

PART TWO: SYNAESTHETIC CINEMA: THE END OF DRAMA

"The final poem will be the poem of fact in the language of fact. But it will be the poem of fact not realized before."

WALLACE STEVENS

Expanded cinema has been expanding for a long time. Since it left the underground and became a popular avant-garde form in the late 1950's the new cinema primarily has been an exercise in technique, the gradual development of a truly cinematic language with which to expand further man's communicative powers and thus his awareness. If expanded cinema has had anything to say, the message has been the medium.¹ Slavko Vorkapich: "Most of the films made so far are examples not of creative use of motion-picture devices and techniques, but of their use as recording instruments only. There are extremely few motion pictures that may be cited as instances of creative use of the medium, and from these only fragments and short passages may be compared to the best achievements in the other arts."²

It has taken more than seventy years for global man to come to terms with the cinematic medium, to liberate it from theatre and literature. We had to wait until our consciousness caught up with our technology. But although the new cinema is the first and only true cinematic language, it still is used as a recording instrument. The recorded subject, however, is not the objective external human condition but the filmmaker's consciousness, his perception and its pro-

¹ For a comprehensive in-depth history of this development, see: Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (New York: Dutton Paperbacks, 1967). And for a survey of initial critical reaction, see *The New American Cinema*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton Paperbacks, 1967).

² Slavko Vorkapich, "Toward True Cinema," in *Film: A Montage of Theories*, ed. Richard Dyer MacCann (New York: Dutton Paperbacks, 1966), p. 172.

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cess. If we've tolerated a certain absence of discipline, it has been in favor of a freedom through which new language hopefully would be developed. With a fusion of aesthetic sensibilities and technological innovation that language finally has been achieved. The new cinema has emerged as the only aesthetic language to match the environment in which we live.

Emerging with it is a major paradigm: a conception of the nature of cinema so encompassing and persuasive that it promises to dominate all image-making in much the same way as the theory of general relativity dominates all physics today. I call it *synaesthetic cinema*. In relation to traditional cinema it's like the science of bionics in relation to previous notions of biology and chemistry: that is, it models itself after the patterns of nature rather than attempting to "explain" or conform nature in terms of its own structure. The new artist, like the new scientist, does not "wrest order out of chaos." Both realize that supreme order lies in nature and traditionally we have only made chaos out of it. The new artist and the new scientist recognize that chaos *is* order on another level, and they set about to find the rules of structuring by which nature has achieved it. That's why the scientist has abandoned absolutes and the filmmaker has abandoned montage.

Herbert Read: "Art never has been an attempt to grasp reality as a whole—that is beyond our human capacity; it was never even an attempt to represent the totality of appearances; but rather it has been the piecemeal recognition and patient fixation of what is significant in human experience."³ We're beginning to understand that "what is significant in human experience" for contemporary man is the awareness of consciousness, the recognition of the process of perception. (I define perception both as "sensation" and "conceptualization," the process of forming concepts, usually classified as "cognition." Because we're enculturated, to perceive is to interpret.) Through *synaesthetic cinema* man attempts to express a total phenomenon—his own consciousness.⁴

³ Read, *Icon*, p. 18.

⁴ In defining consciousness I concur with R. G. Collingwood: "The kind of thought which stands closest to sensation or mere feeling. Every further development of thought is based upon it and deals not with feeling in its crude form but with feeling as thus transformed into imagination." *Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), p. 223.

Synaesthetic cinema is the only aesthetic language suited to the post-industrial, post-literate, man-made environment with its multi-dimensional simulsensory network of information sources. It's the only aesthetic tool that even approaches the reality continuum of conscious existence in the nonuniform, nonlinear, nonconnected electronic atmosphere of the Paleocybernetic Age. "As visual space is superseded," McLuhan observes, "we discover that there is no continuity or connectedness, let alone depth and perspective, in any of the other senses. The modern artist—in music, in painting, in poetry—has been patiently expounding this fact for decades."⁵ The modern synaesthetic filmmaker has been patiently expounding this fact for decades as well, and with far more success than painters or poets.

Finally, I propose to show that synaesthetic cinema transcends the restrictions of drama, story, and plot and therefore cannot be called a genre. In addition to matching McLuhan's view of contemporary existence, it also corresponds to Buckminster Fuller's observations on natural synergetics and consequently is negentropic. Before discussing specifics, however, we must first understand why synaesthetic cinema is just now being developed into a universal language, more than seventy years after the birth of the medium. Like most everything else, it's because of television.

⁵ Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (New York: Bantam Books), p. 13.

Global Closed Circuit: The Earth as Software

Television Renders Cinema Obsolete as Communicator of Objective Reality

Just as every fact is also metaphysical, every piece of hardware implies software: information about its existence. Television is the software of the earth. Television is invisible. It's not an object. It's not a piece of furniture. The television set is irrelevant to the phenomenon of television. The videosphere is the noosphere transformed into a perceivable state. "Television," says video artist Les Levine, "is the most obvious realization of software in the general environment. It shows the human race itself as a working model of itself. It renders the social and psychological condition of the environment visible to the environment."

A culture is dead when its myths have been exposed. Television is exposing the myths of the republic. Television reveals the observed, the observer, the process of observing. There can be no secrets in the Paleocybernetic Age. On the macrostructural level all television is a closed circuit that constantly turns us back upon ourselves. Humanity extends its video Third Eye to the moon and feeds its own image back into its monitors. "Monitor" is the electronic manifestation of superego. Television is the earth's superego. We become aware of our individual behavior by observing the collective behavior as manifested in the global videosphere. We identify with persons in news events as once we identified with actors or events in fiction films. Before television we saw little of the human condition. Now we see and hear it daily. The world's not a stage, it's a TV documentary. Television extends global man throughout the ecological biosphere twenty-four hours a day. By moving into outer space, television reveals new dimensions of inner space, new aspects of man's perception and the results of that perception.

This implosive, self-revealing, consciousness-expanding process is irreversible. Global information is the natural enemy of local government, for it reveals the true context in which that government is

operating. Global television is directly responsible for the political turmoil that is increasing around the world today. The political establishments sense this and are beginning to react. But it's too late. Television makes it impossible for governments to maintain the illusion of sovereignty and separatism which is essential for their existence. Television is one of the most revolutionary tools in the entire spectrum of technoanarchy.

We recognize television's negative effect on the popular arts: that it induces a kind of sedentary uniformity of expression and generates a false sense of creativity. In its broader consequences, however, television releases cinema from the umbilical of theatre and literature. It renders cinema obsolete as communicator of the objective human condition. It has affected cinema in much the same way as the invention of photography affected sculpture and painting. Cubism and other means of abstracting the realistic image were born with the photographic plate because painting no longer provided the most realistic images. The plastic arts abandoned exterior reality for interior reality. The same has happened to cinema as a result of television: movies no longer provide the most realistic images so they've turned inward.

We're in direct contact with the human condition; there's no longer any need to represent it through art. Not only does this release cinema; it virtually forces cinema to move beyond the objective human condition into newer extra-objective territory. There are manifold trends that indicate that virtually all cinema has felt the profound impact of television and is moving inevitably toward synaesthesia. The progression naturally includes intermediary steps first toward greater "realism," then *cinéma-vérité*, before the final and total abandon of the notion of reality itself. The fact that we're now approaching the peak of the realism stage is demonstrated by Warhol, for example, whose recent work contrasts "reality" with "realism" as manifested in the spontaneous behavior of actors pretending to be acting. In addition there's virtually all of Godard's work, as well as John Cassavetes' *Faces*, James McBride's *David Holzman's Diary*, Peter Watkins' *The War Game*, Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, Paul Morrissey's *Flesh*, and Stanton Kaye's *Georg and Brandy in the Wilderness*.

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Most of this work is characterized by an astute blending of scripted and directed acting with spontaneous improvisation, in which the actor randomly fills in the parameters of a characterization predetermined and predestined by the director. Yet precisely because they attempt to approximate objective reality without actually being real, places them firmly in the tradition of conventional Hollywood pretend movies, with the exception of camera presence or what might be called process-level perception.

It's only natural that contemporary filmmakers should be more successful at imitating reality since the intermedia network makes us more familiar with it. But there's a curious and quite significant aspect to the nature of this new realism: by incorporating a kind of bastardized *cinéma-vérité* or newsreel style of photography and behavior, the filmmaker has not moved closer to actual unstylized reality itself but rather a reality prestylized to approximate our primary mode of knowing natural events: television. We accept it as being more realistic because it more closely resembles the process-level perception of TV watching, in which unstylized reality is filtered and shaped through the process of a given medium.

The traditional dramatic structure of these films becomes more easily discernible in contrast with pure *cinéma-vérité* work such as Jean Rouch's *Chronicle of a Summer*, Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back*, or Chris Marker's brilliant *Le Joli Mai*. A comparison of *Faces* or *David Holzman's Diary* with Warhol's *Nude Restaurant* is even more revealing: the difference between prestylized and predestined realities on the one hand, and Warhol's totally random and only partially prestylized reality on the other, is brought into sharp focus. Warhol has expressed regret that a camera cannot simply be switched on and left running for twenty-four hours, since the "important" (naturally-revealing) events seem to occur at that moment just after it stops turning. Godard disclosed similar sentiments when he said: "The ideal for me is to obtain right away what will work. If retakes are necessary it falls short of the mark. The immediate is chance. At the same time it is definitive. What I want is the definitive by chance."

Synaesthetic Synthesis: Simultaneous Perception of Harmonic Opposites

Time, said St. Augustine, is a threefold present: the present as we experience it; the past as present memory; the future as present expectation. Hopi Indians, who thought of themselves as caretakers of the planet, used only the present tense in their language: past was indicated as "present manifested," and the future was signified by "present manifesting."⁶ Until approximately 800 B.C., few cultures thought in terms of past or future: all experience was synthesized in the present. It seems that practically everyone but contemporary man has intuitively understood the space-time continuum.

Synaesthetic cinema is a space-time continuum. It is neither subjective, objective, nor nonobjective, but rather all of these combined: that is to say, *extra-objective*. Synaesthetic and psychedelic mean approximately the same thing. Synaesthesia is the harmony of different or opposing impulses produced by a work of art. It means the simultaneous perception of harmonic opposites. Its sensorial effect is known as *synaesthesia*, and it's as old as the ancient Greeks who coined the term. Under the influence of mind-manifesting hallucinogens one experiences synaesthesia in addition to what Dr. John Lilly calls "white noise," or random signals in the control mechanism of the human bio-computer.⁷

Any dualism is composed of harmonic opposites: in/out, up/ down, off/on, yes/no, black/white, good/bad. Past aesthetic traditions, reflecting the consciousness of their period, have tended to concentrate on one element at a time. But the Paleocybernetic experience doesn't support that kind of logic. The emphasis of traditional logic might be expressed in terms of an *either/or* choice, which in physics is known as *bistable logic*. But the logic of the Cybernetic Age into which we're moving will be *both/and*, which in physics is

⁶ Benjamin Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Publications Office, 1956).

⁷ John C. Lilly, *The Human Bio-Computer* (Miami, Fla.: Communications Research Institute, 1967).

called *triadic logic*. Physicists have found they can no longer describe phenomena with the binary yes/no formula but must operate with yes/no/maybe.

The accumulation of facts is no longer of top priority to humanity. The problem now is to apply existing facts to new conceptual wholes, new vistas of reality. By "reality" we mean relationships. Piet Mondrian: "As nature becomes more abstract, a relation is more clearly felt. The new painting has clearly shown this. And that is why it has come to the point of expressing nothing but relations."⁸ Synaesthetic cinema is an art of relations: the relations of the conceptual information and design information within the film itself graphically, and the relation between the film and the viewer at that point where human perception (sensation and conceptualization) brings them together. As science gropes for new models to accommodate apparent inconsistencies and contradictions, the need for seeing incompatibles together is more easily discerned. For example, the phenomenon of light is conceived in *both/and* terms: both continuous wave motions and discontinuous particles. And we have noted our incapacity for observing both movement and position of electrons.

This is but one of many reasons that synaesthetic cinema is the only aesthetic language suited to contemporary life. It can function as a conditioning force to unite us with the living present, not separate us from it. My use of the term synaesthetic is meant only as a way of understanding the historical significance of a phenomenon without historical precedent. Actually the most descriptive term for the new cinema is "personal" because it's only an extension of the filmmaker's central nervous system. The reader should not interpret "synaesthetic" as an attempt to categorize or label a phenomenon that has no definition. There's no single film that could be called typical of the new cinema because it is defined anew by each individual filmmaker.

I've selected about seven films that are particularly representative of the various points I wish to make. I'm using them only to illuminate the nature of synaesthetic cinema in general, not as specific archetypal examples. Sufficient literature exists on Brakhage's *Dog Star*

⁸Piet Mondrian, *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1945), p. 50.

Man to preclude any major expository analysis here, but it is exemplary of virtually all concepts involved in the synaesthetic mode, in particular syncretism and metamorphosis. Will Hindle's *Chinese Firedrill* is an outstanding example of the evocative language of synaesthetic cinema as distinct from the expositional mode of narrative cinema. Pat O'Neill's *7362*, John Schofill's *XFilm*, and Ronald Nameth's *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* provide some insight into kinaesthetics and kinetic empathy. Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses*, in contrast with Warhol's *Blue Movie* and Paul Morrissey's *Flesh*, illustrates the new polymorphous eroticism. And, finally, Michael Snow's *Wavelength* has been chosen for its qualities of extra-objective constructivism.

Syncretism and Metamorphosis: Montage as Collage

The harmonic opposites of synaesthetic cinema are apprehended through syncretistic vision, which Anton Ehrenzweig has characterized as: "The child's capacity to comprehend a total structure rather than analyzing single elements... he does not differentiate the identity of a shape by watching its details one by one, but goes straight for the whole."⁹ Syncretism is the combination of many different forms into one whole form. Persian tapestries and tile domes are syncretistic. Mandalas are syncretistic. Nature is syncretistic. The majority of filmgoers, conditioned by a lifetime of conventional narrative cinema, make little sense of synaesthetic cinema because their natural syncretistic faculty has suffered entropy and atrophy.

Buckminster Fuller: "All universities have been progressively organized for ever-finer specialization. Society assumes that specialization is natural, inevitable and desirable. Yet in observing a little child we find it is interested in everything and spontaneously apprehends, comprehends and coordinates an ever-expanding inventory of experience."¹⁰

It has been demonstrated that all species of life on earth that have become extinct were doomed through overspecialization, whether anatomical, biological, or geological. Therefore conventional narrative cinema, in which the filmmaker plays policeman guiding our eyes here and there in the picture plane, might be described as "specialized vision," which tends to decay our ability to comprehend the more complex and diffuse visual field of living reality.

The general impression that syncretism, and therefore synaesthetic cinema, is empty of detail or content is an illusion: "... it is highly sensitive to the smallest of cues and proves more efficient in identify-

⁹ Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1967), p. 9.

¹⁰ Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 13.
Press, 1967), p. 9.

ing individual objects. It impresses us as empty, vague and generalized only because the narrowly-focused surface consciousness cannot grasp its wider more comprehensive structure. Its precise, concrete content has become inaccessible and 'unconscious.'¹¹

Synaesthetic cinema provides access to syncretistic content through the inarticulate conscious. Similarly, it contradicts the teachings of Gestalt psychology, according to which we must make an *either/or* choice: we can choose either to see the "significant" figure or the "insignificant" ground. But when the "content" of the message is the relationship between its parts, and when structure and content are synonymous, all elements are equally significant. Ehrenzweig has suggested that syncretism is "Gestalt-free perception," and indeed this must be the case if one expects any visual "meaning" from synaesthetic cinema.

Paul Klee, whose syncretistic paintings closely resemble certain works of synaesthetic cinema, spoke of the *endotopic* (inside) and *exotopic* (outside) areas of a picture plane, stressing their equal importance in the overall experience.¹² Synaesthetic cinema, primarily through superimposition, fuses the endotopic and exotopic by reducing depth-of-field to a total field of nonfocused multiplicity. Moreover, it subsumes the conventional sense of time by interconnecting and interpenetrating the temporal dimension with images that exist outside of time. The "action" of *Dog Star Man*, for example, could be an entire life-span or merely a split second in the inarticulate conscious of Stan Brakhage. I stress "action" as commonly understood in the cinema because synaesthetic syncretism replaces montage with collage and, as André Bazin has observed, "montage is the dramatic analysis of action." Bazin was perceptive enough to realize that "only an increased realism of the image can support the abstraction of montage."¹³

Synaesthetic cinema subsumes Eisenstein's theory of montage-as-collision and Pudovkin's view of montage-as-linkage. It demonstrates that they were certainly correct but didn't follow their own observations to their logical conclusions. They were restricted by the con-

¹¹ Ehrenzweig, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 20.

¹² Paul Klee, *The Thinking Eye* (London: Lund Humphries, 1961).

¹³ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray (Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1967), p. 39.

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sciousness of their times. Synaesthetic cinema transcends the notion of reality. It doesn't "chop the world into little fragments," an effect Bazin attributed to montage, because it's not concerned with the objective world in the first place. The new filmmaker is showing us his feelings. Montage is indeed an abstraction of objective reality; that's why, until recently, Warhol did not cut his films at all. But synaesthetic syncretism is the only mode in which the manifestations of one's consciousness can be approximated without distortion.

There's no conflict in harmonic opposites. Nor is there anything that might be called linkage. There is only a space-time continuum, a mosaic simultaneity. Although composed of discrete elements it is conceived and edited as one continuous perceptual experience. A synaesthetic film is, in effect, one image continually transforming into other images: metamorphosis. It is the one unifying force in all of synaesthetic cinema. The notion of universal unity and cosmic simultaneity is a logical result of the psychological effects of the global communications network.

If montage is the dramatic analysis of action, a film without classic montage thus avoids at least the structural element of drama inherent within the medium. All that remains to avoid drama entirely is to exclude dramatic (i.e., theatrical) content by making content and structure the same. Warhol's films are not dramatic, and neither are films at the extreme opposite end of the spectrum, synaesthesia. The classical tension of montage is dissolved through overlapping superimposition. For example: we have shots A, B, and C. First we see A, then B is superimposed over it to produce AB. Then A fades as C fades in. There's a brief transitional period in which we're seeing ABC simultaneously, and finally we're looking only at BC. But no sooner has this evolved than B begins to fade as D appears, and so on.

This is a physical, structural equivalent of the Hopi "present manifested" and "present manifesting" space-time continuum. It's the only style of cinema that directly corresponds to the theory of general relativity, a concept that has completely transformed all aspects of contemporary existence except traditional Hollywood cinema. The effects of metamorphosis described above become more apparent if shots A, B, and C happen to be of the same image but from slightly

different perspectives, or with varied inflections of tone and color. It is through this process that a synaesthetic film becomes, in effect, one image constantly manifesting.

And finally we're forced to admit that the pure art of cinema exists almost exclusively in the use of superimposition. In traditional cinema, superimposition usually gives the impression of two movies occurring at once in the same frame with their attendant psychological and physiological connotations coexisting separately. In synaesthetic cinema they are one total image in metamorphosis. This does not imply that we must relinquish what Eisenstein called "intellectual montage." In fact, the conflict-juxtaposition of intellectual effects is increased when they occur within the same image. Fiction, legend, parable, myth, traditionally have been employed to make comprehensible the paradoxes of that field of nonfocused multiplicity that is life. Synaesthetic cinema, whose very structure is paradox, makes paradox a language in itself, discovering the order (legend) hidden within it.

Stan Brakhage: *Dog Star Man*

Dog Star Man is a silent, seventy-eight-minute film divided into *Prelude* and *Parts One through Four*. It was shot in 1959-60 and edited during the next four years. *Prelude* is an extremely fast collage of multiple-level superimpositions and compounded images that emerge from a blurry diaphanous haze and slowly take form, only to be obscured by other images and countermotions. We begin to discern specific objects, patterns, and finally a motif or theme: the elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water; a childbirth; a man climbing a mountain with his dog; the moon; the sun throwing off huge solar prominences; lovemaking; photomicrography of blood vessels; a beating heart; a forest; clouds; the faces of a man and a woman; and literally thousands of other images to appear in the rest of the film.

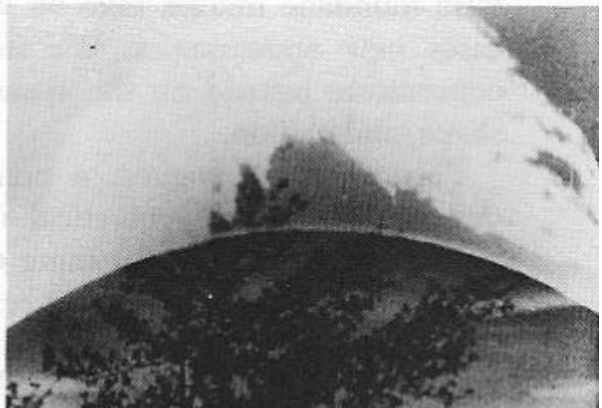
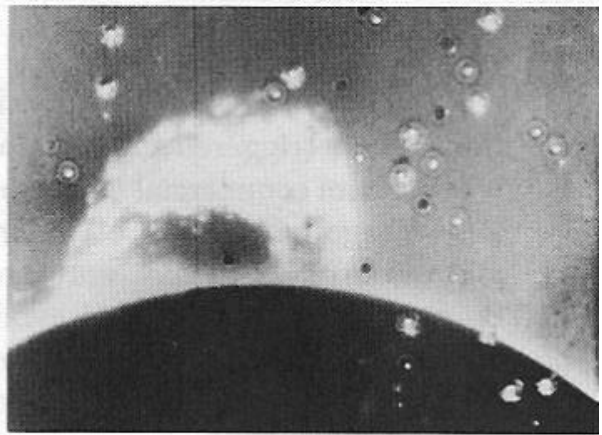
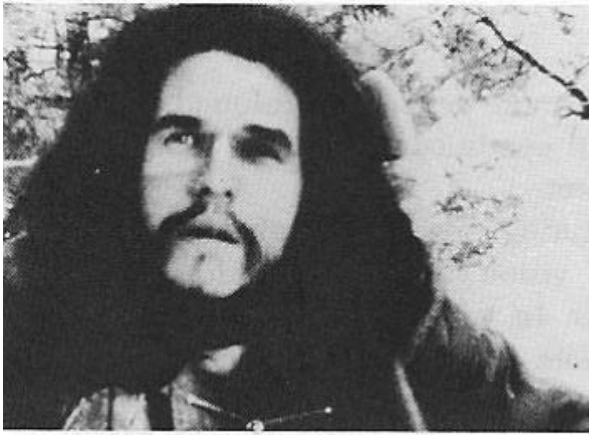
These images exist essentially autonomously and are superimposed or compounded not for "dramatic" effect but rather as a kind of matrix for psychic exercise on the part of the viewers. For example, over an expanding solar prominence we might see Brakhage's leonine face or a line of snow-covered fir trees in the mountains of Colorado. We are not asked to interpret or find "meaning" in these

combinations, though vastly rich experiences are possible. When the images emerge from a hazy blur, for example, we are not asked to interpret this as the creation of life or some similar dramatic notion, but rather as a perceptual experience for its own sake, in addition to the contextual relationship of this image to the rest of the film, or what Eisenstein indicated by the term "intellectual montage."

Whereas *Prelude* is a rapid barrage of multiple overlays, *Part One* is superimposed sparingly, concentrating on interface relationships between individual shots. However, every effort is made to subdue any effect that might be considered montage. The shots fade in and out very slowly, often fading into a color such as red or green. The fragments of *Prelude* fall into place and an overwhelming sense of oceanic consciousness evolves. We begin to realize that Brakhage is attempting to express the totality of consciousness, the reality continuum of the living present. As his solitary figure climbs the snow-covered mountain, we see images of man's world from the micro-spectrum of the bloodstream to the macro-spectrum of the sun, moon, and universe. Both time and space are subsumed in the wholeness of the experience. Superimposition is not used as an economical substitute for "parallel montage"—indicating simultaneous but spatially separate events—for spatio-temporal dimensions do not exist in the consciousness. Brakhage is merely presenting us with images orchestrated in such a way that a new reality arises out of them.

When we see the sun superimposed over a lovemaking scene, it's not an invitation to interpret a meaning such as cosmic regeneration or the smallness of man in the universe, but rather as an occasion to experience our own involuntary and inarticulate associations. The images are not symbolic, as in *The Seventh Seal*, or artfully composed as in *Last Year at Marienbad*. Brakhage does not manipulate us emotionally, saying: "Now I want you to feel suspense" or "Now I want you to laugh" or "Now is the time to be fearful." This is the ploy of the commercial entertainer: an arrogant degradation of cinema, using film as a tool for cheap sensationalism. This is not to say that spatio-temporal experiences, or suspense, humor, or any emotion cannot be found in synaesthetic cinema. Quite the contrary: because we're dealing with our own personal associations, emotion is

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Stan Brakhage: *Dog Star Man*. 1959-64. 16 mm. Color, black and white. 78 min. "The totality of consciousness, the reality continuum of the living present."

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guaranteed. And it will be more genuinely profound than the formula-triggered gratification of conditioned response that we receive from commercial entertainment.

Brakhage has spoken of "restructuring" vision through his films, and often refers to the "untutored" vision of the child before he's taught to think and see in symbols. In what he calls "closed-eye vision," Brakhage attempts to simulate, by painting and scratching on film, the flashes and patterns of color we perceive when our eyes are closed. Approximately midway through *Dog Star Man*, otherwise mundane images take on wholly new meanings and in some cases new appearances. We stop mentally labeling images and concentrate instead on the synaesthetic/kinaesthetic flow of color, shape, and motion.

This is not to suggest a nonobjective experience. The images develop their own syntactical meaning and a "narrative" line is perceived, though the meaning of any given image may change in the context of different sequences. This constitutes a creative use of the language itself, over and above any particular "content" conveyed by that language. (Wallace Stevens: "A new meaning is equivalent to a new word.") The effect of synaesthetic cinema is to break the hold that the medium has over us, to make us perceive it objectively. Art is utterly folly unless it frees us from the need of art as an experience separate from the ordinary.

Wittgenstein has described art as a game whose rules are made up as the game is in process. The exact meaning of words (images) becomes known only in the context of each new statement.¹⁴ E. H. Gombrich, on the other hand, demonstrates that objective realism also is a game, but one whose schema is established prior to its use and is never altered. Artists and society thus learn to read the schema as though it were objective reality. But since the language itself is not used creatively, the viewer is seduced beyond form into an abstract content with an illusion of being externally objective.¹⁵ Thus the viewer is captive under the hold, or spell, of the medium and is not free to analyze the process of experience.

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1963).

¹⁵ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, The Bollingen Series XXXV (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1960).

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Brakhage expressed this concept with respect to his own work: "Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which must know each object encountered in life through a new adventure of perception. Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and gradations of color. Imagine a world before the beginning was the word."¹⁶

¹⁶ Stan Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision," ed. P. Adams Sitney, *Film Culture* (Fall, 1963).

Evocation and Exposition: Toward Oceanic Consciousness

There is an important distinction to be made between *evocation*, the language of synaesthetic cinema, primarily poetic in structure and effect, and *exposition*, the language of narrative cinema, which chiefly conforms to traditional, literary narrative modes. Intermedia artist and filmmaker Carolee Schneemann has characterized evocation as the place between desire and experience, the interpenetrations and displacements which occur between various sense stimuli. "Vision is not a fact," Miss Schneemann postulates, "but an aggregate of sensations. Vision creates its own efforts toward realization; effort does not create vision."¹⁷

Thus, by creating a new kind of vision, synaesthetic cinema creates a new kind of consciousness: oceanic consciousness. Freud spoke of oceanic consciousness as that in which we feel our individual existence lost in mystic union with the universe. Nothing could be more appropriate to contemporary experience, when for the first time man has left the boundaries of this globe. The oceanic effect of synaesthetic cinema is similar to the mystical allure of the natural elements: we stare in mindless wonder at the ocean or a lake or river. We are drawn almost hypnotically to fire, gazing as though spellbound. We see cathedrals in clouds, not thinking anything in particular but feeling somehow secure and content. It is similar to the concept of *no-mindedness* in Zen, which also is the state of mantra and mandala consciousness, the widest range of consciousness.

Miss Schneemann defines perception as *eye-journey* or *empathy-drawing*. It is precisely through a kind of empathy-drawing that the content of synaesthetic cinema is created jointly by the film and the viewer. The very nature of evocation requires creative effort on the part of the viewer, whereas expository modes do all the work and the viewer becomes passive. In expositional narrative, a story is being *told*; in evocative synaesthesia an experience is being created. The

¹⁷Carolee Schneemann, "Snows," *I-Kon*, ed. Susan Sherman, Vol. 1, No. 5 (New York: March, 1968).

figure of Stan Brakhage in *Dog Star Man* actually moves through a psychic environment created by the viewer, whose deeply-hidden creative resources and hungers have been evoked by the film.

With typical poetic eloquence, Hermann Hesse has summarized the evocative effects of oceanic consciousness in this memorable passage from *Demian*: "The surrender to nature's irrational, strangely confused formations produces in us a feeling of inner harmony with the force responsible for these phenomena... the boundaries separating us from nature begin to quiver and dissolve... we are unable to decide whether the images on our retina are the result of impressions coming from without or from within... we discover to what extent we are creative, to what extent our soul partakes of the constant creation of the world."¹⁸

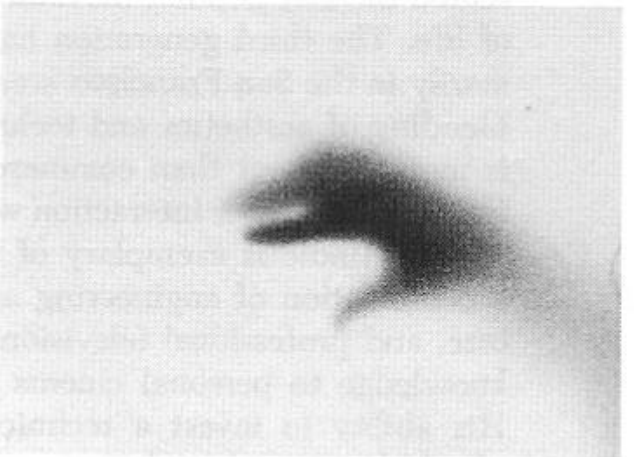
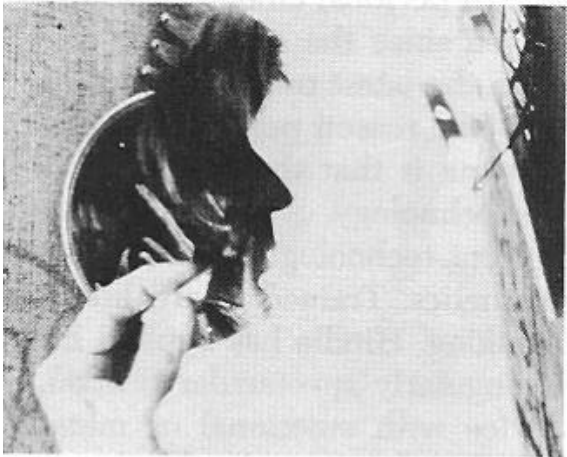
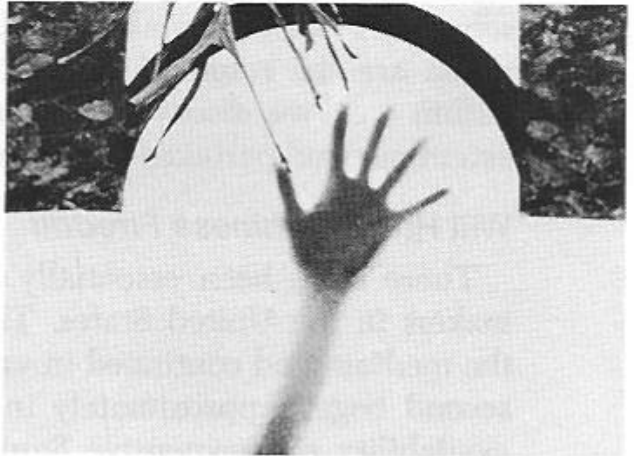
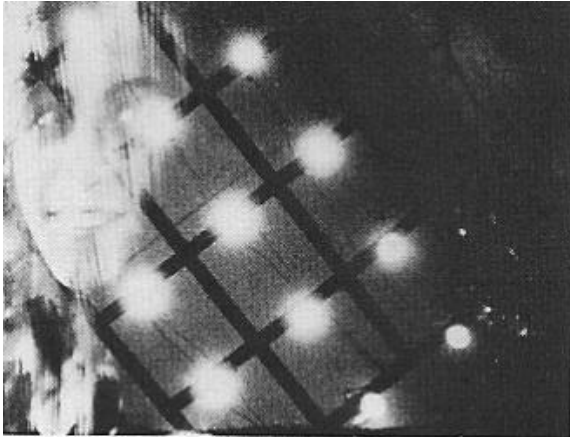
Will Hindle: *Chinese Firedrill*

There have been essentially three generations of personal filmmakers in the United States. The first began with the invention of the medium and continued in various stages through the 1940's. The second began approximately in the mid-1950's with the increasing availability of inexpensive 8mm. and 16mm. equipment. It represented the first popular movement toward personal cinema as a way of life. The third generation has evolved since the mid-1960's, primarily in the San Francisco area, where the latest trend is toward a blending of aesthetics and technology. One reason personal cinema is more eloquent than commercial cinema is that the filmmaker is forced into a closer interaction with his technology.

Will Hindle is exemplary of this recent technological awareness, a combination of engineering and aesthetics. Trained in art, literature, and professional television filmmaking, Hindle has applied his knowledge to personal cinema in a singularly spectacular fashion. His ability to invest a technical device with emotional or metaphysical content is truly impressive. He has, for example, developed the technique of rear-projection rephotography to a high degree of eloquence. He shoots original scenes with wide-angle lenses, then "crops" them by projecting and rephotographing this footage using a special single-frame projector. Thus extremely subtle effects are

¹⁸Hermann Hesse, *Demian* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 88.

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Will Hindle: *Chinese Firedrill*. 1968. 16mm. Color. 24 min. "We discover to what extent our soul partakes of the constant creation of the world."

achieved that would be prohibitively expensive, if not impossible, if done through conventional laboratory optical printing.

Although many synaesthetic films are wonderfully evocative, Hindle's recent works are especially notable for their ability to generate overwhelming emotional impact almost exclusively from cinematic technique, not thematic content. Hindle has an uncanny talent for transforming spontaneous unstylized reality into unearthly poetic visions, as in *Billabong* (1968), a wordless impressionistic "documentary" about a boy's camp in northern California, and *Watersmith* (1969), a spectacular visual fantasy created from footage of an Olympic swimming team at practice.

Chinese Firedrill, unique in Hindle's work, was prestylized and "performed" almost in the traditional sense of a scripted, directed, and acted movie. The difference is that Hindle used the images not for their symbolic or theatrical content but as ingredients of an almost iconographic nature, to be compounded and manipulated through the process of the medium. Although there are "actors" (Hindle plays the principal role), there is no characterization. Although there are sets, we're not asked to suspend our disbelief.

Chinese Firedrill is a romantic, nostalgic film. Yet its nostalgia is of the unknown, of vague emotions, haunted dreams, unspoken words, silences between sounds. It's a nostalgia for the oceanic present rather than a remembered past. It is total fantasy; yet like the best fantasies—*8½*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Children of Paradise*—it seems more real than the coldest documentary. The "action" occurs entirely within the mind of the protagonist, who never leaves the small room in which he lives. It's all rooms everywhere, all cubicles wherever we find man trapped within his dreams. Through the door/mirror is the beyond, the unreachable, the unattainable, the beginning and the end. Not once in the film's twenty minutes can we pinpoint a sequence or action that might be called "dramatic" in the usual sense. Yet almost immediately an overwhelming atmosphere of pathos is generated. There are moments of excruciating emotional impact, not from audience manipulation but from Hindle's ability to realize metaphysical substance, stirring the inarticulate conscious. Every effort is made to distance the viewer, to keep us aware of our perceptions, to emphasize the purely cinematic as opposed to the theatrical.

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We find Hindle kneeling on the floor of his surrealistic room stuffing thousands of IBM cards into boxes. Over this we hear a strange monologue of fragmented words and sentences in an odd foreign accent. This is punctuated by fierce thunderclaps and howling wind that evolve into ethereal music and tinkling bell sounds. Periodically the screen is slashed across with blinding white flashes while the central images constantly are transformed through lap-dissolves and multiple superimpositions. There are flash-forwards of images to be encountered later, though we don't recognize them and therefore don't interpret them. We see nude lovers, a small boy bathing, a beautiful woman with candles, a huge eyeball, a battery of glaring lights. These are noted for their inherent psychological connotations and not as narrative devices.

The most memorable sequence of *Firedrill*, possibly one of the great scenes in the history of film, involves Hindle lying in anguish on his floor and slowly reaching out with one hand toward the glimmering void beyond his door. Suddenly a mirror-like reflection of his arm and hand appears on the opposite side of the mirror. When he removes his hand we see the vague shadowy figure of a nude woman silhouetted ghostlike, her skin sparkling. In slow motion the silhouette of a nude man enters from an opposite direction and the two gossamer figures embrace in a weightless ballet of graceful motion in some dream of bliss. In the film's final image, the haunted man has become a child once again, splashing in his bath in a series of freeze-frames that grow ever fainter until they vanish.

Synaesthetics and Kinaesthetics: The Way of All Experience

The term *kinetic* generally indicates motion of material bodies and the forces and energies associated with it. Thus to isolate a certain type of film as kinetic and therefore different from other films means we're talking more about forces and energies than about matter. I define *aesthetic* quite simply as: the manner of experiencing something. *Kinaesthetic*, therefore, is the manner of experiencing a thing through the forces and energies associated with its motion. This is called *kinaesthesia*, the experience of sensory perception. One who is keenly aware of kinetic qualities is said to possess a kinaesthetic sense.

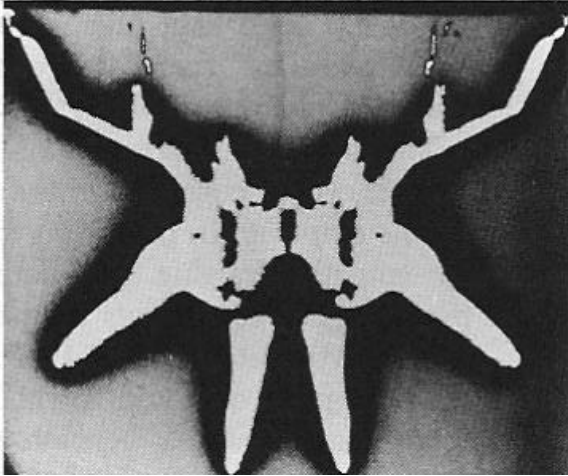
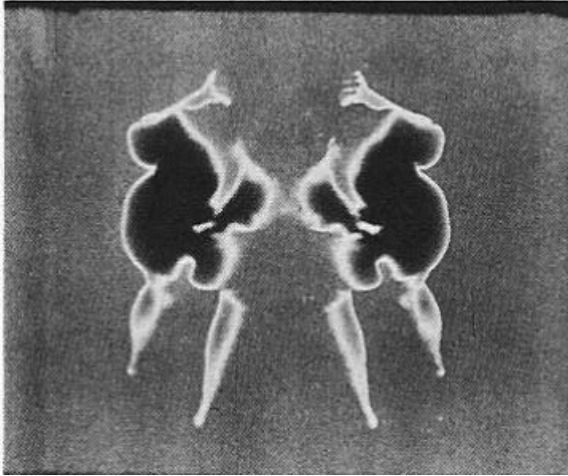
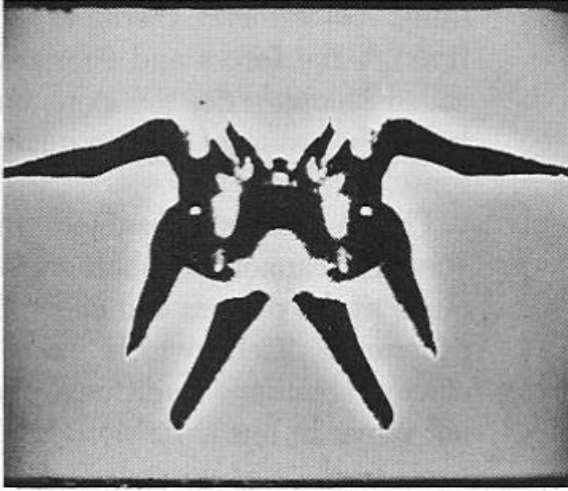
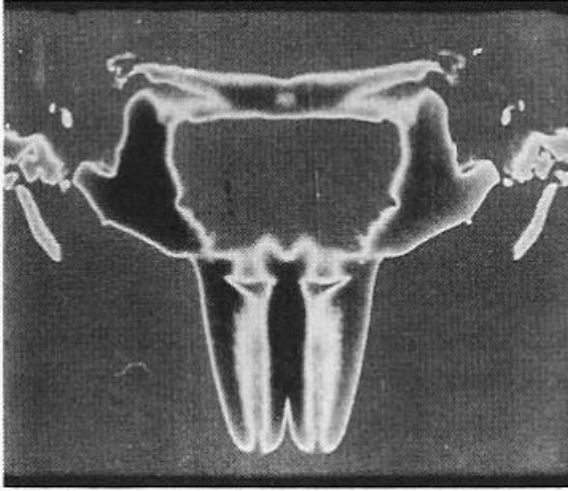
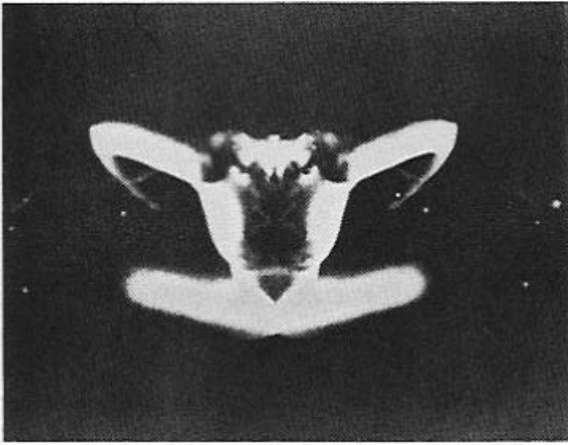
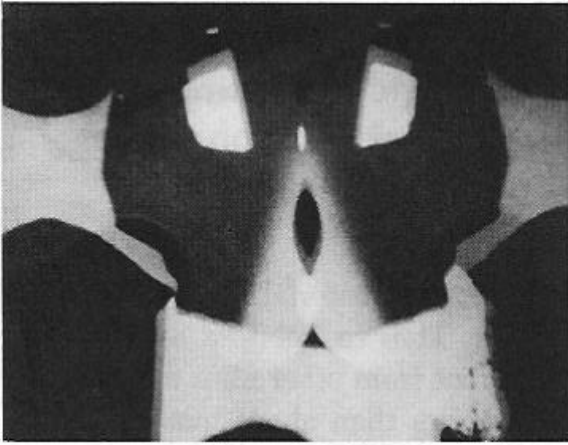
The fundamental subject of synaesthetic cinema—forces and energies—cannot be photographed. It's not what we're seeing so much as the process and effect of seeing: that is, the phenomenon of experience itself, which exists only in the viewer. Synaesthetic cinema abandons traditional narrative because events in reality do not move in linear fashion. It abandons common notions of "style" because there is no style in nature. It is concerned less with facts than with metaphysics, and there is no fact that is not also metaphysical. One cannot photograph metaphysical forces. One cannot even "represent" them. One can, however, actually *evoke* them in the inarticulate conscious of the viewer.

The dynamic interaction of formal proportions in kinaesthetic cinema evokes cognition in the inarticulate conscious, which I call *kinetic empathy*. In perceiving kinetic activity the mind's eye makes its empathy-drawing, translating the graphics into emotional-psychological equivalents meaningful to the viewer, albeit meaning of an inarticulate nature. "Articulation" of this experience occurs in the perception of it and is wholly nonverbal. It makes us aware of fundamental realities beneath the surface of normal perception: forces and energies.

Patrick O'Neill: 7362

New tools generate new images. In the historical context of image-

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making, the cinema is a new tool. 7362 is among the few purely cinematic images to evolve from this new seventy-year-old tool. All the visual arts are moving toward the cinema. Artists like Frank Stella or Kenneth Noland have been credited as significant painters within the last decade because they kept the game going. One is impressed that they merely discovered new possibilities for a two-dimensional surface on stretchers. But the possibilities are so narrow today that soon there will be nowhere to go but the movies.

Pat O'Neill is a sculptor with a formal background in the fine arts. Like Michael Snow, also a sculptor, O'Neill found unique possibilities in the cinema for exploration of certain perceptual concepts he had been applying to sculpture and environmental installations. 7362, made some five years ago, was the first of many experiments with the medium as a "sculptural" device. The term is intended only as a means of emphasizing the film's kinetic qualities.

7362 was named after the high-speed emulsion on which it was filmed, emphasizing the purely cinematic nature of the piece. O'Neill photographed oil pumps with their rhythmic sexual motions. He photographed geometrical graphic designs on rotating drums or vertical panels, simultaneously moving the camera and zooming in and out. This basic vocabulary was transformed at the editing table and in the contact printer, using techniques of high-contrast bas-relief, positive/negative bi-pack printing and image "flopping," a Rorschach-like effect in which the same image is superimposed over itself in reverse polarities, producing a mirror-doubled quality.

The film begins in high-contrast black-and-white with two globes bouncing against each other horizontally, set to an electronic score by Joseph Byrd. This repetitive motion is sustained for several seconds, then fades. As though in contrast, the following images are extremely complex in form, scale, texture, and motion. Huge masses of mechanical hardware move ponderously on multiple planes in various directions simultaneously. The forms seem at times to be recognizable, at others to be completely nonobjective. Into this serial, mathematical framework O'Neill introduces the organic fluid lines of

Patrick O'Neill: 7362.1965-66.16mm. Color, black and white.
11 min. "Human and machine interact with serial beauty,
one form passing into another with delicate precision."

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the human body. He photographed a nude girl performing simple motions and processed this footage until she became as mechanical as the machinery. At first we aren't certain whether these shapes are human or not, but the nonrhythmic motions and asymmetrical lines soon betray the presence of life within a lifeless universe. Human and machine interact with serial beauty, one form passing into another with delicate precision in a heavenly spectrum of pastel colors.

John Schofill: *XFilm*

The young Berkeley physicist John Schofill has exhibited a thorough and creative grasp of kineticism as regards the representational organic image. Although *XFilm* is a spectacular example of montage-as-collage, it does not ignore the conflicts of volume, scale, mass, and graphic direction that Eisenstein found so central to film form. Other physiological montage effects postulated by Eisenstein—metric, rhythmic, tonal, overtone—also are used by Schofill not for any result that might resemble montage, but rather to generate an overpowering sense of kinaesthesia, or rushing dynamic force.

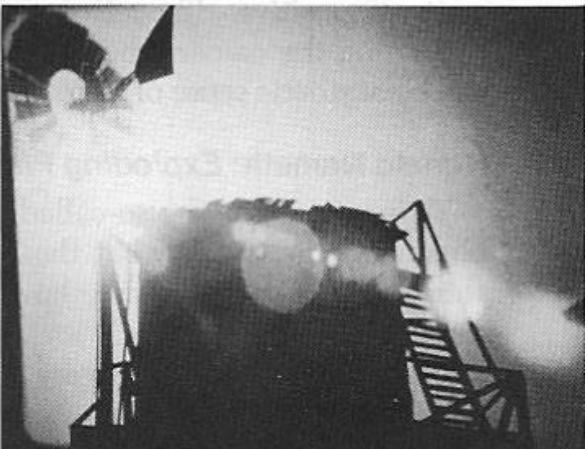
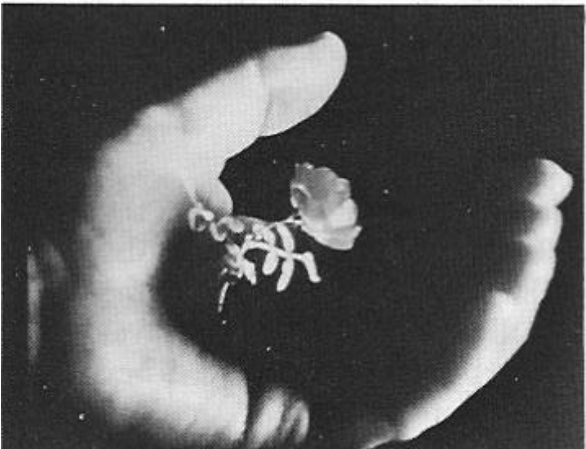
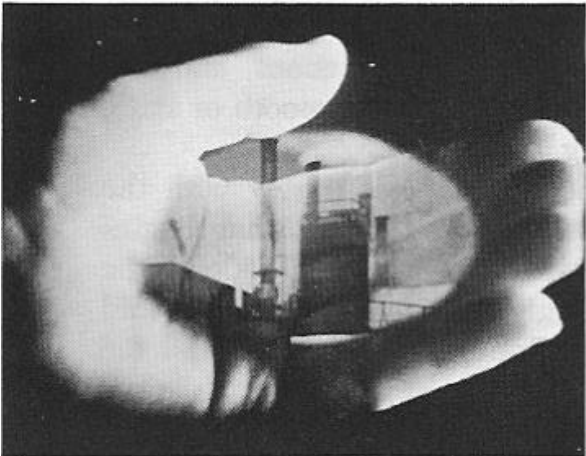
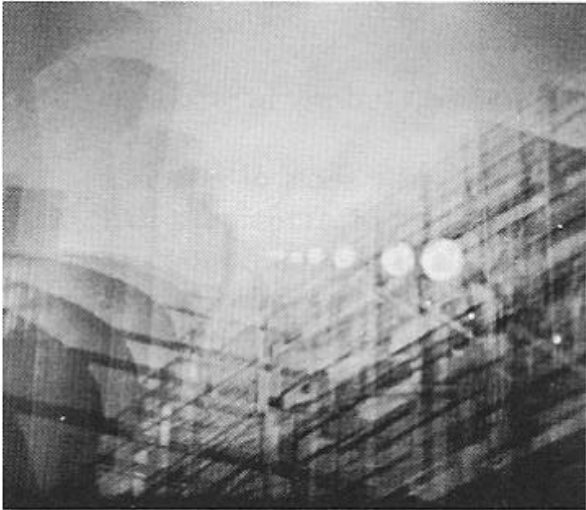
Through precise manipulation of individual frames and groups of frames, Schofill creates an overwhelming sense of momentum practically unequaled in synaesthetic cinema. There is almost a visceral, tactile impact to these images, which plunge across the field of vision like a dynamo. Yet they are punctuated with moments of restful quietude. It is a composition of point-counterpoint, the better to accentuate kinaesthetic content.

Schofill has developed a method of A-B-C-roll editing for superimpositions, adapted from Karel Reisz's methods of cutting single footage.¹⁹ It's a rhythmic concept, that is, a shot is divided into definite kinetic "beats." The kinetic activity begins, reaches a middle point, and ends. In triple superimpositions, the corresponding

¹⁹Karel Reisz, *The Techniques of Film Editing* (New York: Hastings House, 1968).

John Schofill: *XFilm*. 1967. 16mm. Color. 14 min.
"Images which plunge across the field of vision like a dynamo... punctuated with moments of restful quietude."

Synaesthetics and Kinaesthetics: The Way of All Experience 101



rhythms of each piece of film are matched, fading in and out without abrupt cuts.

XFilm begins with quiet formal imagery: static shots of factories spewing poison into the sky, strongly reminiscent of Antonioni's *Red Desert*. The structures are seen in eight levels of superimposition of eight different zoom-lens positions. The sound track explodes with an extraordinary tape composition by Berkeley composer William Maraldo, a synthesis of East Indian and rock music that perfectly counterpoints the visuals with its own sense of dynamic thrust. We see a series of tableau statements in which a nude girl's cupped hand opens to reveal a flower, then a factory. Then begins an accelerating succession of flash-frames, macro-close-ups of electronic circuitry, tree bark, dirt, plants, human flesh. Each image is balanced in terms of scales, volumes, masses, directions, and textures of objects within it. Quite often a particularly smooth or static image is counterpointed with strobing flash-frames.

The most powerful sequence, one which deals purely with the kinaesthetic experience, involves a time-lapse sunset that begins with a low horizon, bare-limbed trees, and a blue sky. Suddenly the action is speeded: clouds and squiggly jet contrails rush up and over. Maraldo's sound track takes a spiraling, droning dive and the sun appears, sinking rapidly like a comet from upper left to lower right. Just as it reaches the horizon the foreground and trees flash brilliant white (superimposed high-contrast negative over a high-contrast positive silhouette). The effect is stunning. A train, approaching the camera, becomes visible as the sun fades, continuing the kinaesthetic sense of dynamic volumes and trajectories.

Ronald Nameth: *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*

To some extent the so-called psychedelic discotheque was to the cinema of the sixties what the Busby Berkeley ballroom was to the thirties. In a larger sense, however, they are by no means in the same class either socially or aesthetically. The Berkeley extravaganzas, like Hollywood, were not places but states of mind. They generated their own ethos, their own aesthetic. They answered an obvious need for escape from the dreary hardships of the times. Life imitated art. But thirty years later Hollywood had degenerated to the point that it was, at best, an imitation of an imitation. The spate of

"hip" Hollywood films, which began to appear after 1966, was about as socially significant as the various Kennedy assassination "souvenirs," and was proffered with the same exploitive street-vending zeal. Like all commercial entertainment, these films were *about* something rather than *being* something, and so were the discotheques they imitated.

Andy Warhol's hellish sensorium, the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, was, while it lasted, the most unique and effective discotheque environment prior to the Fillmore/Electric Circus era, and it is safe to say that the *EPI* has never been equaled. Similarly, Ronald Nameth's cinematic homage to the *EPI* stands as a paragon of excellence in the kinetic rock-show genre. Nameth, a colleague of John Cage in several mixed-media environments at the University of Illinois, managed to transform his film into something far more than a mere record of an event. Like Warhol's show, Nameth's *EPI* is an experience, not an idea.

In fact, the ethos of the entire pop life-style seems to be synthesized in Nameth's dazzling kinaesthetic masterpiece. Here, form and content are virtually synonymous, and there is no misunderstanding what we see. It's as though the film itself has exploded and reassembled in a jumble of shards and prisms. Gerard Malanga and Ingrid Superstar dance frenetically to the music of the Velvet Underground (*Heroin*, *European Son*, and a quasi-East Indian composition), while their ghost images writhe in Warhol's *Vinyl* projected on a screen behind. There's a spectacular sense of frantic uncontrollable energy, communicated almost entirely by Nameth's exquisite manipulation of the medium.

EPI was photographed on color and black-and-white stock during one week of performances by Warhol's troupe. Because the environment was dark, and because of the flash-cycle of the strobe lights, Nameth shot at eight frames per second and printed the footage at the regular twenty-four fps. In addition he developed a mathematical curve for repeated frames and superimpositions, so that the result is an eerie world of semi-slow motion against an aural background of incredible frenzy. Colors were superimposed over black-and-white negatives, and vice-versa. An extraordinary off-color grainy effect resulted from pushing the ASA rating of his color stock; thus the images often seem to lose their cohesiveness as though

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wrenched apart by the sheer force of the environment.

Watching the film is like dancing in a strobe room: time stops, motion retards, the body seems separate from the mind. The screen bleeds onto the walls, the seats. Flak bursts of fiery color explode with slow fury. Staccato strobe guns stitch galaxies of silverfish over slow-motion, stop-motion close-ups of the dancers' dazed ecstatic faces. Nameth does with cinema what the Beatles do with music: his film is dense, compact, yet somehow fluid and light. It is extremely heavy, extremely fast, yet airy and poetic, a mosaic, a tapestry, a mandala that sucks you into its whirling maelstrom.

The most striking aspect of Nameth's work is his use of the freeze-frame to generate a sense of timelessness. Stop-motion is literally the death of the image: we are instantly cut off from the illusion of cinematic life—the immediacy of motion—and the image suddenly is relegated to the motionless past, leaving in its place a pervading aura of melancholy. Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, Peter Goldman's *Echoes of Silence*, and Truffaut's *400 Blows* are memorable for the kind of stop-frame work that Nameth raises to quintessential beauty. The final shots of Gerard Malanga tossing his head in slow motion and freezing in several positions create a ghostlike atmosphere, a timeless and ethereal mood that lingers and haunts long after the images fade. Using essentially graphic materials, Nameth rises above a mere graphic exercise: he makes kinetic empathy a new kind of poetry.

Ronald Nameth: *Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable*. 1966. 16mm. Color, black and white. 30 min. "An eerie world of semi-slow motion against an aural background of incredible frenzy. He makes kinetic empathy a new kind of poetry."

Mythopoeia: The End of Fiction

"If what we see depicted had been really the truth, successfully created in front of the camera, the film would cease to exist because it would cease, by the same token, to be a myth."

ANDRÉ BAZIN

In 1934 Erwin Panofsky wrote: "To pre-stylize reality prior to tackling it amounts to dodging the problem. The problem is to shoot and manipulate unstylized reality in such a way that the result has style." The problem that concerned Panofsky was how to work with the two qualities unique to cinema alone, not to be found in any other aesthetic medium.

The first is its ability to capture and preserve a picture of time. This is fine until the filmmaker wishes to comment upon or interpret the events he has captured. Thus we come to the second unique property of cinema, its aesthetic element: the ability to post-stylize natural reality. To understand this concept we must examine the three general purposes to which cinema historically has been applied: fiction, documentary, and *cinéma-vérité*.

Cinematic fiction should be understood as prestylized or manufactured reality that did not exist prior to the making of the film. The only true reality that remains in the finished film is the objective awareness of the stylization itself. That is to say, a theatrical scenario-based fiction film deals with a prestylized reality distilled and recorded through the personality of the writer, then visualized by the director, crew, and actors according to certain schemata. Not only is this not objective reality; it's not even the cohesive, unique reality of one artist's perception.

A documentary also deals with prestylized reality. The documentary filmmaker shifts and reorganizes unstylized material into a narrative form that explains that reality to the viewer. Thus a documentary is not an explanation of reality, but rather the reality of an explanation.

Cinéma-vérité, or direct cinema, is based on recording actual unstylized reality as it exists at a particular moment before the camera. The filmmaker is never to intrude by directing the action or in any way alter the events taking place (that is, beyond the unavoidable alterations caused by his very presence). The filmmaker's refusal to intervene directly in the reality before his camera, and the resultant loosely-organized structure, bring this type of cinema closer to the truth of the way events move in actual reality.

Synaesthetic cinema is all and none of these. It is not fiction because, with a few exceptions, it is based wholly on unstylized reality. It is not documentary because the reality is not organized into an explanation of itself. And it is not *cinéma-vérité* because the artist shoots and manipulates his unstylized reality in such a way that the result has style.

This process, best described as "post-stylization," is accomplished through cinematic equivalents of the four historical styles of art: realism, surrealism, constructivism, and expressionism.

Cinematic realism already has been defined as *Cinéma-vérité* capturing and preserving a picture of time as perceived through unstylized events.

Cinematic surrealism is achieved by the juxtaposition of unstylized elements so incongruous and remote that close proximity creates an extra dimension, a psychological reality that arises out of the interface.

Cinematic constructivism, as we've discussed it, actually is the universal subject of synaesthetic cinema: a constructivist statement, a record of the process of its own making.

Cinematic expressionism involves the deliberate alteration or distortion of unstylized reality, either during photography with lenses, filters, lights, etc., or after photography with optical printing, painting, or scratching on film.

Post-stylization of unstylized reality results in an experience that is not "realistic" but neither is it "fiction" as generally understood, because none of the elements is altered or manufactured prior to filming. In essence a myth is created, a myth born out of the juxtapositions of the paradoxes of reality. Webster defines myth as a story that "serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon." The natural

phenomenon explained by synaesthetic cinema is the filmmaker's consciousness. It is a documentary of the artist's perception. Since this is not a physical reality, it must be a metaphysical reality, that is, a myth. In the approximation of this intangible, however, the artist's language is reality, not fiction. What we see on the screen is not an act. True, it's processed through the medium until it no longer is objective reality, but it is nonetheless real. This is *mythopoeic reality*. In one sense it renders fiction obsolete.

At the beginning of *Alphaville*, Jean-Luc Godard states: "There are times when reality becomes too complex for communication. But legend gives it a form by which it pervades the whole world." This is the legitimate role of fiction: to establish a framework that provides insights into otherwise inaccessible areas of the living present. But most insights inherent in fiction as the simulation of objective reality have been absorbed by the collective consciousness. The structure of the system is an index of the performance that may be expected from that system: the simulation of reality has delivered its maximum performance; it no longer benefits us as it has in the past.

Obviously, filmmakers will continue to prestylize reality; in one sense the very nature of art is the rearrangement of the environment for greater advantage to humanity. Yet this prestylization will not be so clearly separated from "reality" as it has been. Because of technology, we have now reached the point at which it is possible to manipulate reality itself in order to create new legends. It may be that insights most relevant to contemporary society will be achieved primarily through this language.

Synaesthetics and Synergy

Synaesthetic cinema by definition includes many aesthetic modes, many "ways of knowing," simultaneously omni-operative. The whole, however, is always greater than the sum of its parts. This is a result of the phenomenon called *synergy*. Synergy is the behavior of a system unpredicted by the behavior of any of its parts or sub-assemblies of its parts. This is possible because there is no a priori dependency between the conceptual and design information (i.e., the energy) of the individual parts. The existence of one is not requisite on the presence of another. They are harmonic opposites. In physics this is known as the Theory of Complementarity: the logical relation between two descriptions or sets of concepts which, though mutually exclusive, are nevertheless both necessary for a complete knowledge of the phenomenon.

Dramatic narrative cinema is antisynergetic. Individual parts of linear drama predict the behavior of the whole system. For a genre to exist it must include parts that are integral to the a priori purpose of the system. As E. H. Gombrich has demonstrated, the function of its "words" must remain constant and predictable. To gratify conditioned needs for formula stimulus, the commercial entertainment film must follow prescribed rules that predict the whole system of conflict-crisis-resolution.

We have seen, however, that the behavior of a conflict or game is always governed by its weakest moment, which is equivalent to the notion of a chain being only as strong as its weakest link. This idea, however, presupposes a linear chain under opposing vectors of stress, i.e., narrative drama. Fuller: "We tend to think it is logical to say that a chain is no stronger than its weakest link—which immediately is thrown out of validity when we join the other end of the chain back on itself. We think a chain ought to be just an infinite line rather than a circle because we inherited the Greek concepts of linear and plane geometry [which] imposed the concept of an infinite surface and the infinite line as logical to the then-prevalent belief that the earth was flat... However, in nature all the lines are completely

curved and all chains do eventually return upon themselves."²⁰

The malfunction or absence of any one element in a linear narrative constitutes a break in the system and relinquishes the system's hold over the viewer's consciousness. But synaesthetic synergy is possible only when the parts behave with integrity and without self-consciousness. If the metals in chrome-nickel steel tried to retain their individuality, the synergetic effect of tripling the tensile strength through alloy would never occur. Fuller has noted that the individual tensile strengths of chromium, nickel, and iron are in the approximate range of 70,000, 80,000, and 60,000 pounds per square inch respectively. Yet in alloy they yield 300,000 psi tensile strength, which is five times as strong as its weakest link and four times as strong as its strongest link.

The entertainer makes a package that is equal to the sum of its separate parts; the artist fuses his parts into an alloy greater than its ingredients. That is, synaesthetic synergy does not tend toward greater complexity, but rather produces an effect that in physics is known as *elegant simplicity*. An elegantly simple construction accomplishes that which previously required many different mechanisms, either physical or metaphysical. Recent revolutionary concepts in biology are an example. John McHale: "The DNA/RNA mechanism construct renders obsolete an enormous number of separate 'biological facts' and relates biology via biochemistry to biophysics—and thence to a more elegantly simple configuration of structural hierarchies as extending outward from the micro-nucleus through the median range of ordinary perception towards macro-structural hierarchies at the level of galaxies."²¹

Let us briefly review what we mean by synergy as applied to the cinema. We have learned that synaesthetic cinema is an alloy achieved through multiple superimpositions that produce syncretism. Syncretism is a total field of harmonic opposites in continual metamorphosis; this metamorphosis produces a sense of kinaesthesia that evokes in the inarticulate conscious of the viewer recognition of an overall pattern-event that is in the film itself as well as the

²⁰R. Buckminster Fuller, *Ideas and Integrities* (New York: Collier Books, 1969), p. 65.

²¹McHale, "Knowledge Implosion," *Good News*.

"subject" of the experience. Recognition of this pattern-event results in a state of oceanic consciousness. A mythopoeic reality is generated through post-stylization of unstylized reality. Post-stylization simultaneously involves the four traditional aesthetic modes: realism, surrealism, constructivism, and expressionism.

Herbert Read has suggested that these four styles are intercorrelated to the four modes of human consciousness: thought, intuition, emotion, and sensation. Of course, they are operative in commercial entertainment as well; but it's the nature of synaesthetic cinema that one is made aware of the process of one's own perception; thus one invests the experience with meaning by exerting conscious control over the conversion of sight impressions into thought images. We can easily see how thought, intuition, and sensation may be directly engaged or indirectly evoked in the synaesthetic viewing experience; the role of emotion deserves further comment.

The emotional content of dramatic narrative cinema is predominantly the result of expectations that the viewer brings with him to the theatre, and thus he remains passive during the viewing experience so that his conditioned response to the formula may be fully gratified. In this way he satisfies his unconscious need to experience the particular emotions that he has already decided to experience. The film is "good" or "bad" in relation to its effectiveness as a catalyst for these predetermined emotions. However, the emotional content of synaesthetic cinema exists in direct relation to the degree of conscious awareness of the act of perceiving, and is thus seldom predictable. Synergy is the essence of the living present, and it is the essence of art. Where synergy does not exist, energy tends toward entropy and change becomes increasingly unlikely.

Synaesthetic Cinema and Polymorphous Eroticism

"The Western consciousness has always asked for freedom: the human mind was born free, or at any rate born to be free, but everywhere it is in chains; and now at the end of its tether."

NORMAN O. BROWN

For the majority of the mass public, "underground" movies are synonymous with sex. Although this conclusion was reached for all the wrong reasons, it is nevertheless accurate. If personal cinema is indeed personal, and if we place any credence at all in Freud, personal cinema is by definition sexual cinema. A genuine social underground no longer is possible. The intermedia network quickly unearths and popularizes any new subculture in its relentless drive to satisfy the collective information hunger. Jean-Luc Godard once remarked that the only true twentieth-century underground was in Hanoi. But I would suggest that in the history of civilization there never has been a phenomenon more underground than human sexuality.

The vast political and social revolution that is now irreversible in its accelerating accelerations around the planet is merely a side effect of the more profound revolution in human self-awareness that is producing a new sexual consciousness.

We hold the radical primacy of the passions to be self-evident. Norman O. Brown: "All Freud's work demonstrates that the allegiance of the human psyche to the pleasure-principle is indestructible and that the path of instinctual renunciation is the path of sickness and self-destruction."²² If there is a general debasement of the sexual act among the bourgeoisie, it is precisely because that sexuality has been repressed. Charles Fourier: "Every passion that is

²² Norman O. Brown, "Apocalypse: The Place of Mystery in the Life of the Mind," *Harper's* (May, 1961).

suffocated produces its counter-passion, which is as malignant as the natural passion would have been benign."²³

Nowhere is this more evident than in commercial cinema. Hollywood movies are teasers whose eroticism is a result of psychological conditioning that is not, fundamentally, the enjoyment of sex itself. Girlie and Hollywood films "for mature adults" are founded on puritanical concepts of "sin" and other repressive measures, no matter how "honest" or "artistic" or "redeeming" the presentation may seem. The absurd notion that sex must somehow be "redeemed" is exploited by Hollywood as much as by the makers of girlie or stag films. Hollywood presents "redeemed" sex, suggesting there's an unredeemed way of doing it and therefore we're getting away with something. Girlie and stag films take the opposite approach: they represent sex in various stages of "unredemption" until the point of watching them becomes more an act of rebellion, of something "dirty," clandestine, without redeeming qualities, than the enjoyment of sex. That is to say, the present socioeconomic system actually contributes to the corruption of the institution it claims to uphold.

However, it is now only a matter of a few years until the final restrictions on sexuality will disintegrate. The revolution that seeks the restructuring of social arrangements—a utopia of material plenty and economic freedom—is secondary by far to that other revolution that demands the total release of psychic impulses. This imminent utopia of the senses has been described by the neo-Freudian psychoanalyst A. H. Maslow as *Eupsychia*, a view oriented to the liberation and satisfaction of inner drives as prerequisite to any effective reorganization of the exterior social order.²⁴ It implies the necessary transformation of a bourgeois society that perpetrates the three cardinal crimes against human sexuality: delayed sexual gratification, restricted to "adults only"; heterosexual monogamy; specialization of sexual activity limiting pleasure to the genitals.

Eupsychia and utopia are both quite inevitable and both quite out of our hands, for they are the irreversible result of technology, the

²³Charles Fourier, *La Phalange*, quoted by Daniel Bell in "Charles Fourier: Prophet of Eupsychia," *The American Scholar* (Winter, 1968-69), p. 50.

²⁴A. H. Maslow, "Eupsychia—The Good Society," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, No. 1 (1961), pp. 1-11.

only thing that keeps man human. The most comprehensive, reliable, and respected future-forecasts attempted by scientific man indicate that individual sensorial freedom is virtually synonymous with technological progress.²⁵

Buckminster Fuller is among many who have noted the effects of industrialization and cybernetics on sexual activity: "We may glimpse in such patterning certain total behaviors in Universe that we know little about. We noted, for instance, that as survival rate and life-sustaining capability increase, fewer birth starts are required. This may be related to our developing capacities in interchanging our physical parts, or producing mechanical organs, of having progressively fewer human organisms to replenish. The drive in humanity to reproduce as prodigally as possible decreases considerably. This may be reflected in social behaviors—when all the girls begin to look like boys and boys and girls wear the same clothes. This may be part of a discouraging process in the idea of producing more babies. We shall have to look askance on sex merely as a reproductive capability, i.e., that it is normal to make babies. Society will have to change in its assessment of what the proclivities of humanity may be. Our viewpoints on homosexuality, for example, may have to be reconsidered and more wisely adjusted.

Repression and censorship become impossible on an individual level when technology outstrips enforcement. The new image-exchange and duplication technologies are a formidable obstacle to effective sexual censorship. Home videotape recorders, Polaroid cameras, and 8mm. film cartridges render censorship nearly powerless. One prominent scientist working in laser holography has suggested the possibility of "pornograms"—pornographic, three-dimensional holograms mass-produced from a master and mass distributed through the mail since their visual information is invisible until activated by plain white light.

²⁵See Olaf Helmer, *Delphi Study*, Rand Corp., 1966; Theodore J. Gordon, "The Effects of Technology on Man's Environment," *Architectural Design* (February, 1967); Herman Kahn, Anthony J. Wiener, *The Year 2000* (New York: Macmillan, 1967); "Toward the Year 2000: Work in Progress," American Academy of Arts and Sciences Commission on the Year 2000, *Daedalus* (Summer, 1967).

²⁶R. Buckminster Fuller, "The Year 2000," *Architectural Design* (February, 1967), p. 63.

When sexual material is readily available in the home, it changes the public attitude toward sex in commercial cinema. We aren't likely to be dazzled by discreet nudity on the Silver Screen when our home videotape library contains graphic interpretations of last week's neighborhood bisexual orgy. This is precisely what is happening in thousands of suburban homes, which otherwise are far from avant-garde. Within the last three years intermarital group sex has become an industry of corporate business, particularly in the Southern California area where a new world man is evolving. Computer firms compete with one another, matching couples with couples and compiling guest lists for orgies at homes and private country clubs. Home videotape systems are rented by the month and tapes of flagrant sexual activity are exchanged among the participants, many of whom regularly attend two orgies a week, sometimes as frequently as four or five, as the will to sexual power overtakes their outlaw consciousness. They discover the truth in Dylan's remark that you must live outside the law to be honest.

Thus man moves inevitably toward the discovery of what Norman O. Brown describes as his polymorphous-perverse self. A society that restricts physical contact in public to handshakes and discreet heterosexual kisses distorts man's image of his own sexual nature. However, anyone who has ever participated in even the most chaste encounter groups or sensory awareness seminars such as those conducted at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, is impressed with the new sensual identity he discovers within himself, often accompanied by surprise and embarrassment.

The effects of habitual group sex, even when exclusively heterosexual, become obvious: man inevitably realizes that there is no such thing as "perversion" apart from the idea itself. We begin to recognize that our sexual potential is practically limitless once psychological barriers are erased. We see that "heterosexual," "homosexual," and "bisexual" are social observations, not inherent aspects of the organism. Freud, and more recently Brown, Marcuse, and R. D. Laing have noted that the qualities of "maleness" and "femaleness" are restricted to genital differences and do not even approach an adequate description of the human libido. And so, "Genital man is to become polymorphously perverse man, the man of love's body, able to experience the world with a fully erotic body in

an activity that is the equivalent of the play of childhood."²⁷

Personal synaesthetic cinema has been directly responsible for the recent transformation in sexual content of commercial movies. After all, *I Am Curious* begins to seem a bit impotent when Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* is playing at the Cinémathèque around the corner. Synaesthetic cinema, more than any other social phenomenon, has demonstrated the trend toward polymorphous eroticism. Because it is personal it's a manifestation of consciousness; because it's a manifestation of consciousness it is sexual; the more probing and relentlessly personal it becomes, the more polymorphously perverse it is. (Dylan: "*If my thought/dreams could be seen, they'd put my head in a guillotine.*") Because eroticism is the mind's manifestation of body ego, it is the one offensive quality that we cannot be rid of by slicing off a particular appendage. We are forced to accept it: synaesthetic cinema is the first collective expression of that acceptance.

The art and technology of expanded cinema will provide a framework within which contemporary man, who does not trust his own senses, may learn to study his values empirically and thus arrive at a better understanding of himself. The only understanding mind is the creative mind. Those of the old consciousness warn that although the videotape cartridge can be used to unite and elevate humanity, it also can "degrade" us by allowing unchecked manufacture and exchange of pornography. But the new consciousness regards this attitude itself as a degraded product of a culture without integrity, a culture perverse enough to imagine that love's body could somehow be degrading.

John Dewey reminds us that when art is removed from daily experience the collective aesthetic hunger turns toward the cheap and the vulgar. It's the same with the aesthetics of sex: when the art (i.e., beauty) of sex is denied and repressed we find a "counterpassion" for the obscene "...as malignant as the natural passion would have been benign." There is no basis for the assumption that synaesthetic cinema will contribute to the debasement of sex. We know that precisely the opposite is true: for the first time in Western culture the aesthetics of integrity are about to liberate man from

²⁷ Richard W. Noland, "The Apocalypse of Norman O. Brown," *The American Scholar* (Winter, 1968-69), p. 60.

centuries of sexual ignorance so that he may at last understand the infinite sensorium that is himself.

The Pansexual Universe of Andy Warhol

It might be said of Warhol that what he did for Campbell's Soup, he did for sex. That is, he removed sex from its usual context and revealed it both as experience and cultural product. From the verbal jousting of *My Hustler* and *Bike Boy* to the casual intercourse of *Blue Movie*, Warhol has expressed an image of man's sexuality unique in all of cinema. Although partial to homosexuality, his work nevertheless manages to generate an overwhelming sense of the polymorphous-perverse. This is particularly evident in his most recent work.

For example, a romantic heterosexual relationship of warm authenticity develops between Viva and Louis Waldron in the notorious *Blue Movie*. In *Lonesome Cowboy* and Paul Morrissey's *Flesh*, however, Waldron is equally convincing as a brusque homosexual. Ironically, it is Morrissey's beautiful film that epitomizes the unisex world of The Factory. The Brandoesque Joe Dallasandro is virtually the embodiment of polymorphous-perverse man as Morrissey interprets him: the archetypal erotic body, responding to the pleasures of the flesh without ideals or violence in a pansexual universe.

Because of their objective revelatory purpose, Warhol's and Morrissey's films are not synaesthetic. Yet, because of their non-dramatic structure, neither are they spectacles. It is spectacle ("... something exhibited to view as unusual or entertaining; an eye-catching or dramatic public display.") that defeats whatever erotic purpose may exist in conventional narrative cinema. Eroticism is the most subjective of experiences; it cannot be portrayed or photographed; it's an intangible that arises out of the aesthetic, the manner of experiencing it. The difference between sex in synaesthetic cinema and sex in narrative cinema is that it's no longer a spectacle. By definition synaesthetic cinema is an art of evocative emotion rather than concrete facts. The true subject of a synaesthetic film that includes fucking is not the act itself but the metaphysical "place between desire and experience" that is eroticism. It ceases to be spectacle because its real subject cannot be displayed.



Paul Morrissey: *Flesh*. 1968. "Joe Dallesandro, the archetypal erotic body, responding to the pleasures of the flesh without ideals or violence in a pansexual universe."

Virtually the entire range of erotic experience has been engaged by the new cinema. Carl Linder is concerned with the surreal/psychological aspects of sexuality in films like *Womancock* or *The Devil Is Dead*. Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* and *Normal Love*, Ron Rice's *Chumlum*, Bill Vehr's *Brothel* and *Waiting for Sugar*, and *The Liberation of Mannique Mechanique* by Steven Arnold and Michael Wiese all explore the polymorphous subterranean world of unisexual transvestism. Stephen Dwoskin's exquisite studies, such as *Alone* or *Take Me*, reveal a Minimalist's sensibilities for latent sexuality and nuances in subtle autoeroticism. Warhol's *Couch*, Barbara Rubin's *Christmas on Earth*, and Andrew Noren's *A Change of Heart* confront, in various ways, the immortal subject of "hard core" pornography.

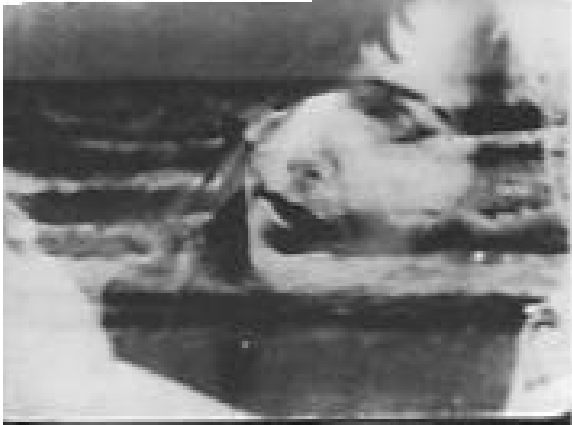
Carolee Schneemann: *Fuses*

"Sex," as Carolee might say, "is not a fact but an aggregate of sensations." Thus by interweaving and compounding images of sexual love with images of mundane joy (the sea, a cat, window-filtered light), she expresses sex without the self-consciousness of a spectacle, without an idea of expressivity, in her words, "free in a process which liberates our intentions from our conceptions."

Carolee and her lover James Tenney emerge from nebulous clusters of color and light and are seen in every manner of sexual embrace. Often the images are barely recognizable, shot in near-darkness or painted, scratched, and otherwise transformed until montage becomes one overall mosaic simultaneity of flesh and textures and passionate embraces. "There were whole sections," Carolee explains, "where the film is chopped up and laid onto either black or transparent leader and taped down. I also put some of the film in the oven to bake it; I soaked it in all sorts of acids and dyes to see what would happen. I cut out details of imagery and repeated them. I worked on the film for three years." This fragmentation not only prevents narrative continuity, therefore focusing on individual image-events, but also closely approximates the actual experience of sex in which the body of one's partner becomes fragmented into tactile zones and exaggerated mental images.

Every element of the traditional "stag" film is here—fellatio, cunnilingus, close-ups of genitals and penetrations, sexual acro-

120 Expanded Cinema



Carolee Schneemann: *Fuses*. 1965-68.
16mm. Color, black and white. 18 min.
"A fluid oceanic quality that merges
the physical act with its metaphysical
connotation, very Joycean and very
erotic."

batics—yet there's none of the prurience and dispassion usually associated with them. There is only a fluid oceanic quality that merges the physical act with the metaphysical connotation, very Joycean and very erotic. There's a fevered kinetic tempo that flawlessly evokes the urgency of sexual hunger. A "story" is being told but it's the story of every person in the audience who has wanted to express the richness of his experience in some concrete way. Carolee offers a psychic matrix in which this articulation might take place, and by this very act the spectacle is defeated.

Between scenes of lovemaking we see Carolee seated nude before her window, looking out at the sea as the curtains whisper lazily in the afternoon breeze. This image is repeated several times and serves to establish a sense of place and unity; this is a home, not a whorehouse. If there's anything unique about a pornographic film made by a woman it's this emotional unity that ties the images together. Scenes of Carolee skipping merrily through the surf are given as much prominence as close-ups of fellatio and cunnilingus. She's filming her consciousness, not her orifices. *Fuses* moves beyond the bed to embrace the universe in oceanic orgasm. "The thing that is disreputable in the idea of pornography for me," she says, "is that it tends to have to do with the absence of feeling, the absence of really committed emotions. I was after some kind of integral wholeness; the imagery is really compounded in emotion."

Synaesthetic Cinema and Extra-Objective Reality

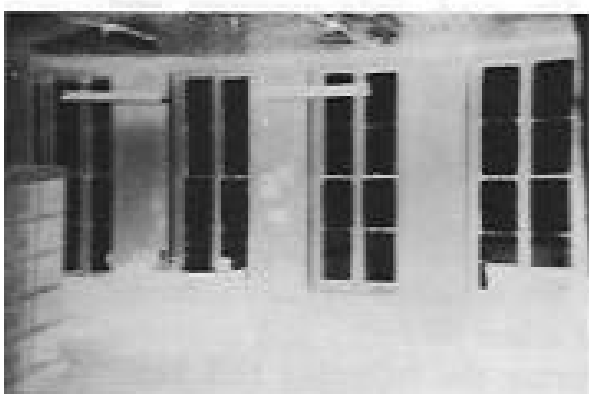
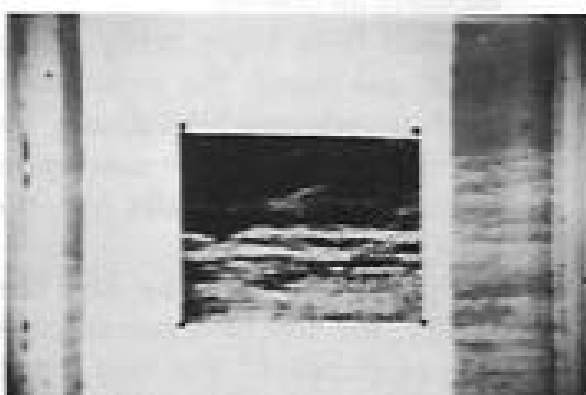
Michael Snow: *Wavelength*

Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, a forty-five-minute zoom from one end of a room to the other, directly confronts the essence of cinema: the relationships between illusion and fact, space and time, subject and object. It's the first post-Warhol, post-Minimal movie, one of the few films to engage those higher conceptual orders that occupy modern painting and sculpture. *Wavelength* has become the forerunner of what might be called a Constructivist or Structuralist school of cinema, including the works of George Landow, Tony Conrad, Snow's wife Joyce Wieland, Paul Sharits, Ernie Gehr, Peter Kubelka, Ken Jacobs, Robert Morris, Pat O'Neill, and at least two of Bruce Baillie's films, *All My Life* and *Still Life*.

A large studio loft in New York: pristine light flooding through tall curtainless windows, street sounds floating on still air. The motionless camera is positioned high up, closer to the ceiling than the floor, so that a certain atmosphere, a certain environmental ambience is conveyed in that special way the cinema has of creating a sense of place. In fact, the first thought that comes to mind is that if a room could talk about itself this is what it would say.

Soon we discover the camera isn't static: every minute or so it jerks slightly forward; we realize the zoom lens is being manipulated rather clumsily; ever so slowly we are edging toward the wall of windows. This realization adds the first of many new dimensions to come: by introducing the element of motion, specifically invisible motion like the hands of a clock, the filmmaker adds the temporal element to a composition that in all other respects appears static. Motion is the only phenomenon that allows perception of time; the motion here, like time, is wholly conceptual.

Minutes pass: we notice subtle details—patterns of light and shadow, furniture arrangements, signs, tops of trucks, second-story windows, and other activity seen through the windows. Two women enter with a large bookcase, which they move against a wall, and then leave without speaking. There's a dispassionate distance to this activity, not in the least suggesting anything significant.



Michael Snow: *Wavelength*. 1967.
16mm. Color. 45 min. "The first post-Warhol, post-Minimal movie, one of the few films to engage those higher conceptual orders that occupy modern painting and sculpture."

Now we notice subtle permutations in the light (is it our eyes or the focus?). The walls seem darker, the light colder. We see a chair previously not visible (or was it?). Two women enter again (the same two?). They walk to a table and sit; apparently they are on a coffee break. (Perhaps this is a remote section of a warehouse or garment factory.) The women sit in silence. Suddenly, as though from a distant radio, we hear the Beatles: "... *Strawberry Fields... nothing is real... living is easy with eyes closed, misunderstanding all you see...*"

Apart from being eerily prophetic, the music strikes the perfect emotional chord: the scene assumes a totally different inflection, a kind of otherworldly dream state. What previously was a cold impersonal warehouse now appears romantically warm. The music fades; one woman walks out; the other remains for a few minutes, then leaves.

Up to this point the film has presented a "believable" natural reality, the sort of filmic situation in which one speaks of "suspension of disbelief." But now, for the first time, a nonrepresentational cinematic reality is introduced: there begins a constant alteration of image quality through variation of film stock, light exposure, and printing techniques. By changes in light we realize also that we are alternating between times of day—morning, noon, dusk, night. With each cut the room appears completely different though nothing has been physically altered and the position of the camera has not been changed.

At the point when the image goes into complete negative, the synchronous "natural" street sounds are replaced by an electronic pitch, or sine wave, which begins at a low 50 cycles and increases steadily to a shrill 12,000 cycles during the following half hour. Thus "realistic" natural imagery has become pure filmic reality, and whatever identifications or associations the viewer has made must be altered.

Night: fluorescent lamps glowing (when did they go on?). In the blackness through the windows we see fiery red streaks of automobile taillights. Suddenly there's offscreen scuffling, tumbling, crashing glass, muffled cries. A man stumbles into the frame, moans, crumples to the floor with a loud thud below camera range. The electronic pitch is louder, the zoom closer. Window panes and photo-

graphs on the wall develop phantom images, vague superimpositions slightly offset. We no longer see the floor or side walls, just table, windows, photos, still indistinguishable. A girl in a fur coat enters. The light has changed: the room now appears to be an apartment. There's a yellow vinyl-aluminum kitchen chair that seems oddly out of place. The table actually is a writing desk with a telephone. She dials: "...Hello, there's a man on the floor... he's not drunk... I think he's dead... I'm scared... should I call the police? ... all right, I'll meet you outside... " She hangs up, walks out.

An overwhelming metaphysical tension engulfs the composition, filling the emptiness with a sense of density. Suddenly, a superimposed phantom image of the girl appears, transparently repeating the motions of entering, dialing, talking, leaving—but in silence beneath the whine of the sine wave, like some electromagnetic reverberation of past activity. The ghost image, which refers back in time to the "real" girl whose presence is linked in time to the death of the man, develops the only sequential, linear element in an otherwise nonlinear composition.

We realize also that the enlarged superimposed "outlines" around the window frames and photos refer to future points in the physical film itself when these objects actually will be that size. Similarly, the ghost "flashback" of the girl is a reference to the film's own physical "past," when the frame contained forms that it no longer contains.

Bright daylight: the room no longer is foreboding; the electronic tone is at its peak. The very light seems alive with a cold scintillation. The camera edges closer, blocking out the windows, until finally we distinguish the photograph on the wall: a picture of the ocean. A superimposed halo appears around the photo; suddenly the screen is an abstract (or more precisely, literalist) geometrical composition, totally symmetrical. This no longer is a room, no longer a movie, but quite literally an object—still photographs running through a projector.

Now the zoom advances to within the ocean photo; the sea consumes the entire screen. The electronic pitch runs a berserk glissando up and down the tone scale; We gaze at the ocean hypnotically: the fathomless water betraying no depth; the rhythmical waves frozen in time, answering some cosmic lunar force (Snow: "An

implication of universal continuity"). We remember Chabrol's remark: "There are no waves; there is only the ocean." For a long time we stare mindlessly at this ocean and then, very slowly, it fades into nothingness.

Like so many experimental filmmakers Michael Snow came to the cinema by way of painting and sculpture. His Expo '67 exhibit and recent New York showings have attracted considerable attention due to their exploration of the act of seeing as applied to Minimal sculpture. An understanding of Minimal Art is essential to the appreciation of *Wavelength* (shot in one week of December, 1966). Remembering Warhol's pivotal contribution, it is still possible to say that *Wavelength* is without precedent in the purity of its confrontation with the nature of the medium: It is a triumphant and definitive answer to Bazin's question, "*Que-est-ce que le cinéma?*"

Like all truly modern art, *Wavelength* is pure drama of confrontation. It has no "meaning" in the conventional sense. Its meaning is the relationship between film and viewer. We are interested more in what it *does* than what it *is* as an icon. The confrontation of art and spectator, and the spectator's resultant self-perception, is an *experience* rather than a meaning.

Referring to critics of Minimal Art, painter Frank Stella remarked: "If you pin them down they always end up asserting that something is present besides the paint on the canvas. My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there is there."²⁸ Similarly, in *Wavelength* there is no dependence on an idea or source of motivation outside the work itself. The subject of the film is its own structure and the concepts it suggests. (Snow: "My film is closer to Vermeer than to Cézanne.") But because Snow is working in the medium of cinema, he must deal with the element of illusion, a quality not inherent in painting or sculpture. The very essence of cinema is the fact that what we see there is *not* there: time and motion. These concepts have been engaged in recent traditional cinema (*Persona*, *Blow-Up*, *David Holzman's Diary*), but always symbolically, never in the empirical fashion of Snow's movie. *Wavelength* is post-Minimal because, thanks to the cinema, it can deal empirically with illusion, that is, a wider range of vision than usually

²⁸ Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton Paperbacks, 1968), pp. 157-158.

is engaged in the plastic arts. It is post-Warhol because it confronts the illusory nature of cinematic reality; it presents not only "pure" time and space, but also *filmic* time (fragmented) and space (two-dimensional, nonperspectival). It is more metaphysical than Minimal. *Wavelength* is a romantic movie.

Snow emphasizes that editing is an abstraction of reality by alternating times of day with each cut, and by cutting rarely. Thus he achieves what Mondrian called the "relations" of abstract nature. The theory of relativity reduces everything to relations; it emphasizes structure, not material. We've been taught by modern science that the so-called objective world is a relationship between the observer and the observed, so that ultimately we are able to know nothing but that relationship. Extra-objective art replaces object-consciousness with metaphysical relation-consciousness. Romance is born in the space between events.

Image-Exchange and the Post-Mass Audience Age

The Rebirth of Cottage Industry

Just as the individual's unique identity is smothered by a social system that prohibits education by experiment and restricts creative living, so society itself as one organism suffers from the effects of unilateral mass education inherent in the present public communications network. Future historians would have a grossly inaccurate picture of today's culture if they were to judge our social meanings and values by the content of the so-called popular media.

Judging from broadcast television, for example, where the individual has little choice of selection, a personality such as Glen Campbell or a program like "Bonanza" might appear representative of popular taste because their lowest-common-denominator appeal satisfies the indiscriminate passivity of most of a hundred-million viewers. However, if we judge the same society at the same time by those media that offer personal selection and individual communication—LP record albums, for example—we find the Beatles as the representative image: two different worlds existing as one, distinguished by the technologies through which they communicate. The same phenomenon occurs in the cinema. The majority of college students flock to movies like *Easy Rider* or *Alice's Restaurant*, but when they make their own movies it's a different story entirely. The crucial difference is between mass public communication and private individual communication.

But that difference is quickly being resolved. When the proliferation of technology reaches a certain level of saturation in the environment, we cease to be separate from it. Communications technologies shape and record the objective and subjective realities of Everyman. The intermedia network becomes metabolically and homeostatically interfaced with each human being. To unplug any one of the advanced nations from the global telephone network, for example, would be a more extreme deterrent than any bomb; and the global television linkages soon will become equally as vital.

In the past we've had two mass personalities: our media personality and our "natural" personality. Pioneering radio and television

announcers adopted a mode of speech and behavior essentially unnatural, a formal way of talking and acting through the media. In a sense, the media function as behavior-altering agents for special occasions called "shows," much the same as alcohol is a behavior-altering agent for special occasions called "cocktail parties." But the recent phenomena of "underground" FM radio and "two-way" or "conversation" radio and television are evidence that we're feeling more comfortable with our extensions. Soon we'll converse as intimately over television and radio as we do now over telephones. The increasing number of twenty-four-hour all-news radio stations is a symptom of humanity's growing awareness of the monitor function of the media, even though today's profit-motive news might well be described as tactical misinformation. The notion of putting on a "show," although still prevalent in name at least, is losing its meaning. Inevitably, show business is becoming communication business, which in turn is becoming education business. And thus begins the revolution.

The mass-audience, mass-consumption era is beginning to disintegrate like Hesse's alter ego Harry Haller in *Steppenwolf*, who regretted his dual nature until he realized that he not only had two selves but quite literally dozens. It is generally accepted that the post-Industrial Age will also be an age of post-mass consumption. Cybernation virtually guarantees decentralization of energy sources. There'll be no need for a "department" of water and power, for example, when we learn to harness solar energy as easily as we make transistor radios. Inherent in the proliferation of inexpensive film technology, which caused the phenomenon of personal cinema, is the force that soon will transform the socioeconomic system that made commercial mass entertainment necessary in the first place. Synaesthetic cinema not only is the end of movies as we've known them aesthetically; the physical hardware of film technology itself is quickly phasing out, and with it the traditional modes of filmmaking and viewing. We're entering the era of image-publishing and image-exchange, the inevitable evolutionary successor to book publishing: the post-mass audience age.

The hardware and software environment presently exists in which one can purchase films as easily as one purchases books or records. The video/film symbiosis accomplished in electron-beam recording

results in the end of "movies" as social event and technical discipline. The decisive factor in the demise of cinema and TV as we've known them is the ability to choose information rather than being enslaved to mass broadcasting schedules or distribution patterns, restricted by both mode and (profit) motive. This revolutionary capability exists even though the military/industrial complex withholds it from us.

Although commercial restrictions are inevitable in the early stages of the phenomenon, we shall soon find that the personal filmmaker is equivalent to the major studio. It is now possible to collect hundreds of cartridges of one's own synaesthetic cinema—images of one's actual life preserved out of time—for documentation, post-stylization, and study. For the first time in history every human now has the ability to capture, preserve, and interpret those aspects of the living present that are meaningful to him. The key word is *interpret*. In a very real sense we can now show both our experiences and our emotions to one another, rather than attempting to explain them in verbally abstracted language. There's no semantic problem in a photographic image. We can now see through each other's eyes, moving toward expanded vision and inevitably expanded consciousness.

DeMille's *Ten Commandments* and Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* both go into the same ten-dollar cartridges, and then comes the test: the ability to own and repeatedly view a film is conditional on the availability of films *worth* multiple viewings. We shall find that ninety percent of all cinema in history cannot be viewed more than a couple of times and still remain interesting. No one is going to pay thirty dollars to see a movie. The only films capable of supporting multiple viewings, in the same way that paintings and records are enjoyed repeatedly, are synaesthetic films in which the viewer is free to insert himself into the experience differently each time. Thus the technology that allowed synaesthetic cinema to exist on a mass scale in the first place is the same technology that will force virtually all image-making toward synaesthesia, the purest manifestation of consciousness.

The individual's ability to apprehend, capture, generate, transmit, duplicate, replicate, manipulate, store, and retrieve audiovisual information has reached the point where technology results in the re-

birth of "cottage industry" as conceived by the economist William Morris during the Industrial Revolution in England—the autonomous ability of the individual to generate his own industry within his own local environment. The primary difference between Morris' pre-industrial view and today's post-industrial reality is that cottage industry and global cybernetic industrialization interpenetrate each other's spheres of influence synergetically, each benefiting from the other.

The introduction of videotape cartridges forces mass communications into the untenable position of restricting individual freedom. Shortly, the educational and aesthetic messages of society will be communicated through cartridge-exchange and telecommand regional videotape cable centers; live broadcast television will be free to move information of a metabolic, homeostatic, interplanetary nerve-system function. At present, videotape or filmed information can be electron-beam recorded onto low-cost photosensitive material which, in the example of Columbia's EVR, results in one-hour cartridges of 180,000 black-and-white frames or half-hour cartridges of 90,000 color frames. They can be displayed individually or sequentially in random-access or automatic modes on any television set with higher resolution than videotape systems or broadcast TV. The system reduces broadcast videotape costs by a factor of fifty, home videotape costs by ten, and is approximately one-fifteenth as expensive as conventional filmmaking.

Coupled with other technologies such as the Polaroid family of cameras, the videophone, and long-distance Xerography and Xerographic telecopying, we arrive at a situation in which every TV image and every frame of every videotape or movie in history can now be filmed, taped, photographed, or copied in a number of ways, then replicated and transmitted—all by the individual. The *auteur* theory thus becomes utterly meaningless. We've progressed to the point at which an "impersonal" or "official" film is unthinkable. There's no such thing as an impersonal or nonauthored film: there is only honest cinema and hypocritical cinema, and they are measured by the difference between what is inside and what is outside of the maker's consciousness. Art is both "adult" and personal: we begin with that behind us, taken for granted, beneath discussion, and we go on from there.

For thousands of young persons around the world today, the cinema is a way of living. As we find ourselves faced with increasing leisure time, the camera will become more important as an instrument of creative living as opposed to its present role as conditioner of the dronelike existence we now lead. I mean to suggest that the camera—either cinema, or video, or both—as an extension of our nervous system, functions as a superego that allows us to observe and modify our behavior by observing our "software" image just as world man modifies his behavior by observing his collective superego as manifested in the global videosphere. By creating new realities in video/cinema we create new realities in our lives. We have seen that it is aesthetically and technically possible: let us now briefly examine the process.

The ethnological filmmaker Jean Rouch, speaking of his *cinéma-vérité* study, *Chronicle of a Summer*, described the superego function of the camera with his subjects: "At first," he said, "there's a self-conscious hamminess. They say to themselves, 'people are looking at me and I must give a nice impression of myself.' But this lasts only a very short time. And then, very rapidly, they begin to think—perhaps for the first time sincerely—about their problems, about who they are, and they begin to express what they have within themselves. As the film progresses and the people see the rushes, they begin to think about the character they were representing involuntarily—a character of which they had been completely unaware, that they discovered on the screen all of a sudden with enormous surprise. And so *the film becomes a reason for living* and they feel they must play that role. However, they will often deny the authenticity of the film, claiming they were putting on for the camera, because what has been revealed of them is so personal, a role which normally they would not project to the world.

"But something very strange occurs: the cinema becomes for them a pretext to try to resolve problems that they were not able to resolve without the cinema. I'm convinced that ninety percent of what they say is extremely sincere, and out of that they would never have had the courage to say at least ten percent without the cinema. The extraordinary pretext is, if you wish, the possibility to say something in front of the camera and afterwards be able to retract it, saying it

was just for the camera. The extraordinary possibility of playing a role which is oneself, but which one can disavow because it is only an image of oneself."²⁹

The new filmmaker no longer is required to make drama or to tell a story or even to make "art," though art may certainly result. Personal cinema becomes art when it moves beyond self-expression to encompass life-expression. Art is not created; it is lived. The artist merely reports it. Synaesthetic cinema is not filmed so much as experienced onto film or videotape. As an extension of the citizen's nervous system it can't be judged by the same canons that traditionally have represented art. It's simply the first utterance of human beings who've found a new language. If art is involved, it's the art of creative living as opposed to passive conditioned response. The possibility of realizing one's innermost desires with the excuse that it's "just for the film" is a temptation that will be too strong to resist when we're released from the needs of marginal survival. Wallace Stevens: "It is the explanations of things that we make to ourselves that disclose our character: the subjects of one's poem are the symbols of one's self or one of one's selves."

Along with each man's life being the subject of his own study is the need for each man to be consciously part of Man's life. "In dreams," said Yeats, "begin responsibilities." Buckminster Fuller has said that the great aesthetic of tomorrow will be the aesthetic of integrity. For ten thousand years more than five hundred generations of agricultural men have lived abnormal, artificial lives of repetitive, boring toil as energy slaves who must prove their right to live. But now we are on the threshold of freedom. We are about to become our own gods. We are about to face the problem of values. Bronowski: "The problem of values arises only when men try to fit together their need to be social animals with their need to be free men. There is no problem, there are no values, until men want to do both."³⁰

For the first time in history we're approaching that point at which both will be possible if we fashion our lives with a sense of integrity.

²⁹Jean Rouch in Conversation with James Blue," *Film Comment* (Fall-Winter, 1967), pp. 84-85.

³⁰Bronowski, *Science and Human Values* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1965), p 55.

We've modified our environment so radically that we must now modify ourselves in order to exist in it. If we're all to become one, the ethics of individual man must become a meta-ethic for global man. Donald Schon: "In seeking a meta-ethic we suffer from the fact that society traditionally delegates the job of change to special individuals in its midst, to artists, inventors and scientists—and then isolates them from the rest of society in order to preserve the illusion of stability of norms and objectives."³¹

Not only must we completely revise our attitudes toward "ownership" of the physical earth; we must also learn to accept the fact that the ideas and creations of humanity do not belong to any one individual. Thus technology not only helps maintain the present level of mankind's integrity, it actually forces us to increase that integrity and provides the social framework within which to begin. Freedom is the acceptance of responsibility. Bronowski speaks of the "habit of truth" as it applies to scientific experiments. Contemporary man in general might be said to practice a habit of hypocrisy: "There is no more threatening and no more degrading doctrine than the fancy that somehow we may shelve the responsibility for making the decisions of our society by passing it to a few scientists armored with a special magic. The world today is made and powered by science; for any man to abdicate an interest in science is to walk with open eyes toward slavery."³²

The irresponsible audience will learn responsibility when it becomes its own audience through the synaesthetic research of expanded cinema and image-exchange. And in this activity it will come to discover the scientific meta-ethic. "The practice of science compels the practitioner to form for himself a fundamental set of universal values... the exactness of science can give a context for our nonscientific judgments."³³ By its very nature synaesthetic cinema will close the gap between art and science because the art of creative living must become a science if life is to hold any meaning in the Cybernetic Age.

³¹ Donald Schon, *Technology and Change* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1967), p. 24.

³² Bronowski, pp. 5, 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.