo gallery show in New York City took place in 1956 at the Rienzi Gallery.

[49] "There is a kind of fragile quality to a lot of the materials he used; an almost fugitive quality—fugitive in the sense of being impermanent. Fabrics, cardboard, melted wax—these are vulnerable materials. And in his very best work he tends to use a lot of that, giving things a mellow, often rather dreamy surface." Walter Hopps, "Artists on Artists: Bruce Conner," *BOMB*, Summer 2002, pp. 8-11.

[50] Conner mocks the French pronunciation of assemblage to Richards, his way of distinguishing the term from the usage popularized by William Seitz's landmark exhibition, "The Art of Assemblage" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961. Interview with Richards, 4-5. For more on

Here Conner radically expands what is typically understood to count as mixed media assemblage, signaling how capacious his understanding of the term could be. He extends it to include performance and theater, but also people and events. Conner implies, without stating outright, that this expanded conception of assemblage is bound up with his turn to filmmaking in 1958, begging the question of how assemblages of events or people are figured in or through his films.

As originally conceived by Conner, A MOVIE would have constituted an early example of film installation, a moving image assemblage made up of various audio-visual elements. Initially he envisioned it as a film loop that would "run forever" as part of a changing "environment" including other "objects and lights, and different sounds."[51] Fascinated by the concept of "a never-ending movie" Conner admits in the same interview, "Of course television is like never-ending movies too."[52] Ultimately Conner found that his idea for A MOVIE wasn't technically feasible; the cost of a rear screen projector and film loop machine exceeding what he could afford at the time. Though it is now recognized as one of the most significant works of American avant-garde cinema, to Conner, the short film that became A MOVIE felt like "a dreadful compromise."[53] If A MOVIE had been looped and screened in a gallery its relationship to television might be more pronounced. As it stands, television haunts the theatrical version of A MOVIE as an absence, a force of obsolescence. At the same time, the film suggests that television will allow many of the pleasures and horrors it memorializes to live on, while remaining ambivalent about the possibilities that inhere in its "never-ending" stream of images.[54]

A MOVIE could be understood as an assemblage of disparate events recorded on film. It begins by juxtaposing incongruous scenes of action. As it continues, it shifts radically in tone, calling into question the operations that link one image to another. The film was inspired in part by a short sequence cut from stock footage that appears in the

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Seitz's exhibition and Conner's role in it, see Hatch, 70-4; Carlos Kase, *A Cinema of Anxiety: American Experimental Film in The Realm of Art* (1965–75) (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2009), pp. 221-228; and Interview with Marc Selwyn, "Bruce Conner, Marilyn and the Spaghetti Theory," *Flash Art*, 24: 156, Jan/Feb 1991, pp. 94–7.

[51] Interview with Richards, 27. In another interview, Conner offers this further elaboration of his original plan for A MOVIE: the environment he envisioned would incorporate "all kinds of moving objects, strobe lights, random sounds coming off of the radio, tape machines, television. And this movie would continue to go all the time. Not only would there be separate images from totally different movies, but the sound that would be accompanying it would be totally different every time it went though." Bruce Conner, "Bruce Conner Interview with Mia Culpa" Part 2, *Damage* 4 (January 1980), p. 7.

[52] Interview with Richards, 28.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Catherine Russell reads A MOVIE as a prophecy of television's erosion of "the real," a loss that she argues Conner aestheticizes by offering a "melancholy elegy for a lost depth of representation." Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography* (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 248.

Marx Brother's film *Duck Soup* (1933).[55] In *Duck Soup*, Groucho Marx plays the embattled dictator of Freedonia. During a scene of confused combat he calls for help on the radio and then reassures his men, "Help is on the way!" At his word, screaming fire trucks begin to pour out of the station, followed after a cut by a battalion of policemen on motorcycles, a fleet of marathon runners, and a relay of swimmers diving into the water. Then come the baboons, stampeding elephants, and finally a school of dolphins leaping to the rescue.

In A MOVIE there is no narrative motivation for the chase that opens the film. It begins with a credit sequence that holds on the title card "BRUCE CONNER" more than a few beats too long [Figure 2.1]. With this gesture, Conner teasingly suggests that action in A MOVIE will be motivated by the name of the author rather than any discernable plot or narrative logic. At the same, the playful overemphasis on his filmmaking credit begs a serious question. How does this anonymously authored footage figure our relationship to the historical disasters it pictures? What would it mean to claim it? How, other than by an act of sheer will, could anyone make such a claim? These questions hover unresolved while the action in A MOVIE continues apace. Conner cannily mocks familiar cinematic conventions of sequencing and temporality. A title card announces "the end of part four" before any image has appeared on screen [Figure 2.2]. A nudie film brazenly interrupts the long run of countdown leader that follows [Figure 2.3]. After these deferrals and delays, the action finally begins, unprompted by a call for help. It features a long sequence lifted from Hopalong Cassidy films that Conner purchased in condensed form on 16mm reels released specifically for home audiences [Figure 2.4].[56]

Hopalong Cassidy, a fictional heroic cowboy, was the subject of over 60 feature films. His character found a second life not only in the film reels produced for home projection that Conner used in A MOVIE, but also on television. B-Western film production was being phased out in the late 1940s just as young television networks were in search of material that would guarantee new audiences. (The title A MOVIE plays on the idea of "b-movies," low budget productions which were often shown as the second half of a double feature, a model of distribution that was all but phased out by the time Conner's film was released in 1958.) Under these conditions, Hopalong Cassidy made the transition to the small screen, becoming a popular mainstay of the regular television schedule. In fact, the initial broadcasts of the familiar Western were so popular that network executives at NBC decided not to waste time producing a series made for television right away, and simply reedited existing features from the 1930s down to broadcast length, opening up the possibility imagined in A MOVIE of remediating any and all old movie material.[57]

In A MOVIE Conner mimics this possibility ambivalently. Cowboys, Indians, and

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[55] See Culpa, 7. In an interview with Scott MacDonald Conner recalls seeing the film when he was sixteen. Scott MacDonald, "Bruce Conner" in *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with American Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 253.

[56] In the interview with MacDonald, Conner explains, "I bought condensations of films that I knew had action. Of course, that something was condensed down to one hundred feet meant it had all the most visual material in the first place." MacDonald, 254.

[57] John Dunning, *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 329.

covered wagons cut from old Hopalong Cassidy films ride en masse toward some unspecified destination. Then, just as in the Marx Brother's montage, things begin to get a bit strange, silly even. The cinematic grammar of Conner's ride to the rescue is instantly recognizable even without the narrative cue found in *Duck Soup*. A raging elephant appears in a shot spliced between scenes of horses galloping across the screen. This shot is followed by the intrusion of other incongruities: a train, tanks, race cars crashing at the bend in the track. Subtly the forward motion of pursuit becomes a self-reflexive relay. Disaster looms. An old car plunges from a cliff, and then abruptly without warning, a title card announces "the end" (again). This is, in fact, the end of what could be considered the film's first movement.

In the second and third sections of A MOVIE, the tone changes dramatically. The soundtrack, Otto Respighi's "Pines of Rome," shifts from a resounding charge to a mournful dirge.[58] The light-hearted chase gives way to a series of images that are separated by lengths of black leader, leaving behind the easy links and playful match cuts that characterize first section of the film. This second section of A MOVIE introduces footage from newsreels. Like the Hopalong Cassidy and the novelty stunt footage of the first section, this material is also culled from commercial compilation reels produced for home viewing.[59]

The first sequence of A MOVIE plays with the visual grammar of one of the quintessential tropes of narrative filmmaking – the chase. This latter sequence fixes upon the grammar of the news, where there need not be any correspondence or visual association between one shot and the next.[60] Conner offers an account of this grammar, which chimes with the way images in this section of A MOVIE seem to arrive without any obvious relationship to what precedes or follows:

> If you listen to a news program on the radio it may report ten events in a row. It's no different than A MOVIE: it's something totally absurd and ridiculous, next to a world wide catastrophe, next to speculation, next to a kind of instruction about

[58] The soundtrack for A MOVIE uses the first ("The Pines of the Villa Borghese"), second ("Pines near a Catacomb"), and fourth ("The Pines of the Appian Way") movements of Respighi's symphonic poem.

[59] Castle Films released a 16mm reel for home movie enthusiasts entitled "MOVIES GREATEST HEADLINES" in 1952 that featured many of the images that appear in this section of A MOVIE including the Hindenburg crash and the Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapse. Conner used this or a similar newsreel compilation as source material.

[60] This section of the film is anchored by the only sequence in A MOVIE that approaches anything like narrative coherence, however parodically. It marries together material drawn from a variety of incompatible sources: action film, newsreel, and pornography. A submarine descends. Through the periscope a sailor catches sight of a woman in a bikini bearing a strong resemblance to Marilyn Monroe. He fires a torpedo, which sets off a nuclear explosion. The soundtrack is oddly meditative throughout the action sequence that follows: surfers, water skiers, and men in long boats ride the rough waters seemingly stirred up the explosion. This eruption of narrative during a long string of disconnected events further underscores the discontinuity that marks the rest of the footage. Conner revisits the atomic blast footage generated by the Bikini Atoll tests in his film *Crossroads* (1976). See Gosse for an extended reading of the film's relationship to what she calls "the atomic sublime."

> how you're supposed to think about some political or social event. […] Ga-ga, ga-ga! I mean, this is comic book time![61]

Indelible scenes of disaster (the Hindenburg on fire, the hypnotic swaying of the Tacoma Bridge) are followed by vertigo inducing spectacles (a woman perched on the shoulders of a tight rope-walker, a couple spinning on a narrow plank jutting out from a skyscraper). Material pilfered from travelogues also appears without warning – topless women somewhere in the South Seas carry impossibly tall fruit baskets on their heads, tribesmen crowd around a dead elephant.[62] This ethnographic kitsch opens the way for other footage that might be considered more newsworthy, scenes of famine and war. A MOVIE eventually returns to the editing style that characterizes the opening chase scene, but only to show every forward movement ending in catastrophe: water skiers collapse, planes topple over nose first in the water, motorcycles get caught in the mud. This litany of human and technological failure builds to a fiery conclusion. Fighter jets go down; explosions follow one after the other; a volcano erupts. Then more grisly news material appears: an execution by firing squad, the hanging of Mussolini in the street surrounded by riotous crowds, all the human wreckage of war—including piles and piles of corpses. After the film's opening romp, the long lengths of black film leader that separate many of the shots and the mournful strains of the soundtrack suggest something like the irrepressible return of history to the screen, but only at the risk of becoming indistinguishable from all other manner of ahistorical spectacle.[63]

As an "assemblage of events" A MOVIE demonstrates how powerfully montage can undo the particularity and significance of individual actions and occurrences by yoking together the incongruous, threatening to level meaningful differences under the

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[61] Conner, quoted in an interview with William C. Wees (July 1991) and reprinted in William C. Wees, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993), p. 103.

[62] Russell reads the ethnographic images of non-Western "Others" in A MOVIE as "an interruption of the perpetual catastrophe of failed progress […] the memory of the body in the machine of modernity." For her, "the body of the Other signifies a return of historical imagination in another, dialectical form" (Russell, 251). I am less certain that these images attain the dialectical status attributed to them by Russell. In my view they do more to reinforce than rupture the spectacle that threatens to overwhelm the return of historical consciousness to the screen.

[63] Spectacle is the term Guy Debord uses to describe an advanced degree of capital accumulation, conditions of production and "separation" under which capital "becomes image." This definition allows him to treat spectacle as something more than just a collection of images, it is, Debord insists, "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images." A MOVIE precedes the publication of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* by almost a decade, but concretizes effects that resonate strongly with the description it offers of "images detached from every aspect of life merge[d] into a common stream," what Debord calls "a pseudo-world apart" apprehended as a mere "object of contemplation." Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. (New York: Zone, 1994 [1967]), p. 12. This is not however to suggest that A MOVIE offers the critical diagnosis of the origins of spectacle found in Debord's writing, nor anything like the analytical narration found in the film version of Debord's text, *The Society of the Spectacle* released in 1973. In REPORT Conner vividly renders contradictions internal to spectacle without the didacticism of Debord's filmmaking.

sign of spectacle, and in the process brokering a sense of looming disaster. A MOVIE comes to an end with a brief respite from this endless catalog of horror. In the final shots of the film a shipwreck appears as a ruin of all the destruction we have just witnessed. A diver disappears into its depths, perhaps in search of something worth recovering from the rubble. The film ends as the sun briefly breaks through the surface of the water offering a fleeting glimpse of redemption.

Conner's montage exploits what Siegfried Kracauer calls, "the provisional status of all given configurations."[64] In his 1927 essay, "Photography," Kracauer critiques newsreels (and the illustrated press in general) for making the world appear as something totalized, complete, and completely available to the camera. In response, he calls for an authentic form of montage that would counter the false completeness of the world pictured in newsreels. A MOVIE betrays a similar antipathy toward the newsreel's tendency to reduce history to spectacle. By mixing newsreels with non-news materials and inserting lengths of black leader between shots, Conner's film exaggerates this totality, but also emphasizes incongruity and contingency over and above seamlessness.

Conner produced A MOVIE to be screened over and over, cultivating a form of associative montage designed to offer up new experiences with each viewing.[65] He often described editing found footage as "playing with happenstance or chance relationships" like those generated by throwing the I-Ching,[66] a point of reference less aligned with John Cage's embrace of chance as a compositional strategy, than with models of viewing Conner adapted from commercial cinema.[67] He was interested in the way film trailers, for example, used extreme condensation to push narrative logic to the brink of non-sense,

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[64] In his essay, "Photography" from 1927, Kracauer describes the photographic image as a form which consciousness can inhabit or abandon, especially once the memory of what it pictures fades. Once abandoned, nature appears inert, fragmentary, and meaningless. When a photograph ages or departs far enough from its origins, suddenly elements that were previously assimilated to the scene become newly visible and available for new associations. For Kracauer, photography provokes a confrontation between consciousness and nature, because the photograph is only a disintegrated unity: "It consists of elements in space whose configuration is so far from necessary that one could just as well imagine a different organization of these elements." Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography" (trans. Thomas Y. Levin) *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring, 1993 [1927]), p. 436.

[65] In a letter to his New York dealer, Charles Alan, written in 1957, Conner proposed a distribution system that would enable people to purchase artists' films as prints directly from the gallery, very likely drawing his inspiration for this proposal from the sale of the compilation reels that were to become his source material. Letter to Charles Alan, April 1957, in Alan Gallery Records (Archives of American Art). In a revealing pun, Conner insists that such viewing "requires the private eye," a phrase that underlines the value he placed on screening films repeatedly in private, but that also suggests a mode of watching, that as Kevin Hatch remarks, is "akin to detective work" (Hatch, 119).

[66] Interview with Richards, 29.

[67] Cage began using chance operations in 1951, when his student, the composer Christian Wolff, gave him a pocket version of the I Ching. For an extended account of the role of the I Ching in the development of Cage's aleatory aesthetics see Peter Jaeger, *John Cage and Buddhist Ecopoetics: John Cage and the Performance of Nature* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2013).

evoking surprising and unexpected associations in the process.[68] Conner used a form of highly controlled and quick paced editing borrowed from the film industry to spark the kind of flights of fancy he himself had experienced as a young cinephile. This strategy pushed chance and its opposite, absolute control, toward the brink of collapse, a gamble that risked flipping over into high paranoia, (a possibility he would later cultivate openly in REPORT).[69]

Both Kracauer and Conner share an apocalyptic sense of the danger, but also the promise that inheres in montage as it strips photographic material of its original context and opens it up to new provisional associations. Kracauer describes this risk as the "go-for-broke game of history."[70] He invests montage with the political potential to break with the given order by bringing a still unknown, but potentially more valid organization of nature into view. Kracuer acknowledges that exposure to the contingent aspect every new configuration risks confronting consciousness with complete meaninglessness, but defends montage for its potential to awaken what he calls "an inkling of the right order of the inventory of nature."[71] A MOVIE briefly animates this possibility in the final shot of the diver descending to recover something from the wreckage of history, though the political significance of this gesture ultimately remains uncertain.

After A MOVIE, Conner began to take a different approach to montage, with different implications for thinking about media's social dimensions.[72] He moves away from the promise of recovery and reconfiguration that flares up briefly at the conclusion of A MOVIE and begins to court failures of vision through repetition and sound-image matches overburdened with too much significance, by activating visual puns in the match between sound and image or playing with the multiple meanings of signs encoded into his cinematic materials, for example by suggesting the visual equivalence between a focus ring and a gun sight. With this shift after A MOVIE, Conner's montage begins to emphasize the image's capacity to establish social relations between viewers in the present, rather than the promise of a more valid social order to come. In A MOVIE Conner emphasizes the contingency of all possible configurations through montage. The film denaturalizes spectacle and opens up a space for imagining a new and better world emerging from rubble of the past. In REPORT, by distinction, Conner uses montage to reanimate a singular traumatic event, President Kennedy's assassination, in an impossible

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[68] He found it wonderful, he tells Richards, that in a movie trailer Barbara Stanwyck could slap a man while yelling "I hate you, I hate you" and then in the next shot a train would plunge off a cliff, followed by a shot of someone firing a gun. Interview with Richards, 29.

[69] Conner's longstanding fascination with paranoid montage is worth distinguishing from the critique of paranoia as a political instrument found for example in Craig Baldwin's *Tribulation 99*. For an incisive reading of how Baldwin mobilizes paranoia as political satire see Jeffrey Skoller, *Shadows, Specters, Shards: Making History In Avant-Garde Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005), pp. 36-7.

[70] Kracauer, 435.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Conner does eventually return to a mode of montage consonant with Kracauer's essay in a series of films made in the 1970s that have the dreamy, confused quality of childhood memories: *Take the 5:10 to Dreamland* (1976) and *Valse Triste* (1977). If A MOVIE is cut like a preview, then these films have a much more retrospective quality—they function more like flashbacks or dream sequences than film trailers.

attempt to prevent it from passing fully into history. This form of montage draws out tensions embedded in the prevailing order, rather than staking a claim on an unknown, but more utopian order still to be established.

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"Be the newscaster." This was the invitation extended to anyone who bought a reel of film for home viewing sold under the name "News Parade" in the late 1950s or early 1960s [Figure 2.5]. The theatrical newsreels that mingled with other bits of cinematic imagery in Conner's teenage mind were, by the early 1960s, on the verge of obsolescence. Moving images of current events were now more commonly encountered on television than at the cinema. The News Parade series grew up alongside theatrical newsreels; but remarkably the novelty of watching these films at home did not wear off even as television came to occupy a central place in domestic life.[73] News Parade was released annually as a digest of the previous year's biggest stories—military battles, political contests, and sporting events. In 1956 a new feature was added; each silent edition of News Parade included a text for viewers at home to read "aloud or on tape" in place of the soundtrack. Performing the script allowed home viewers to play at presenting the news, to become involved by taking up a position between the television anchor and omniscient newsreel narrator speaking from somewhere off-screen.

In A MOVIE, Conner began to experiment with these filmed news digests, breaking with the original script to reflect on the disaster of history in general, an ambition aided by the substitution of Respighi's orchestral score for the original newsreel narration. He produced REPORT (1963-1967) with similar news film material in response to a specific world-altering event – the surprising violence that ended John F. Kennedy's telegenic presidency. In REPORT Conner foregoes the use of a musical score. He follows a script, though one that is unlike any text provided by News Parade. Conner's editing reverses the conventional notion of narration as a supplement to the image track. Rather than record a text on tape to accompany the images on screen in the manner of the News Parade participant-viewer, in REPORT Conner treats the image track like a text pasted together to illustrate the soundtrack, albeit in a highly associative and unpredictable way.

REPORT draws attention to social dimensions of spectatorship left unexplored in A MOVIE. It invites viewers to relive a moment when the control and authority that had characterized news reportage during the newsreel era was dramatically and unforgettably destabilized on television. In A MOVIE, Conner attacks the spectacular totality of the world pictured by newsreels and haunted by televisual endlessness. In REPORT, by contrast, Conner uses newsreel material to amplify contingencies and tensions already

[73] The home-movie version of the newsreel became especially popular during the Second World War, but the News Parade series almost ended production in the mid 1950s for fear that television would erode its market. Surprisingly its popularity persisted, so Castle Films, the distributer of these films reversed its plan to discontinue it at the end of 1956 and even began producing the films in collectors editions with added premiums (including the written transcript of the narration). The company continued to release annual headline highlight reels until 1975. Scott MacGillivray, *Castle Films: A Hobbyist Guide* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2004), pp. 35-6.

built into television's coverage of a breaking news event. A MOVIE comically foregrounds the filmmaker's hand in the montage, while Conner's name does not appear at all in the credits of REPORT [Figure 2.6]. The film generates uncanny and paranoid effects that obscure the labor of his montage behind the appearance of puns and double meanings that feel uninvited and yet inevitable, while nevertheless betraying socially charged tensions that do not figure in the earlier film.

Reports of Kennedy's shooting broke through soap operas and talk shows on the afternoon of Friday November 22, 1963. Newsmen scrambled to cobble together an account of the events unfolding in Dallas. After the initial story of the shooting aired there was no official word on the status of the President's injuries for almost an hour. REPORT powerfully reactivates the disorder triggered by the assassin's bullets, viscerally placing the viewer in that anxious expanse between the first reports of the shooting and official word of the President's passing. Once news of Kennedy's death was finally confirmed, regular commercial programming was suspended to commemorate his life and prepare for the memorial services scheduled for the following Monday. During the four days of continuous coverage that long weekend, millions of viewers gathered before the television, constituting an audience of unprecedented size.[74] This audience witnessed the efforts of producing the live coverage that brought them together, including difficulties compounded by technology and other unforeseeable circumstances.

The networks rushed to broadcast the last footage of Kennedy alive on the morning of the assassination. The appearance of these images happened to coincide with the official announcement of the President's death, a point to which I will return.[75] Two days later, while crowds were somberly gathering at the Capitol, Lee Harvey Oswald was shot live on-camera and this image was rebroadcast repeatedly in one of the first uses of slow motion replay on television. Conner exploits the remarkable dissonance that arises between the networks' efforts to restore a sense of order and calm, and the unsettling sense that no amount of planning and coordination would suffice to keep unbidden images from appearing on screen.

Television newsmen worked around the clock to support the coordinated effort to instill a sense of order and calm after Kennedy's assassination, but for all their efforts, they couldn't fully contain the violent aftershocks of the event. In REPORT, Conner resists this return to order, using montage to exaggerate the unsettling experiences television audiences endured in the days after Kennedy's death. REPORT conjures this mass audience as an inchoate crowd; one that appears violently disposed toward the image of Kennedy rather than solemnly gathered to commemorate his life. Nearly half a century has passed since Conner first screened REPORT, but the shock of the aggression it pictures has not diminished. Part of its lasting effect is due to the difficulty of identifying the origins or meaning of this antagonism.

REPORT opens with a shot of Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy waving from their limo in downtown Dallas [Figure 2.7]. The car nears the edge of the frame, but instead of

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[74] The Nielsen Company reported that on Monday, November 24th a record breaking 41,553,000 televisions were tuned in to the funeral. "America's Long Vigil," *TV Guide*, Jan. 25, 1964, p. 20.
[75] American Broadcasting Corporation broadcast this footage. See Phil Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts" in *Theorizing Documentary* ed. Michael Renov, (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 58-89.

passing from view it returns to cross the screen again and again. The soundtrack is drawn from radio reports recorded at the scene of the event.[76] The on-the-spot radio coverage heightens the tension produced by the rolling edits, which repeat by interrupting the shot in a slightly different place each time.[77] Conner exaggerates the immediacy of television's capacity at that moment to cover the assassination in real time. At the same time, he keeps the fantasy of this live transmission at bay with a montage that plays on the dread generated by the viewer's foreknowledge of what is to come.

As motion stutters and stalls, the image on screen is at odds with the temporality of real-time reporting on the soundtrack. The President gives a short wave as the motorcade passes. The shot repeats. The image breaks down as soon as the reporter remarks haltingly, "It...it appears as though something has happened in the motorcade route." A brief series of single frames clipped from bits of film leader signals the transmission failure. Though this sequence races by, the individual high contrast frames are partially legible. The focus crosshair reads as a rifle sight. A single frame marked "head," grimly activates the multivalent nature of many other bits of language printed on standard academy film leader, including "code letter," "agency," "product" and "picture." This single-frame editing pushes the fragmentation of time to the absolute limit. Is this acceleration or arrest? Time seems to pass strangely, or perhaps not at all.

With the first news of the shooting on the soundtrack, Kennedy disappears from view. Suddenly it is as if the projector's lens has gone completely out of focus. The reporter repeats, "standby, just a moment please." An instant later, when he confirms, "there *has* been a shooting" partially exposed dark frames begin to flicker at a steadily increasing rate [Figure 2.8]. The rhythmic editing of intermittent blank frames and dark flares produces a riot of unpredictable optical effects—neural stimulation evocatively described by one reviewer as "electrical anarchy."[78] What appears on screen is no longer an image projected from a negative. As the light and dark frames alternate more and more quickly, hallucinatory, formless, fluorescent apparitions begin to appear, optic impressions caused by the rhythmic oscillation of the flicker. It becomes difficult to focus directly on the screen. Visual disorientation during this stroboscopic section is amplified by frantic reports issued from the scene. A mobile unit races after the motorcade to the hospital. Sirens wail.

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[76] In 1963 the nightly television news format was in transition from a fifteen-minute program to a half hour format. CBS premiered the first thirty-minute nightly news broadcast on September 2, 1963. NBC followed suit on September 9, 1963. ABC did not switch the half hour format until 1968. Stephen L. Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2007), p. 126.

[77] Stan Brakhage describes this style of editing in depth, comparing it to Gertrude Stein's use of variation within repetition. Stan Brakhage, *Film at Wit's End: Eight Avant Garde Filmmakers* (New York: McPherson & Company, 1989), p. 135.

[78] Ken Kelman describes the stroboscopic sequence as a "prelude of light and motion, or of energy" under the "influence of invisible forces, objectively registered in the flicker as electrical anarchy" suggested as the "workings of hidden power." Ken Kelman, "The Anti-Information Film" in *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the films in the collection of Anthology Film Archives*, Vol. 1: Anthology Film Archives Series 2 (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1975), p. 242. ("Electrical anarchy" is the medical term describing the stage that precedes a cardiac arrest when the regularity of normal rhythm is overthrown by rapid and self-sustaining electrical activity.)

The swarming optical effects that appear during this extended sequence throw the viewer violently back onto her own body.[79] She is invited to register what her experience shares in common with other viewers lit up around her by the glow of the screen. The sequence goes on for three minutes, but feels much longer. It becomes nearly impossible to gauge the passing of time while in a state of optical overstimulation; has it been thirty seconds or an eternity? The film powerfully evokes the strange temporality of Kennedy's assassination coverage over the long weekend of broadcasts – a protracted experience of viewing that was both psychically and physically exhausting.

Conner has described the strobe as a point of view shot, a cinematic way to register Kennedy's own fading consciousness.[80] Read this way, the dissolution of the image also solicits the viewer to inhabit the position of the dying President himself, an impossible moment of identification. As if responding to the impulse to turn away from such an experience, the film is propelled into a sequence of looped images that echoes the lurching progression of the motorcade glimpsed just before the shooting. Oswald's rifle is carried overhead down a crowded hallway at the police station; Jackie pulls at the door of the ambulance. These gestures stutter and repeat, lingering on screen a beat longer each time before returning to their starting point. Images fail to pass away immediately. Time continues to be made strange as repetition transforms the figures on screen into weird filmic marionettes.

On the soundtrack, more reports flood in, but like the images on screen, they only rephrase and repeat what little information is available. The first half of REPORT ends with a long run of film leader. The dispersive irregular televisual flicker returns now as perfect filmic order. The countdown is anchored by crosshairs that appear absolutely still as numbers from ten to three repeatedly flash by. In most films, countdown leader appears at the beginning and end of the film. In REPORT this long run countdown leader occupies the very center of the film. The numbers run down again and again in anticipation of the moment Kennedy's death will be confirmed. During this sequence, first hand accounts of the shooting on the soundtrack give way to the rhythms of the newsroom punctuated by the clacking keys and recurring bells of the teletype machine audible in the background. The event is processed into the form of newspeak—bits of information that can be reiterated until some new piece of information arrives. These formalized accounts rephrase accounts offered by eyewitnesses to fill the time of uncertainty before Kennedy's death is made official.

The countdown brings us back from the brink of near total temporal disorientation during the flicker sequence, but this return is marked by residual tension and paradox. A countdown should mark a linear progression toward a predictable end. In REPORT it becomes unpredictable, cyclical, and at the same time shot through with simultaneity and

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[79] Conner explains his intention during the stroboscopic section this way: "to get in people's heads because people in that situation start to create patterns from the flickering light—they're not on screen they're in your mind." Interview with Richards, 14.

[80] "I started with this flash of light that corresponds in a kind of time differential to say the loss of consciousness; it is a report that [Kennedy's] been shot and you get this flickering, stroboscopic effect with like 12 white frames and 12 black frames per second. And it changes down to…something like 18 black frames and 6 white frames per second, then it goes out to blackness." Ibid., 8-9.

stasis. The crosshairs of the focus ring printed on the film leader remain a motionless element that returns regularly between beats of the countdown. This cruciform device is a multivalent motif in Conner's hands – gun sight, but also Christian cross, as well as a sign of transition, the place where the film finds itself at a crossroads.[81] By drawing out the duration of the countdown, Conner maximizes the overlay or "synch" between all possible associations.

The official word of the President's death ends the uncertainty that pervades the first half of REPORT. Conner marks the announcement, when it comes, with three holes punched through the celluloid strip of film [Figure 2.9]. Three frames, one after the other, are pierced, producing an absence in the place of the focus guide. A single punch hole is a familiar sight to film editors and projectionists: it is a device that marks the synchronization of soundtrack and image, thus safeguarding cinematic illusion. Conner's stuttering repetition of this hole-punched sync frame (sometimes called a pop) is itself a kind of visual pun—evoking the three rifle shots that rang out in Dallas.[82] Repetition negates the function of the sync pop, suggesting the impossibility of a precise lock between image and audio track—a gesture underscored by the fact that these frames appear in the center of Conner's film, rather than at the beginning where the synch between sound and image is conventionally established.

The crosshair printed on film leader functions as an aid to vision, an instrument that enables the projectionist to focus a beam of light thrown upon a screen. It is the most profane cross imaginable—a tool rather than a symbol, an aid designed to prepare a picture for the eye. Conner's nearly imperceptible subversion of the sync frame, rendering it multiple and briefly visible, figuratively undermines the film's focus. The multiple pops suggest an excess of synchronization, a paradoxically dispersive form of condensation and concentration.

In the latter section of REPORT, which Conner refers to as the epilogue, news footage comes into contact with other found material, including fragments of television commercials, scientific films, and old movies. Here Kennedy's image finds its place among others, including animated electrical appliances, atomic clouds, and shattered light bulbs [Figure 2.10]. The inclusion of this heterogeneous material transgresses the solemn suspension of regular programming that occurred on television in the days after the assassination. Images of crowds begin to appear among the fragments of television commercials and other bits of filmic ephemera. These crowds mourn and cheer in turn; they march with placards agitating for civil rights in one moment and then patriotically wave hundreds of flags at a military parade in the next. Kennedy returns to the screen, but just as quickly he is lost within the relentless onslaught of images. Conner's carefully ordered assembly of images brings a volatile body politic to the screen, exemplified by the first (and arguably most enduring) images of the epilogue, footage taken from a bull

[81] CROSSROADS is the title Conner would give another major found footage film in 1976, a film made from footage of the atomic tests at Operation Crossroads. Needless to say, the intersection of temporality and State power figure importantly in this film as well. A brief clip of this test footage appears in the epilogue of REPORT where it signals among other things Kennedy's role in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

[82] It is difficult to resist also reading this "pop" as a sign of Conner's antipathy toward the coolness of contemporary "pop art."

fight, where the crowd thrills to the violence of blood sport [Figure 2.11].

The soundtrack of the epilogue returns to a scene recorded in Dallas less than an hour before the assassination—the arrival of Kennedy and the First Lady at Love Field. Conner's precise editing mimics the media's close attention to the production of Kennedy's funeral.[83] It includes a number of shots that also appear in the Universal newsreel, "The World Mourns." The original newsreel follows the caisson carrying the President's flag-draped coffin through Washington D.C.—first to the rotunda of the Capitol Building where mourners line up to pay their respects, then to St. Mathews Cathedral where funeral services are held, and finally to Arlington Cemetery for the burial.[84] In REPORT, the somber narration of the memorial services in the newsreel is replaced by a live report from Love Field, where crowds await the arrival of the President and First Lady in Dallas. This overlay between two different moments of coverage involves two, incompatible temporal qualities—bright anticipation and solemn memorialization, a mix which has the effect of intensifying feelings of foreboding and dread. Undoing the synchronization between sound and image allows new, unbidden associations to flare up along the way, charging incidental details with new, paranoid significance.

Images appear on screen as if triggered by the rambling observations of the reporter at Love Field. Cuts generate visual puns, contrapuntal effects, and stabs of irony. As the reporter notes the arrival Air Force One, a shot of the jet sitting on a darkened runway is interrupted by a snippet of commercial for the space age cereal "Super Jets—sugar toasted oat cereal." The dark humor of the this juxtaposition stings all the more if the viewer remembers that the footage of the plane comes from news coverage of Kennedy's casket arriving in Washington later that evening.

The newsman narrates Kennedy's momentary disappearance into the crowd at the airfield, a scene that seems to foreshadow the violence to come. Combat scenes from *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) punctuate the moment when this crowd is linked most explicitly to violence by the reporter at scene noting how people have begun straining against the barrier surrounding the airfield in anticipation of the President's appearance [Figure 2.12]. He remarks:

> Mr. Kennedy has stepped out of the automobile he is now shaking hands, Mrs. Kennedy is right behind him and they are walking along the line of the fence shaking hands with some of the hundreds of people who have come here to view their arrival, thousands of children now swarming trying to get over the fence.

Shots of machine guns blasting through barbed wire and waves of solders breaching the trenches from *All Quiet on the Western Front* appear on screen, lending an extra shock to the reporter's indelible evocation of "thousands of children swarming," a phrase which infantilizes the crowd as a whole, but also suggests an uncontrollable threat lurking behind the excitement the President has stirred up.

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[83] *Life* magazine, for example, reported that the First Lady called ahead from Air Force One to White House staffers to retrieve accounts of the preparations for Lincoln's laying in state. "Murder of the President" *Life Magazine* Vol. 55 No. 23 (December 6, 1963), pp. 22-40.
[84] Universal Newsreel (Vol. 36 No. 97).

Kennedy's momentary disappearance into the crowd mirrors the form of the montage itself. His image is absorbed into a throng of images—leveling any distinction between it and other everyday commodities. In this way Conner plays on the convention of representing a leader as a figure composed of the bodies of his subjects, (exemplified most famously by the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*) [Figure 2.13].[85] Here instead of constituting the people as a coherent figure, Kennedy's image is consumed and lost within the flux of images that make up the body politic. But Conner's montage is far from randomly composed. It is precisely keyed to the exact words of the narrator, correlating images from a wide variety of sources to the newsman's report on the soundtrack. Just as Kennedy's image no longer incorporates or "frames" the masses, who now appear as inchoate, volatile, and even aggressively disposed toward him, the narrator no longer contains the meaning of signs generated by the montage.

In REPORT Conner does not narrate news footage in the past tense, as newsreel convention would dictate. Instead, he simulates live television coverage of the shooting that never actually aired, since there was no live television feed of the President's motorcade in Daley Plaza that day [Figure 2.14].[86] Conner was watching television coverage of the assassination along with countless others and decided almost immediately to record what he could directly from the television screen with a 8mm home movie camera.[87] This footage does not appear in REPORT, but it does suggest that the film was deeply marked by its maker's experience of being a member of that audience. Conner recounts,

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[85] Hal Foster sketches a relevant history of the emergence of the mass subject tracing it back to the disincorporation of the body politic (figured as the image of the king) that followed the rise of the bourgeois class. Foster contends that the figure of the sovereign returns to "reembody 'the People-as-One'" in two distinct ways in the twentieth century: as the "Egocrat," a term he borrows from Claude Lefort, and the correlative "politician as celebrity" (and "celebrity as politician"). Kennedy is, of course, the paragon of the politician as celebrity type. See Hal Foster, "Death in America" *October* Vol. 75 (Winter 1996), pp. 36-59.

[86] In fact there was no image at all to accompany the first reports of the jarring news of the shooting on television. When the announcement came, there was nothing on screen but the network logo. Walter Cronkite recalls having to broadcast from the radio booth because there was no camera in the newsroom at that mid-day hour. As Cronkite tells it, the camera was in another studio on another floor. It had to be retrieved and even then it needed twenty minutes to warm up, Vaughn, 241. This is yet another one of the technical glitches to which REPORT responds so viscerally. The soundtrack of REPORT comes not from television, but from reports of the assassination produced by local Dallas radio stations released as an LP in 1964. *Four Days that Shocked the World* was released by Colpix Records (a division of Columbia Pictures) and UPI (United Press International). Recently there has been some dispute as to whether these are authentic radio recordings or recreations. Karl King, "Reel Top 40 Radio Repository." (Sunday, November 26, 2000).
<http://www.reelradio.com/comment/comment.cgi?kbox112263~KBOX+Dallas,+November+22,+1963~../se/index.html>

[87] Stan Brakhage has described this footage as a sketch for the work that would become REPORT. Brakhage, 130-133. It later became the film TELEVISION ASSASSINATION. See Bruce Jenkins, "Bruce Conner's REPORT: Contesting Camelot" in *Masterpieces of Modernist Cinema,* ed. Ted Perry (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 249.

> The day Kennedy was assassinated was a very unique event. Nothing has ever happened like that since. All communications were blocked off. Nobody could understand whether you know, we're in a military takeover and we're all going to be pulled off into concentration camps the next day or what was going on. The theaters closed and radio didn't broadcast anything except repetitive authorized "news," on television you kept seeing the same images again and again just like in REPORT. And then they brought out Oswald and killed him on camera for everybody like a television show. People who lived through those days, draw off all of that experience. Once you've been in a shipwreck…you can identify with the other people who've been in a shipwreck.[88]

Tellingly he compares the event of the assassination to the final image of A MOVIE, but here it functions as a metaphor for a shared experience that brings strangers together in the present, rather than as an allegorical image of recovery and redemption to come.

Though the style of montage changes dramatically between the first and second parts of REPORT, it continues to heighten feelings of uncertainty and disorientation. The first half of the film lingers over repeated actions or absents the image altogether. In the second half of REPORT, sound and image are cut together in ways that overburden associations with too much meaning. Both strategies of editing depart from the potential suggested by the final image of A MOVIE, in which montage is invested, as I have argued, with the capacity to generate some new social order out of the disaster of history. In REPORT, by contrast, Conner works against the social order that television and the state tried to restore in the staging of Kennedy's funeral as a media event.

Conner's montage plays on the logic of the media events it conflates, the memorial service and the original event upended by the assassination—Kennedy's trip to Dallas. In both cases, Kennedy's administration recognized the value of a well-planned media appearance.[89] In Dallas reports from mobile units along the parade route were issued by newsmen waiting for the President to appear according to a precisely timed schedule—an operation designed in large part to involve the press (and by extension the public) in the President's political efforts. Kennedy was in Texas that day to help negotiate an ongoing conflict between different factions of the Democratic Party, but also to raise his own profile in the state before the upcoming election. The path of the parade route was released to the press in the days before his visit in order to turn the short trip

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[88] Interview with Richards, 12-13.

[89] Kennedy was the first President to hold live press conferences on television. His careful management of every detail including the angle of lights and the choice of camera lenses are well documented. Editing was something else he was careful to control, though more indirectly by setting specific terms for how much material must be cut from an interview. For example, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the President invited the three major networks to participate in an intimate Christmas chat. He spelled out exactly how much material was to be cut, but left it to the interviewer to decide what could be spared. According to one of the reporters involved, knowing his that interlocutors were required to edit out a third of the interview, Kennedy offered an unusable answer to any question that struck him as unfriendly, insuring that the networks would broadcast only the most flattering moments of the chat. Mary Ann Watson, "How Kennedy Invented Political Television," *Television Quarterly* (Spring 1991), pp. 61-71.

across town into a media event.[90] This was a decision calculated to involve the media in disseminating an image of popular support for Kennedy in Texas—an effort to directly contradict polls that suggested his political weakness there. Before the shooting, this plan seemed to be producing its intended effects. The crowds that lined the streets appeared energized and supportive. After the shooting, many more crowds lined up solemnly in Washington D.C. to pay their respects. The violence of the assassination only temporarily suspended the plotting of time as measured and predictable, coordinated and "covered" in the way these political operations required.

President Johnson describes television's reassuring role in producing the media event of the funeral in terms that differ starkly from Conner's paranoid uncertainty: "television provided a personal experience which all could share, a vast religious service which all could attend, a unifying bond which all could feel."[91] These words appear in a special memorial issue of TV Guide released in January of 1964, itself a fascinating document of the self-conscious construction of television's "coming of age" in the wake of Kennedy's death [Figure 2.15]. Staff writers for the program guide painstakingly reconstructed what had been broadcast in the hours and days after the assassination. The retrospective guide to the networks' coverage of Kennedy's death makes clear that REPORT's temporal complexities are born of a certain fidelity to what actually appeared on television that weekend. This is most striking in the sequencing of the film's two-part structure; REPORT confirms the death of the President before turning back to his arrival at Love Field earlier that day in the second half of the film. This flashback hews closely to what television audiences saw not long after news of the shooting broke.

Conner's film mimics this and many of the other destabilizing shocks built into the news of the assassination to amplify their impact. Moreover, this amplification works against the unifying effects of television's memorial coverage celebrated by Johnson. In addition to the unforgettable scenes of Kennedy's family in mourning, much of the network coverage focused on the masses lining the streets of the Capital waiting to pay their respects to the slain President, scenes disrupted again when Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald and the event was inadvertently broadcast live and then subsequently shown repeatedly in slow motion during the follow up coverage. These disruptions are exaggerated in REPORT; the film's structure underlines temporal instability at every point, allowing this instability to inflect scenes of public assembly.

REPORT has often been read as Conner's critique of the widespread exploitation of the Kennedy myth in the wake of the assassination.[92] In my view, the film endures not

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[90] "Back to Dallas" *Life Magazine*, Vol. 90 No. 21 (November 24, 1967), pp. 54-55.

[91] Two months after the assassination of President Kennedy, on January 25, 1964, *TV Guide* published a special edition entitled, "America's Long Vigil." The publication typically provides a schedule of what is to come, but this issue had to be reconstructed retroactively from logs and tapes made of live broadcasts in the days after the assassination. Regular programming was suspended for nearly four days once reports of the shooting in Dallas broke through soap operas and talk shows that Friday afternoon. The unprecedented suspension of regular programming provided an occasion for the producers of this ephemeral program guide to publish something worth saving, a keepsake, advertised on the cover as "a permanent reminder of what we watched."

[92] This reading follows Conner's own remarks on the film. See for example, Unpublished Interview with Robert Shimshak, June 15, 1991, Page 3. Carton 15, Folder 38,

because it succeeds in this critical ambition, but for the way it registers the volatile experience of millions of viewers coming to terms with this act of surprising and destabilizing violence. By treating the soundtrack as a script, as a precise guide for the assembly of the montage, Conner actually undermines its authority, as well Kennedy's capacity (as image) to figure political order. At the same time, Conner displaces his own precise authorial control by reproducing the experience of unbidden images erupting on screen. The precision of the montage produces a paranoid effect. The presence of Conner's hand as a filmmaker becomes conflated with what Ken Kelmen calls, "invisible forces" suggested as the "workings of hidden power."[93] The effect is most acute when Oswald appears on screen. The narrator repeats the route the motorcade will take through downtown Dallas. A freeze frame of Jack Ruby lunging toward Oswald flashes up at the moment the reporter says, "just to be sure you find yourself in the proper location let's give it to you once again." Conner's own labor, partially obscured by the illusion he creates of shadowy forces guiding the hand of history, plays an important role in the tension REPORT sustains between authority, order, and contingency.

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While making REPORT, Conner began to feel more and more ambivalent about his newfound fame as a filmmaker. In 1963 he was surprised to win a coveted grant from the Ford Foundation. At the same time a review of his solo show at the Alan Gallery by Brian O'Doherty in the *New York Times* focused heavily on Conner's first two films, A MOVIE and COSMIC RAY, to the detriment, he felt, of the other works on display.[94] Fearing

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BANC MSS 2000/50c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
On REPORT as a form of Barthesian myth see Bruce Jenkins, "Explosion in a Film Factory," *2000 BC: the Bruce Conner Story Part II*, ed. Peter Boswell, Joan Rothfuss, and Bruce Jenkins (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), pp. 185-223. On irony in REPORT see P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 299-300. On REPORT and semiotic-materialist critique, see James, 156-159. Kevin Hatch argues that REPORT exceeds social-critical satire, and reads the film as a medium specific meditation on "the difficult processes of encountering and accepting loss." Film "in the form of its leaders, joins, cuts, projected light—and darkness" is the medium that allows Conner to work through trauma first registered by way of television. Hatch, 157. In my view this reading of the film too quickly leaves aside Conner's concern with the maintenance and mediation of political order in REPORT.

[93] Kelman, 242.

[94] The films were not actually being shown at the time in the gallery, O'Doherty had requested a special screening. In an interview with Paul Cummings for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art Conner recounts, "The review came out and it was spectacular. It was like one-third of a page, on Sunday. Three-quarters of it was about the movies. People came to the gallery and said, 'Where are the movies? What is this junk on the walls?' I was very proud of the show. I wanted people to see what I had done. This kind of notice was something that I had always wanted. It meant some attention was going to be paid. But it was totally diverted and twisted around. The gallery sold two things out of the show. Didn't make enough money to pay for the announcements. I decided to make a movie to ruin my reputation as a filmmaker." Interview with Cummings, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, April 16, 1973, pp. 25–26. For an extended discussion of O'Doherty's review see Kase, 228-232.

that this new attention to his filmmaking would diminish the significance of his identity as an artist, he conspired to produce a film that he hoped would "ruin his reputation" as a filmmaker.[95] He screened this film, entitled LEADER, only once in 1964.[96] Though LEADER failed to end Conner's career as a filmmaker, it did provoke an unexpected insurrection that lends extra significance to the antagonism that pervades REPORT.

LEADER, much like it sounds, is a film made of nothing but film leader [Figure 2.16]. Countdown leader is typically spliced to the "head" of a reel so that the projectionist can thread the projector and quickly adjust the focus before the feature begins to play. In Conner's film the countdown runs without interruption for nearly 35 minutes, never giving way to any other kind of image. The repetitive countdown sequence that appears in REPORT as a long, but anticipation filled 3 minutes is extended in LEADER into a seemingly endless run. The countdown in REPORT sustains anticipation; each cycle of numbers running down could coincide with the announcement that will bring waiting to an end. In LEADER, there is nothing to anticipate, no chance of being drawn into the action.

The specter of televisual endlessness haunts LEADER in more ways than one. Like REPORT, it mixes filmic and televisual material together in ways that undermine the temporal codes that govern each medium. Conner took the soundtrack from a television docudrama about Nazi prison camps. It includes clips of prisoners yelling, "We gotta get out of here" and guards shouting back, "You are embarrassed you have been captured, aren't you?"[97] Conner rerecorded these sometimes inaudible phrases from the television, and edited a looped audio montage on tape.[98] The soundtrack of LEADER does not provide a structure for the film the way it does in REPORT (where the newscaster, though absent on screen, seems to activate the images that appear there). Conner inverts the powerful

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[95] Interview with Cummings, 26. Also see Hatch, 148-9.

[96] This was one of two other events - scenarios in which "Bruce Conner" was either elected or eliminated as "leader." In the first, he planned a Bruce Conner convention in which everyone in attendance would be named Bruce Conner. Elections held by this group would invariably produce the same results since the only name on the ballot would be Conner's own. In 1967, vowing to give up art and filmmaking altogether, Conner stopped editing REPORT (though he never considered it "finished"). In November of that year his name appeared on the ballot in San Francisco, as well as on buttons distributed throughout the city that read, "I AM BRUCE CONNER." Given the chance to state his qualifications for the office of Supervisor in the city's official voter's guide, he offered a passage from the New Testament on divine light. See Joan Rothfuss, "Escape Artist," *2000 BC: the Bruce Conner Story Part II*, ed. Peter Boswell, Joan Rothfuss, and Bruce Jenkins (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), pp. 159-183.

[97] Ibid., 34. At the time of making LEADER, Conner was involved in tape loop experiments at the San Francisco Tape Music Center. David W. Bernstein, "Introduction," *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-garde,* ed. David W. Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 34.

[98] The sound, Conner explained to Paul Cummings, "came through a television set (which had some distortion) onto a tape machine. It was then rerecorded over and over and transferred onto another tape. That tape was transferred onto sound negative and then transferred onto the film. So it had all these generations. It ended up like a third of the sound was inaudible. It was difficult to understand. You had to pay attention. And since it obviously wasn't visual, it had to be aural and it took a lot of effort." Interview with Cummings, 26-7.

affective charge generated in REPORT by editing to the urgent beat of the on-the-spot reportage. Audio looping in LEADER diminishes the film's affective charge rather than increasing it. Looped images in REPORT intensify dread, whereas the looped soundtrack in LEADER drains the film of the capacity to solicit any response but frustration and disengagement.

Like REPORT, a title that conflates the idea of a news report with the sound of a gun firing, LEADER is an obvious pun.[99] Conner uses film leader to interrogate the authority of the filmmaker by analogizing it to that of a "captivating" ruler or elected official. He has said of the film, "I was the filmmaker and I was forcing them to be there."[100] Conner staged the work to openly exhibit his relationship as "filmmaker-leader" to the audience as fundamentally antagonistic. The only screening of LEADER took place at the Swetzoff Gallery in Boston. Conner had hoped the film would incite the audience to get up and leave, but things didn't go according to plan. LEADER shared the bill with Jack Smith's highly anticipated *Flaming Creatures*. (It was intended as the b-film complement to Smith's feature presentation.) At the last minute the order of the program was reversed. LEADER was shown first instead of *Flaming Creatures*. The audience became agitated, but mostly refused to leave before getting a chance to see Smith's scandalous film, which had caused the highly publicized arrest of Jonas Mekas in New York a few months earlier.[101]

Conner recounts the audience's unpredictable reaction to LEADER in terms that invite comparison to the tensions that erupt throughout REPORT:

> [A] man pulled the power plug for the projector and turned on the lights. […] He said, 'There is a question of power source here!' [...] After another five minutes, somebody walked up and took the movie screen away, so the picture was now being projected in the back room of the gallery, on top of the desk and walls and furniture.

Given that he made LEADER in the midst of editing REPORT, the work suggests the analogy of Conner's own power as a filmmaker to Kennedy, leader of the free world. This already unstable association is further complicated by the soundtrack, which brings together a matrix of other associations including the conflation of the newsreel narrator (or television news anchor) with Nazi prison guard. Like the overburdened signs that populate REPORT, Conner freights "leader" with more meaning than it can properly sustain.

The choice of a soundtrack drawn from a dramatization of the Second World War is significant. LEADER evokes a historical moment in which newsreels provided the

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[99] Art Simon also suggests that the title REPORT serves as a reference to the Warren Commission Report. He argues that the film rehearses the tendency of post-Warren Commission inquiries to fixate less on the event than on "the textual practices carried out in its wake." Art Simon, *Dangerous Knowledge*: *The JFK Assassination in Art and Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), p. 140.

[100] Interview with Richards, 33.

[101] Interview with V. Vale in *RE/Search #11: Pranks!* (San Francisco, CA: RE/Search Publications, 1986), pp. 70-71.

primary means for keeping the home front abreast of developments in the war.[102] In the aftermath of Kennedy's assassination, this would have been a resonant memory. Until that time, no event had warranted the same cooperation between commercial media outlets with the state to convey a coherent, regulated message during a moment of national crisis.

In 1942, the Office of War Information (OWI) was established to officially coordinate newsreel and Hollywood productions with the nation's war efforts. The OWI exercised significant influence over the newsreel companies by suggesting stories and coordinating logistics with the military for covering them.[103] The military exercised even more control by providing much of the footage of the war to newsreel producers directly, footage that was subject to censorship by its own security officers. These synchronized efforts brought state sanctioned images of war to the screen for millions of theatergoers with relative efficiency and speed.[104]

In REPORT, Conner mimics and disrupts the coordination between television news producers and the state, obscuring his own labor behind the specter of "hidden power." Grappling with his own power as a filmmaker to assemble or disperse an audience, in LEADER he subverts this parallel between himself and news producers working in concert with the government, imagining himself instead as an autonomous and completely sovereign leader, akin to Kennedy (or the image he presented). In the melee that erupted during the screening of LEADER, the specter of hidden power in REPORT was unexpectedly raised again. It comes across in Conner's telling of the story of the screening, the way he relishes the member of the audience announcing: "There is a question of power source here!" The phrase recalls the mysterious charge generated by the flickering screen in REPORT and the sense of "electrical anarchy" it animated.

The addition of electrical power to the constellation of signifiers at play in LEADER provides a radical alternative to the logic of repressive power that Conner's original gesture was designed to expose or exacerbate. It suggests a paranoid model of power as unseen but pervasive. It also suggests a force that animates images. Electricity becomes in this sense a metaphor for ideology, but also for power as something that must be generated (and not simply exercised). As he edited REPORT for another three years after the riotous debut of LEADER, Conner continued to grapple with questions provoked

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[102] Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 404.

[103] George H. Roeder, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience During World War Two* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 18-19.

[104] Schatz, 403-4. The five major newsreels companies had to work with identical footage provided by the military. There were some difference in the way each company presented this material, but ultimately, coverage was very consistent and (indirectly) controlled by military access (404). They cooperated with the government, largely because they had no choice, but protested that the images they were given to work with looked more like travelogues than combat scenes. Some of the military's tight control over the footage provided to newsreel companies was loosened by a directive issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1943, which allowed for a "more comprehensive and unvarnished depiction of combat action" than had previously been possible (404).

by the overlay between these different conceptions of power and the systems that sustain them.[105]

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REPORT ends with an ominous image of a mysterious woman pressing a button labeled "sell" [Figure 2.17].[106] The image, like LEADER, raises uncertainty about where power is located and how it operates in REPORT. If power is not contained or embodied by a sovereign leader such as Kennedy (or his stand-in, the filmmaker), then where is it? How does it shape the world? The image of an anonymous female agent hooked up to a mysterious apparatus suggests a cartoonish, yet strikingly resonant fantasy about a technocratic system that regulates or controls everything, a networked form of power that does not reside in any one individual, but is somehow everywhere and nowhere at once. REPORT marks this dream image of a nefarious cybernetic command system as bound up with television's newfound status. It throws this fantasy into relief, by fixing on a moment in which it was suspended by necessity so that television could cooperation with the state to address viewers as citizens, just as newsreel producers had done during the Second World War.

Once news of Kennedy's shooting broke, commercial interruptions were suspended until after the state funeral ended four days later. The temporary ban on advertising marked the constitution of an exceptional collective experience. Conner's film suspends this state of exception in turn. Snippets of cheery commercials for dish soap and cereal intrude willy-nilly into somber scenes of mourning. In REPORT, Kennedy's image is governed by the same logic that animates ads for refrigerators and garbage disposals. Collectivity here is not something that emerges once commercial interruptions have been put on hold. Instead, the organization of time for sale returns in REPORT, offering an experience "all could share." The imperative "sell" appears now as the invisible command behind the suspension of advertising during the continuous coverage of Kennedy's death and memorial service.

Celebrations of television's response to the assassination note the reassuring sense of the smooth transition of power it provided during a time of great uncertainty. Conner animates anxiety about the eruption of political instability this coverage was designed to contain by refusing to mark the distinction between television's address to the citizen and the consumer. In this context the final image of the film signals the operation or process of organizing audiences into measurable populations whose attention could be valued in

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[105] Conner released eight versions of REPORT before he stopped editing the film in 1967.

[106] This image opens on to the film's network imaginary in a significant way, the importance of which will become more clear in the pages that follow. It comes from an industrial film made to promote IBM's new SABRE computer, which stands for (Semi-Automatic Business-Related Environment), a technology originally developed for the U.S. Air Force and adapted for the airline industry to aid in processing reservations in real time. This system, which became operational in 1962, was the first large, high-speed commercial computer/communications network. For a longer history of SABRE in the context of the history of "real time systems." See Phillip A. Laplant, *Real-Time Systems Design and Analysis* (New York: Wiley, 2004) pp. 1-22.

the form of discrete units of time for sale. REPORT exploits the tension between this operation and the task of mediating the political crisis of Kennedy's assassination thrust upon the television unexpectedly that day.

The Nielsen Company reported that on Monday, November 25th 1963, more than 41 million televisions were tuned into President Kennedy's funeral, and over 180 million people watched the memorial coverage worldwide. Nielsen ratings of this sort were central in the constitution of television audiences as populations of consumers about which data could be collected through surveys and other forms of continuous monitoring. Aided by Nielsen and other rating service providers, television networks commodified potential acts of consumption in the form of time for sale to advertisers. Kennedy's assassination temporally upended these operations of managing time as something for sale (at the very moment that it also generated the largest audience in television history). The first half of REPORT conjures the experience of this exceptional breakdown, but in that sense it also points back to the norms the event violated. Conner's film responds directly to the immediacy of the event as it appeared on television. But a longer time frame of memorial coverage is also contracted within the film. Why did he continue working on the film, eventually producing eight different versions between 1963 and 1967? Perhaps the crisis that the film pictures is not Kennedy's death so much as the prompt return to business as usual after the fact. By refusing closure and releasing multiple versions of REPORT, Conner resisted the order that was reestablished after the assassination, a refusal that ironically perhaps, shadowed the consumer rhythms of "this year's latest model" that punctuate the film.

The final shot of the button marked "sell" comes from an industrial film made to promote IBM's new SABRE computer, which stands for Semi-Automatic Business-Related Environment, a technology originally developed for the U.S. Air Force and adapted for the airline industry to aid in processing reservations in "real time." This system, which became operational in 1962, was the first large, high-speed commercial computer/communications network. Recontextualized within REPORT, the image of the SABRE interface, complete with the button marked sell, calls to mind the cybernetic processes by which television incorporates feedback into its own production (with ratings playing an increasingly determinative role in what was broadcast), but also as a system organized around targeting audiences as potential consumers.

The Nielsen Media Company and others like it helped to make it possible for broadcasters to sell time in fixed amounts to advertisers who wanted to target specific audiences. It installed meters and distributed survey diaries to sample households designed to determine who was watching what. In the spring of 1963, the House Special Subcommittee on Investigations summoned A.C. Nielsen to the Capitol to review the standards by which his company was extrapolating its data from sample households. At that time, Nielsen Audimeters monitored about a thousand households automatically. An article on the hearings entitled "Selling Confusion" published in *Time Magazine* in April of 1963 explains the device, "When a spool of film is replaced, the Audimeter would reward its keeper by ejecting two quarters."[107] But the majority of households were not yet automatically monitored. These participants were instead prompted to write down

[107] "Selling Confusion" *Time Magazine*, Vol. 81, Issue 15 (Friday April 12, 1963), p. 107.

what they were currently watching every half hour, by a Recordimeter which emitted a loud buzzer and produced a flashing white light behind the picture tube.

Television animated fantasies of an audience whose habits could be translated into data and whose potential acts of consumption could be commodified in the form of time for sale on television (even if the technical means for doing so were still quite primitive in 1963). Kennedy's assassination temporally upended those operations, at the very moment that it also generated the largest audience in television history, a collectivity brought together by a sense of national identity. REPORT generates all manner of inappropriate affects out of the confrontation between this form of collectivity and the one figured by television's incorporation of feedback into its commerical operations.

Before drawing this chapter to a close, it is worth looking again at the demise of the newsreel in the light of the cybernetic logic of televisual feedback that REPORT engages and disrupts. In his study on the rise and fall of the newsreel between 1911 and 1967, Raymond Fielding observes, "It would be an oversimplification to blame the decline and failure of the newsreel on television competition alone."[108] He points to the ossification of the newsreel's format after the emergence of sound, and blames it partly on the fact that it could not be properly evaluated on its own merits in terms of box office returns because it was integrated into and shared its viewers with the program that preceded the feature. Said another way, there was no way to transform audience reception of newsreels into usable data.

REPORT brings the obsolescence of newsreel powerfully into view. What is remarkable, as Fielding suggests, is not that newsreels eventually ceased production, but that they lasted as long as they did. He attributes the longevity of the newsreel to the stabilizing role it played during the tumultuous years of the 1930s and 40s, in particular the way in which newsreel producers found common cause with the state during the Second World War. Newsreel, even at its most frivolous and spectacular, has a history bound up with the operations of the state. REPORT underscores how television differs: moments that assemble and address an audience as citizens (rather than consumers) are figured as interruptions to standard televisual fare. REPORT pictures the relative weakness of television's capacity to sustain its address of viewers as citizens.

REPORT departs from the concerns that shape A MOVIE by attending to the social conditions under which people and events might be constituted as "assemblages." In A MOVIE, found footage functions as a material element of an assemblage constructed by the filmmaker, a situation Conner parodically overemphasizes, but does not ultimately undo. The final shots of A MOVIE open the possibility of a form of montage that would engage in the "go-for-broke game of history." REPORT by contrast employs film to engage an "assemblage" of people and events that is found rather than constructed, an audience assembled by way of the historical contingency of President Kennedy's assassination. It exploits tensions it discovers within the unpredictable continuous coverage provided by network television news rather than trying to disrupt what it takes to be a seamless, but false totality (as in A MOVIE).

LEADER serves as the hinge between these two different approaches to assemblage (constructed and found). It offers an extreme version of the joke that launches A MOVIE,

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[108] Raymond Fielding, *The American Newsreel*, 1911-1967 (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2006), p. 196.

in which Conner holds too long on his own filmmaker credit title. LEADER exaggerates and parodies the autonomy and control of the filmmaker in order to invite its complete undoing. Conner staged the work as a provocation designed to disperse an already assembled audience (but without engaging the conditions of under which it originally came together). Conflating the exercise and abdication of control as a filmmaker, he did not yet fully seize upon the possibility of interrogating the social dynamics of that control. The screening of LEADER did not goes as planned. Inadvertently it raised questions of power that Conner continued to pursue in REPORT.

The antagonisms that Conner allows to erupt within REPORT are what mark this assemblage as a form of what I am calling "social media." By interrogating the forces (or forms of power) that condition the way people are assembled as a collective, REPORT moves away from the montage operations of linking and unlinking that appear in A MOVIE (and are negated in LEADER, where arguably montage is reduced to an absolute minimum). The image of spectacularized history A MOVIE offers is totalizing, while in REPORT, history appears differently, shot through with tension and uncertainty. REPORT is marked by unruly social energies that pose a challenge to the seamless image of order that the commercial networks, in cooperation with the state, worked overtime to produce after Kennedy's death.

REPORT is fundamentally ambivalent about the political potential of the aggressions it activates. The crowds Conner pictures agitate for civil rights in one moment, but also cheer wildly at military marches and bullfights. Like A MOVIE, what REPORT offers is a glimpse of something hopeful, but also terribly fragile, fleeting and uncertain. This is not to say that Conner's work is cynical. Rather I think it urges the viewer to take stock of the full range of conditions and possibilities, both promising and disheartening, stirred up by the profoundly affecting event of Kennedy's assassination, which was also the event of summoning an audience newly aware of its unprecedented scope.

Herbert Marcuse argues that the social was once defined in opposition to both the state and the market. In 1964, he described the rise of a one-dimensional society characterized by dreams of technocratic control and management that threatened the autonomy of a realm of existence outside the organizing logic of the state on the one hand, and the market on the other. REPORT attempts to reanimate that space as vital and full of antagonism, not to the state alone, or toward Kennedy as its representative, but toward the forces of the state and the commodity form working in concert to absorb the social, to manage ways of living, feeling, and acting that would otherwise resist assimilation, with Kennedy's image as the emblem of this union and his death its catalyst. The social energies that animate REPORT are not in and of themselves political, but when activated, they can help fuel political struggle, as the scenes of the March on Washington that flash up in REPORT remind us. REPORT knows that these energies can also be easily dissipated through spectacles of violence or caught back up in the machinery of commerce and state power. But, like A MOVIE, it awakens the "inkling" that things need not be that way. The next chapter turns to the question how political struggles can take form within the anarchic, often messy, domain of affect and action that REPORT brings into view.

Chapter 3
Wire Photo

Carolee Schneemann was trained as a painter in the late 1950s, and continues to identify as one, despite being better known today for her work in performance and film.[109] Her earliest canvases (c. 1957) depict abstract landscapes or large reclining figures. In these works, snaking gestural marks create overall compositions buzzing with detail and the palpable feel of paint built up on the surface of the canvas. Bodies in these pictures share many of the visual and material qualities of the spaces they are made to inhabit. In the early 1960s Schneemann developed a performance form she called "Kinetic Theater." Early works of Kinetic Theater such as *Glass Environment for Sound and Motion* (1962), *Newspaper Event* (1963), and most famously *Meat Joy* (1964) were scored happening-like events for multiple performers staged within environments of scavenged materials and urban debris. In these performances, Schneemann continued her painterly exploration of figuration by other means—incorporating movement into works concerned with the question of how bodies occupy or relate to their larger environmental surround.

This chapter examines how Schneemann's treatment of the relationship between the constructed environment and the body changes with the staging of *Snows* (1967), a work of Kinetic Theater made in direct response to the Vietnam War. *Water Light/Water Needle* (1966) serves as an important hinge between the concerns that dominate Schneemann's early Kinetic Theater (materiality, vision, embodiment), and the more explicitly political preoccupations that shape *Snows*, presented as part of the Week of Angry Arts—an artist organized "festival of dissent" against the Vietnam War [Figure 3.1].[110] I begin with a discussion of Schneemann's painting-assemblages to highlight the concerns that dominate the early Kinetic Theater performances, and then turn to a closer reading of *Water Light/Water Needle* and *Snows* to show how the social dimensions of her media are rearticulated in response to environments pervaded by news of the war in Vietnam.

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[109] Curator Maura Reilly begins her catalog essay, "Carolee Schneemann: Painting, What it Became" with a statement that Schneemann made in 1993: "I'm a painter. I'm still a painter and I will die a painter. Everything that I have developed has to do with extending visual principles off the canvas." See *Carolee Schneemann: Painting, What it Became*, ed. Maura Reilly (New York: P.P.O.W and Project Projects, 2009). Kristine Stiles, one of Schneemann's most astute critics also insists that Schneemann's performance work cannot be understood without taking her formation as a painter into consideration. See Kristine Stiles, "Schlaget Auf: The Problem with Carolee Schneemann's Paintings," in *Carolee Schneemann: Up To and Including Her Limits*. (New York: The New Museum, 1996), pp. 15–25 and Kristine Stiles, "The Painter as an Instrument of Real Time" in *Imaging Her Erotics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 3-16.

[110] The Week of Angry Arts ran from January 29th-February 8th, 1967. *Snows* opened before the program officially began on January 21st and was performed a total of eight times (January 21-22, 27-29, February 3-5, 1967). The program includes the note, "Snows supports and is one of the events of Angry Arts Week." Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy* (New York: Documentext, 1979), p. 128.

Schneemann's Kinetic Theater grew out of efforts to bring a tactile, immersive dimension to painting. In an interview with Gene Youngblood published in *Expanded Cinema* in 1970, Schneemann describes the ambitions of her Kinetic Theater this way: to "dislocate, disassociate, compound, and engage our senses, to allow our senses to expand into primary feelings, as well as the sensitive relatedness among persons and things."[111] Schneemann began to pursue the link between painting and performance by experimenting with "putting the body where the [paint] brush had been." This expanded notion of painting engaged her viewer-participant as an embodied locus of vision within a larger surround.

Labyrinths, her first performative work, took place in Sidney, Illinois, outside of Champaign-Urbana in the Summer of 1960 while she and her partner James Tenney were in graduate school. The inspiration for the work came from watching her cat Kitch respond to the "environment" opened up by a tree that crashed through the side of their house during a tornado.[112] She explains,

> We knew this was a disaster, and we had no idea what to do, but my cat Kitch studied this tree in the sink in the smashed window and immediately saw it as a doorway: a magical entrance-exit. She walked along the branch of the tree from the sink outside to the field, and I said, that's what I want to do. […] So the first performative work was to invite people, friends from the university and give them cards [with written instructions on how] to be within the altered landscape, to be in the mud, to be in the water, crawl under the trees and over the trees. I didn't know exactly what I was doing, but I was intensifying the process of painting by putting the body where the brush had been.[113]

In Illinois Schneemann discovered a new environment, and with it a new way of mobilizing embodied vision. Soon after she would begin to construct environments herself. Upon completing her M.F.A. in painting at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 1961, Schneemann moved to New York City and took up residence in a former furrier's loft. There she found an abundance of discarded materials, which she often incorporated into her painting-assemblages—works ranging in size from the handheld to the immersive environmental surround.

In *Window to Brakhage* (1962), a mirror diagonally bisects a cigar box layered with rough textured patches of oil paint flecked with bits of glass [Figure 3.2].[114] The

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[111] Kinetic Theater developed within the context of the Judson Dance Theater, though Schneemann often also aligns with it with what she calls "painter's Happenings." Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 32. Also see Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body*: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993).

[112] "I decided to use the fallen tree and flooded-out rock walls, the mud and broken branches, as an 'environment' – a labyrinth-for a group of friends to proceed through one Sunday afternoon." Scheenmann, *More than Meat Joy*, 7.

[113] Interview with Gia Kourias, *Time Out New York*, September 17, 2012. <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/dance/carolee-schneemann-talks-about-judson-dance-theater>

[114] Sylvie Simonds points out that *Window to Brakhage* (1962), central to the development of Schneemann's Kinetic Theater, was also a direct influence on Stan Brakhage's filmmaking. Schneemann made the work as a gift for Brakhage. Footage of the box's interior appears in

reflective surface of the mirror animates the box's painted interior. In the mirror, color and texture are set in motion, no longer bound to the two dimensional surfaces of the construction. Soliciting the viewer to move the box to catch the light, the work offers an experience that binds touch to vision.[115] *Window to Brakhage* allows the viewer to participate directly in creating the visual experience it offers.

Schneemann's larger-scale compositions incorporate textured materials, moving elements, and blinking lights that further emphasize the tactile qualities of her materials. *Four Fur Cutting Boards* (1963), for example, includes a dangling hubcap and a couple of ruined umbrellas attached to simple motors [Figure 3.3]. Scrappy metal spindles spin, shifting slowly in relation to the other elements of the construction including odds and ends of wood, fur, and fabric.[116] Broad sweeps of pigment keyed to the scale of her own body echo passages of line and color created by way of these found materials. Composed to activate attention to the distinct physicality of its gestural marks and surfaces, this work calls for a mode of looking that involves the body as much as the eye.

Glass Environment for Sound and Motion, presented in May 1962 at the Living Theatre, was one of Schneemann's first attempts to work directly with an ensemble of performers in a constructed environment [Figure 3.4]. She describes *Glass Environment for Sound and Motion* as an "enlarged collage" that would incorporate and transform the actions and gestures taking place within it.[117] The performers were to produce sounds by

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Brakhage's film, *Dog Star Man* (1961-64). Simonds argues that *Window to Brakhage* enabled the filmmaker to "see" and experience painting as animated, which led to the development of his use of multiple superimpositions and the practice of painting directly onto celluloid. Sylvie Simonds, *A Countercultural Movement: Examining Carolee Schneemann's Kinetic Theatre Between 1963 and 1970* (Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, 2013), pp. 41-2.

[115] Kristine Stiles notes Schneemann's ability to "draw the eye back to the body that sees: both to the body's inextricable connection to what is seen and to its role in determining the nature of the seen." Stiles, "The Painter as an Instrument of Real Time," 3.

[116] Both *Window to Brakhage* and *Four Fur Cutting Boards* appear as environmental elements in Schneemann's "performance for camera," *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963). Elise Archias offers an incisive reading of the interplay between materiality and coded legibility in *Eye Body,* arguing that the work takes up the codes of advertising, pornography, and religious iconography, though not always in the ways assumed by Schneemann and her critics. She questions, for example, whether *Eye Body* succeeds in generating the new "erotic iconography" Schneemann had hoped it would. "Does it not rather offer a dense force field of clichéd femininity?" she asks. Archias concludes that *Eye Body* "exaggerates the extent to which the body is always coded," but suggests that we take this as one of its insights. Archias insists that we read Schneemann's Kinetic Theater through concerns born of its own moment, rather than casting it in the light of a critical discourse around gender and performance still to come. She reminds us that like many of her contemporaries, Schneemann was primarily interested in the question of what "openness to contingency" is like (rather than identity as a socially embedded category). My reading of Schenemann's later works is indebted to these insights, but also reads *Snows* as a break from the concerns that dominate the early performances. Openness to contingency remains a central concern for Schneemann, but I argue it takes on new significance in the context of anti-war protest. See Elise Archias, *The Body as a Material in the Early Performance Work of Carolee Schneemann, Yvonne Rainer, and Vito Acconci* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2008).

[117] Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy,* 21.

striking against the glass elements of the environment as they moved. This work extended and united the two kinds of movement at play in the large and small painting-assemblages by making the figure of the viewer-participant over into a performer who enters into an environment in which she herself becomes one of its mobile elements.

The score for *Glass Environment* underlines Schneemann's focus on the particular characteristics of her performers' bodies as elements within the larger composition. She directed each to move in a style determined by "the particularities and contrasts between types, each seen as vivid, distinctive."[118] One dancer was to keep her actions "small, round, compact, unselfconscious" while projecting "innocence and efficiency of temperament," another was to cultivate "controlled wildness, poignant energy."[119] During the performance Schneemann stayed off to the side, improvising the use of flashlights to illuminate the figures on stage and bounce light back into the audience. *Glass Environment for Sound and Motion* involved everyday actions such as push-ups, making faces in the mirror, hammering nails, coughing, and pushing a baby carriage. Alongside these more recognizable movements the performers engaged in ecstatic gestures that were harder to read, including arm flapping, spinning, and shrieking. Schneemann describes her interest in activating this mix of materials and gestures: "Every element contributes to the image. The active qualities of any one element (body, light, sound, paper, cloth, glass) find its necessary relation to all other elements and through conjunction and juxtaposition the kinetic energy is released."[120]

After *Glass Environment* two of the performers, Yvonne Rainer and Arlene Rothlein, invited Schneemann to participate in Robert Dunn's choreography workshop.[121] Members of this group would perform together in July of 1962 at the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village and begin to call themselves the Judson Dance Theater in April of the following year. Schneemann's *Newspaper Event* was performed as part of the third Judson Dance Theater concert in January 1963. Rather than focus on individual body types for this work, she assigned each performer a role corresponding to a different part of the body, with the notion that by moving together the group would create a disarticulated, but nonetheless collective bodily whole.[122] This movement took place within a large pile of crumpled newspapers, which created a context for the collaborative action. Schneeamann describes *Newspaper Event* as a "first attempt" at using a loose performance score to guide "contact and improvisation" that would "activate neglected thresholds of awareness."[123]

> Individuals could create their own activity and its momentum, while responding to and incorporating the 'intrusions' and unexpected conjunctions with others.

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[118] Ibid., 22.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 11.
[121] Ibid., 32.
[122] These roles were sometimes doubled up in surprising ways having nothing to do with the proximity of one body part to another. For example, Ruth Emerson was given the role of the legs and the face, while Yvonne Rainer was assigned the neck and feet. See Ramsey Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 111-2.
[123] Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 33.

> Any particularized area of focus could be absorbed directly into a collective unity. There was no underlying basis of abstract structure or rule, no pre-determined movement patterns. Unpredictability permitted the audience to respond exactly as and when we were responding.[124]

Schneemann's account of the work reveals how closely she aligned the audience and performers as participants. By flashing light back and forth between the stage and the space of the audience, she sought to incorporate the reactions of the participant-performer/viewers into the work as it progressed. Together newspaper and light created a dynamic immersive environment that provided a visual and tactile context for this contingent unfolding of action and reaction.

Meat Joy, performed in Paris at the First Festival of Free Expression in May of 1964, and then later that year in New York and London, was also staged among mounds of crumpled newspaper, which the critic Jill Johnston described as "a tangible and a mysterious setting for a poetry of action" [Figure 3.5].[125] The action in *Meat Joy* revolves around encounters between performers—flesh exposed in fur-lined bikinis and briefs—and other materials such as paint, chicken carcasses, fish, and uncooked sausages. The work is often understood as an exercise in overcoming inhibition, a celebration of what Susan Foster calls "frictive encounters between bodies as intimate and pleasure-filled."[126] Elise Archias argues the awkward, unintended motions and postures that occur while performers focus on improvised encounters generate a vivid sense of the body's materiality in *Meat Joy*, (rather than the sexual charge of any particular action). Schneemann does not present the bodies of the performers as purely physical or material. As Archias notes, even if that were her aim, it would be impossible: "in photographs especially, but in performance as well, the body can never be pried fully away from the codes and conventions through which it is read."[127] But by putting performers in a physically demanding scenario with strict directions about how interactions were to unfold, Schneemann invites contingencies that underscore the physicality and literal materiality of the body as privileged visual values. A similar principle holds for interactions that take place during *Water Light/Water Needle*.

Water Light/Water Needle was inspired by the immersive qualities of light and water in Venice. In 1964, Schneemann visited the Venice Biennale after staging *Meat Joy* in Paris. There she found herself altogether overwhelmed: "I walked off the train and across the station into startling reversals of figure and ground, water and stone, dazzling light and shadow, solidity, transparency."[128] She experienced the fragments of sky and architectural detail reflected in the canals as enlarged "detailed optical effects." Movement along the city's waterways provided a visual experience she described in her notebook as "merging and duplicating what is outside, including the viewer." Schneemann compared the experience to entering into one of her own mirrored-painting

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[124] Ibid.
[125] Jill Johnston, "Dance," *The Village Voice*, November 26, 1964, p. 13.
[126] Susan Foster, *Dances that Describe Themselves: The Improvised Dances of Richard Bull* (Hanover, NH and London: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 49.
[127] Archias, 76.
[128] Carolee Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy,* 103.

constructions, where focus "converge[s] and splinter[s] depending on the angle of observation."[129]

While in Venice Schneemann began to envision an aerial performance on ropes strung across the canal at San Marco in which members of the audience lining the water's edge would flash beams of light onto the bodies of performers gliding effortlessly through the air.[130] Ultimately the work that grew out of this concept, *Water Light/Water Needle*, took place in New York City two years later at St. Marks Church on the Bowery.[131] *Water Light/Water Needle* developed from concerns with the active transformation of an environment characterized by "enlarged optical effects" into a process-oriented exploration of bodies moving within a system of ropes, pulleys, and newsprint [Figure 3.6]. The transposition of Schneemann's original idea to its new context in New York City involved trading the immersive reflections on the water in Venice for a light absorbing sea of newsprint.

As in her earlier performances, the newspaper that appears in *Water Light/Water Needle* provides movement with a context, a space defined as a changeable physical environment. In *Water Light/Water Needle* Schneemann pares this movement down to a minimum. She eliminates specific directives to individual performers based on distinct roles or types. In the early Kinetic Theater performances, the emphasis was on sense stimuli, the visible "interaction and exchange between the body and the environment."[132] In *Water Light/Water Needle* this dynamic exchange takes place within an environment responsive to the slightest motion or shift of weight. Ten performers, five men and five women, maneuver along a network of ropes strung at different heights across an open space. Tattered newspapers and other debris cover the floor below. The performance takes the form of a series of unchoreographed encounters between bodies struggling to keep their balance in this constantly shifting terrain.

The participants in *Water Light/Water Needle* wear white work clothes that are smudged and soiled by their movements, which involve making their way along the ropes, sometimes dragging limbs or torsos through piles of crumpled newsprint as the piece progresses. In a rehearsal note Schneemann observes that as the process unfolds, the white fabric of their costumes gathers marks that begin to "model the shapes of [their] bodies."[133] The motions the work highlights are not theatrical, balletic, or gymnastic, in other words, they are not spectacular; they simply present the body as functional, literal, and without artifice. Schneemann tells her performers: "No gesturing, no funny,

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[129] Ibid. Examples of other mirror constructions include *Northlight*, (1962), *Colorado House* (1962), and *Romer's House* (1962).

[130] Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 22.

[131] *Water Light/Water Needle* was also performed again in May of that year outdoors in Mahwah New Jersey at the Havemayer Estate. In this chapter I focus on the first iteration of the performance.

[132] In an undated note found among her papers, she writes, "I am after the interpretation of displacements which occur between various sense stimuli; the interaction and exchange between the body and the environment outside it; the body as environment." Carolee Schneemann Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 950001, series 1, box 2, folder 2.

[133] Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 107.

mechanical or acrobatic effects." She emphasizes, what matters most is that "every movement and every moment is *relational*."[134]

In her conversation with Youngblood, Schneemann suggests why this intense focus on direct encounter began to take on special urgency for her in the mid 1960s. Increasingly Schneemann understood her Kinetic Theater as a way of grappling with the enervating effects of daily news. She explains that her work's exploration of reciprocity and exchange was one way of responding to the limitations imposed by forms of media that foreclose what had so impressed her about the environment in Venice, the "inclusion and transformation" of a subjective response. She elaborates her point with an example that is utterly banal, though it takes on added significance in the context of the Vietnam War: "We get all this information and there's absolutely no way to react," she tells him. "You're reading some horror in your newspaper while eating your doughnut. […] So we're trapped with all these fears of real impotence."[135] Under these conditions, she reflects, people crave what she calls "tactile confirmation."[136] They want to "be in touch with their physicality, to be able to communicate, and to grow, to touch one another and be touched."[137] She explores this possibility in *Water Light/Water Needle*, where the physicality of the body is directly correlated to the possibility of direct communication without recourse to symbols or signs, here social interdependence takes a form that is both highly visible and immediately visceral.[138]

During *Water Light/Water Needle*, movement is improvised. Each performer moves hand over hand along ropes until they encounter another body. Schneemann provides only a few precise directions to structure these encounters. She stipulates: No one is to pass anyone else on the ropes without engaging in physical contact. During these encounters, one person takes a hand off the ropes to gently turn the head of the other person. Performers are to "impinge on each other's movements." One person may accept the weight of another and "carry them along in their motion." The work does not dramatize these encounters as antagonistic. Schneemann notes, "there is never a struggle; the balance of each on the ropes regulates the possible combinations." Elsewhere she emphasizes, "We are a unitary system; your own energy and the position of the ropes expands, vibrates, and extends each motion."[139] The circulation of bodies is self-regulating: movement at one spot on the ropes requires other performers to adjust their

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[134] Ibid., 106.
[135] Youngblood, 370.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Carrie Lambert-Beatty identifies an important political dimension of the preoccupation with direct communication that defined the cultural moment in which the Judson Dance Theatre emerged. Sociologists, most prominently Erving Goffmann, were beginning to study embodied communication among people co-present to one another in time and space. Lambert-Beatty notes, "what Goffman called copresence was, at the same moment, undergirding the social vision of the emerging New Left, whose emphasis on participatory democracy as an antidote to the 'remote control economy' and the 'structural separation of people from power animated the 1962 'Port Huron Statement' of Students for a Democratic Society." Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 24.
[139] Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 106.

position and balance elsewhere. The ropes create a simple feedback mechanism that presents a model of social interdependence and relationality.

Schneemann's language in her rehearsal notes for *Water Light/Water Needle* is proto-cybernetic, particularly where it puts the stress on the mechanics of adjustment and balance over and above antagonism and struggle. It moves beyond her early concern with kinetic movement, toward a new, tentative, interest in cybernetic control. Cybernetics emerged as a discourse within the context of the Cold War, driven in part by institutional participation in military research and development. It provided a common framework or schema for investigating problems of prediction and control within physical, biological, technological, and social situations, domains that previously would have been dealt with independently. Cybernetic principles were most often employed to model theoretical solutions to complex problems. Providing a shared vocabulary of terms and concepts drawn from information and communication theory, mathematics, computer science, biophysics, as well as psychology, anthropology, and social sciences—the field of cybernetics enabled researchers to identify commonalities between a diverse set of self-organizing phenomena.

Cybernetics sought to establish universal principles for defining control mechanisms including what is commonly known as the feedback loop.[140] Norbert Wiener, who coined the term cybernetics in 1948, identifies feedback as one of the defining characteristics of any cybernetic scenario. A feedback circuit channels the output of a system or process back into the system as an input to establish and maintain a state of self-regulating homeostasis. The process that unfolds in *Water Light/Water Needle* is a very simple example of a feedback loop. Within cybernetic discourse, feedback is understood to function as a mechanism of control, a way to maintain equilibrium. "Control system" may refer to a management strategy, structure or device that governs or regulates change within a dynamic system. Control mechanisms use feedback to constrain contingencies and reign in the effects of unpredictable phenomena. Within cybernetic discourse, control pertains not only to biological and technical phenomena, but also social systems. In other words, it analogizes social change to change that occurs in biological and information systems. As an idea with an enormous influence on post-war thought and aesthetics, control animates fantasies about what it might mean to act politically that *Snows* ultimately calls into question.

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[140] The first wave of cybernetics emphasized homeostasis, defined by biologists as the capacity of living organisms to maintain steady states in the face of environmental changes. Cybernetics extended this idea to machines by developing the concept of an informational feedback loop, where information is reduced to a quantifiable choice and humans are understood to be fundamentally similar to machines in their processing of information. This approach dominated from the period of 1948 until about 1970. Second wave cybernetics made allowances for forms of reflexively not figured into earlier feedback models. Instead of homeostasis, it emphasizes autopoiesis which is the study of how systems self-replicate. "An autopoietic machine is a machine organized (defined as a unity) as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components which through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them…" Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela *Autopoiesis and Cognition: the Realization of the Living* (Dordrect, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980 [1973]), pp. 78-9.

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Less than a year after the performance of *Water Light/Water Needle* at St. Mark's Church on the Bowery in March 1966, Schneemann staged *Snows* as part of The Week of Angry Arts, a citywide artist organized protest against the Vietnam War. *Snows* involved a number of moving elements including six performers, live projectionists, and revolving colored lights triggered by sensors attached to seats in the theater's audience. Like *Water Light/Water Needle*, *Snows* staged a series of encounters between performers within an environment pervaded by news materials, but this time the materials took the form of moving images: 1940s newsreels and the film *Viet Flakes*, made by re-filming news photos of the Vietnam war. The shift between *Water Light/Water Needle* and *Snows* marks a pivotal moment in Schneemann's interrogation of her own media, a turn best understood as spurred by the social exigencies of political action that define the period. The use of newsprint in her earlier performances may have obliquely signified a landscape pervaded by media, but until she introduced moving images, the particular content of the news would have no direct bearing on the actions of her performers.[141]

In *Snows*, Schneemann engaged found news images as carefully as she had attended to the bodily particularities of her performers in earlier works.[142] The work is concerned with what it feels like to move with and among others, particularly where media promise to confirm or restrict our access to sensory experience and social meaning. In *Water Light/Water Needle* interactions between performers at one spot along the rigging required the other performers elsewhere on the ropes to adjust their weight and balance in turn, creating a proto-cybernetic model of what Schneemann calls a "unitary system." In *Snows*, feedback mechanisms wired directly into the seating of the theater controled the lights and projectors. Here, rather than underscoring what is plainly evident in the interactions between performers, feedback calls attention to exchanges that cannot be perceived easily, or perhaps even at all.

In a roundtable on "Time and Space" led by Lucy Lippard in 1979, Schneemann emphasized the relationship between steps that she and her contemporaries were taking with what she called the "changing media in the early sixties" and the "social and political energies" animating the "transformations that everyone was sharing at that time."

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[141] Throughout Schneemann's notes for *Water Light/Water Needle*, newsprint is referred to simply as "paper" – suggesting that like the bodies of the performers, it functions as a tactile material without necessarily carrying the additional significance of "news."

[142] Pamela M. Lee identifies in *Snows* what she calls forms of "bodily confusion" that result in "a loss of control of the body by the image at large." Said another way, she reads the work as the imaging of the body losing control, a state brought on by its contact with images. For Lee, this loss paradoxically leads to the transcendence of "visions of atrocity and dread." Lee focuses on "the image at large" so the specificity of the moving images Schneemann employs in *Snows* falls out of her analysis. My reading restores that specificity and meaning to the temporal unfolding of the work. Lee detects a loss of control, whereas I argue that *Snows* challenges fantasies of control (and its total abdication) in order to make space for finding a way to act in concert with others despite uncertainty about how to measure or know the meaning of what may result. Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the Sixties,* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), p. 212.

> There wasn't the marked division at that time, for me, between the street movement—organizing, sensitivity awareness to police intrusions on group gatherings—that social situation, that political commitment was related to any kind of aesthetic groundwork being explored. It was all more of a piece.[143]

Throughout the period in which she was developing her Kinetic Theater performances, Schneemann was involved in various forms of anti-war organizing, protest, and performance events policed for their alleged obscenity.[144] In a letter to Henry Sayre she explains how she employed movement exercises developed for her Kinetic Theater performances to train protesters to minimize bodily harm when forcibly corralled by police.[145] Beyond this direct transposition of movement training from one context to the other, Schneemann's statement begs the question of how the demands of direct action, sensitivity awareness, and political organizing shaped the encounters she staged between bodies within the media rich environment of *Snows*.

In *Water Light/Water Needle*, ink from the newsprint visibly marks the contours of the bodies on view. In *Snows,* Schneemann takes a less literal approach to the exploration of how media impact the appearance of bodies on stage. *Water Light/Water Needle* emphasizes the contingencies of bodily movement that occur in situations that involve a changeable physical environment. *Snows* by contrast, presents a series of movements and gestures that are more or less legible in the context of an environment pervaded by media. Media in Schneemann's earlier works is taken up as a material, but in *Snows* it begins to accumulate additional significance that is at once historical, technological, and institutional. In other words, if *Water Light/Water Needle* responds to the alienating effects of news media by activating newspaper as a responsive material, then *Snows* takes this process one step further, engaging with news media in multiple forms, each registering different effects and associations. A newsreel from the 1947 projected on a large round surface that serves as a screen provides the first news images that appear in the *Snows*. Later in the performance a found novelty "newsreel" of happy

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[143] Carolee Schneemann in panel discussion, "Time and Space Concepts in Event Art" moderated by Lucy Lippard, *Time and Space Concepts in Art,* eds. Marilyn Belford and Jerry Herman (New York: Pleiades Gallery, 1980), p. 28.

[144] Schneemann describes an incident involving a performance by Charlotte Moorman shut down by a police raid in a letter to Joseph Berke. "Letter to Joseph Berke, February 14, 1967," *Correspondence Course*, ed. Kristine Stiles, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 113. Among her papers at the Getty Research Institute there are flyers for demonstrations, organizing meetings, and fundraisers by organizations such as the Vietnam Peace Parade Committee and Vietnam and Reservists to End the War in Vietnam. Carolee Schneemann Papers, Getty Research Institute, Accession no, 950001, series 1, box 1, folders 10, 13, 14 and box 2, folders 1-3. In her letters she describes her participation in marches and protests. For example see "Letter to Chieko Shiomi, August 1966," *Correspondence Course*, 108.

[145] Schneemann also describes working with friends called up for the draft to provoke dissociative states during their medical exams in order to gain a psychiatric release from service, inviting another way to read the performance of dissociation that takes place in *Snows*. See Carolee Schneemann, "Letter to Henry Sayre, July 15, 1986," published in *Correspondence Course*, 364-5.

skiers shot during the Second World War floods the theater. Swivel-mounted projectors allow the film's images spread and bend around every corner of the theater. The performance concludes with the projection of *Viet Flakes* on the same round surface where the first newsreel appeared.

Viet Flakes is not a newsreel, though it is made up of news images. Schneemann made the film with a handheld camera, which she used to scan, and in doing so, animate a series of news photographs from reports on the intensifying conflict in Vietnam [Figure 3.7]. In the film, scenes of war come in and out of focus as Schneemann moves her camera over their surfaces. For Schneemann, the images in *Viet Flakes* serve as "the heart and core" of *Snows*.[146] *Snows* also includes non-news media: A diary film shot by Schneemann in the snowy weeks leading up to the performance full of images that echo the scenes of winter sports that pervade the theater early on in *Snows*. In addition to moving images, *Snows* is punctuated by cut-up tape sound collages, including the haunting audio track for *Viet Flakes* produced by James Tenney, a jarring mix of pop singles, strains of Vietnamese folk music, and fragments of Bach that is reminiscent of radio signals coming in and out of range. The specter of broadcast haunts the work in another way, often unremarked. Action in *Snows* unfolds before a large grid-like structure, a frame hung with bags full of colored water that Schneemann describes as a giant lens, but that could also be read as a bank of monitors like those found within a television studio control room [Figure 3.8].[147] The presence of technicians, operating multiple projectors from the foot of the stage in full view of the audience also contributes to the television studio-like atmosphere of the performance.

The environment of *Snows* evokes connotations of a media-scape that are only signaled obliquely, if at all, in *Water Light/Water Needle*. Correspondingly, *Snows* involves multiple performance modes that generate different registers of bodily legibility, distinct from the straightforwardly tactile or physical qualities emphasized in *Water Light/Water Needle*. Shifts between these different registers of bodily legibility occur over the course of the performance. *Snows* moves away from the cybernetic model of social relationality tentatively explored in *Water Light/Water Needle* where every interaction produces a tangible corresponding reaction that in turn functions as feedback shaping subsequent interactions. Though *Snows* makes use of a technological feedback circuit in the staging of the work, (the seats wired-up to the lights cue the action on stage), it ends with a meditation on the limits of feedback as a model of social action. In *Snows*, Schneemann makes room for reflecting on vulnerability, loss, and the difficulty of acting in the face of the uncertainty provoked by reports of distant war. If *Water Light/Water Needle* looks to forms of "tactile confirmation" to counteract feelings of impotence provoked by the daily news, then *Snows* seeks a way to proceed without it.

In *Water Light/Water Needle*, Schneemann was interested in the way performers would adjust to keep their balance on the ropes in response to interactions between other performers taking place elsewhere along the rigging. As a self-regulating system the emphasis was on relational movement and balance. In *Snows*, feedback works differently.

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[146] Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 129.

[147] The wood structure was built to support a grid of soft plastic panels filled with colored liquids. For a fuller account of the staging of *Snows* see Schneemann's description in *Imaging Her Erotics,* 75.

The relationship between action and corresponding response remains uncertain. Here too, every movement, every moment is relational, structured by reciprocity, but the relations that result are inaccessible, unreadable, and strange. *Snows* interrogates and even begins to challenge the kind of homeostatic social system imagined in *Water Light/Water Needle*.

Snows unfolds as a series of different actions, best described as exercises or operations that stress reciprocity and exchange between performers. Sometimes the gestures of performers read as legible within the context of news footage that also appears within the work. At other times, movements and expressions are much more difficult to decipher. Ultimately, some gestures only acquire significance after the fact, their legibility developed in the projected light of *Viet Flakes* at the work's conclusion. Questions of bodily legibility in *Snows* are bound up with politically charged anxiety around the perception of distance and the mobilization of otherness that characterizes news coverage of the Vietnam War.

Snows begins with six performers, three women and three men, gathering on stage to watch a newsreel depicting a series of catastrophes, battles, and acts of violence, what Schneemann calls "one little horrific element after another."[148] After the newsreel, the male and female performers pair off and slowly circle one another, lunging forward or giving in to the attack rather than resisting it [Figure 3.9]. Schneemann used similar exercises in workshops on injury-prevention during protests or raids. Within the context of *Snows*, however these exchanges allow the audience to see what bodies look like when intensely focused and attentive to each other's actions, recalling the literal, material qualities of the body emphasized during *Water Light/Water Needle*. At the same time, each performer plays a role, as if adopted from the dramas featured in the newsreel. Actions code one figure as "aggressor" and the other as "victim," connotations of conflict not in operation during the similarly physical encounters of *Water Light/Water Needle*. The specific gestures of the performers do not directly mirror the events pictured in the newsreel, but the roles they play do nonetheless form associative links with its images of war, battle, attack, and surrender.

In the next sequence of *Snows* bodies lose this coded legibility. Pairs of performers cover each other's faces in white grease paint and take turns manipulating one another's expressions, as if molding them out of clay [Figure 3.10].[149] Strobe lights interrupt the action, transforming it into a series of snapshot-like freeze frames. As in *Water Light Water/Needle*, performers modify one another's position in some way, but here their encounters are highly theatrical, all artifice. Performers switch roles, but there

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[148] Youngblood, 368

[149] Schneemann first explored this type of action, which the score identifies as the "creation of faces" in *Ghost Rev*, staged in November of 1965 with Phoebe Neville in collaboration with USCO. It resembles aspects of Reichian therapy designed to dissolve "holding patterns" or "body armoring." Schneemann identifies Wilhelm Reich as an important influence. In her letters she often uses language that evokes his concepts of muscular or character armor. See for example, Schneemann, "Letter to Joseph Berke, February 14, 1967," *Correspondence Course*, 114. For a fuller account of the Reich's influence on her work, see Anette Kubitza, "Fluxus, Flirt, Feminist? Carolee Schneemann, Sexual Liberation and the Avant-garde of the 1960s" *n. paradoxa*, Issue No. 15 and 16, July/September 2001 and July 2002.

is no way to know how one interaction feeds into the next since each produces only unreadable, arbitrary changes. The action begins under flickering strobe lights, but then gives way to softer flashes of light activated (unknowingly) by members of the audience. With the assistance of engineers from Experiments in Art and Technology, Schneemann wired up a number of theater seats with contact microphones that fed into a switching system controlling the speed of the lights and other audio-visual performance cues.[150] When someone sitting in one of those seats shifted their weight it would trigger the lights, speeding up or slowing down the cues for action on stage, which would elicit further cues from audience members in turn. This circuit of feedback incorporated the embodied responses of the members of the audience into the work in real time. Restless shifting in the audience would slow down or speed up the flashing of the lights, signals that served as cues to the performers to move the action along. There was no way for viewers to know that their movements were correlated to the changing tempo of actions unfolding on stage, and even if there had been, there would have been be no way for them to know what that correlation might mean.

In the written score for *Snows*, Schneemann describes the exchanges between performers as "transformations" that induce "corresponding but unpredictable emotions."[151] As one performer "molds" the face of the other, the model takes on an expression that is artificially imposed, but nevertheless causes emotions to well up unexpectedly. Here changes in appearance induce feeling, rather than convey it. As Schneemann is careful to note, these feelings are unpredictable; they may or may not be commensurate with the visual appearance of the expressions that are their source. Performers attend carefully to each other's bodies, but now their actions and reactions are displayed as made artifacts, artificial, however acutely felt.

Snows imagines a form of looking that would no longer be simply receptive; but instead would involve mutual visibility, however open to manipulation. It pictures an active relay between receptivity and response, but one that is also fraught, forced, and above all uncertain. Withholding direct reference to Vietnam, this moment in *Snows* calls up anxieties provoked by media coverage of the war, discomfort that would have been amplified during the that week of artist-led protest by the proliferation of especially shocking images of war's human costs. Schneemann plays on fears, palpable during the Week of Angry Arts in disagreements between protestors about how to address the public at large, that news images of bodily violence might generate too much emotion, unwanted feelings, or perhaps worse, not much reaction at all.

Toward the end of *Snows*, Schneemann moves away from cybernetic forms of response and control. During the latter half of the work actions produce visual tableaux that anticipate some of the images that appear fleetingly during the projection of *Viet Flakes* at the conclusion of the performance. Here action generates a body that only becomes legible in time, emerging like a photographic print submerged in developer, in contrast to the scenes of immediate action and reaction that appear earlier in the work.

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[150] Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) was organized by Billy Kluver and Robert Rauschenberg to pair engineers with artists. See Carolee Schneemann, "Aspects of E.A.T. in Making *Snows*," *E.A.T. News,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (June 1, 1967), pp. 15-17 and Ralph Flynn, "*Snows* Technical Description" *E.A.T. News,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (June 1, 1967), pp. 17-18.
[151] Ibid., 135.

Seemingly random actions begin to unfold between performers with more complexity than in earlier exercises where roles are reversible and repeated. For example, two figures drag another across the stage. Then they "hang" (Schneemann's direction in the score) her up with a looped length of rope [Figure 3.11]. Finally they wrap her limbs and torso in tin foil. Specific gestures are echoed or even developed later by images that flash by, sometimes almost imperceptibly, in the film *Viet Flakes*, projected at the conclusion of *Snows*.

The act of dragging a body across the stage recalls an image that Schneemann has since published alongside the score to *Snows*, a photograph of the corpse of a Viet Cong soldier dragged behind an American tank [Figure 3.12]. The hanging of a body by a rope is similarly echoed by a photograph of a man strung up by his ankles during an investigation by South Vietnamese troops [Figure 3.13]. The photo of the man dragged by a tank was taken for the wire service United Press International and awarded World Press Photo of the Year at the end of 1966, while that of the man strung up by his ankles was taken for *Paris Match*, and then reproduced widely enough that in May of 1966 *Time Magazine* ran a story about its role in fueling growing anti-war sentiments. In the eyes of the magazine's editors, the proliferation of indignant captions accompanying each reprint had failed to tell the story behind the interrogation reported by the photographer.[152] *Viet Flakes* does not analyze the image to attempt to discern whether the truth of one caption or another can be determined by something that appears in the frame. Through camera movement Schneemann animates these images with her own distress and desire to transform or turn away from the violent acts they picture. The camera makes this private experience of looking public. The camera's movement suggests that no single view can fully take in what they show. By temporalizing her own process of scanning over the images, she slows and enlarges a process that often takes place much more quickly, as if to insist that these image can't simply be registered and passed over, as so often happens when one is flipping through the pages of a magazine or newspaper. The movement of the camera also opens up a space of indeterminacy between her look and the look of her viewer, who may find herself straining against the jerky shifts in focus and unexpected edits. In this way, *Viet Flakes* questions the power of the camera to offer traces of an embodied emotional response to the viewer as their own, sensitive to the way such transmissions may succeed or fail to register over distances of space and time.

The act of wrapping limbs in sheets of tin foil evokes an image that appears in *Viet Flakes* that Schneemann has never republished. It depicts a woman on the ground holding up a badly burned hand dressed in tattered bandages [Figure 3.14]. A child nurses at her breast. The original photograph first appeared in the New Left journal *Ramparts* as part of a photo-essay that included other images of women and children badly burned by napalm or scarred by shrapnel.[153] Many of the most explicit images from this essay were featured prominently during events that took place during the Week of Angry Arts.

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[152] *Time* reported that the man in the photograph had confessed to being a sniper responsible for the death of a small child. According to the photographer who followed the unit as they searched for the sniper, the man was cut down from the tree unharmed and taken as a prisoner after fifteen minutes of questioning. "Angle Shots," *Time Magazine*, May 6, 1966, (Volume 18) Issue 18, p. 43.

[153] William F. Pepper, "The Children of Vietnam" *Ramparts Magazine*, January 1967, pp. 45-68.

The anti-war arts festival that invaded New York City in the winter of 1967 involved over forty performances and events by some five hundred artists.[154] During that week of protest, photographs of Vietnamese villagers disfigured by napalm and shrapnel appeared at unexpected moments. Posters confronting passersby with an image of a woman cradling a toddler covered in burns appeared plastered all over the city [Figure 3.15]. Slides of napalm-scarred Vietnamese children drawn from the *Ramparts* photo-essay were projected during a poetry reading held in a university auditorium. Blown-up enlargements of these same images made their way through the streets of the city attached to the side of a flatbed truck that that traveled from the Village up to Harlem, bringing anti-war poetry and performance out into the wintry streets.[155] This caravan distributed twelve thousand copies of a pamphlet with a cover that featured a child whose flesh wounds provided further evidence of the horror perpetuated by the American military's use of incendiary agents against civilians.[156] Throughout the week, and in many protests to follow, images of bodies bearing disfiguring marks of violence were enlisted to convey the urgency of dissent. Under these conditions, the literal and material qualities of the body that had interested Schneemann in *Water Light/Water Needle* were subsumed within the grisly generality of vulnerability, damage, and otherness.

Not everyone who participated in the Week of Angry Arts endorsed the shocking use of anonymous images of scarred and burned Vietnamese villagers. A full-day event entitled, "An Act of Respect for the Vietnamese People," for example, implicitly challenged the impulse to let shocking photographs speak for themselves. Musicians played Vietnamese music. Susan Sontag read Buddhist texts. There were presentations about Vietnamese rivers, villages, food, and families. "Information not emotion was to be the medium," concluded one reporter after interviewing the event's organizers.[157] Seen in this context, Schneemann's contribution to the Week of Angry Arts registers much of the same ambivalence about the use of emotionally charged images, while simultaneously suggesting equal uncertainty about the efficacy of information overload as a

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[154] The Week of Angry Arts involved artists, writers, poets, filmmakers, musicians, playwrights, dancers, actors, and stage technicians. The breadth of participation is documented in "Report of Angry Arts Week" (May 1967) in Rudolf Barnick and Dore Ashton Files, PAD/D Archives (Museum of Modern Art Library). The *Washington Post* reported that the week included: "13 classical music concerts, a jazz concert dedicated to draft age youths, a folk and rock marathon, some 40 films, two evenings of dance, five evenings presented by Broadway and Off-Broadway actors, a variety of exhibits and panel discussions and other endeavors more experimental in form." More than 100 artists contributed panels to a 120 x 20 foot "Collage of Indignation." Rasa Gustaitis, "'Angry Arts' War Protest Opens in N.Y.: Unprecedented in Scope," Special to The Washington Post. *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (January 30, 1967), p. D8.

[155] Max Kozloff describes the ubiquitous appearance during the Week of Angry Arts of a poster that confronted passersby with the question: "Would you burn a child?" See Max Kozloff, "… A Collage of Indignation," *The Nation*, February 20, 1967, pp. 248-51 and Curtis Harnack, "Week of the Angry Artist," *The Nation*, February 20, 1967, p. 245. The Poets' Caravan is mentioned in Don McNeill, "Week of Angry Arts: Protest of the Artists," *Village Voice*, January 26, 1967, p. 13. It is also briefly discussed in Francis Frascina, *Art Politics and Dissent*: *Aspects of the art Left in Sixties* America (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999) pp. 117-9, 125.

[156] Frascina, 188.

[157] Gerald Jonas, "Dissent," *The New Yorker,* February 11, 1967, p. 30.

countervailing strategy.[158] This doubt emerges even in the work's title: *Snows* suggests numbness, blindness, the fear that photographic overexposure depoliticizes violence making it feel as unstoppable or as inevitable as nature. At the same time, it evokes the idea of noise or static, the buzz of an interrupted signal or information lost to entropy.

Snows wrestles with the affective fallout produced by tactics of confrontation, shaming, and over exposure. It allows for the significance of certain actions to develop retroactively, and then only at the risk of loss or the failure of vision. In *Viet Flakes*, images appear on the verge of disappearance. Schneemann's camera moves over her collection of news images as if animated by distress, the desire to see, to look closely and the equally powerful desire to turn away. As the camera pans, details are thrown in and out of focus. An image may linger on screen long enough to recall actions staged earlier, or it may flash by too quickly to be grasped.

When the image of the woman with a bandaged hand comes fleetingly into view in *Viet Flakes*, we catch only a brief glimpse of her face before the frame goes out of focus again, cutting quickly to a series of shots that encompass more of her full, but blurred figure. Schneemann's camera quickly scans over the details that provide the shock of the original photograph—the ragged bandage juxtaposed with the child at her breast—then focuses on the look that greets the photographer's lens. It is that of a woman who regards the camera steadily and directly, confronting anyone who might prefer to scrutinize her situation, her body, without having to acknowledge first her capacity to look back. *Viet Flakes* makes this fraught exchange of looks across time and space into something to see, but in doing so it also acknowledges the urge to look away, to give oneself over to feelings of helplessness.

Viet Flakes invites us to question whether Schneemann's moving camera is animated by what we could call, with Soyoung Yoon, an "imperialist logic of vision."[159] Does her interrogation or probing of the "foreign" presence of the other, as embodied by this wounded mother and child, work to subdue her alterity? Or does her camera seek to render its subjects more familiar, rather than less, showing us an image of maternal suffering that exceeds any and all differences across culture, time, and space? The scanning camera risks treating the subjects of the film as objects of knowledge to be scrutinized at close range. And yet, *Viet Flakes* would hardly seem to confirm and shore up a sense of control over what is seen. What kind of fantasy is this anyway? Do the herky-jerky movements of the camera in *Viet Flakes* suggest the undoing of its operator's (self)possesssion? In the end, we are left to wonder what kind of access to experience the movement of the camera can grant us as viewers. To see in *Viet Flakes* is surely not to

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[158] After *Snows*, Schneemann turned increasingly to sensory overload as a strategy in works such as *Ordeals*, staged at the Judson Church in August 1967 and *Electronic Activation Room* staged at the Happenings & Fluxus Retrospective in Cologne, in the winter of 1970-1. See *More than Meat Joy*, 163. *Electronic Activation Room* focused more on audio/visual information overload than the kind of bodily experience produced by the torture tunnel in *Ordeals*. Both works suggest that the ambivalence in *Snows* toward overload as a strategy is something that Schneemann continued to explore.

[159] I borrow the phrase, "imperialist logic of vision" from Soyoung Yoon and draw here on her discussion of Serge Daney's call for the "alterity of the image." Soyoung Yoon, *Matter of Havok: Détournement in the Films of Debord, Rouch, and Godard*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford, 2010).

know or possess, but to confront a destabilizing vulnerability with regard to both the one who looks and the image to be seen, a lack of control that is also an opening onto forms of reciprocity and exchange that do not function to secure the viewer's own sense of visual and self-mastery. Schneemann acknowledges that dispossession may be displaced onto a figure of a different status, a body marked by codes of class, gender, race or ethnicity, as a way to mitigate the threat of that difference. She produces an image of this process in action, allowing it to be seen as a powerful constraint on the work of organizing dissent.

Schneemann added the image of this woman to *Viet Flakes* only days before the first performance.[160] She has published other source images that appear in *Viet Flakes* side by side with performance documentation to signal how they are linked to moments of live action. In two different versions of the published score for example, the photograph of man strung up to be interrogated is paired with a picture of one of the performers, Shigeko Kubota, notably the only Asian member of the group, being "hung" from the looped rope on stage [Figure 3.16].[161] But the photograph of the woman with the bandaged hand has never appeared in any of the published documentation of *Snows*. It calls back, only faintly perhaps, to the extended sequence of live action in which the body of the "hanged woman" is wrapped in tinfoil.[162] Made over as a silvered surface, the body's exposure to light during this action increases even as it simultaneously recedes from view [Figure 3.17].

Wrapping is protective; it suggests the process of fostering an image in potential—the possibility of recovery, but also the threat of loss. Schneemann makes much of the associative properties of her materials. Foil, like rope has conductive properties that draw out relationships between bodies. At the same time foil threatens to obscure the particularity of those bodies in ways that mimic the scarring of flesh by napalm, an image that haunts the raced and gendered bodies of the Vietnamese villagers that appear in *Snows*. If *Snows* begins with a sequence in which performers respond attentively to each other's micro-movements, then it ends by mobilizing relays between images that may never register, and as a result are much more difficult to see.

While other protesters during the week of Angry Arts pursued strategies of obscene exposure and confrontation, Schneemann's work made space for reckoning with the ambivalence, restlessness, and uncertainty provoked by war reportage, characterized both by everyday banality and glimpses of unprecedented graphic violence. She rendered performers' bodies analogous to these photographic images, first by the use of flashing

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[160] Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 147. Schneemann began working on *Viet Flakes* in 1965 and continued to edit it up until its debut. A passage from Schneemann's journal published alongside the score includes the following entry for January 13, 1967: "Finally shoot the (new) Viet images over again." Given that Pepper's photo essay in *Ramparts* had just been published a few weeks before this entry, I take for granted that his image of the mother and child was among the new material Schneemann added to the film just before it debuted.

[161] The scenario for *Snows* first appeared in print in 1968 in the small magazine I-KON (No. 5). It was later reprinted in *More than Meat Joy*, 129-144. It is also excerpted in *Happenings and Other Acts* ed. Mariellen Sandford, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 219-224. The score also appears in modified form in Schneemann's collected writings, *Imaging Her Erotics*, 74-85.

[162] Alphonse Shilling shot documentation of the rehearsals and the performance that Schneemann later edited into *Snows,* 16 mm film on video, color and b & w, silent, 20:30 minutes, 1967.

strobe lights and white face paint and later through gesture, with contorted, mask-like expressions that played on the anxieties that war reportage often provokes and attempts to refigure as moral shock.

John Berger describes the redoubled effect of violence perpetuated by photojournalism during the Vietnam War. In his view, this violence enacts "cuts in time" that produce a sense of incommensurability with the everyday. Shame and the desire to "other" the figures depicted in photographs of the war generate depoliticized compensatory reactions that naturalize violence, dismiss it as an age-old human drama, an endless cycle where someone will always play the role of aggressor and someone else the role of victim. The title *Snows* hints at this possibility, a metaphor for violence as random and regular as the weather. The action of bodies coded as "aggressor" and "victim" also might seem to reinforce a similar view. But by evoking the technological image of television fuzz, *Snows* also suggests a channel conveying no information, only noise—a closed feedback loop without end. This is the sense of the title that comes to the fore during the sequence in which contact between bodies become more difficult to read. Schneemann's title might also be understood a third way, as a register of the affective static, the enervation that comes with confronting the pain of others.[163] If *Water Light/Water Needle* conjures an image of action where every movement, every experience leads to a perceptible reaction, then *Snows* raises the question of how to move, in concert with and among others, without that confirmation (tactile or otherwise). *Water Light/Water Needle* shows us a system of relations grounded in the presence of others. *Snows* asks how such systems work when those relations are mediated by greater distances, otherness, and political violence.

The body wrapped in silvery foil provides a counter model to photography figured as a flash or a cut in time. It develops in the moving light of *Viet Flakes*, but also bears with it the risk of disappearing again without having changed a thing. *Snows* acknowledges the feelings of ambivalence, helplessness, and disavowal that may follow from this possibility, but doesn't rest there. It continues to develop, not unlike a photographic image before it has been fixed. The cybernetic concept of feedback animates fantasies of control, where every action produces a predictable and measurable, which is to say, perceptible reaction. *Snows* reminds us that in order to participate fully in the actions that bind us together socially and politically, we must resolve to put such fantasies aside. We can neither retreat into helplessness, nor expect immediate, clear confirmation of how our actions will register, and their meaning carry forward.

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I have argued throughout this study that news plays a special role in film experiments concerned with how social life takes form. My claim is underwritten by the assumption that this emerging species of mediated performance, one Schneemann did much to innovate, provided a space for exploring the social domain of bodily, behavioral, or performative relations and codes. This project should be read as coextensive with the political shift that defines the period of the long sixties, away from politics rooted

[163] I borrow this phrase from Susan Sontag. See *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (New York: Picador Press, 2003).

primarily in class-bound antagonisms, toward modes of direct action organized around struggles in which the legibility of bodily codes took on new significance and heightened importance, for example during the civil rights movement or the fight for gender equality, and in the linking of those struggles to efforts to end the war. The appearance of news images depicting bodies marked indelibly by violence in *Snows* suggests how utterly fraught these efforts could feel, but also how urgently necessary they were to maintain, feelings Schneemann feared the increasingly proliferation of such images might dull or deny. Perhaps even more importantly, the work questions what it means to imagine social life as a set of formal or abstract relations, however concretely manifested, by admitting the affective noise generated by news and the temptation to disavow moments and movements that are relational, unconfirmable as they may be.

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During the Vietnam War news wires sent images flying around the globe at record speed, while the underground press grew by way of networks that were as much social as they were technological. The wire connecting the bodies of audience members in their seats to the flashing stage lights evokes the news-wires that made it possible to disseminate images snapped at the frontlines across the world. Access and immediacy did not (and could not) however automatically generate the political will to challenge the war. Schneemann's work not only intersects with the history of commercial news-wires, it also anticipates the flowering of the underground press, growth fueled in no small part by the influence of the growing anti-war movement and the new networks of exchange it engendered.[164]

Robert Morgan identifies the Liberation News Service (LNS) as the source of the images in *Viet Flakes,* citing conversations and statements by Schneemann.[165] LNS, a New Left, underground news bulletin service, wasn't established until the summer of 1967 when its founders broke away from the United States Student Press Association.[166] Schneemann must have collected the images from other sources, some of which I have identified.[167] The mistaken reference to LNS is significant, however; it calls attention to the fact that *Snows* was staged at a moment when the development of new outlets and networks for circulating news felt urgent. In 1965 when Schneemann began filming *Viet*

[164] See John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 82-114.
[165] Robert C. Morgan, "Carolee Schneemann's *Viet Flakes*" in *Imaging Her Erotics*, p. 88.
[166] The Liberation News Service offered a subscription service to underground newspapers. For $15 a month papers received, what McMillian describes as "mimeographed news packs mailed twice weekly, often on brightly colored paper, addressing a wide range of issues, including the draft, antiwar activity, Cuba, SDS, the black power movement, and the far-out acid drenched wing of the youth movement." By 1968 the service had 200 underground papers as subscribers. McMillian, 103.
[167] The collection of photographs is not included among her papers at Getty archive, so it remains uncataloged.

Flakes, there were only five underground papers. By 1967 the number had grown to about a dozen. In 1969 over five hundred underground papers were being published.[168]

In an article entitled, "The Movement and the New Media" distributed by LNS in 1969, Thorne Dreyer and Victoria Smith write, "The underground press was born of necessity. Something was happening, and it demanded visibility."[169] They go on to discuss the evolution of underground networks such as LNS and the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) in the context of other journalistic innovations in film (the Newsreel collective) and radio (Radio Free People). Dreyer and Smith sum up the "new media" style of these endeavors as one that embraces the "involvement" of the journalist (or filmmaker, etc.) in the events they are reporting:

> A journalistic "given" that the new media refuses to accept is "objectivity." Journalistic objectivity is so basic to the trade that journalism schools don't even need to discuss it much. Newsmen take it as axiomatic. The principle of objectivity assumes that a writer's distance from and non-involvement with his subject insures accuracy. Fact is valid and opinion invalid (except on the editorial page). In the movement media, however, involvement and experience are prerequisites for good journalism, for a liberated journalism. Once freed from the illusory constraints of objectivity, you can explore new levels of creativity and communication.

Schneemann made *Snows* at a moment when journalists in different media (film, radio, print) were working toward the suspension of objectivity in favor of emphasizing immediacy and involvement in an effort to give voice to political dissent.

Snows responds to the increased promise of immediacy made possible by news-wires, on the one hand, and the rise of new forms of journalism that found a home in the underground press on the other. Television is the medium most often associated with the Vietnam War.[170] Wiring the responses of the audience into the work could be understood as a way of imagining forms of participation that broadcast would seem to foreclose (and that the "new media" sought to establish). On a stage set that resembled a strange kind of television studio, Schneemann explored what the "inclusion and transformation" of subjective responses to the environment would mean in a space suffused with moving images of war, which is to say, something other, presumably, than the meaning assigned to feedback collected from television audiences by Nielsen polls for the purposes of selling advertising, but also something less assured than what the promoters of "the new (underground) media" imagined possible.

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[168] Ken Wachsberger, "Preface," *Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press, Part 1*. ed. Ken Wachsberger, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2011), p. xiv.
[169] Thorne Dreyer and Victoria Smith, "The Movement and the New Media" <http://www.nuevoanden.com/rag/newmedia.html>
[170] Much has been written about how television's role in disseminating violent images of the war was not as significant as has sometimes been claimed. See for example Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). He cites studies by Lawrence Lichty and George Bailey, Oscar Patterson III that come to similar conclusions about the rarity of graphic images on television.

Schneemann produced *Viet Flakes* in collaboration with her partner at the time, the composer James Tenney, who created a tape collage for the soundtrack. His audio editing intensifies the destabilizing visual shifts in scale and location. Cascading strains from Bach and discordant notes from a Vietnamese folk song interrupt instantly recognizable pop radio hits like "96 Tears" or "We Can Work it Out" by the Beatles. The relentless shifting between fragments of songs recalls the act of scanning or tuning in to a radio. The familiar pop songs especially seem to linger; the urge to complete their broken refrains is almost irresistible. Something about this radio effect cuts against the intensely private scanning of the image by Schneemann's camera. It evokes the vague sense generated by broadcast media, not only of other signals in the air, but also of other people tuning in elsewhere. In this context, we might read a body wrapped in foil as kind of an antenna, an imperfect and makeshift remedy for poor reception, but also crucially, for forms of everyday atomization. At the heart of *Snows* we discover a discontent that keeps the dial spinning or the eye moving, scanning full of desire for something no song or photograph could ever deliver—the process of moving, acting, and struggling with and alongside others while remaining uncertain about one's own control (or lack of control) over what may result.

Schneemann describes *Snows* in terms of the relationships of reversibility that structure the work. Summing up the piece, she writes, "We set each other on fire, we extinguish the fire, we create each other's face and body, we abandon each other, we take responsibility for each other, we reveal each other, we choose, we respond, we build we are destroyed."[171] What better account of how to move and be moved, of how to exercise the senses, once control has been set aside a governing logic. And if this "we" necessarily remains an uncertainty, what better way to discover what it would mean to keep moving, to keep dissenting together nonetheless. The "we" Schneemann names is not an entity, a public, given in advance. It takes shape provisionally, through enacting forms of mutual exposure and risk. *Snows* models a way to understand how news images might play a role in such a process, understood as an address (rather than violent cut). Risk inheres in the possibility of loss, of the failure to register, of noise. As a process of thinking, feeling, and working through structures of reversibility, *Snows* also incorporates the possibility that in our responses to this address, we too may fall short of the mark. Even so, the work insists, it is this risk and not its containment that makes something possible that had not been possible before.

[171] Schneemann, *More than Meat Joy*, 131-2.

Chapter 4
Network Media

This chapter traces the path of Stan VanDerBeek from the commercial broadcast network CBS (Columbia Broadcast System) in 1965 to the public television station WGBH-Boston in 1970, a transit made by way of his own idiosyncratic conception of a media network, which he called the "Culture Intercom." At CBS, VanDerBeek produced a video collage entitled *Panels for the Walls of the World* (1965-7), a work that pictures a vast worldwide news network devoid of newness. While making *Panels for the Walls of World*, VanDerBeek began to envision another kind of network, one that would offer an alternative to the centralized commercial model provided by CBS. In 1965, he initiated a series of live, immersive, multi-projection performances inside his "Movie-Drome," a hand-built dome-shaped theater. VanDerBeek imagined that these "information concerts," which he also sometimes called "Newsreels of Dreams," might one day be beamed by satellite to other similar theaters linked up to image archives and media labs across the globe. This extended media network, he hoped, would function as a kind of visual "intercom" facilitating new forms of communication and exchange.

In 1969 VanDerBeek abandoned the Movie-Drome to become an artist-in-residence at WGBH-Boston, a well-established educational television station on its way to becoming an important node in the newly established national network of broadcasters, PBS (Public Broadcasting Service). While at WGBH, he produced *Violence Sonata*, an experimental broadcast that aired in January 1970. This work marked a shift away from the formal and technological language VanDerBeek had earlier used to describe the Culture Intercom. With *Violence Sonata*, he began to treat television as part of a larger "electronic nervous system" capable of registering and responding to social feedback. As an attempt to quell violent social unrest by overwhelming this nervous system, *Violence Sonata* proved an interesting and timely failure. VanDerBeek's experiment threw into relief mounting tensions built into the project of establishing a national public television network in 1970, historically rooted social conflicts that his earlier, more formal network experiments did not register or address.

Network is a term that bundles together multiple related, but distinct phenomena, each connected to, but not entirely synonymous with "media" or even the short hand phrase "the media." Network may refer to commercial or public broadcast networks such as CBS and PBS, but it can also describe the spread of wires, cables, and newly launched satellites administered by the telecommunications industry. Both notions of "network" share in common a basic principle of organization: disparate, individual nodes linked together in a unifying structure. Networks may be centralized around a single hub or series of major nodes, or they may be decentralized, defined by a non-hierarchical series of lateral connections. In practice, institutional and technological media networks almost always overlap, but taken as separate ideas, each instantiates a distinct notion of the social or social life.

This chapter tracks VanDerBeek's attempts to make moving images for and within networks defined by each of these possibilities, a process that involved grappling with those differences. His work raises questions about the project of modeling social life

in and through network forms. Could social relations be modeled as formal configurations mirrored in the structure of relationships between nodes in a technological network or would they be better understood as something that emerges through the dynamic, if sometimes antagonistic, process of interaction that networks facilitate as corporate or public organizations? His work tentatively explores the possibility of employing feedback to manage network exchanges, but in the process begs the question of how feedback functions and at what cost.

Today the term network necessarily evokes a specific constellation of technologies and practices related to computing and the Internet. VanDerBeek's work anticipates many of the feelings and experiences that characterize contemporary network culture. In his work we catch a glimpse of how this future, our present, once looked. The domain of that contemporary network, Wendy Chun argues, is largely imaginary.[172] "Imagined networks," she claims, have come to replace the "imagined communities" identified by Benedict Anderson with the nation state. Anderson's "imagined communities" emerged alongside the proliferation of the printed word and capitalism, forged in no small part by what he calls the "mass ceremony" of reading the morning newspaper. Chun adopts Anderson's term "imagined" to describe relationships between members of a network that need not be actualized to remain animated as a possibility or an image. She argues that with the rise of networked technologies, individuals are more likely to see themselves as part of networks than communities.[173] "The collective 'we' imagined through networks" Chun tells us, is best described as "a series of connected 'yous.'" VanDerBeek's engagements with televisual networks in the 1960s anticipate and attempt to work through the question raised by Chun's claims: *how* to conceptualize or "imagine" the relations that networks facilitate. This endeavor entailed finding new ways of thinking about audiences for moving images, but also a new conception of the filmmaker/media artist as an innovative technician-manager and institutionally mobile networker.[174]

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[172] Wendy Chun, "Imagined Networks, Glocal Connections," presented at *Seminar in Experimental Critical theory VII: Rewired [Asian+TechnoScience+Area] Studies,* August 1, 2011. <http://rewired.uchri.org/?page_id=118>

[173] Fred Turner provides a compelling counter-proposal to Chun's assumption that technology drives this change. He suggests that the dream of the imagined network was born of political rather than technological conditions. Turner traces the emergence of liberal, democratic discourses in psychology, anthropology, and aesthetics in the 1940s that offered counter models to the image of fascism's perfectly coordinated and undifferentiated mass. These disciplines sought ways to preserve the distinctness of well-integrated individuals while allowing for unifying forms of connection and communication. In my view, Turner's argument productively complicates the distinction between imagined communities and imagined networks based on a vague technological periodization. Chun implies imagined networks are not synonymous with the nation form, but Turner shows us that the metaphoric model of the network helped to define a set of galvanizing democratic ideals in a time of international crisis. Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[174] Melissa Ragain offers an extended discussion of the specific institutional conditions of VanDerBeek's own development in this direction in her essay, "From Organization to Network:

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In 1965 a letter arrived at the New York City headquarters of CBS addressed to the network's formidable chairman, William S. Paley. It read: "Dear Mr. Paley, it's about time you made me artist-in-residence at CBS, yours truly, Stan VanDerBeek." VanDerBeek, trained as a painter at Black Mountain College and Cooper Union, would by the end of the decade be recognized as a pioneering figure in the emerging field of media art.[175] In 1965 however, he was known primarily for his antic animated underground films. Yet not long after penning this note, VanDerBeek found himself sitting across the desk from Paley in a corner office high above Sixth Avenue, a surprising situation given that the network had no "artist-in-residence" position at the time.

This meeting was not VanDerBeek's first contact with CBS. He had worked at CBS a decade earlier as a set designer and animator on the children's program, *Winky Dink and You* [Figure 4.1]. During his short stint with the show, VanDerBeek developed many of the cutout animation techniques that appear in his early films.[176] He was fired from the job before the show went off the air in 1957, but for a time, he continued to sneak back into the studio to work on his own films after hours.[177] In the next several years VanDerBeek began to receive critical recognition for his talents as a filmmaker: In 1963 he began teaching animation at Columbia University, and in the following year was awarded a coveted Ford Foundation grant.[178] But acclaim had not translated directly into access to the resources of the television studio that he had once enjoyed. By

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MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies," *X-TRA: Contemporary Art Quarterly*, Spring 2012 Volume 14 Number 3, p. 27.

[175] VanDerBeek studied painting at Black Mountain College and Cooper Union in the early 1950s.

[176] Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (New York: Dutton, 1967), pp. 184-5. Renan reports that in the eighteen months VanDerBeek had access to CBS through his position at *Winky Dink and You* he made *What Who How* (1955) and *Visioniii* (1955), both animated collages. He also completed *Mankinda* (1956-7) in which he developed an animated painting technique that also appears in *Breath Death*. He worked on material that would later find its way into films such as *Yet* (1957), *Street Meet* (1957), *Astral Man* (1958) and *Ala Mode* (1958). By 1958 VanDerBeek had built his own animation stand and no longer required the use of the one at the CBS studio. *Winky Dink and You* was canceled, which also affected VanDerBeek's access to the resources of the television network.

[177] VanDerBeek relays the story of his surreptitious tenure at CBS in an unpublished interview with Richard Kostelantz, cited by Gloria Sutton, "Stan VanDerBeek: Collage Experience" in *Stan VanDerBeek The Culture Intercom*, (MIT List Visual Arts Center/Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2011), p. 80.

[178] For a longer discussion VanDerBeek's emergence as something of an unofficial spokesperson for underground cinema see Andrew Uroskie, "From Pictorial Collage to Intermedia Assemblage: Variations V (1965) and the Cagean Origins of VanDerBeek's Expanded Cinema" *Animation* Vol. 5 No. 2 (July 2010), p. 226.

1965, he was no longer content to sneak around CBS's studios late at night; this time, he went right to the top.

The meeting with Paley lasted all of fifteen minutes, and as VanDerBeek remembers it, the famously remote network executive never once took his eyes off a row of four television monitors mounted on the wall across the room. Nevertheless, VanDerBeek managed to convince Paley to grant him access to the network's studios, though not the official title, "artist-in-residence." The past professional link to CBS, and the relatively modest acclaim he had achieved as an underground filmmaker, may have emboldened VanDerBeek to propose the idea of an artist's residency at the network, but VanDerBeek's return to CBS was also enabled by a new, provisional, openness toward collaborations between artists and corporations, an impulse that governed a number of similar initiatives to bring art and technology closer together that were beginning to crystallize at this moment.[179]

With the assistance of a few studio engineers VanDerBeek began work on the video collage that would become *Panels for the Walls of the World* (which he eventually completed in 1967) [Figure 4.2]. In 1965, state of the art video equipment was still essentially inaccessible to artists like VanDerBeek, and he was eager to try his hand at the innovative editing techniques it made possible.[180] But VanDerBeek also had another motive for returning to CBS: he was also hoping to raid the vaults at the network, "groaning" as he put it, "with all this old junk newsreel stuff."[181]

Panels for the Walls of the World pictures a world of stunts, dance-a-thons, explosions, circus acts, and military spectacles, in other words, anything and everything that might catch the eye of a newsreel cameraman. Videographic transitions such as dissolves, mattes, and wipes divide the screen so that these unrelated scenes bump up against and even bleed into each other. The work is punctuated by an audio track of political sound bites, surf music, and rudely comedic effects. VanDerBeek worked with six film loops to create three variations of the piece, but he saw immediately that the possibilities were endless: with more time, he said, he could have made fifty variations. The real premise of the work, he explained later, was that it could go on forever.[182]

Despite the new formal possibilities afforded by video, *Panels for the Walls of the World* has a distinctly anachronistic feel. It marries new video technology to outmoded

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[179] In 1966 a number of enterprises of this sort were established: the Artist Placement Group was founded to bring together artists and corporations in Britain, Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) was created by Bell Labs scientist Billy Klüver and Robert Rauschenberg to pair artists and engineers, and The Art & Technology Program was established by curator Maurice Tuchman at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to integrate artists within think tanks and technology firms.

[180] The date of Nam June Paik's first use of the Sony Portapak is often given as 1965. Tom Sherman argues that this date is a myth that requires correction. See Tom Sherman, "The Premature Birth of Video Art" <https://lists.thing.net/pipermail/idc/2007-January/002063.html>

[181] Interview with Jud Yalkut, in *Electronic Zen: The Alternate Video Generation* (unpublished manuscript, 1984), unpaginated. <http://www.vasulka.org/archive/Artists10/Yalkut,Jud/> First published as "Stan Vanderbeek: The Violence Sonata", *The East Village Other*, N.Y., February 18, 1970.

[182] Ibid.

film footage. VanDerBeek's embrace of these "junk" images violates the news values that reigned supreme at the commercial broadcast network in the mid 1960s. Efforts to get the scoop on major news stories and convey the most compelling, lively, and immediate sense of unfolding events generated prestige which could be transformed directly into increased advertising revenue, a strategy pursued nowhere more successfully than at CBS.

Under Paley's direction, CBS grew from a radio network of 16 affiliate stations in the late 1920s to the largest radio network in the United States by 1935. By 1965 television had entered the picture, and CBS had become the highest rated broadcaster in the United States. But for many years, despite its explosive growth, CBS lagged behind its rival network, NBC (The National Broadcasting Company).[183] NBC's strength in the ratings was owed in large part to its trove of contracted talent and its success in the realm of entertainment. As a counter strategy, Paley began to develop what he called "prestige programming" with a particular focus on the production of high quality original broadcast journalism. CBS established its own news division as early as 1933, but it was the radio broadcasts made live from Europe in the years leading up to the Second World War, that finally brought this plan to fruition.[184] These reports generated new formats, such as *World News Roundup*, established to report breaking events during the build up to the Second World War.

World News Roundup was the first program to coordinate voices from various sites and cities in Europe into a single broadcast, an impressive technological feat in the days of short wave radio hook ups. CBS won considerable recognition for the comprehensive coverage it delivered in the midst of crisis, most famously for Edward R. Murrow's richly imagistic reports from London during the Blitz of 1939. Murrow's reports from the streets and roofs of the city emphasized immediacy and presence. The network's policy of preempting regularly scheduled programs to broadcast breaking news further underscored timeliness as an important network value. After the Second World War television became a commercial reality, but for a few years radio was still considered the primary home for serious journalism. Television had to develop its own codes and conventions – distinct from both radio and newsreel, before journalists of any stature were willing to make the leap to the new medium.

Until the early 1960s, television news was valued primarily for its coverage of pre-scheduled live events such as political conventions. Otherwise television news bureaus were poorly equipped to cover breaking news. TV cameras were too unwieldy. Signal strength presented another constraint. Broadcast television used frequencies with very short ranges when picked up by rabbit pole antennae. As a result, broadcasts covered primarily local news. When films of foreign news appeared, they reported on events that were often more than a few days old, since film had to be airlifted and delivered

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[183] Gary Paul Gates, *Air Time: The Inside Story of CBS News* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 22.

[184] On war reportage at CBS see Eric Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States: Volume 2: Golden Web* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 74-83. Also see Philip Seib, *Broadcasts from the Blitz: How Edward R. Murrow Helped Lead America into War* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2006).

physically to the stations. CBS continued to rely on newsreel companies to provide these images until 1953.[185]

VanDerBeek produced *Panels for the Walls of the World* at a moment when up-to-the-minute coverage of distant events was finally becoming a real possibility for television news, as it had earlier been for radio with the development of programs like *World News Roundup*. VanDerBeek's video exploits tensions that emerged as the journalistic norms of established formats such as radio and newsreel were recast for commercial broadcast television. In July of 1962 live images were transmitted by way of satellite across the Atlantic for the first time.[186] In September of 1963, nightly newscasts at CBS and NBC were expanded from 15 to 30 minutes. A few months later, television news offered unprecedented continuous coverage of the Kennedy assassination seen by millions of people all over the world, an event that played a significant role in altering public perception of network television as a news medium.[187] *Panels for the Walls of the World* exaggerates television's capacity to offer worldwide coverage, while at the same time imagining a network "for the world" where the timeliness of news reporting has ceased to matter at all.

In *Panels for the Walls of the World*, VanDerBeek composes fragments of events into evocative sequences that do not generate the sense of one event following another. The use of wipes and other videographic transitions undermines the feeling of time progressing. Instead it is as if everything in this world, if it can be called a world, has already happened, and is now happening again all at once. Nothing is timely, because everything is always already going on. The structure of this network seems to allow any combination of sensory elements. At the same time, upon close viewing, the work's aleatory associations remain haunted by the persistence of the ground plane. Scenes of the earth from a multitude of perspectives suggest that taking leave of its surface for the imaginary space of the network is not quite as easy as it might seem. The video pictures the physical and emotional demands of adjusting to the loss of orientation that a worldspace provides.

The final version of *Panels for the Walls of the World* was completed in 1967.[188] The video opens with the roar of an engine. A small indistinct landscape appears framed in black. As it expands to fill the screen, a man in a harness with knees tucked up braces himself and is suddenly lifted into the air [Figure 4.3]. A parachute opens protecting him in his rapid ascent: what at first looks like a trick of reverse animation is actually a sky dive practiced in reverse, orchestrated to demonstrate how a soldier might be recovered

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[185] Conway, 271-294.

[186] The first trans-Atlantic satellite transmission took place in July 1962.

[187] Gates, 5.

[188] VanDerBeek used the title *Panels for the Walls of the World* to refer to a mural project commissioned by the Walker Art Center that he completed while a research fellow at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies (a position he held while in residence at WGBH Boston) in 1970. The mural was transmitted one panel at a time by telephone using a Xerox machine called a "Telecopier." Using this early version of the fax machine, he sent the mural from MIT to various remote sites, including the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Over the course of the exhibition, he updated the work by replacing individual panels. This fax machine mural, like the earlier video that shares its name, treats the image as something to be endlessly reconfigured and transmitted from one site to another.

from difficult terrain. Once off the ground, however, the rescued figure floats perilously close to the cloud of an atomic blast, an effect produced by way of video-graphic superimposition [Figure 4.4]. The unexpected shift in scale and perspective suggests something of the force that drives *Panels for the Walls of the World*. We are no longer firmly on the ground, our world has grown in scope exponentially; we now find ourselves confronting both the infinitesimal atom and the world altering event in a single ungraspable instant.[189]

The paratrooper recedes from view, waving as he floats into the toxic dust. With this dissolve the last remnants of narrative logic in *Panels for the Walls of the World* begin to fade away. Without warning, the familiar voice of President Kennedy cuts in to make an announcement, but is drowned out by a jeering crowd. These wild cheers mysteriously conjure the image of Marilyn Monroe [Figure 4.5]. But her presence is fleeting, and threatens to disappear into another scene much less immediately legible: Behind the paparazzi shots of Monroe, a pair of rough work-worn hands breaks up a lump of dry earth [Figure 4.6]. VanDerBeek's icons have none of the cool disinterestedness of Pop Art; nor do they remain framed and held apart from the world in which they appear. Instead, figures like Kennedy and Monroe act as quickening agents; like the blooming mushroom cloud, they send *Panels for the Walls of the World* pin-wheeling into a manic, destructive spin where everything seems to be happening all at once. During the title sequence, the screen divides into three parts, dancers twist and twitch while a circus strong man simultaneously flexes, demonstrating his brawn [Figure 4.7]. In the upper left corner, the ground of this increasingly madcap world remains the focus: first tilled by machines and then later surveyed from high above through the small aperture of an airplane window.

While making *Panels for the Walls for the World*, VanDerBeek began to develop the idea of staging what he called live "information concerts." In an essay published in 1969, VanDerBeek reflects, "We have turned a corner with films and TV, images can now be treated much the way that music is…endlessly and variable and dynamic…stored, and in motion…for instant recall."[190] What would it be like to live in a world where everything is stored and at the ready for instant recall? VanDerBeek's video offers an answer to this question with its insatiable appetite for circus-like attractions, its reduction of political speech to quick memorable quips, and its conflation of military spectacle with entertainment. While picturing a view expanded to take in the whole world, past and present and all at once, *Panels for the Walls of the World* begins to register the emotional costs of a radically expanded sensorium: feelings of suspension, loss of agency, and mania. The tone of VanDerBeek's work is as disorienting as its radical shifts in perspective. The work generates a host of equivocal affects:

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[189] Justus Nieland pursues a similar argument in his study of midcentury American aesthetics and the rise of critical concerns about the bureaucratization of the senses. See Justus Nieland, "'The Scale is the World': Expanded Cinema and the Midcentury Sensorium" presented at the Society for Media and Cinema Studies, March 25, 2012.

[190] Stan VanDerBeek, "Disposable Art—Synthetic Media—and Artificial Intelligence," *Take One* (Montreal), January/February 1969, p. 16.

simultaneously fun and unfun; silly and horrific; irreverent, rude, yet utterly serious, overwrought, affects much like the ones that rule the Internet today.[191]

The work's odd title prompts unsettling questions: What would it mean to "panel" the world? *Panels for the Walls of the World* refigures the world as an enormous modular interior where everything is changeable and distinctions between inside and outside no longer seem to hold, a world, moreover, suffused with anxiety about how to inhabit it while remaining grounded, both physically and emotionally. How to manage the psychic fallout of experience expanded by networks that offer coverage of events across the globe, promising to store and instantly recall anything and everything that has ever happened? How to preserve a sense that one has a meaningful role to play under these conditions? These were the questions that haunted VanDerBeek for the rest of the decade.

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After lobbying Chairman Paley for access to the network's studios in 1965, VanDerBeek published an essay entitled, "Culture Intercom and Expanded Cinema: A Proposal and Manifesto" in which he envisioned a world-wide distribution network of theatres and image libraries designed specifically for artists, a proposal that may have been spurred by the limited access to the means of production and distribution he was granted at CBS [Figure 4.8].[192] For VanDerBeek, however, the stakes extended beyond the issue of autonomy from corporate control. "It is imperative," he writes, "that we quickly find some way for the entire level of world human understanding to rise to a new human scale. This scale is the world…" He called upon artists to invent a non-verbal and internationally recognizable "new world language" for use within the "Culture-Intercom," an "experience machine" designed as an educational tool for the senses, a means to counter the effects of "emotional-sociological comprehension" out-distanced by technology.[193] Such a machine would not only generate images, it would also store and transfer material from a wide variety of sources, including motion pictures, television, computers, and videotape. The Culture Intercom would accelerate the conditions of the crisis that VanDerBeek had envisioned in *Panels for the Walls of the World*, but in doing so, offer a chance to learn how to better manage its effects, by allowing each viewer to

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[191] I borrow the phrase "equivocal affects" from Sianne Ngai. See Jasper Adams and Sianne Ngai, "Our Aesthetic Categories: An Interview with Sianne Ngai," *Cabinet Magazine*, Issue 43, Fall 2011. <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/43/jasper_ngai.php>

[192] Stan Vanderbeek, "Culture Intercom, A Proposal and Manifesto," *Tulane Drama Review* 11 (1965), pp. 38–48. Re-published in Film Culture 40 (Spring 1966), pp. 15-18. For more on the issue of network control see Mark Bartlett, "Strategic Canonization and the Audio-Vision-ary Pragmatics of Stan VanDerBeek's Culture: Intercom," *Animation* Vol. 5 No. 2, (July 2010), pp. 149-172. Gloria Sutton delineates another important source of inspiration for the Culture-Intercom essay in the Vision 65 conference that VanDerBeek attended along with Marshall McLuhan and Buckminister Fuller just before putting his ideas to paper. This conference and its ambitions have much to do with excited tone of the essay, which is remarkably polemical in simultaneously utopian and dystopian registers. Gloria Sutton, "Stan VanDerBeek's Movie-Drome: Networking the Subject" in *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary after Film*. ed. Jeffery Shaw and Peter Weibel (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 136-143.

[193] VanDerBeek, "Culture Intercom," 15.

keep the enormous scale of human life in view, while continuing, as he put it in his manifesto, "to measure, grow, and keep in touch with oneself."[194]

VanDerBeek's proposal for the Culture Intercom was born of Cold War anxiety about communication breaking down between political superpowers. For VanDerBeek, the threat of "emotional-sociological comprehension" out-distanced by technology had reached its most threatening apotheosis in the brinksmanship of the arms race and its strategic dependence of the threat of "mutually assured destruction." He warned, today technology places the "logical fulcrum of man's intelligence so far outside himself that he cannot judge or estimate the results of his acts before he commits them."[195]

VanDerBeek's ambitions for the Culture Intercom were aligned with, and likely influenced by a number of earlier mid-century projects developed to retrain perception, driven by imperatives often articulated in both psychic and political terms. At the Bauhaus in the 1920s, László Moholy-Nagy began to stress the need to integrate reason and the senses in the service of developing "a plan of life which places the individual rightly within his community."[196] This pedagogical imperative influenced the curriculum and philosophy of education that VanDerBeek encountered at Black Mountain College, which became a refuge for many members of the Bauhaus forced to leave Europe during the build up to the Second World War. During that period, calls for a reeducation of the senses in the United States were framed in even more explicitly political terms. In 1942, the widely influential anthropologist and "cyberneticist" Gregory Bateson called upon intellectual and political leaders to find ways to train the "apperceptive habits" of citizens to encourage democratic forms of free will and social tolerance in the face of a rising wave of fascism.[197] Much of the language of VanDerBeek's Culture-Intercom proposal closely echoes another such proposal: György Kepes's widely read treatise, *The Language of Vision*, first published in 1944.[198]

Writing on the brink of the Atomic Age, Kepes advocated a pedagogy of perception that would attune the senses to forms, patterns, and structures, especially important given the increased access made possible by technological means to "phases of the visible world which were previously too small, too fast, too large, or too slow for us

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[194] Ibid., 18.

[195] Ibid., 16.

[196] László Moholy-Nagy, "Education and the Bauhaus," from *Focus* II (London, Winter 1938), reprinted in *Moholy-Nagy*, edited by Richard Kostelanetz and László Moholy-Nagy (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 164.

[197] Turner discusses these examples among others in *The Democratic Surround*.

[198] Kepes writes, "Visual language is capable of disseminating knowledge more effectively than almost any other vehicle of communication. With it, man can express and relay his experiences in object form. Visual communication is universal and international; it knows no limits of tongue, vocabulary, or grammar, and it can be perceived by the illiterate as well as by the literate." György Kepes, *Language of Vision*, (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1944), p. 13. In 1969, VanDerBeek would be awarded a residency at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT established by Kepes in 1967, but run by artist Otto Peine in 1969. VanDerBeek held the position while also in residence at WGBH. See statement by Fred Barzyk, producer of *Violence Sonata* at WGBH, in "Statements on VanDerBeek from artists, filmmakers, TV producers, historians and scientists," Mark Bartlett, ed., *Animation* Vol. 5, No. 2, (July 2010), pp. 217-20.

to comprehend."[199] Kepes was concerned with problems in design and perception, how to "sustain man" as he wrote, "with visions of felt order." He insists, "To function in his fullest scope man must restore the unity of his experiences so that he can register sensory, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of the present as an indivisible whole."[200] Both he and VanDerBeek were interested in what should rightly be called emotional perception. Kepes's primary focus was on urban space, the question of how to create the feeling of order in the lived world. VanDerBeek adapted this notion of visual language to the realm of the imagined network, which was no longer a "world space" in the same sense. In doing so, he left behind the older artist's concern with the production of organic wholeness (a concern common to many of Kepes's contemporaries as well). Instead of integration and wholeness, VanDerBeek emphasized the principles of variation, extension, and exchange.[201]

At the time of publishing "The Culture-Intercom" essay, VanDerBeek was living in Stony Point, New York at an artist's colony called the Gate-Hill Co-op or "The Land," which was populated by friends and colleagues from his days at Black Mountain College including John Cage.[202] The Land provided VanDerBeek with the space to build a prototype for the experience machine he had envisioned in his proposal for the Culture Intercom. This prototype took the form of a thirty-one foot theater fashioned from the top of a pre-fab mail order grain silo. VanDerBeek called this structure a "Movie-Drome" and outfitted it for an ongoing series of multi-projector screening-events [Figure 4.9].

Though some critics have compared it to the geodesic domes associated with Buckminster Fuller (an influential figure at Black Mountain), the Movie-Drome has more

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[199] Kepes, 13

[200] Ibid.

[201] Ragain identifies this as the key to grasping the generational divide between Kepes and VanDerBeek. Ragain, 27.

[202] Cage's aleatory aesthetics were another important influence on VanDerBeek. They collaborated on performance events including *Variations V*. See Uroskie, "From Pictorial Collage to Intermedia Assemblage: Variations V (1965) and the Cagean Origins of VanDerBeek's Expanded Cinema." Ultimately however the place of emotion within their work differed significantly. VanDerBeek was interested in emotional perception as something to be managed through feedback. Cage's compositional strategies were designed to alleviate what he considered music's coercive demand for emotional identification. In other words, emotion was something to be left out altogether. In an essay from 1961 entitled "Where We are Going? And What are We Doing?" Cage writes, "We are leaving our emotions where they are in each one of us. One of us is not trying to put his emotions into someone else. That way you "rouse rabble"; it seems on the surface humane, but it animalizes and we're not doing it." Branden Joseph cites this passage in his discussion of the contradictions built into Cage's anarchic aesthetics. During the period in which he was working on the Movie-Drome, VanDerBeek was aligned with Cage's techno-utopianism, and like Cage had an optimistic understanding of the capacity of technology to apolitically influence social life. Like Cage, (and Fuller and McLuhan) he saw technology as neutral and autonomous opposed to the vested interests of the state and the market. In leaving the Movie-Drome behind to produce *Violence Sonata* at WGBH, I argue here, VanDerBeek was confronted with the limits of this position. See Branden W. Joseph, "HPSCHD—Ghost or Monster" in Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computing and The Foundation of the Digital Arts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 147-169.

in common with the aluminum "Dymaxion House" which Fuller designed for mass production by the aeronautics industry [Figure 4.10]. Like Fuller, VanDerBeek chose to work with prefabricated materials, hoping his design could be easily replicated and disseminated throughout the world. His strange vessel—part storage bin, part airplane—contained all the material and equipment needed to project a myriad of images at high speed, to achieve what the artist called, "visual velocity."[203]

During screenings inside the Movie-Drome viewers would lie down feet toward the center of the room while images from multiple projection sources spread out across the interior of the dome [Figure 4.11]. VanDerBeek's ideal viewer would have Chairman Paley's knack for taking in material from more than one source simultaneously. But where Paley sat upright at his desk, like Dr. Strangelove at Strategic Air Command, as VanDerBeek joked once, viewers inside the Movie-Drome would stretch out on their backs in order to better view a full hemisphere's worth of projected images.[204] The Movie-Drome offered a glimpse of what could be called network-space: infinitely modular—neither interior nor exterior—imagined as a zone of potential association and connection. *Panels for the Walls of the World* had begun to bring this kind of network-space into view. In the Movie-Drome, VanDerBeek ventured even further into the realm of the imagined network.

At first glance, the surface onto which VanDerBeek projected his images seems to instantiate what Leo Steinberg identifies as "the characteristic picture plane of the 1960s"— the flatbed. Steinberg borrows the term "flatbed" from the terminology of the printing press to describe a pictorial surface whose orientation no longer simulates a vertical field, but rather takes on the characteristics of an opaque and horizontal ground. "It's a conception," Steinberg writes, "which guarantees that the presentation will not be directly that of a worldspace, and that it will nevertheless admit any experience as the matter of representation."[205] While Steinberg emphasizes the opaqueness of the field underlying the array of images in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, VanDerBeek explores the immersive possibilities opened up by the simultaneous projection of multiple images onto the underside of a dome [Figure 4.12-13]. The Movie-Drome viewer is oriented toward the heavens rather down onto a horizontal field, a move which radically recasts the spatial effects of the flatbed format in two important ways.

First, the dome implies an endless expanse, rather than the restricted field of the flatbed picture plane. Within the Movie-Drome, discrete, but sometimes overlapping moving and still images take the place of the stars that typically appear on the curved walls of a planetarium. Planetariums simulate the appearance of constellations, which link together light originating from stars at different moments. The constellations encountered by VanDerBeek's audiences inside the Movie-Drome were not static; their individual components were often animated and changed quickly from one moment to the next. The scope of this visual field could shift radically from the atomic to the cosmic. The viewer had to find her own connections between elements in the perceptual field. Drawing out these links herself, she created her own constellations rather than taking in

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[203] VanDerBeek, "Culture Intercom," 17.
[204] Interview with Yalkut.
[205] Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," 82. First given as a lecture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1968.

ones whose contours had already been established. In the process, each image and sound came to function like a node in an endlessly expansive and expanding network. In the Movie-Drome, as with the flatbed image, every viewer is exposed to the same overall field of images, but may have a completely individualized experience of the work.

The second important difference relates to how this viewer is understood. Steinberg's account of the flatbed picture plane conjures a subject addressed as a distinct individual, while inside the Movie-Drome, viewers remain individuals, but gain crucial awareness of their relationship to other viewers co-present under the dome and potentially present in similar domes elsewhere.[206] The screening experience VanDerBeek pursued with the Movie-Drome was intended to strengthen what he described in 1974 as a "new social media consciousness."[207] As part of an expansive communication network, such experiences might also provide the occasion for exchanges to take place between specific localities, an aspect of VanDerBeek's proposal that directly addresses the anxiety induced by the groundlessness of the network pictured in *Panels for the Walls of the World*.

Whereas commercial network news promised to put the listener or viewer in direct contact with the singular voice of the newscaster, the Movie-Drome was designed to cultivate a heightened sense of the co-presence of other unknown, but proximate viewers. As a result, news inside the Movie-Drome, as in *Panels for the Walls of the World*, no longer need to be new. VanDerBeek described his ambitions for the Movie-Drome as "outrageously encyclopedic." Like *Panels for the Walls of the World*, he conceived these screenings as endlessly variable "newsreels of dreams" or "information concerts." The Movie-Drome brought news images into contact with the other kinds of material during live projection performances: hand drawn figures, video processed footage of dancers, and the cut-up animations that had first garnered VanDerBeek recognition as a filmmaker. He combined these various visual materials with the junk newsreels that he used in *Panels for the Walls of the World*, generating a new format derived from an even older news form, the newspaper.

VanDerBeek's experiments in multiple-projection captured the imagination of Marshall McLuhan, who identified the conflation of these two forms (print and moving image) when he compared VanDerBeek's Movie-Drome performances to a "newspaper where umpteen news stories come at you without any connection and without connected themes."[208] Judith Rodenbeck notes that the newspaper served as an important conceptual model for many post war artists.[209] She compares the formal function of the newspaper to both a scrapheap and storehouse where the rigid conventions of the print format – headlines, captions, columns – bring utterly incommensurate events into relationships of

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[206] Gloria Sutton situates the "networked" subject addressed by the Movie-Drome between the "singular viewing subject understood as the bourgeois individual" and the subject of "corporate capitalism," a figure who functions like "a node within an interactive social network." Sutton, "Stan VanDerBeek's Movie-Drome, 140.

[207] Stan VanDerBeek, "Social Imagistics," 88.

[208] Marshall McLuhan, "The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion" in *Perspecta*, no. 11, (1967), p. 166.

[209] Judith Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), p. 84.

equivalence. She ascribes "a peculiar kind of neutrality" to post-war art's adoption of the newspaper as a model for aleatory art practices.

VanDerBeek's repurposed grain silo translates these metaphors—the storehouse and the scrapheap—into architectural form. The affects generated within this space however tended more toward the equivocal than the neutral. "Peculiarly neutral" does however aptly describe the quality of co-presence inside the Movie-Drome. The "new social media consciousness" cultivated by the Movie-Drome pared sociability down to a conceptually abstract, if sensuously experienced minimum, a field of social relations more imagined than imaginatively enacted. The collective body solicited by screenings within the Movie-Drome anticipates the "imagined networks" described by Wendy Chun as an alternative to the imagined communities unified through the mass ceremony of reading the newspaper—a shift away from Anderson's emphasis on the simultaneity of ritual toward the active individual construction of meaning during that shared experience.

Inside the Movie-Drome links between each viewer mirrored the non-hierarchical arrangements between images. Viewers had to navigate distinct, but structurally equivalent pathways from one projected image to the next. Juxtapositions of, and imaginary connections between images suggested a model of social connectedness. One network evoked and mirrored the other. VanDerBeek imagined that the experience of managing one's own visual experience would heighten awareness of others doing the same. This was the crux of his claim that as an experience machine, the Culture Intercom would help viewers adjust to the experience of taking in a world of information while remaining in touch with themselves and aware of their relations to others.

The reclining audience under VanDerBeek's domed projection screen was no longer the unified "we" projected by single channel broadcast media. Each actively made meaningful links between simultaneously given visual elements. However those elements were provided by a single and singular source, VanDerBeek himself. Unlike the news anchor, who appears on screen as the origin of enunciation and means of coordination between the different elements of a broadcast, he remained at the margins of the field of vision, dashing between projectors and turntables to keep the simultaneous array of images flowing on. VanDerBeek placed responsibility on the viewer to coordinate and make sense of her visual experience, but did not completely abdicate control over the performance. He functioned as what Fred Turner has described as a "managerial figure" within the "democratic surround" of the Movie-Drome. Turner aligns the choices exercised by VanDerBeek's viewer with a form of a control that he describes as "a mode in which people might be free to choose their experiences, but only from a menu written by experts."[210]

Individuals inside the Movie-Drome were invited to process and manage their own experiences and relationships to others doing the same within a field of overwhelming stimulus and choice. Though he hoped this would allow for forms of communication foreclosed by television's mass address, in practice the Movie-Drome could only generate *social* consciousness in the most reduced abstract form. VanDerBeek's dream of the Movie-Drome involved plans for forms of participation that would move beyond active forms of reception to also include collective forms of exchange. He imagined that the Culture Intercom would enable interactions between

[210] Turner, 6.

local Movie-Drome audiences. He did not however expect that these exchanges would be collaboratively produced, rather he proposed that each Movie-Drome would have "its artist in residence" whose role it would be to "orchestrate the image material" at his or her disposal.[211] VanDerBeek left the details of this exchange to the reader's imagination however, suggesting that he had not yet resolved the conflict between his own role in single handedly masterminding the elaborate information concerts staged in the Movie-Drome and his desire to engender forms of participation and communication foreclosed by television's uni-directional mass address.

In the end, the Movie-Drome offered a viewer an experience that was not so different from watching television, changing from channel to channel (except that now every channel appeared all at once within an undefined and endless expanse—rather than on an individual monitor one at a time). In order to make the leap from multi-channel projection to actual live feedback, VanDerBeek would have to leave the imagined network of the Movie-Drome behind for a socially embedded communication network which included television as one of its primary nodes. There social life could be more than imagined, it could be enacted imaginatively, allowing space for conflicts to emerge that were impossible to register from the infinitely expanded vantage point provided by the Movie-Drome.

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In 1969 VanDerBeek eventually became an official artist-in-residence, not at CBS, but at WGBH-Boston, a station on the verge of entering into the newly established Public Broadcasting System (PBS) [Figure 4.14]. At the time WGBH was becoming an important center of innovative artist directed programming. In March of that year it broadcast "The Medium Is the Medium," the first national broadcast of video art in the United States, which included work by artists such as Nam June Paik and Allan Kaprow. VanDerBeek arrived at WGBH on the heels of the excitement that this broadcast generated and was invigorated by the possibilities it opened up. By 1969 the dream of the Movie-Drome was at an impasse. VanDerBeek was fatigued by the technical difficulties of working with multiple projectors, and frustrated by the fact that as he put it, after "ten years of scraping around and a terrific physical effort – hand-building the dome and the projectors and wiring the place up" people often fell fast asleep minutes into the show.[212]

VanDerBeek came to WGBH as part of the "Rockefeller Artists-in-Television" program. *Violence Sonata,* produced during his residency at the station, was conceived as an information concert like those he had staged inside the Movie-Drome, but now for the first time produced as a live broadcast event, involving not only multiple projections, but also video mixing, a two-channel simulcast, and a bank of telephones ready to receive calls from viewers at home [Figure 4.15]. At WGBH, VanDerBeek was able to tap into the city's pre-existing networks of television, print, and telecommunication, which afforded him the chance to think anew about how networks function and what role they might play in mediating crisis and social unrest, a question he had begun to formulate, but been unable to fully test with his earlier prototype for the Culture Intercom.

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[211] VanDerBeek, Culture Intercom, 18.
[212] Interview with Yalkut.

Panels for the Walls of the World was made in response to a concept of the network derived from VanDerBeek's experience at the corporate network CBS, where it was initiated. The subject addressed by his video was a subject of the mass medium of television. The Culture Intercom allowed VanDerBeek to expand and elaborate his understanding of a network to include various technological elements, making it something closer to a communications network linking together satellites, memory banks or image archives, and production labs. The Movie-Drome was part studio, part multi-media communication interface. It provided more than a new image format, it allowed for the possibility of new forms of visual communication. The subject of the Movie-Drome was no longer the one addressed by mass media. She retained the individuality and autonomy to actively co-create meaning from an array of image streams presented simultaneously, but did so as part of a network of other similarly addressed individuals. However the imagined network in which she found herself was defined in primarily technological and formal terms. At WGBH VanDerBeek had an opportunity to bring these two different but interrelated conceptions of media networks together. In the process, network became something defined as more than just a spatial arrangement of elements and individuals, though not as VanDerBeek himself initially imagined.

While at WGBH VanDerBeek began to describe the communication networks (television, print, telephone) at his disposal in Boston as part of a single "electronic and media nervous system."[213] This concept of media as integral to a communal nervous system eclipsed the metaphor of the newspaper that had appeared in his earlier writing. VanDerBeek's encyclopedic aesthetic had implicitly privileged a liberal model of collectivity bound up with the principles of equivalence and exchange. At WGBH VanDerBeek set out to explore new modes of what he called "media integration" based on the principle of psycho-social-biological coordination governed by feedback. He elaborated this idea in the program notes for *Violence Sonata*. However, as an experiment in media integration, the broadcast generated effects characterized more by dissent and discord than unity and resolution.

Violence Sonata was broadcast on Monday January 12, 1970. It appeared on both of WGBH's channels simultaneously, but was not a simulcast [Figure 4.16].[214] One channel aired what VanDerBeek considered the "primary material" while the other carried what he described as "a collection of thematic comments."[215] Viewers could

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[213] Program notes for *Violence Sonata*. VanDerBeek file, WGBH Archives, unpaginated.

[214] WGBH was available on both a VHF (very high frequency) and UHF (ultra high frequency) channel. After 1964 most television sets had two dials: a VHF tuner that selected channels 2-13 and a UHF tuner for channels 14-83 (later 14-69).

[215] Program Note, *Violence Sonata*. VanDerBeek adopted the idea of using both channels from a broadcast staged at WGBH the previous year by a young and charismatic British professor, David Silver on his program *What's Happening Mr. Silver*, a counter-cultural map-cap experiment that also explored the use of immediate feedback from viewers invited into the studio. In an episode entitled, "Madness and Intuition," a group of viewers were invited into the control booth and asked to yell out whenever what was appearing on screen became dull. At this signal, the broadcast feed would switch to another camera. Multiple unrelated scenes were staged simultaneously in the studio so that cameras could cut away at any moment from one scene to another, for example, from an intimate discussion about astrology to a throng of dancing kids. In "Madness and Intuition," the emphasis was on attention, contingency and the absolute

switch back and forth at their own discretion, but significantly channel surfing was not VanDerBeek's preferred means for viewing the work. Viewers were instructed to place two televisions side by side; one tuned to channel 2 the other to channel 44. Jill Johnston, critic for the Village Voice, describes lugging a television down three flights of stairs at the VanDerBeek family home so that neighbors could actually watch the program this way.[216]

Violence Sonata paired VanDerBeek's cut-up animations with image streams that layered live feed from the studio and pre-recorded scenes produced specifically for the broadcast. Robot clashes and comic-book battles appeared alongside footage of the Watts riots, Klan rallies, and mushroom clouds. VanDerBeek brought the tumultuous energy of his kitchen-sink aesthetic to bear on the space of the studio itself as well. Before the television cameras started to roll, he staged a series of unexpected events. Audience members were lined up for fingerprinting while police dogs growled nearby. From there things only got more nerve-racking: gunshots rang out, a karate fight erupted, and someone hacked up a piano with an ax. *Violence Sonata* subjected its audience to what Johnston described as VanDerBeek's "eye shattering montage." After the first segment of the program ended, viewers were asked to partake in a town hall style discussion [Figure 4.17]. Watching from the relative calm of one's own living room did not preclude taking part; operators were standing by to answer calls from viewers at home, and these calls were increasingly integrated into the sound mix as the program progressed.

Much of the visual material in *Violence Sonata* treated violence with a light touch: cream pie fights and Rock'em Sock'em Robot battles were more prevalent than combat or riot footage. VanDerBeek made no distinction between these very different species of violence. The war in Vietnam, urban uprisings, car crashes, famine, sport, child's play—all were part of the program. Rather than cutting between images, *Violence Sonata* emphasized synthesis and layering, with the aim of holding these distant images together. These formal and thematic preoccupations were in keeping with VanDerBeek's ambition to orchestrate new modes of media integration, bringing together broadcast television and the two-way communication of the telephone.

VanDerBeek invoked the phrase "information overload" to explain his approach in the program notes distributed to audience members at the broadcast, relying on a vague theory of shock or media therapy, where overwhelming the collective nervous system might somehow shut it down, and with it the violent social unrest that he understood as a symptom of failed communication (rather than as the outcome of economic or racial injustice). Elsewhere he leaned on a more conventional notion of theatrical catharsis, where the experience of violence in the controlled setting of the studio might defuse its eruption elsewhere. Though this was not his stated ambition, what strikes the viewer most today about *Violence Sonata* is how handily it dismantles many of the civic functions and formats now firmly associated with public television: the rational discussion of the public forum, the educational aims of documentary, the in-depth analysis of current events on public affairs programs, and even the elevation of taste through the fine arts of music and

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unrelatedness of the different elements of the broadcast. Any element could be substituted for any other at any time, while in *Violence Sonata*, VanDerBeek put the emphasis on synthesis, layering, and perceptual overload.

[216] Jill Johnston, "Thanks for the Zonkers," *The Village Voice* (January 22, 1970), p. 30.

theater.

This violation of the codes by which public television addresses viewers as citizens is more shocking than any single image that appears on screen during the broadcast. During the breakout discussion, the audience was invited to respond to almost absurdly pat question "Can man communicate?" The first person to respond, a young woman, rejected it right away as the wrong question, contending that violence has more to do with power relations than issues of communication. But rather than engaging this reasonable claim, the facilitator of the forum thanked her politely for her contribution and continued collecting audience "feedback." Each contribution thereafter was accepted without contest and without any further engagement. As the program progressed, audio from viewers calling in randomly started to drown out the speakers on screen, media synthesis tipping the scale from signal to noise. The phone conversations layered into the audio mix from this point on were more conventionally communicative than the exchanges taking place during the open forum. Operators listened carefully and attempted to connect with the mostly disgruntled viewers calling in. But as the program continued, these conversations were treated as just one more track in the audio/visual mix. As the audio began to demand more careful attention, the densely edited visuals started to register as something like televisual wallpaper.

Because of his deep involvement in the production of the live event, VanDerBeek didn't actually see *Violence Sonata* until he had a chance to review the tapes a few days after the broadcast. At that point he expressed doubt and frustration about what he had accomplished. His uncertainty was bound up with the conflation of two ways of thinking about the work's audience. On the one hand *Violence Sonata* convened a loosely bound network of individuals, each of whom was deeply involved in her own idiosyncratic process of making sense of the various streams of information, connected to others only by way of the equivalence and exchangeability of one experience for another. On the other hand, *Violence Sonata* figured a civic community as a single restless body, a nervous system subject to total sensory overload. In the clash between these two possibilities, VanDerBeek hit an unexpected nerve—acute anxiety about how public television, an institution still in formation in 1970, would manage its newfound role as a pubic network.[217]

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WGBH-Boston was established by a consortium of universities in 1951 to take advantage of the Federal Communications Commission allocation of a portion of the airways for educational use, and by 1959 it was linked up with an emerging "educational television network," an important precursor to Public Broadcasting Service. The Public

[217] The founders of PBS were careful to distinguish its offerings from commercial "lock-step" network programming. They developed a distribution service that granted affiliate stations much more autonomy with regard to scheduling than what commercial networks granted. The point to underline here is that immediacy and co-ordination were not the dominant values of public broadcasting, and were even seen as priorities against which public television established its own direction. See James Day, *The Vanishing Vision: The Inside Story of Public Television*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995).

Broadcasting Act, which established the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, wasn't signed into law until 1967. *Violence Sonata* came blasting over the airwaves just as the Public Broadcasting Service was finally incorporated three years later in 1970.

Advocates for public television, including philanthropic foundations, policy makers, and bureaucrats, came together around the question of "public television's capacity to address angry and disenfranchised populations, mediate bitter conflicts, and restore social order."[218] Public television emerged at the crux of two distinct crises of citizenship. Calls for a public broadcasting system emerged in response to rising concerns about commercial broadcasters' failure to develop the educational potential of television, the fear that viewers distracted by a "vast wasteland" of mindless entertainment would succumb to political apathy and disengage entirely from civic life. As public television moved closer to becoming a reality, the nature of these concerns changed. The social unrest of the period, urban uprisings and anti-war protests, fed a fresh wave of alarm about threats to democracy and order. Advocates for public television framed their aims in terms of fostering better educated citizens who would choose reasoned debate over violent protest to express their beliefs.

News production had a role to play in the project of educating citizens. Most public broadcasters agreed that the coverage of breaking news was better left to commercial networks. Public television devoted its energy to producing in-depth coverage and analysis of important stories, public affairs programs that met its mandate to educate and to model the ideal forms and practices of a democratic society. Once it was launched, PBS devoted nearly a third of its prime-time schedule to news and analysis, debates, government affairs, and electronic town halls "designed to extend participation in the political process." (Commercial networks by comparison devoted less than three percent of their prime-time hours to this type of programming.)[219] If the dominant news value on the major networks was timeliness, at PBS the emphasis was on expertise, analysis, and debate cultivated as part of a larger project of addressing the viewer at home as a citizen. The programming guidelines for public television that were developed in 1969 specified that the airwaves would not be turned over to "a cacophony of angry voices," stipulating instead that pubic television would mediate conflicts and restore reason to democracy with recourse to objectivity and expertise.[220] *Violence Sonata* flaunted these dictates, experimenting instead with the use of information feedback as a form of shock therapy designed to disarm violent conflict through sensory overload.

VanDerBeek told an interviewer in the weeks leading up to the broadcast of *Violence Sonata*, "I am interested in feedback, I'm in interested in how a local group, a community feels, reacts. Can't television be used for us to talk to each other?"[221] However, much of the telephone conversation that bleeds into the live mix throughout the broadcast was focused not on the theme of violence, but on objections to statements made by "radicals and peaceniks" in the audience, or to the format of the program, registering the ways it failed to conform to what viewers had come to expect from educational

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[218] Laurie Ouellette, *Viewers Like You?: How Public TV Failed the People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 106.
[219] Ouellette, 106.
[220] Ibid., 114.
[221] John Durniak, "The VanDerBeek Dimension" *Camera World Annual 1970*, p. 77.

television. Reviews in the local papers echoed these complaints, the images left many feeling cold, one complained, "Obscenities were shouted. The president was insulted. People argued violently and unreasonably. Radicalism ran rampant."[222] Another critic observed, "It was a fragmented, disorganized, noisy, weird and even mindless offering in which the overwhelming technique all but obliterated whatever it was trying to say. […] The audience would have profited more from viewing [the recently broadcast documentary] *Savage Roots* [which] dealt with various aspects of human violence in clear organized and intelligent fashion."[223]

Fred Baryzk, the producer of *Violence Sonata*, reports that is was his duty to "find as many groups in the Boston area as possible who had a bone to pick. Black panthers, free sex advocates, radical politicians, hippies, white supremacists, you name it, we found them."[224] The idea was to bring them into the studio to spark antagonistic dialogue. Public television would never become a hospitable place for VanDerBeek's bio-social-technical conception of networked civic life, but *Violence Sonata* was not the only time public broadcasters experimented with fostering potentially explosive conflict. There were other attempts in the early days of public broadcasting to develop programs designed to provoke disputes for the camera by pitting representatives of one social group or political position against another with the aim of defusing "pent-up tensions."[225] This approach was, however, relatively short lived. It provoked concerns about the proper decorum for debate on television. Program formats that modeled appropriate behavior for rational debate were established as the norm, and "the televised display of [reasoned] process" came to define the "public interest logic" of such programs.[226] One way to read the violence that VanDerBeek's *Violence Sonata* directed at its viewers then is as the violence of the repressed, which in the context of public television at this moment might best be described as the exclusion of populist and progressive energies by the network's emphasis on liberal exchange and expertise.[227]

Like public television's other advocates, VanDerBeek framed the social upheaval of the era as a crisis of communication hinging on the problem of how to manage emotion. At PBS emotion was defined in opposition to reasoned debate and expert knowledge, and therefore treated as a threat to good citizenship. VanDerBeek had less faith in these modes of discourse, and used his residency at WGBH to further the project

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[222] Percy Shain, "'Violence Sonata' Emotional Turn-on Time," *Boston Evening Globe,* January 13, 1970.
[223] Anthony LaCamera, "Special on Violence Wastes Time, Film" *Record American Boston*, Jan 14, 1970.
[224] Barzyk, 220.
[225] Ouellette, 250.
[226] Ibid., 127.
[227] Ibid., 120. Ouellette argues, the "humanitarian effort to enlist viewers in the productive non-violent resolution of conflicts, [is] also a template for enlightened citizenship that excluded emotionally and bodily invested forms of political expression and participation, like women's consciousness-raising groups, union meetings, strikes, consumer boycott, and mass protests." There were important exceptions to this tendency, most notably at WGBH a radically inflected program produced for and by Black citizens of Boston entitled, *Say Brother*, but these were more often than not exceptions that proved the rule. See Devorah Heitner, *Black Power TV*, (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 53-82.

of non-verbal communication that he had begun with the Movie-Drome.[228] Though he also saw emotion as something to be managed, he understood the project to be something very different than modeling socially sanctioned modes of behavior and exchange. For VanDerBeek, managing emotion was akin to finding a way to remain in touch with oneself while relating to everything and everyone in the network. Relations, rather than reason, were what mattered. Inside the Movie-Drome these relations had been figured as "peculiarly neutral" formal relations, mirrored by the formal arrangement of projected elements illuminating the dark surface of the dome. During *Violence Sonata* relations took on a different form, they remained formally related to one another of course, but now, they were subject to forms of feedback, and also embedded in an institutional context where neutrality took on a more socially specific meaning—one aligned with privileged and exclusionary forms of behavior.

Inside the Movie-Drome, networked relations could be imagined, though not imaginatively enacted. The emphasis on participation, play, theatricality, and spontaneous conversation in *Violence Sonata* placed new emphasis on the imaginative process of relation. At the center of the broadcast a long conversation takes place that stands out against the noise of audio feedback that characterizes much of the rest of the broadcast. A white man and a black woman, apparently unclothed, lay in bed chatting as if intimates [Figure 4.17]. The conversation is live, not pre-recorded. It takes place in a bed set up in the middle of the television studio set. The camera holds for an extended time on their exchange, which appears to be improvised and often proceeds awkwardly shifting unexpectedly in tone and direction:

> "Where are you?"
> "I'm right here"
> "What do you expect to see?"
> "I expect to see what is it that you're grunting your answers to."
> "Would you like a Chiclet?"
> "Think how long I've waited for you."
> "It's going to be longer still."
> "What would your mother say?" […]

They play lovers, but are clearly uncertain about the status of their history and relationship. The woman teases and provokes, the man jokes back, but also laughs nervously as if he isn't sure where the play-acting begins and ends. This improvisation offers an alternative model to the other forms of feedback that occur throughout the broadcast. Instead of overwhelming the senses, this exchange heightens them, surprises with micro shifts in tone and affective response. Emotion is not so much managed here as

[228] VanDerBeek received a Rockefeller Grant for Non-Verbal Communication Film Studies in 1965. It is important to read the language of his proposal for the Culture Intercom in the context of the agendas of the granting agencies who were supporting his work. The Rockefeller Foundation also sponsored his tenure at WGBH. For an excellent history of the Rockefeller Foundation's grant making in the field of media art see Marita Sturken, "Private Money and Personal Influence: Howard Klein and the Rockefeller Foundation's Funding of the Media Arts," *Afterimage*, Visual Studies Workshop, Volume 14, Issue 6, Rochester, NY (1987), pp. 8-15.

experienced in disarming and unexpected ways. Relation is complex, self-aware, yet playful and open. If VanDerBeek intended the exchange to convey the perils of miscommunication, then that isn't exactly what it achieves. What is does is make communication seem interesting again, something worth attending to carefully, something much stranger and more interesting than a highly mediated debate about the origins of violence in society. Maybe this exchange is more interesting than it might otherwise be because it is surrounded on all sides by noise and threatens points to dissolve entirely into the fray. VanDerBeek's videographic effects intrude upon the scene, electronic dissolves and iris effects reveal other layers of visual signal being broadcast simultaneously, but these manipulations do not finally break the spell the scene casts. Equivocation here has a different impact than it does elsewhere during VanDerBeek's manic production. Some question of relation is felt to hang in the balance, even if only by what he calls a "thread of verbs and nouns."[229]

The staging (and casting) of this provocative exchange betrays the fact that while VanDerBeek claimed to be concerned with all violence in general, the immediate context for the work involved the so called "race riots" that had taken place after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. the year before VanDerBeek arrived at WGBH. The threat of urban uprisings lent a sudden urgency to the task of defining television's role in addressing viewers as citizens during moments of national crisis. After King's assassination, at the mayor of Boston's request, WGBH preempted its weekend programs to repeatedly broadcast a concert by James Brown. In this relatively simplistic way, it played a role in managing emotion in an effort to "cool the violence." VanDerBeek used this phrase to describe the effect he hoped *Violence Sonata* would also produce, although he sought an alternative to the model of television providing an entertaining and emotionally cathartic distraction to would-be rioters.

VanDerBeek was prescient in his understanding of networks as something that would be used to manage emotional relationships as much as information. The stakes of *Violence Sonata* extend beyond the specific partisan politics of public television at the moment of its birth. For VanDerBeek, emotional distress was not something stirred up only during moments of extreme crisis, such as in the days following King's death. It was built into the way information networks expand the scope of human experience. Peering up at the curved walls of the Movie-Drome was no spiritual experience, there was no heaven above looking back down to secure us in our place on earth, only endless space and enormous amounts of junk data. VanDerBeek understood this as a profoundly unsettling experience, and imagined a non-verbal, visual language of velocity that would help viewers process and navigate an expanded realm of perception, not only cognitively but, also emotionally. He more than any filmmaker of his generation sensed the peculiar feelings that networked culture would come to generate, the equivocal affects that color so many experiences online today.

Equivocal affects have become prevalent because networks play a role in suspending us in states of uncertainty about our own agency, they make us feel connected without requiring us to collaborate or feel solidarity of any sort. VanDerBeek was more optimistic about the role images might play in communication and the positive effects of feedback than we can be in our own moment. Images can communicate, but in great

[229] VanDerBeek, "Culture Intercom," 16.

quantities they aren't compelling enough to hold our attention, they start to lose their powers of address. VanDerBeek anticipated how computers would "completely change our information processing" and lead to what he called "the flowering of a mass personal art, instant culture, and incredibly subtle feedback situations."[230] Today it is clear how much we need feedback, something affirming, something to help us manage, which images in great quantity can't provide. Feedback is a management tool, one of the primary ways to navigate social life online. It contracts the world again, makes if feel like it is for us, but in doing so can also wall us off from difference.

If *Panels for the Walls of the World* refigured the world according to a new scale of human experience, bringing into view a vast network that threatened to radically upend our place in the order of things, then the Movie-Drome was VanDerBeek's attempt to realign or even reground sensory experience under these conditions. The network, it implied, can be "for us," if we are willing to take our place among countless proximate "yous." *Violence Sonata* imagined a set of social relations mediated by different forms of feedback. By picturing a world processed as data to be stored and redistributed it threw the liberal protocols of public exchange on PBS into sharp relief, even if that was not VanDerBeek's primary intention.

In a collage made to accompany *Violence Sonata*, VanDerBeek offered the following assessment of the incredible possibilities and even greater potential for failure his work brings into view [Figure 4.18]:

> Two issues seem clear to me: 1) The working intelligence of contemporary life in America-the possibilities of new ideas and projects: Imagination at work through media systems […] 2.) The separate problems of individual action and group consciousness – how to make each aware of the other? The implied possibility of mass access to media and mass media to the individual is astonishing—we will soon all be able to enter the mass dialogue, but the risks are high —<u>we can misunderstand everything!</u>[231]

VanDerBeek did not pursue the full significance of these revelations in his later work. After *Violence Sonata*, he began to develop elaborate plans for planetarium "sleep-ins" and other television broadcasts designed to exploit the medium's capacity to directly address the viewer's unconscious during the dreaming hours.[232] In 1973 he addressed this development in his work in a collage published by the American Film Institute entitled "Social-Imagistics: Some Notes on 'Dream Theatres' and 'Social Surrealism' in the Future" that included the following statement: "Group dream conditioning is a new social bi-product/function of the social inter-perspective, 'minds-I' American television

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[230] VanDerBeek, "Disposable Art," 16-17.

[231] VanDerBeek, *The History of Violence in America* (collage, ca. 1970).

[232] For an extended analysis of this statement and VanDerBeek's political commitment to socialist-inflected models of technologically aided cooperation see Mark Bartlett, "The Politics of Media in Stan Vanderbeek's Poemfields," *Animation*. Vol. 3 No. 3, (November 2008), pp. 266-287.

experience . . .” However before he turned completely toward this collective dream of the future, it was briefly possible to imagine VanDerBeek on a different course, one oriented toward the social tensions of waking life that ground media networks in the present.

Conclusion

> *No longer is the American public a captive audience, and no longer will folks settle for an expressionless recitation of the news. With the advent of the Internet and round the-clock cable news, the audience quickly knows the basic facts of a story . . . They want to know how the journalists they trust feel about things that are important to their lives. The news consumer is almost desperate for someone to define the truth of the matter. Thus, the good old days when the Brinkleys, the Cronkites and even Tom, Dan and Peter could simply introduce stories in measured tones are coming to an end. The audience for dispassionate TV news is shrinking; the demand for passionate reporting and analysis is on the rise.*
>
> – Bill O'Reilly[233]

In 2003 David Brinkley passed away. As the co-host of NBC's *Huntley-Brinkley Report,* which ran from 1956 to 1970, he had been one of the first network newscasters to leave a lasting impression on American television audiences. Bill O'Reilly, whose boisterous and often bellicose nightly broadcast on the Fox News Channel, *The O'Reilly Factor* was then the top rated cable news show, used the occasion to reflect on the changing media ecology of news broadcasting. Brinkley's death coincided for O'Reilly with the end of an era of "dispassionate TV news." O'Reilly's own embrace of "passionate reporting" aims at "the truth of the matter" by eliminating the distinction between reporting and editorializing. On his program, he cultivates authority through the performance of his desires, agonies, and enthusiasms, rather than through their suppression as an earlier generation of broadcasters had done.

The violent events of September 11th, 2001 set the course for the invasion of Iraq just a few months before Brinkley's death in 2003. In the run up to the invasion, the ratings of the Fox News Channel spiked. Before Fox News, cable news had been associated with the 24-hour news cycle and continuous coverage of breaking news first established by CNN. The network had risen to prominence during the Gulf War (1990-1991) by providing audiences with vivid sense of events unfolding in real time, famously reporting live from the Rashid Hotel in Baghdad during the initial bombing campaign of Operation Desert Storm. During the Iraq War, Fox News popularized the magazine format of shows like the *O'Reilly Factor,* which featured a confrontational host openly expressing his or her political views, focused more on ongoing "issues" than breaking news. O'Reilly's account of the changing mediascape of broadcast news highlights the way "round the clock" news distribution created an increased demand for opinion and analysis. He leaves aside the political context, the fact that Fox News hit its stride just as passionately held views were being mobilized in the place of irrefutable evidence to rationalize going to war with Iraq.

Artist Omer Fast's 2002 single channel 18-minute video loop, *CNN Concatenated* (2002), offers an oblique look at the changes wrought by O'Reilly and his pundit peers

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[233] Cited in Chris Peters, "No Spin Zones" *Journalism Studies* Vol. 11, No. 6, April 2010, pp. 832-851 (836).

[Figure 5.1]. Like O'Reilly, Fast contemplates the end of the era of broadcasting that gave rise to the filmic experiments that are the primary focus of this dissertation. Bruce Conner, Carolee Schneemann, and Stan VanDerBeek were members of a generation of artists interested in exploring non-hierarchical network forms that might take the place of television's mass audience. In Fast's video this mass audience is no longer presumed to exist, it has gone missing, become impossible to locate. It is aggressively solicited, but nowhere to be seen. Like the work by Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek discussed in the preceding chapters, *CNN Concatenated* is concerned with the mediation of political crisis, taking the news as its subject and primary material. While the newscaster as a distinct "super subject" disappears in these earlier media experiments, this figure returns in Fast's work, but with his or her singularity subordinated to a strange collective unity. Even as each figure on screen occupies his or her own distinct, enframed space, together these individuals speak with one voice. As the news anchor took on a more culturally significant role in the early 1960s, his disappearance or absence in works by Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek was the precondition for imagining new forms of social relation and public assembly. By reversing this principle, and putting the news anchor front and center, Fast evokes the disruptive power of the social body through its absence, rather than its unexpected appearance.

While Fox News gained a competitive edge during the Iraq war, CNN was still the first place many viewers turned as initial news of the attacks on World Trade Center and the Pentagon broke. In the weeks and months that followed, Fast recorded hours of CNN broadcasts and painstakingly parsed this footage into short segments, creating a database of ten thousand single words and phrases. Fast's precise and manipulative editing of this material in *CNN Concatenated* violates the "dispassionate" codes of journalism, codes already challenged by the rise of what Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel define as "the journalism of affirmation" practiced by O'Reilly and others: "a new political media that builds loyalty less on accuracy, completeness, or verification than on affirming the beliefs of its audiences."[234] In *CNN Concatenated* the passions that inflect this new brand of newspeak are distilled, "the truth of matter" reduced to the rule of desire and fear.

Familiar CNN personalities such as Wolf Blitzer and Christiane Amanpour appear in brief flashes on screen in Fast's video; their words stitched together one by one. As they speak, they seem to channel a message of mysterious origins. The shock of 9/11 incites the surreal slippage of network newsfeed into a pure stream of consciousness. It begins as an incantation written in the idiom of advertising copy that cites a series of virtual, geographic, and political sites (chat rooms, the Midwest, swing states), suggesting a cable news network boasting of its far-reaching coverage. Repetition of the word "between" spoken by different newscasters emphasizes the process of concatenation—the linking of one speaker to another, and one location to the next. As the work continues, "between" begins to mark more than physical or abstract intervals. It outlines spaces of intimacy and states of being or coming undone:

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[234] Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2010) p. 34.

Between/what/used/to be/between/us/and/what/may/have/only/been/a border
Between/the sheets/between/each bite/between/desire/and/confusion

Fast uses concatenation to create an unsettling collective singularity that is surprisingly bodily in its means of address. The message it conveys assumes private, direct knowledge of viewer's relationship to her own body, exposing her anxious awareness of its inevitable failings:

I/know/what/you're/afraid of
You/mistrust/your/body
Lately/it/has/been/looking/more/and/more/foreign
Its been doing strange things
You/suspect/that/it/has/been/keeping/something/from/you
That/knowledge/of/your/own/death/is/already/programmed/inside/somehow…

Talk of terrorist cells "operating inside you" confuses the idiom of war reporting with stories covering health and wellness. It also speaks to the way these figures have themselves been hijacked, their words cut up and rearranged like the letters of a ransom note. Instead of the death of others, here the viewer is confronted with news of her own death and the unmanageable fear, dread, and shame that it provokes. Fast further emphasizes the bodily dimension of this collective speech through odd pauses and sharp intakes of breath that are as expressive as the words the speakers intone.

Tension builds as the narration slides into an erratic one-sided rant directed at the audience as if it were an intimate partner:

You/are/so/hypocritical/self/absorbed/and/pathetic/that/I/wonder/sometimes/just/how/much/it/takes/to/move/you.

CNN Concatenated exaggerates the anxiety O'Reilly expresses about an absent or inattentive audience, no longer held "captive" the way it once was. Comically, absurdly, but also viciously, Fast goes after his wayward viewer. Instead of having her views affirmed, she is excoriated as passive, weak, and dependent on cable news, especially in moments of crisis:

You/love/to/complain/about/me/in/public
But/guess/who/you/run/to/with/the/first/sign/of/trouble
God/you/make/me/sick

The cable news network in *CNN Concatenated* takes on the role of a scorned, unhappy and unfulfilled partner. Desperate to be heard, these pleas and complaints sound like the last gasps of media's mass address.

Fast's unrelenting linear editing stands in sharp contrast to the montage strategies that are the focus of this dissertation. Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek use montage to explore non-linear temporalities of simultaneity, retrospection, and multiplicity. In REPORT, Conner over burdens the sign with multiple meanings and

conflates the event of Kennedy's funeral with his arrival at Love Field shortly before his death. In *Snows*, Schneemann takes up montage to interrogate the promise of networked immediacy, developing relations between moments in time that come into view retroactively, but only at great risk of passing away before they can be registered. VanDerBeek's multi-channel experiments in the Movie Drome produce visual arrays open to multiple, simultaneous associations. Initially for VanDerBeek the structural equivalence between one set of associations and another served as a guarantee of the connection between viewers, a certainty that he, like his contemporaries, began to question while making work dealing with social crisis and political violence in which this formal conception of social life began to reveal its own limitations.

The provisional and often fleeting montage experiments that are the focus of this study share the impulse to exploit internal variation and contradiction within the social field. They participate in making visible the inchoateness of social relations over and against the unity presumed by television's mass address. Fast by distinction employs montage as a form of massification to produce a form of collectivity indistinguishable from absolute individuation. Though the tone of *CNN Concatenated* shifts wildly from moment to moment, Fast's editing maintains a lock-step unity of expression. Concatenation precludes any possibility of cross cutting to a scene outside of the newsroom; there is no unexpected eruption of protest or dissent, all the tension is internal to erratic tenor of the collectively spoken monologue. This provocatively one-sided screed renders the silence of the audience it addresses unnerving, passive aggressive, and powerful enough to unsettle the otherwise dispassionate representatives of cable news reporting.

Natalie Bookchin's, *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2012), a work made a decade after Fast completed *CNN Concatenated* considers what has changed in that time. In Bookchin's video, made from material she found on YouTube, we encounter a world in which the hegemony of both Fox News and CNN is in danger of being eclipsed by the rule of online celebrity gossip perpetuated by tabloid sites such as TMZ and microblogging platforms like Twitter [Figure 5.2]. Here the cultural logic of social media transforms the silent majority anxiously addressed by *CNN Concatenated* into a chattering crowd. Like Fast, Bookchin uses recombinatory editing of appropriated news material, but rather than hijacking the recognizable representatives of the commercial media to perform a script written by the artist, she mines anonymous online archives to excavate the ready-at-hand scripts that people reproduce themselves. *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* takes the form of an 18-channel installation. Anonymous faces appear and disappear on screens floating throughout a dark room. Isolated individuals speak directly to the viewer. They hold forth, offering their opinion of someone whose identity seems difficult to pin down, an ambiguity bound up with markers of social significance – class, gender, and especially race. Sometimes a single voice speaks a line that is almost seamlessly picked up by someone else. "I don't know what race you are…/…Even his name is a mystery." At other times an entire host of speakers appear simultaneously, intoning a single word ("facts," "racist," "human" etc.) in unison.

Bookschin's editing underlines how certain words function as hinges or transfer points between each monologue. Details that seem to belong to the narrative of one

familiar Black male celebrity, politician, or public personality, judged for his adultery for example, slide into discussions that allude to a contested birth certificate or plastic surgery, suddenly recalling the tabloid narratives of other prominent and highly scrutinized Black male public figures. Bookchin doesn't always need to manufacture these slippages as Fast does in *CNN Concatenated*, sometimes she is able to import them wholesale as found social documents. Her extensive exploration of this YouTube micro-genre uncovers a common tendency in online rants about famous Black men—discussion of one such public figure often slips seamlessly into discussion of another, an effect her work amplifies and interrogates.

Bookchin's orchestration of her found material exploits moments of synchronicity and dissonance. This style of editing is closer to conducting than Fast's concatenation. There's a powerful musical quality to the work, particularly when voices ring out in unison. Bookchin transforms these individual speakers into a Greek chorus for our own age of celebrity and political scandal, a precarious collective, whose members often use the same words to express very different sentiments. Her installation creates an echo chamber full of reverb and crossed signals. The danger of social media is not unlike the danger of the journalism of affirmation popularized by Bill O'Reilly and Fox News, in that it puts us into contact only with those who already share our views and with whom we are most likely to agree. This is the challenge posed to older forms of mass address today. Bookchin's work upsets boundaries between people who might not otherwise tune into each other's channels, underscoring what they share in common – their desire to pass judgment on or defend the public figures they discuss and dissect.

Viewers are invited to respond in kind by finding ways to classify and situate each speaker within a larger social matrix: this one a tea partier, that one a Tiger Woods apologist or perhaps a Michael Jackson super-fan, an uncomfortable situation that confronts viewers with their own capacity to make judgments based on little more than a person's appearance, demeanor, and even race. By transforming these found documents into a series of linked portraits, Bookchin mimics the functions of social media, the tools it offers (linking, hashtags, indexing) to reimagine the idea of the social graph. Remaking this abstract instrument of data collection into a principle for organizing the physical space of the gallery, she underscores the bodily dimension of the relations it pictures. The viewer finds herself immersed within the crossfire of voices, perhaps physically disoriented by the faces that appear and disappear from view in the darkened gallery. The work simulates the transformation of YouTube into a social space of interaction where statements can reverberate, carry forward, but also suggests the real limits of such a platform.[235] This is no utopian vision of the people's media. Rather it reminds us that media's role in creating space for the emergence of new social relations often also involves policing difference and maintaining order. Bookchin's work plays with the unconscious slippages that reveal the seams of that order. She does not manufacture a

[235] In an interview with Geert Lovink, Bookchin states, "I don't think [YouTube] is a community - so calling it social media is a misnomer. I don't think there is conversation to be had on it through boxes for comments, or likes or dislikes." Natalie Bookchin and Geert Lovink, "In Conversation with Natalie Bookchin (part 1)," Institute of Network Cultures, March 15, 2011, <http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/culturevortex/category/youtube/>.

simulated dialogue, but rather produces a series of interconnected monologues that shift from speaker to speaker without warning. Exchange takes a mimetic form: mirroring the performance of readily available talking points or "scripts" rather than engaging in enlightened debate. The work rearticulates the affective experiences generated not only by the rise of the cable news pundit, but also by new forms of online protest, for example the testimonies about personal debt that spread during the Occupy uprisings or the statements of solidarity behind the "I am Trayvon Martin" campaign. These strategies exploit powerful forms of resonance and repetition immanent to a format that underlines isolation and individuality. They also beg the question of how this rhetorical emphasis on mirroring and consensus might ultimately impoverish what we think of as "online community" and its capacity to sustain internal difference and meaningful forms of confrontation and conflict resolution.

The work that feels most relevant to the contemporary exploration of media's social dimensions takes up forms of direct address avoided or radically reworked by Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek. This strategy intersects with the legacy of video used as a medium of self-reflection and interaction, a history that sits alongside the filmic experiments examined in the preceding chapters. In the early days of video, complex montage while possible (as evidenced by VanDerBeek's *Panels for the Walls of the World)* was often difficult to achieve without special access to professional editing equipment. The first generation of video artists tended to explore the medium's capacity to convey immediacy, often through unedited durational performances for the camera or live feeds designed to relay images of audiences back to themselves, as in the work of Bruce Nauman, Joan Jonas, Peter Campus, or Dan Graham. The exploration of these formal qualities, rooted in the new medium's technical limitations later informed the anti-aesthetic of social and political uses of video by collectives such as VideoFreex and TVTV, groups more interested in the participatory potential of the medium than in its phenomenology.[236] Video activists treated feedback as a social rather than a strictly technological capacity of the medium, but often took for granted its counter-hegemonic capacities.

This assumption has much to do with the ways video as a medium is bound up with television's formal codes and modes of address. Television is an important bridge between the structures of social life—a signifier for a world of relations qualified by class, gender, race, ethnicity, etc., and social as a description of modes of interaction, exchange, and communication. To speak of social media today is to reckon with the slippage between these two meanings. These two registers of "social" are connected, but more and more, the meaning of the former is occluded by the later.

Montage in contemporary video art plays a more significant role than it once did. Digital editing has made it possible to mimic the functionality of key word searches performed by databases and search engines, a shift that signals the impact of the convergences that are taking place between television and the Internet. Despite these developments, it is possible to find traces in contemporary artists' video of the preoccupations that shaped the work of Conner, Schneemann, and VanDerBeek almost forty years ago. My brief readings of works by Fast and Bookchin are meant to highlight

[236] Kenneth Rogers makes a similar point in his essay, "We are Here, We Could be Everywhere: Freewaves and the Use Value of Video History" <http://freewaves.org/about/20th-anniversary/>

the way each expresses antipathy toward feedback as a social phenomenon and calls attention to the bodily dimensions of social life, two significant links back to the work of this previous generation.

In the mid 1960s, feedback was a new possibility with potential worth exploring. Today we take it as a given that feedback dominates much of the activity deemed social online, much the way older forms of unidirectional address once dominated television. Feedback is solicited constantly by status updates, or offered up in the form of likes, shares, and comments, often (though certainly not always) as a quick affirmation or damning negation. Only the most techno-utopian holdouts would argue that feedback is inherently progressive and productive – most would concede that it is equally capable of fostering participation and political engagement as it is of perpetuating low level social anxiety managed as a form of mindless diversion.

Feedback has become a familiar feature of the media landscape, which is not to say that as a social phenomenon it no longer warrants our attention. The question is how it conditions the way bodies move, occupy space, interact, and convey meaning, particularly during moments of political crisis where issues of identity and history are at stake. Contemporary social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become the place where these questions seem to matter most now. Spectacular images of state violence and the bodies it imperils erupt regularly within social media news feeds otherwise dominated by relatively random and often rather trivial content, posts that cannot be assured of their claim on our attention. This regularity, and the forms of exchange it conditions, provokes new questions about how we experience media as social and by extension, the affective dimensions of social life in our own moment.

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Figures

Figure 1
Anthony McCall, *Circulation Figures*, 1972/2011
Single channel video installation. B/W. Sound. 35 min.

Figure 1.1
John Cameron Swayze for NBC's Camel News Caravan

Figure 1.2
Douglas Edwards for CBS News

Figure 1.3
Andy Warhol, *Screen Test* (Ingrid Superstar), 1966
16mm film. B/W. Silent. 4 min.

Figure 1.4
Vito Acconci, *Centers*, 1971
Single channel video. B/W. Sound. 22 min.

Figure 1.5
Vito Acconci, *Undertone*, 1973
Single channel video. B/W. Sound. 35 min.

Figure 1.6
Walter Cronkite reporting on the moon landing, 1969

Figure 2.1
Bruce Conner, A MOVIE, 1958
16mm film. B/W. Sound. 12 min.

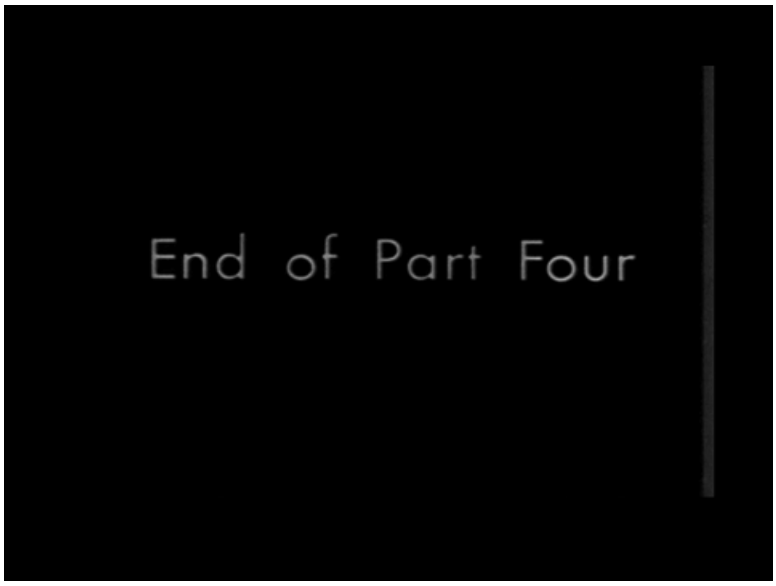

Figure 2.2
Bruce Conner, A MOVIE, 1958

Figure 2.3
Bruce Conner, A MOVIE, 1958

Figure 2.4
Bruce Conner, A MOVIE, 1958

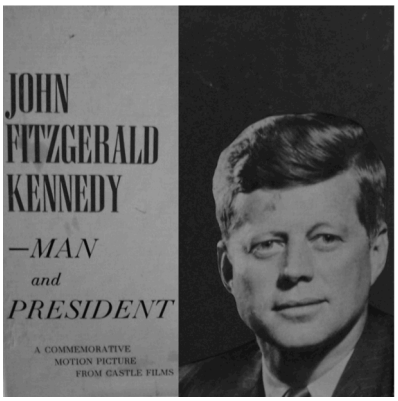

Figure 2.5
JFK Commemorative News Film

Figure 2.6
Bruce Conner, REPORT, 1963-7
16 mm film. B/W. Sound. 13 min.

Figure 2.7
Bruce Conner, REPORT, 1963-7

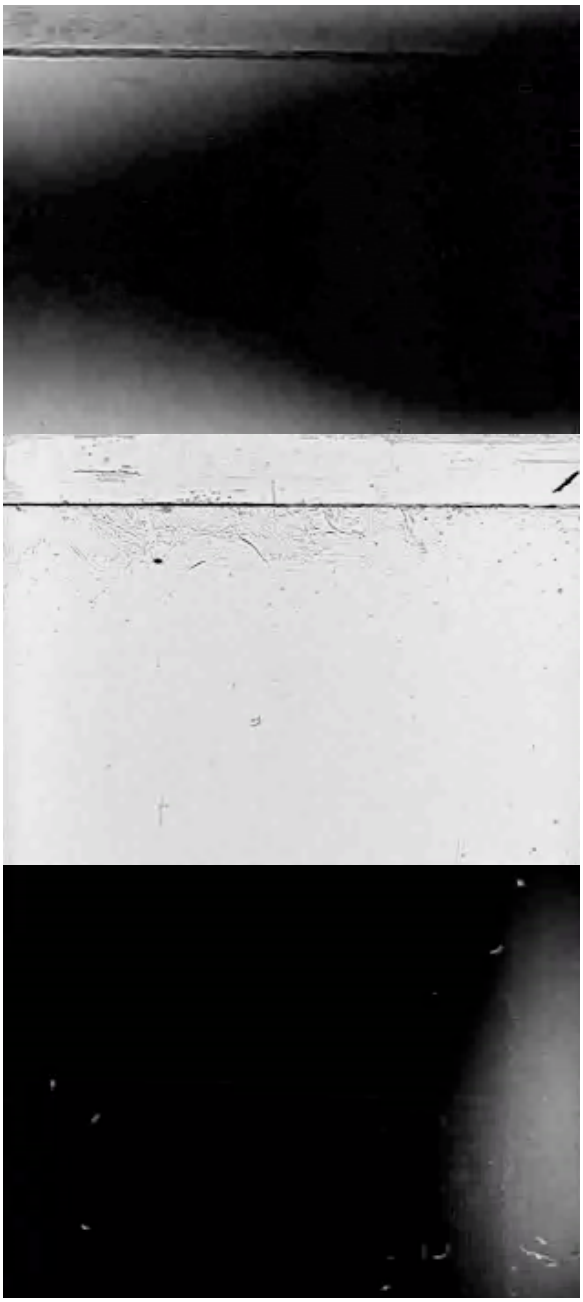

Figure 2.8
Bruce Conner, REPORT, 1963-7

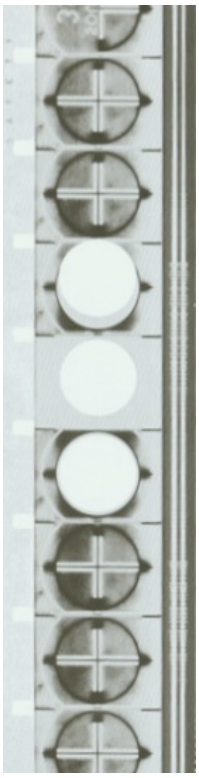

Figure 2.9
Bruce Conner, REPORT, 1963-7 v

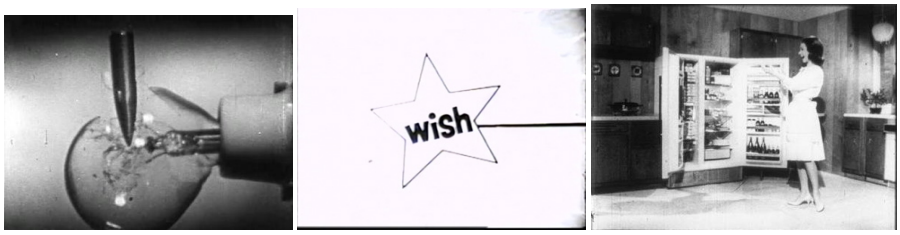

Figure 2.10
Bruce Conner, REPORT, 1963-7

Figure 2.11
Bruce Conner, REPORT, 1963-7

Figure 2.12
Bruce Conner, REPORT, 1963-7

Figure 2.13
Frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan

Figure 2.14
CBS New Bulletin

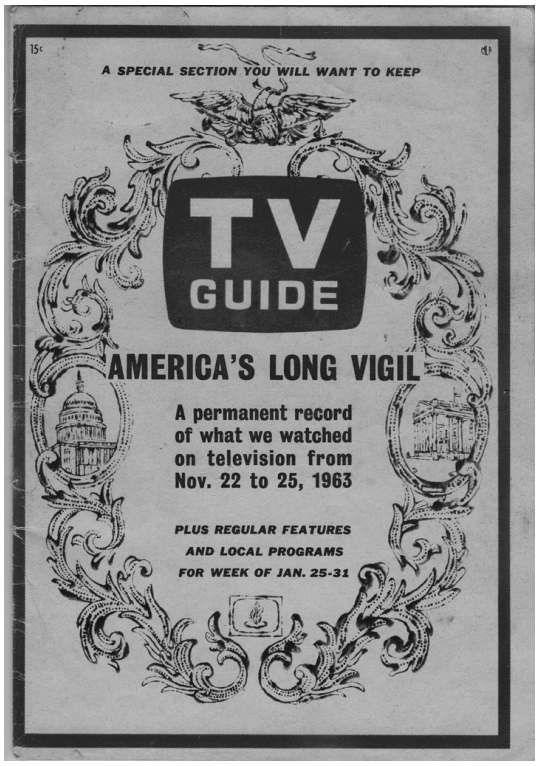

Figure 2.15
TV Guide. January 25, 1964

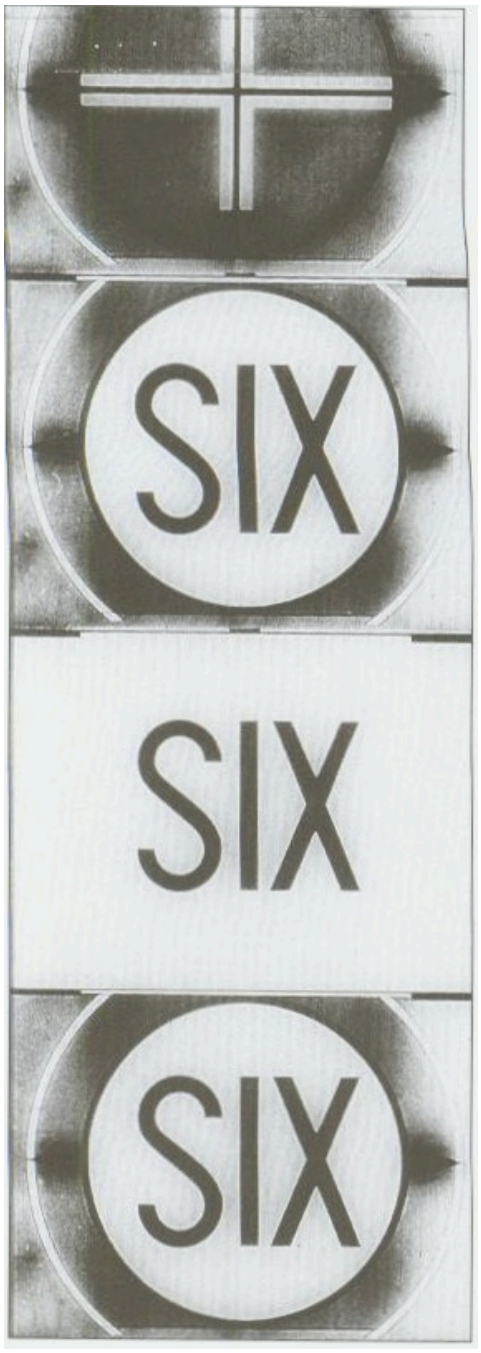

Figure 2.16
Bruce Conner, LEADER, 1964
16 mm film. B/W. Sound. 35 min.

Figure 2.17
Bruce Conner, REPORT, 1963-7

January 29 — February 5

week of the

ANGRY ARTS

Against the War in Vietnam

artists of New York speak through their own work
to dissociate themselves from U.S. policy in Vietnam

BROADWAY DISSENTS
An exciting evening of music, film, dramatic readings, and panel speak-out featuring Alan Alda, Ruby Dee, John Henry Faulk, Jules Feiffer, George Tabori and many others.
Village Theatre, 105 Second Avenue.
Sunday, January 29 at 8:30 P.M. Admission $2.00, Students $1.00

OFF-BROADWAY DISSENTS
The Open Theatre: I — Informal evening of songs, readings, improvisations, short plays.
Sheridan Square Playhouse, 99 Seventh Avenue South.
Monday, January 3 at 8:30 P.M.
"The Houston Corporal" by Paul Foster, directed by Tom O'Horgan, La Mama Repertory.
"Fruit Salad" by Brent Dusty, directed by Tony Barsha, Theatre Genesis.
"Akiki Socks & Jim Shoelaces" by John Wieners, directed by Jerry Benjamin.
Gate Theatre, 162 Second Avenue.
Tuesday, January 31 at 8:30 P.M. Admission 2.00, Students 1.00

"Happy Hunting" by Lewis Allen, directed by Sidney Walters.
The Pageant Players in 3 short plays
A short happening by Allan Kaprow.
St. Marks in the Bouwerie, Second Avenue and 10th St.
Wednesday, February 1 at 8:30 P.M. Contribution

"We Don't Need a War" by Helen Eisner
"Claws of the Eagle, Claws of the Jaguar" by Lee Baxendall, directed by John Chase.
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette Street.
Thursday, February 2at 8:30 P.M. Admission 1.00

The Open Theatre: II — More songs, readings, improvisations, short plays.
St. Mark's Playhouse 113 Second Avenue.
Friday, February 3 at 8:30 P.M. Admission $3.00, Students $1.00

DANCERS DISSENT
Dance Protest for Vietnam I
In Praise of Peace. Anne Wilson.
16 Millimeter Earrings, Meredith Monk.
Images in the Snow, Marta Marrisquez.
Blues for the Jungle, Elsa Powers.
Hunter Playhouse 68th Street and Lexington.
Monday, January 30 at 8:30 P.M. Admission 2.00, Students 1.00

Dance Protest for Vietnam II
Mazurkas to Anna Pavlova, James Waring.
Fauna, Aileen Passloff.
Convalescent Dance, Yvonne Rainer
Meditation, Remy Charlip. Yellow Umbrella Dance, April and December.
Wall, Robert Huot; One-Two-Three, Twyla Tharp; Vietnam, Margot Colbert.
Hunter Playhouse, 68th Street and Lexington.
Thursday, February 2 at 8:30 P.M. Admission 2.00, Students 1.00
(Tickets at Hunter Playhouse box office day of performance only).

FOLK ROCK DISSENTS
Folk Rock Marathon featuring "The Fugs" with many others
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, West Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
Friday, February 3 from 4 P.M. to 11 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

AVANT GARDE MUSICIANS DISSENT
Concert 1: Compositions by Max Neuhaus, Phil Corner, Morlon Feldman, Earle Brown, Malcomb Goldstein and others
Community Church, 40 East 35th Street
Monday, January 30 at 8:30 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

Concert 2: Instrumental and Electronic Music by Robert Steff, Jackson Maclow, James Tenney, Carolee Schneeman, Eugene Glickman, Steve Reich, David Behrman and others
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, West Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
Tuesday, January 31, at 8:30 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

MUSICIANS DISSENT
Bach E Major Partita Sanford Allen, Violin
St. Mark's Methodist Church, 55 Edgecomb Avenue
Sunday, February 5 at 11:00 A.M. Free

Music of the Baroque New York Baroque Ensemble
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, West Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
Sunday, January 29 at 8:30 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

Baroque Music Program New York Chamber Soloists
Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, 30 W. 68th Street
Monday, January 30 at 8:30 P.M. Free

Music of the Renaissance Dazzona Bloch, Lute and Virginla
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, West Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
Monday, January 30 at 8:30 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

Bach Cantata #82 Beethoven Sonata "Les Adieux"
Myer Kupferman's Opera "In A Garden" Judson Chamber Ensemble
Grete Sultan, Piano
Carnegie Recital Hall, 154 West 57th Street
Wednesday, February 1 at 8:30 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

Bach's Cantata #140 Judson Chamber Ensemble and Bread and Puppet Theater
Village Theater, Second Avenue and 6th Street
Thursday, February 2 at 8:30 P.M. Admission, 1.00

MIDNIGHT CONCERT
by a full symphony orchestra. New York's finest musicians will play without conductor to symbolize the individual's responsibility for the brutality in Vietnam. Bach's "Liebster Jesu" Mozart's G Minor Symphony
Funeral March from Beethoven's Eroica, and a short dramatic reading by Diana Sands.
Town Hall, 113 W. 43rd Street
Friday, February 3 at midnight.
Tickets at Town Hall box office Admission, 1.00

Schubert's Opera "Lysistrata" by Judson Chamber Ensemble
St. Luke's Church, Hudson and Grove Streets
Saturday, February 4 at 8:30 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

Josef Marx Barocco Ensemble
Spencer Memorial Church, 99 Clinton, Brooklyn Heights
Sunday, February 5 at 11:00 A.M. Free

Bach Cantata (repeat of Thursday night's program)
Village Theater, Second Avenue and 6th Street
Sunday, February 5 at 2:30 P.M. Admission, 1.00

20th Century Music for the Harpsichord Robert Conant, harpsichordist
Judson Hall, 165 West 57th Street
Sunday, February 5 at 8:30 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

SPECIAL ANGRY ARTS FILM PROGRAM
Note: Army films listed are classified as available for public viewing but may be refused to Week of the Angry Arts. Negotiations with Department of Army are now in progress.

Associated Programs (in sympathy with Week of Angry Arts)
February 1-5 Film-makers Cinematheque
125 West 41st Street
Films of Joy in Honor of Angry Arts Against the War in Vietnam
(For detailed program, call 966-3010)

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29
St. Mark's Church, Second Avenue & 10th Street
5:00 P.M. Millennium Film Studies II
"FOR LIFE, AGAINST THE WAR"
World Premiere of Film Collage by 40-plus film makers including Stan Brakhage, Shirley Clarke, Robert Frank, Hilary Harris, Les Savage, Phillip Stapp, Stan Vanderbeek
Admission $2.00 Students $1.00

MONDAY, JANUARY 30
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, West Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
7:30 P.M. "THIRTIES MAN: BIG BLACKOUT OF '65"
Live Shadow Play by Ken Jacobs.
(No admission while this portion of program in progress)
"FOR LIFE, AGAINST THE WAR"
World Premiere of Film Collage by 40-plus film makers including Stan Brakhage, Shirley Clarke, Robert Frank, Hilary Harris, Les Savage, Phillip Stapp, Stan Vanderbeek
Admission $2.00 Students $1.00

FILM PROGRAM CONTINUED
TUESDAY, JANUARY 31
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, West Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
7:30 P.M. FILMS BY THE U.S. ARMY I, "ARMY REPORT #7"
(operation in Vietnam)
"INFANTRY WEAPONS & THEIR EFFECTS"
"LIFE—MY RIGHT TO LIFE" (Conscience & killing in war) Free

8:15 P.M. Films for Peace, Films for Life I
"LET IT SHINE" Abbe Beren
"BOUNDARY LINES" Phillip Stapp
"SHOWBAY" Carson Davidson
"EXCHANGE OF WORDS" Richard Adams-
"BLONDE COBRA" Ken Jacobs
"6 VARIATIONS ON A DANCE THEME" Hilary Harris
"JACK LEVINE" Herman Engel & Peter Robinson Admission $1.00

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, West Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
7:30 P.M. Films for U.S. Army II
"THE THIRD CHALLENGE—UNCONVENTION WARFARE" Free

8:15 P.M. Films for Peace, Films for Life II
"NAPALM" Charles Harmon
"BREAKING THE HABIT" John Marty
"FREADLE AND BOBBIN" Wheaton Gallantine
"SON OF BABA" Richard Preston
"VINYL" Andy Warhol
"HEART OF SPAIN" Leo Hurwitz Admission $1.00

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1
New Yorker Theatre, Broadway & 88th St.
12 midnight "FOR LIFE, AGAINST THE WAR" Film Collage
(see Monday, January 30 program)
"12/12/42" Bernard Stone
"DESASTRES DE LA GUERRE" Courtney Rodin Films
Admission $2.00 Students $1.00

THURSDAY, FEB. 2
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, West Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
8:00 P.M. Films by the U.S. Army III
"FACE TO FACE WITH COMMUNISM"
"OPERATION SEA SWALLOW, VIETNAM" Free

8:45 P.M. Films for Peace, Films for Life III
"THE CONE OF WAR", "FREE HOLE", & "FIVRE"
"BLAZES" Robert Breer
"LINCOLN SPEAKS AT GETTYSBURG" Lewis Jacobs
"SUNDAY ON THE RIVER" Gordon Hitchens
"3 FILMS" Stan Brakhage
"SCARY TIMES" Shirley Clarke Admission $1.00

THURSDAY, FEB. 2
St. Mark's Church, Second Avenue & 10th St.
8:30 P.M. Millenium Film Studies II
"THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS SCREAM"
"CULTURE AND PROPAGANDA FROM RIGHT TO LEFT"
Illustrated Lecture by Martin S. Dworkin Free

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3
Judson Church, Washington Square South
THREE VIEWS ON VIETNAM—A Symposium of Films with
COMMENTS BY SUSAN SONTAG

8:00 P.M. Fits by U.S. Army
"GUERILLA WARFARE AND SPECIAL FORCES IN OPERATION"
"THE LINE IS DRAWN" (the struggle in Vietnam) Free

8:45 P.M. New Films from North Vietnam & the N.L.F.
New American Peace Films
"PINE OF THE LOGGED" Peter Bosomer
"12/12/42" Bernard Stone Contribution

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5
St. Mark's Church, Second Avenue & 10th St.
5:00 P.M. MILLENIUM FILM STUDIES III
Bob Downey—creator of "Chafed Elbows" Free

ARTISTS DISSENT
Collage of indignation
A 1200 foot canvas on which over 100 leading painters and sculptors protest the war in Vietnam.
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, W. Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
On view during entire week of the Angry Arts.

POETS AND WRITERS DISSENT
NAPALM POETRY READING
Muriel Rukeyser, Denise Levertov, Robert Creely, Paul Blackburn, Will Inman, Allen Ginsberg, John Logan are among more than 30 poets who will read. Evening features discussion by Robert Bly and others from Rampartts.
Community Church, 40 East 35th Street
Wednesday, February 1 at 8:30 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

AN ACT OF RESPECT FOR THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE
in which actors, poets, writers, dancers and theatre groups will show and tell the everyday life of the Vietnamese people. Each Act of Respect will be dedicated to individual Vietnamese, alive or dead. Participants in this day-long event, conceived and coordinated by Robert Nichols, will include: Paul Blackburn, Bread and Puppet Theatre, Irene Fornes, Denise Levertov, Jackson Mac Low, Meredith Monk, Robin Morgan, Joel Oppenheimer, Pageant Players, Grace Paley, Susan Sontag.
Washington Square Methodist Church, 133 West 4th Street
Saturday, February 4, beginning at 2 P.M. Free

PHOTOGRAPHERS DISSENT
Exhibit of photographs by Werner Bischof of Life in Vietnam. Also "Contemplation Room" event combining 200 color slides of Vietnamese life with tapes from Dale Minor's NBAI reports.
N.Y.U. Loeb Student, Center, W. Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, January 29, 30 and 31 and again on Friday, February 3. Free

PANEL DISCUSSION
The War, The Artist, His Work I
Dore Ashton, Moderator: Panel includes Allin D'Arcangelo, Irving Petlin, Susie Davis, Marlan Feldman, John G. Kilgore, Lionel Ragosin
Washington Square Methodist Church, 133 West 4th Street
Tuesday, January 31 at 8:30 P.M. Contribution

The War, The Artist, His Work II
Paul Goodman, Moderator: Panel includes Robert Rip, Leon Golub, Maxwell Geismar, George Tabori, Harold Rosenberg.
Washington Square Methodist Church, 133 West 4th Street
Thursday, February 2 at 8:30 P.M. Contribution

Architecture and Vietnam
Bert Bapak, Moderator: Panel includes Harold Edelman, Percival Goodman, Ernst Hacker, Mario Salvadori.
N.Y.U. Loeb Student Center, West Broadway, Cor. W. 4th
Thursday, February 2 at 8:30 Free

CARAVAN OF THE ANGRY ARTS
A decorated float, carrying poets, folk singers, films, artists and actors will make street corner stops from Greenwich Village to Harlem on Tuesday, January 31, Thursday, February 2 and Saturday, February 4 from 12 noon to 5:30 P.M.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM
Chalk Talk by Maurice Sendak, poetry reading by Eve Merriam, Yakim Mime Troupe, films and folk-singers.
Place to be announced.
Saturday, February 4th at 2:30

JAZZ CONCERT
Get-Loud & get-up keys.
Village Theater, 105 Second Ave.
Sunday, February 5 at 4:00 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

THE LAST WORD
Finale! A variety show including Jack Gilck, Daniel Nagrin, Cyrele Furman, Phil Corner and many more.
Village Theatre, 105 Second Avenue
Saturday, February 4 at 8:00 P.M. Admission, 2.00 Students, 1.00

Patron tickets to all events $25.00 If you can't come, contribute! Funds urgently needed for operating expenses and to cover free events.

Send checks to: ANGRY ARTS
Robert Reitz, Chmn.
224 West Fourth Street
New York City 10011
AL 5-1341

ANGRY ARTS SPONSORS AND PARTICIPANTS (Partial List)

DANCE
Remy Charlip
Scott Douglas
Yvonne Rainer
Daniel Nagrin
Aileen Passloff
Elsa Powers
Yvonne Rainer
Judy Schaffer
Glen Tetley
James Waring

FILMS AND PHOTOGRAPHY
Richard Adams
Richard Avedon
Carl Bissinger
Stan Brakhage
Tom Brandon
Ruth Bukhardt
Shirley Clarke
Rebecca Doherty
Robert Frank
Peter Gessner
Hilary Harris
Ken Jacobs
Lee Jacobs
Albert Kahn
Alfred Leslie
Jonas Mekas
Sidney Meyers
Leo Murwitz
Jonas Paley
Richard Preston
Lloyd Ragosin
Lee Savage
Carolee Schneeman
Phillip Stapp
Patricia Thomas
Francis Thompson
Stan Vanderbeek
Amos Vogel
Andy Warhol
Herman Waldberg

FOLK/ROCK
Judy Collins
Stu Cunningham
Barbara Dane
Fugs
Gene and Francoise
Phil Ochs
Jacqueline Sharp
Ismael Young

MUSIC
David Berman
Barbara Benton
Chris Brown
Edward Brewer
Gene Bruck
Robert Conant
Philip Corner
Malcolm Goldstein
Arl Farmer
Morton Feldman
George Flynn
Emanuel Ghent
Earle Brown
Eugene Glickman
Malcolm Goldstein
Alan Grishman
Leonid Hambro
Lejaren Hiller
Malcolm Kaplan
Alison Knowles
Jaime Laredo
Ruth Laredo
Julius Levine
Thomas Nee Mark
Max Neuhaus
Matthew Raimondi
Steve Reich
Ned Rorem
Mike Sahl
Hermann Scherchen
Hermann Seaman
Peter Serkin
Norman Singer
Elie Siegmeister
Raymond Swanson
Benjamin Steinberg
Arnold Steinhardt
Gerald Tarack
James Tenney
Michael Tree
Meyer Kupferman
Ezra Laderman
Beth Lamon
Wolfgang Zankarmann

PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS
Bernard Aptekar
Elias Asher
Dore Ashton
Jack Beal Brach
Paul Brach
Paul Burlin
Allan D'Arcangelo
CPLY
Mark DiSuvero
Harry Dougherty
Elaine duKoening
Friedel Dzubas
Peter Fenakis
Antonio Frasconi
Leon Golub
Robert Goldthwey
David Hare
Burt Hasen
Phoebe Hoffman
Thomas B. Hess
Paul Jenkins
Paul Hodkins
Ruben Kadlin
Allen Kaprow
Max Kozloff
Gerald Laing
Jacob Landau
Ann Lee
Richard Lindner
Knox Martin
Matta
Claes Oldenburg
Philip Pearlstein
Irving Petlin
Joe Raffaelli
Shay Rieger
Ad Reinhardt
Larry Rosenberg
James Rosenquist
Robert Scull
Jason Seeley
Jack Sonenberg
Raphael Soyer
Ray Spaeth
George Sugerman
Mike Todd
Gene Tulchin
David Weinrib
James Wines
Adja Yunkers

POETS & WRITERS
Donald Barthelme
Robert Bly
Robert Creely
Louise Bogan
Kenneth Burke
Hortensia Calisher
Robert Creely
Edwin Denby
Clayton Eshleman
Max I. Goldman
Allen Ginsberg
Ivan Gold
Paul Goodman
Paul Gruma
Nat Hentoff
David Ignatow
Will Inman
John G. Kilgore
Hans Koningsberger
Stanley Kunitz
Denise Levertov
John Logan
Walter Lowenfels
Dwight Macdonald
Norman Mailer
David McReynolds
Eve Merriam
Robert Nichols
Joseph Heath
Joel Oppenheimer
Gerd Stern
Allen Planz
Gordon Ropoff
Philip Roth
Muriel Rukeyser
Joel Sloman
Susan Sontag
Susan Sontag
Gilbert Sorrentino
Elizabeth Sutherland
Harvey Swados
Theodore Weiss
Sol Yurick

THEATRE
Alan Alda
Alan Arkin
Eric Bentley
Walter Bernstein
John Berry
Jacqueline Brooks
Ruby Dee
Robert Brustein
Godfrey Cambridge
Joseph Chaikin
Frances Chaney
Alexander H. Cohen
Ossie Davis
Ossie Davis
Ruby Dee
Hillard Elkins
Alvin Epstein
Julius Epstein Hallc
Jules Feiffer
Herb Gardner
Ellis Gardner
William Gibson
Jack Gilford
Lou Gilbert
Paul Goodman
Elliott Gould
Jean Genet
Barbara Harris
Frances Hoffin
Anne Jackson
Richard Jordan
Hunter Kaplan
Sol Kaplan
Harlan Kleiman
Burton Lane
Joseph Leaver, Jr.
Millard Lampell
Madeline Lee
Jacques Levy
Vivian Lindfors
Paul Mann
Emest Martin
Claire Nichtern
Alan North
Arthur Penn
Charlotte Rae
Jason Robards
Lawrence Roloff
Wolfgang Roth
Diane Sondi
Allan Schneider
Peter Schumann
Martin Sherwood
Stephanie Silla
Michael Smith
Joe Stein
John Strauss
George Tabori
Lawrence Tarbuck
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Wager
Eli Wallach
Kathleen Widdoes
Stanley Young

Figure 3.1
Week of Angry Arts Program (January 29-February 5, 1967)

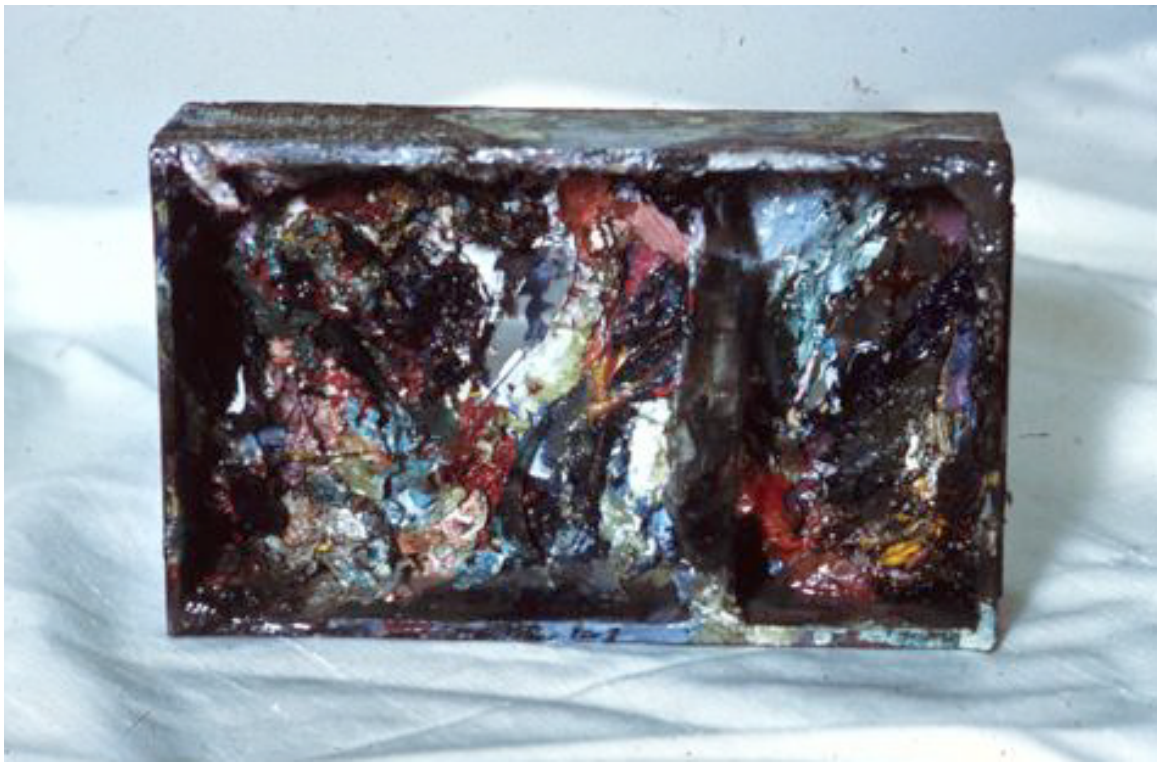

Figure 3.2
Carolee Schneemann, *Window to Brakhage*, 1962

Figure 3.3
Carolee Schneemann, *Four Fur Cutting Boards*, 1963

Figure 3.4
Carolee Schneemann, *Glass Environment for Sound and Motion*, 1962

Figure 3.5
Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy*, 1964

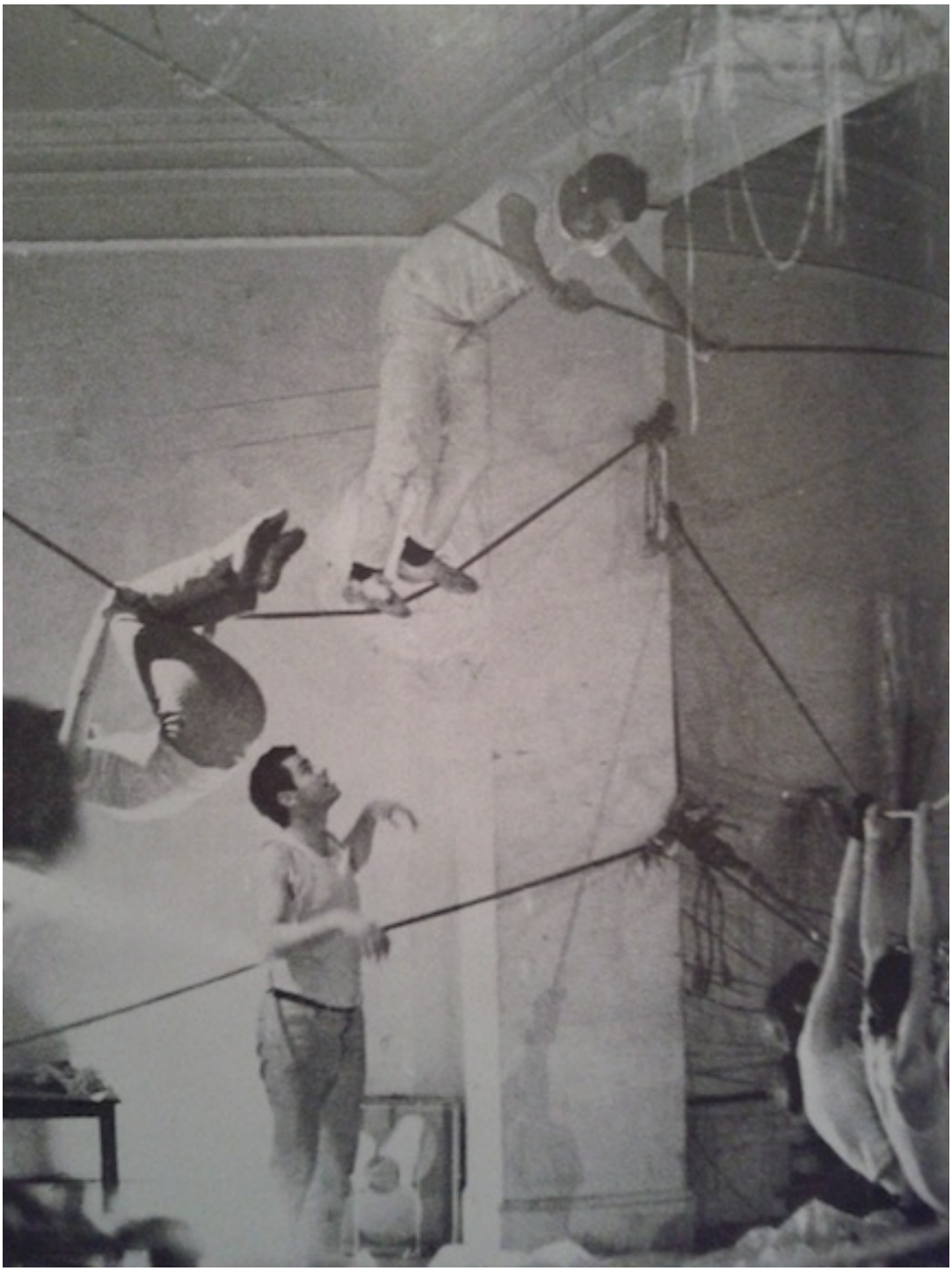

Figure 3.6
Carolee Schneemann, *Water Light/Water Needle*, 1966

Figure 3.7
Carolee Schneemann, *Viet Flakes* 1965-7
16mm film. Toned B/W. Sound. 17 min.

Figure 3.8
Carolee Schneemann, *Snows*, 1967

Figure 3.9
Carolee Schneemann, *Snows*, 1967

Figure 3.10
Carolee Schneemann, *Snows*, 1967

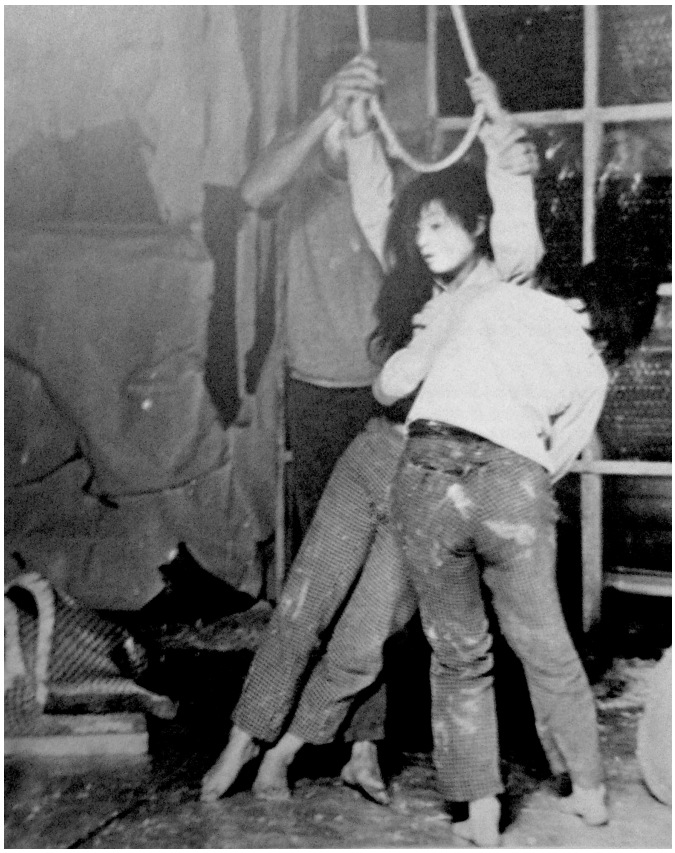

Figure 3.11
Carolee Schneemann, *Snows*, 1967

Figure 3.12
Photograph by Kyoichi Sawada for United Press International Wire Service, 1966
Carolee Schneemann, *Viet Flakes*, 1965-7

Figure 3.13
Photograph by Sean Flynn for *Paris Match*, 1966
Carolee Schneemann, *Viet Flakes*, 1965-7

Figure 3.14
William F. Pepper, "Children of Vietnam," *Ramparts* (January 1967)

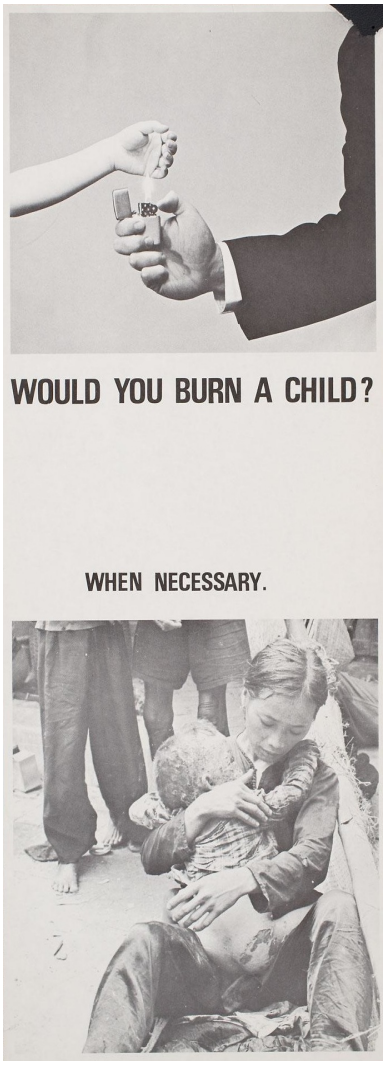

Figure 3.15
Anon., Would you burn a child?, nd.

Figure 3.16
Carolee Schneemann, *Snows* Performance Score in *More Than Meat Joy* (detail)
Carolee Schneemann, *Snows* Performance Score in *Imaging Her Erotics*

Carolee Schneemann, *Snows*, 1967

Figure 4.1
Winky Dink and You

Figure 4.2
Stan VanDerBeek *Panels for the Walls of the World,* 1965-7
Video. b/w. sound. 8 min.

Figure 4.3
VanDerBeek *Panels for the Walls of the World*, 1965-7

Figure 4.4
VanDerBeek *Panels for the Walls of the World*, 1965-7

Figure 4.5
VanDerBeek *Panels for the Walls of the World,* 1965-7

Figure 4.6
VanDerBeek *Panels for the Walls of the World*, 1965-7

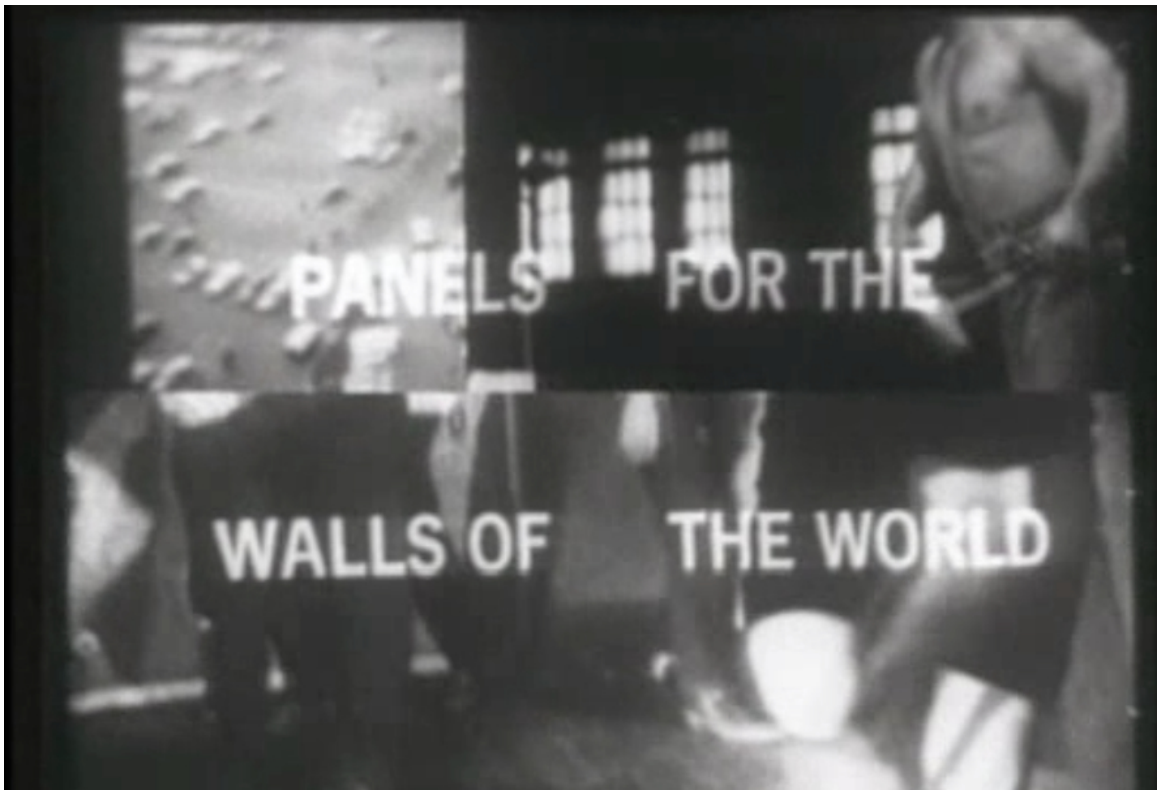

Figure 4.7
VanDerBeek *Panels for the Walls of the World*, 1965-7

"CULTURE: INTERCOM" AND EXPANDED CINEMA

A Proposal and Manifesto

STAN VANDERBEEK

primetime

for the moment this world
and the idea of this world
curve together in the mind
resembling each other . . . .
this cockfleshhouse . . . starkplane and running man
sunsight handdance life, looking at life
comes, coming to be part of itself

to this vast analogy of space and time
that curve off and together in the mind
movement . . . light . . . it is clear we do not have a
fixed point of view
our mouth is not our hand, timebent, manspan
our eyes are not our ears, virtuallook, age leg
image move, motion itself is moving
if I think it's different it's an illusion
the world is an idea, man is an idea
in the revolving door of the universe . . .

if I can, I will
take it from there . . .

Figure 4.8
Stan VanDerBeek, "Culture Intercom and Expanded Cinema: A Proposal and Manifesto"
Tulane Drama Review 11 (1965)

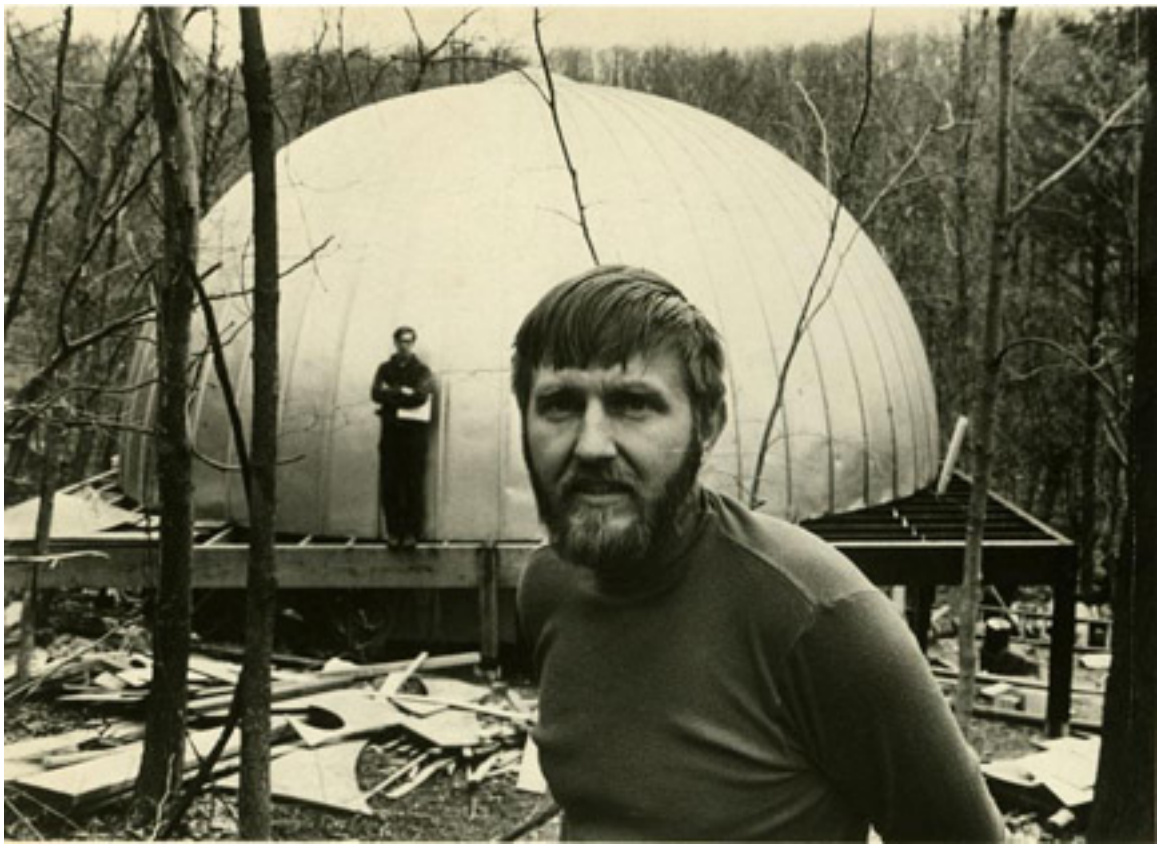

Figure 4.9
Stan VanDerBeek, MovieDrome at Gate Hill Co-op, nd.

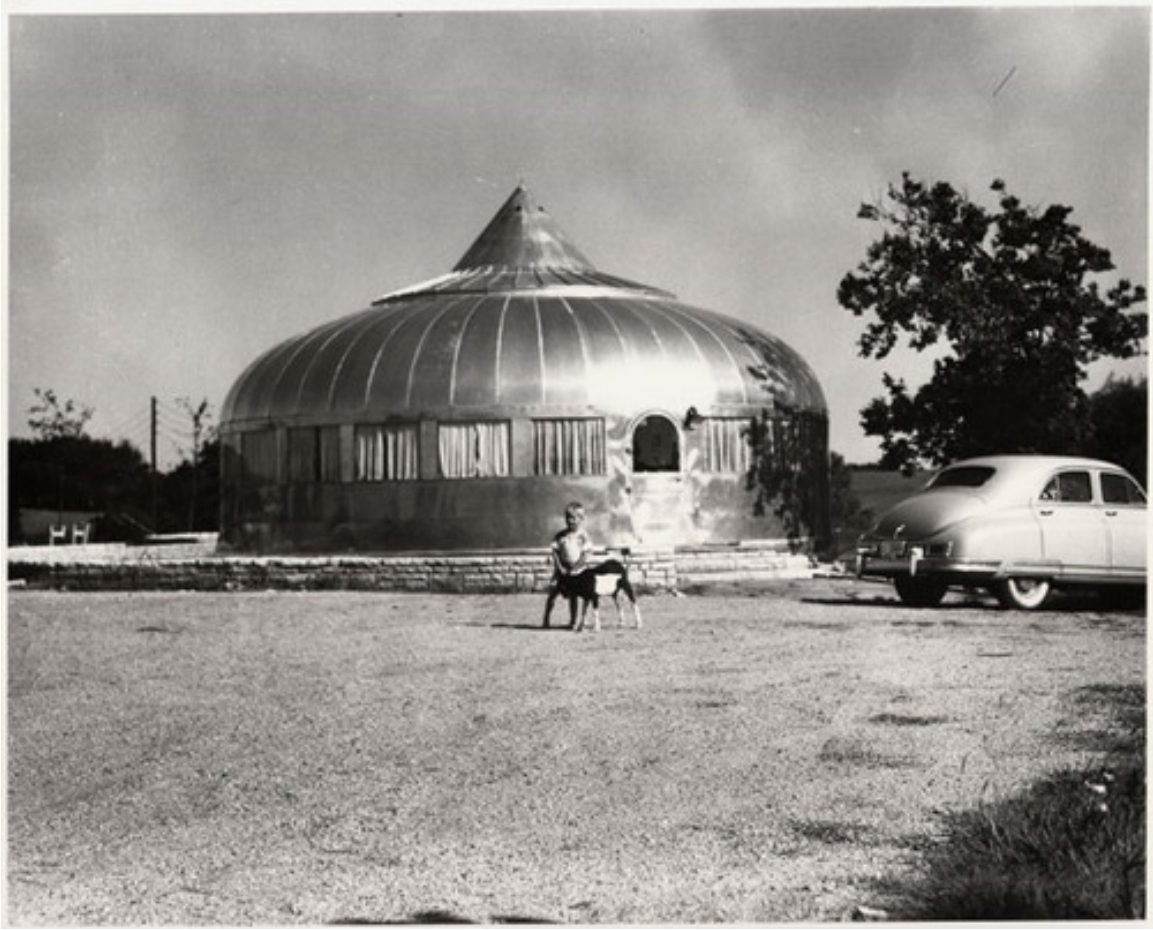

Figure 4.9
Buckminster Fuller, Dymaxion House, nd.

Figure 4.11
Stan VanDerBeek, MovieDrome, nd.

Figure 4.12
Robert Rauschenberg, *Features from Currents,* 1970
Silkscreen, 40 x 40 inches

Figure 4.13
Stan VanDerBeek, MovieDrome
Installation view, *Ghosts in the Machine,* New Museum, 2012

Figure 4.14
Stan VanDerBeek at WGBH, 1969

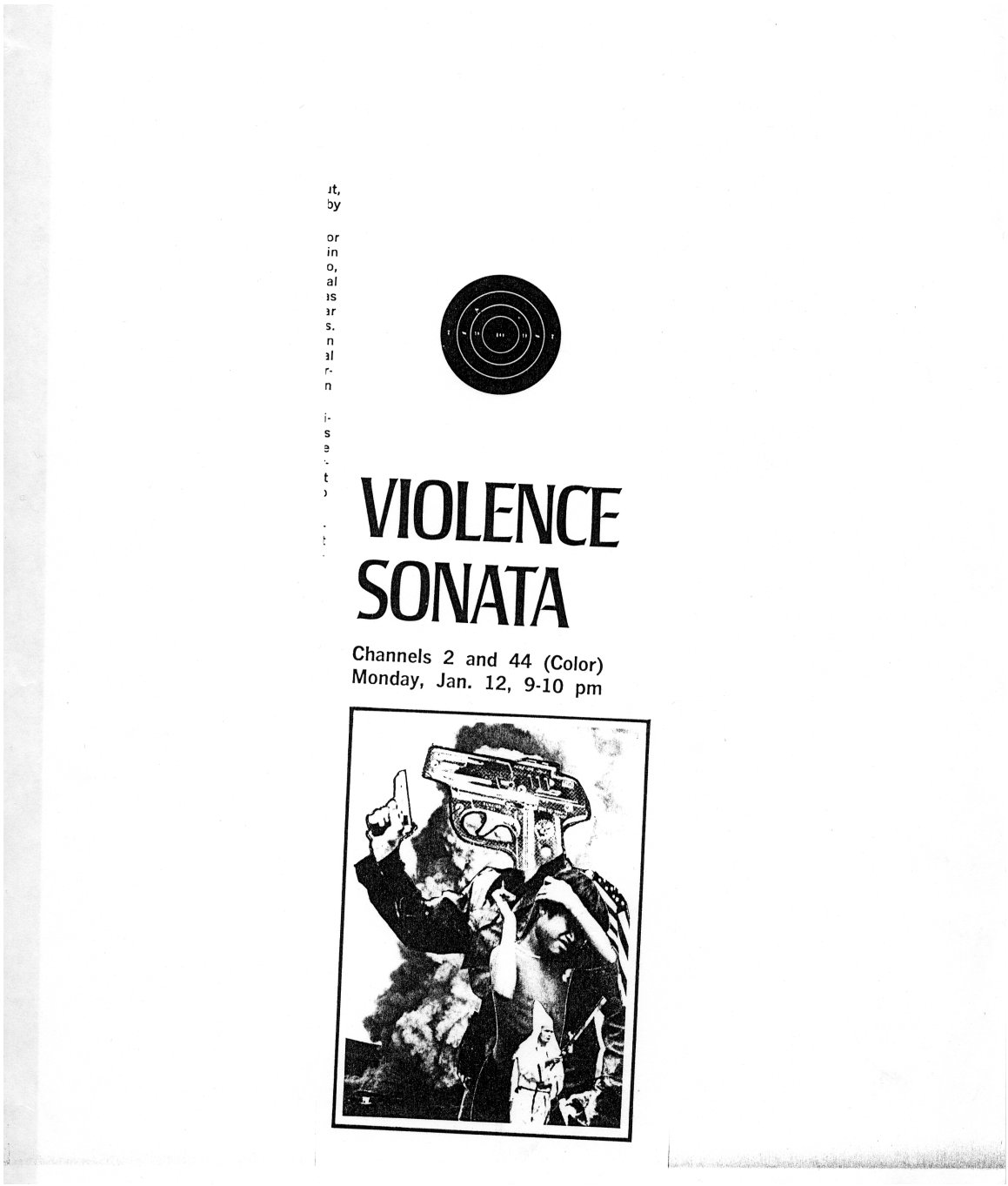

Figure 4.15
Stan VanDerBeek, Program for *Violence Sonata*, 1970

Figure 4.16
Stan VanDerBeek, *Violence Sonata,* 1970
Two-channel video transferred from ¾ in. air print. Color. Sound. 49 min.
Installation view, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2011

Figure 4.16
Stan VanDerBeek, *Violence Sonata,* 1970

Figure 4.17
Stan VanDerBeek, *Violence Sonata,* 1970

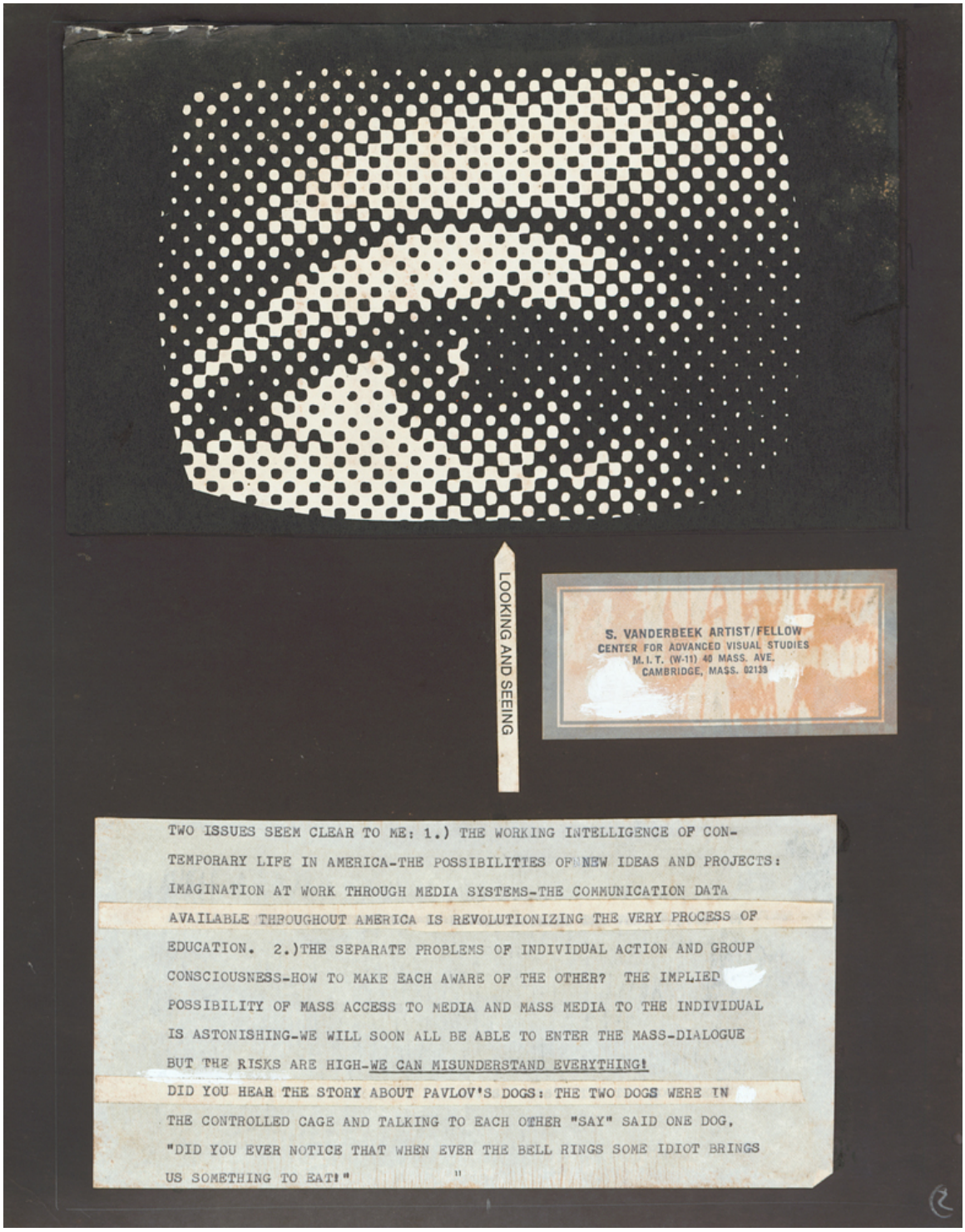

Figure 4.18
Stan VanDerBeek, *History of Violence in America*, ca. 1970 (detail)
Collage on paper, thirteen works, 11 x 14 in. each

Figure 5.1
Omer Fast, *CNN Concatenated,* 2002
Single channel video loop. Color. Sound. 18 min.

Figure 5.2
Natalie Bookchin, Now he's out in public and everyone can see, 2012
18-Channel video installation. Sound. Color. 16 min.
Installation view, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibition, 2012