

**Undesirable Owen Land:  
Continuity and Difference in American Avant-Garde Film**

A thesis submitted by  
Christian Whitworth

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

Tufts University

May 2017

Adviser:

Jacob Stewart-Halevy

## **Abstract**

The American avant-garde filmmaker Owen Land (formerly George Landow, 1944-2011) occupied a marginal position within post-war “structural film.” This study seeks to address Land’s peripheral inclusion within the movement by examining his use of parody, humor, and citation. Such devices, this text argues, criticize or edify scenes, styles, and figures drawn from a broad history of experimental filmmaking. Detailed analysis of Land’s films reveals a network of influence that incorporates films by Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, and Hollis Frampton as well as texts by film historians P. Adams Sitney and Paul Arthur. Many of Land’s parodies exercise a hidden polemic, accentuated through biting humor and absurd word play. Beyond the tendentious relations between Land and other structural filmmakers, the imitation of filmic events and texts reaffirms parodied films and figures within a canonical history of the medium. This thesis accounts for these variations of parody throughout Land’s oeuvre by relating them to the social dynamics of avant-garde film and Land’s place within the discipline.

## **Acknowledgements**

I must begin by thanking my advisor, Jacob Stewart-Halevy, for his continued encouragement, patience, and support throughout this project. From the first day of his graduate seminar to the completion of this thesis, Jacob provided me with invaluable guidance and insight. For that, I am truly grateful. Thanks also to the other members of my committee, Malcolm Turvey and Sarah Keller, for their expertise and inspiration. Their comprehensive knowledge of avant-garde film contributed greatly to this project. I am grateful also to the other faculty and staff of the Department of Art History at Tufts, especially Eric Rosenberg, Karen Overbey, Jeremy Melius, Amy West, Chris Cavalier, and Anne Burgess for their reassurance throughout the project and throughout the program.

I am grateful to Dean Robert Cook and Laura Wood for their support of this research through a Tisch Library Graduate Fellowship. Thanks also to Chao Chen for her unmatched research skills and for unearthing crucial scholarship on parody and humor in the visual arts. This project would not have been possible without the assistance of Louis-Philippe Van Eeckhoutte and the staff at Office Baroque Gallery, who kindly provided access to Land's films and who provided kind words of encouragement in the process. Thank you also to Mark Webber and P. Adams Sitney, who shared enlightening anecdotes about Land and who advocated for his scholarly examination.

My gratitude goes also to those who supported my goals prior to arriving at Tufts. Ahndraya Parlato, Michael Frank, Rose Bouthillier, and Natalie Fleming provided me invaluable instruction and support in my decision to pursue a

graduate degree. I think often of my RIT friends—some of the most endearing and inspiring people I have met. Their passion, resilience, and love continues to amaze me, even from afar and after so long.

I would be remiss not to mention those who welcomed me to Boston and made this place a home. Thank you to the staff at the Tufts University Art Gallery, especially Laura McDonald. Thank you also to the other members of my cohort. You never cease to inspire me. I found solidarity through your company, your genuine compassion and curiosity, not to mention your comic relief. My heart goes out also to Mallory, Genevieve, and Kip. Thank you for everything.

My deepest gratitude is reserved for my family, who have been my strongest source of support and encouragement throughout this process. Thank you to Peter, Janeil, and my parents for your continued reassurance, especially in moments of self-doubt. None of this would have been possible without your love and conversation. You taught me the value of hard work and compassion, and for that I am forever grateful. Thank you.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge that numerous people—too many to be listed here—influenced the completion of this project. I thank you for sharing your time and ideas, and I happily recognize that any faults remaining within the text are my own.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Figures.....	vi
Introduction: Undesirable Owen Land.....	1
Chapter 1: On Parody.....	9
Reading History, Reading Film.....	9
The Process of Pouring Red Paint.....	23
Chapter 2: Semantic Antics.....	34
Filmmaker as <i>Schadchen</i> .....	35
Textual Corruption.....	42
Chapter 3: Sex, Self, <i>Dialogues</i> .....	52
Deconstructing Libido.....	53
Autobiography and Embodiment.....	62
Conclusion.....	72
Appendix of Figures.....	75
Bibliography.....	102

## List of Figures

- Figure 1: Owen Land, “Sic Transit Gloria Mundi: when good things happen to bad people.” In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD. [01:19:56]
- Figure 2: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:14]=
- Figure 3: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:29]
- Figure 4: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:01:22]
- Figure 5: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:02]
- Figure 6: Maya Deren, *At Land*, 1944 [00:13:50]
- Figure 7: Stan Brakhage, *Blue Moses*, 1962 [00:08:59]
- Figure 8: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:01:54]
- Figure 9: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:04:39]
- Figure 10: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:16]
- Figure 11: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:27]
- Figure 12: Owen Land, *Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc.*, 1966. Color, silent, 20 minutes [00:01:06]
- Figure 13: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:03:04]
- Figure 14: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:03:28]
- Figure 15: Owen Land, *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops*, 1976. Color, sound, 10 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:26]
- Figure 16: Owen Land, *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops*, 1976. Color, sound, 10 minutes. 16mm. [00:08:25]
- Figure 17: Owen Land, *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops*, 1976. Color, sound, 10 minutes. 16mm. [00:08:57]
- Figure 18: Owen Land, *Undesirables (Work-In-Progress)*, 1999. Black-and-white, sound, 12 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:30]
- Figure 19: Owen Land, *Undesirables (Work-In-Progress)*, 1999. Black-and-white, sound, 12 minutes. 16mm. [00:01:44]
- Figure 20: Hollis Frampton, *Critical Mass*, 1971. [00:02:41]
- Figure 21: Owen Land, *Undesirables (Work-In-Progress)*, 1999. Black-and-white, sound, 12 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:52]

- Figure 22: Hollis Frampton, (*nostalgia*), 1971. Black-and-white, sound, 38 minutes. [00:03:55]
- Figure 23: Owen Land, "Regrettable Redding Condensation." In *Wide Anglo Saxon*, 1975. Color, sound, 22 minutes. 16mm. [00:15:05]
- Figure 24: Owen Land, *Wide Anglo Saxon*, 1975. Color, sound, 22 minutes. 16mm. [00:18:29]
- Figure 25: Owen Land, *Wide Anglo Saxon*, 1975. Color, sound, 22 minutes. 16mm. [00:20:55]
- Figure 26: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:10:02]
- Figure 27: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:10:04]
- Figure 28: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:19]
- Figure 29: Andy Warhol, *Blow Job*, 1963. Black-and-white, silent, 35 minutes. [00:01:54]
- Figure 30: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:14]
- Figure 31: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:29]
- Figure 32: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:01:15]
- Figure 33: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:09]
- Figure 34: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:03:25]
- Figure 35: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:06:23]
- Figure 36: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:12:47]
- Figure 37: Marcel Duchamp, *Anémic Cinéma*, 1926. [00:01:51]
- Figure 38: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:13:58]

- Figure 39: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:14:21]
- Figure 40: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:14:30]
- Figure 41: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:15:13]
- Figure 42: Owen Land, "Owen Land Interviewed." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:01:36]
- Figure 43: Egon Schiele, *Two Women (Due donne)*, 1915.
- Figure 44: Owen Land, "Bending Over Backwar: fragment of an egon." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:47:47]
- Figure 45: Egon Schiele, *Nude with Red Garters*, 1911.
- Figure 46: Owen Land, "Cognitive Dissonance: criticizing the critics." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:26:05]
- Figure 47: Owen Land, "Cognitive Dissonance: criticizing the critics." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:26:58]
- Figure 48: Owen Land, "Paradox Now: How to Miff a Spliff and Sluff a Muff." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:15:24]
- Figure 49: Owen Land, "The Divided Self." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:02:30]
- Figure 50: Owen Land, "The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:05:43]
- Figure 51: Owen Land, "The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:06:16]
- Figure 52: Owen Land, "The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:06:54]
- Figure 53: Owen Land, "The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:07:16]



## Introduction

### Undesirable Owen Land

In the early 1970s, the avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage (1933-2003) commented to friend and peer, Owen Land (formerly George Landow, 1944-2011), “someday Hollywood will probably make a film about us...”<sup>1</sup> The “us” to which Brakhage referred was a circle of American avant-garde filmmakers working throughout the 1960s and 70s under the designations “underground film,” “alternative film,” or “independent cinema.” This cinematic movement found at least some semblance of autonomy apart from industrial film, i.e. Hollywood cinema. Indeed, both classifications reciprocate the social and economic conditions of their respective producers or audiences.<sup>2</sup> “Because the social relations of [industrial film’s] production are those of the economy at large, as it integrates cultural production into commodity production,” writes David E. James, “the capitalist cinema thus sustains the generally obtaining mode of production in two interlocking ways, ideologically and materially. It recreates in its spectators the desires and fears, the conscious and unconscious subjectivity, by which they are accommodated to capitalist society....”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, “underground film” operated under the conditions of “radical otherness,”<sup>4</sup> void of capitalist economic interests and defined rather, in formalist terms, by “the

---

<sup>1</sup> Land and Webber, *Two Films by Owen Land*, 122.

<sup>2</sup> Either designation “reproduces the relations of production.” See Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” 133. Cited in James, “Considering the Alternatives,” 7.

<sup>3</sup> James, “Considering the Alternatives,” 7.

<sup>4</sup> Sitney, *Visionary Film*, viii

rejection of linear narrative...”<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the social differences between industrial and avant-garde film point to the differences between individuals within said socialities—“the art of the worker” and “the work of an artist.”<sup>6</sup> Simply, the social attitudes expressed within the avant-garde film movement ran counter to the dominant social and aesthetic paradigm of industrial cinema, recalling Walter Benjamin’s “criteria of an attitude to the dominant relations of production of the time and a position in them.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, David E. James writes:

[Avant-garde filmmakers’s] use of film in ideological and social self-creation allowed for and demanded new social relations around the apparatus, new relations among people who made the films, and new relations between filmmakers and their audiences. Just as the functions of the industrial cinema is to sustain bourgeois social relations by representing them as normal and others as deviant, so one of the functions of alternative film was the sympathetic representation of alternative social relations.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, Brakhage’s supposition that Hollywood would one day produce a film about those filmmakers who worked outside the confines of commercial film seems not only entirely implausible but antithetical to the movement’s radically divergent social ideologies.

A marginalized film movement distinct from Hollywood attended to its own social circles and artistic interests. But even within the underground film movement, there were filmmakers who worked on the periphery, who, so to speak, ran counter to the “counter-movement.” Of no one was this truer than Owen Land, a painter-turned-filmmaker most often associated with structural

---

<sup>5</sup> Sitney, *The Avant-Garde Film*, vi.

<sup>6</sup> James, “Considering the Alternatives,” 21.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 222.

<sup>8</sup> James, “Considering the Alternatives,” 11.

film.<sup>9</sup> While Land's films are often praised by critics for their complexity,<sup>10</sup> the filmmaker has, for the most part, evaded necessary, critical scholarship. Even in those rare instances of examination, critics offer a description of Land more akin to a caricature than a resolute examination. In 2005, for instance, the film critic Paul Arthur described Land as "an iconoclast among iconoclasts, a deadpan prankster and a scourge of aesthetic orthodoxies."<sup>11</sup> Granted, Arthur's joke may be attuned to Land's jocular method of filmmaking, his parodic adaptation of fellow filmmakers and film critics. Land "responded" in 2009 during an episode of his last film, *Dialogues*, entitled *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi: when good things happen to bad people*. In this fictional scene, we find Land (played by Eric Michael Kochmer) within a gallery of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. Carrying a small sledgehammer, Land proceeds to break one of the Byzantine icons on display (fig. 1) before the museum director, a woman in lingerie, intervenes. Their conversation quickly regresses into flirtatious play, affirming the absurdity prevalent throughout Land's oeuvre.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> As the nomination of the movement suggests, "a cinema of structure"<sup>9</sup> developed along a similar (though not identical) program espoused by post-Saussurian structural linguistics "to question," as David E. James writes, "the relationship between language and some extratextual reality to which it had been supposed to refer...." We might look to Roland Barthes for an articulation of both movements's goals, which aimed "whether reflexive or poetic [...] to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the 'function') of the object." James, "Pure Film," 237; Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," 214.

<sup>10</sup> As Paul Arthur states, "if the utter folly of trying to iron out in prose Land's most recent fantasias isn't by now apparent, it soon will be." Arthur, "Joker at Play in a Sea of Holes," 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>12</sup> Land enters the director's office in anticipation of being sent to the Gulag. Instead, she pays him 10,000 rubles for destroying the icon, saying "It clashes with our drapes."

Such absurdity and parodic mockery, in addition to the filmmaker's own self-alienation, garnered Land an unfavorable reputation. Jonas Mekas's note about avant-garde film's admission of social seclusion may be relevant in a discussion of Land's marginalization:

There is a feeling in the air that cinema is only beginning; that now cinema is available not only to those who possess a high organizational and group-work talent, but also to those poets who are more sensitive, but often un-communal, who prefer privacy, whose powers of observation and imagination are most active in privacy.<sup>13</sup>

From outside the avant-garde film movement, Owen Land is able to observe and comment on structural films, their makers, and their critics with clever humor. Some of the "targets" of Land's parodies include filmmakers like Tony Conrad, Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Joyce Wieland, Ernie Gehr, and Paul Sharits. Furthermore, P. Adams Sitney, the historian who gave the structural film movement its name (whether accepted or contested or wholly rejected),<sup>14</sup> remained in constant dialogue with Land, whether personally or scholarly. In fact, Sitney and Land remained lifelong friends after having been born thirty-two days apart in the same apartment building in New Haven.<sup>15</sup> According to Sitney, much of Land's "fragmented institutional life" is due to a near-death experience with

---

<sup>13</sup> Mekas, "Notes on the New American Cinema," 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> The term "structural film" was first offered by P. Adams Sitney in his 1969 essay, "Structural Film." Sitney's history of structural film evolved within the writing of his publication, *Visionary Film*; the author, as David E. James writes, "retains the formalist definitions but endows structural film with a quasi-spiritual motivation that enables him to situate it as the logical culmination of the visionary tradition through its capacity not simply to record, but to induce extraordinary states of consciousness." Sitney writes, "The structural film approaches the condition of meditation and evokes states of consciousness without meditation; that is with the sole meditation of the camera." See Sitney, "Structural Film," 1; Sitney, *Visionary Cinema*, 370; James, "Pure Film," 241-242.

<sup>15</sup> Sitney, "Owen Land," 64.

colitis at the age of sixteen.<sup>16</sup> Ill health plagued the entirety of the filmmaker's life, often forcing him to return to his parents's home for weeks without contact. These bouts of self-isolation persisted, often without notification of his whereabouts. As a result, Land was presumed to have passed away in 1999, when no one was able to contact him. Eventually, the film curator Mark Webber, who later organized a traveling retrospective of Land's films and edited *Two Films by Owen Land*, called the filmmaker's mother's home in Deerfield Beach, Florida. When she picked up, Webber asked to speak to Owen. At the time, his mother was unaware that Land changed his name from George Landow to Owen Land sometime in the late 1970s or early 1980s. Therefore, she answered by saying that no one named Owen lived at the residence. But when Webber asked to speak to George, she handed the phone over, and Land was found alive and well.

I hesitate from belaboring biographical specifics, but I believe elements of Land's biography enlighten the social peculiarities within his film's accrual of parody and allusion. Land offers a description of his biography in a letter to Stan Brakhage, presumably sent in the early 1970s:

The biographical data which seems significant to me concerns my continuing attempts to satisfy my curiosity about the apparent absurdities of the world. Perhaps this curiosity caused me to begin to make art—initially taking the form of deliberately absurd responses to situations in which one was expected to respond in a conventional way (though I still like the technique, the element of pride in it makes me usually refrain from using it). [...] Inspired by such writers as Joyce and Beckett, I thought that what I really wanted to do was write theater of the absurd type plays. Then I found myself in art school, on the road to becoming a painter—so as to be able to deal with existential material in a more concrete way—to make visible. [...] If this were a traditional “testimony” and not a biographical note, I would write about how I was actually transformed through a spiritual encounter with the Messiah. I will only say that I began to

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

understand human history in the light of the truths revealed in the scriptures, and saw the resurrection as the event around which all others revolve. Making films is important to me, but I can only do it for at most fifty more years. What is fifty years compared with all time (or no time)? If art is made in heaven (the bible tends to indicate that it is), I would like to make music for the glory of God.<sup>17</sup>

While Land's note makes no specific mention of any films, it points to the issues that will be addressed throughout this thesis. Land's unconventional approach to the production of experimental cinema foregrounds the movement's absurdities. In this sense, a foundational concern for the resurrection of Christ may be translated to a "resurrection" of film history. But Land finds absurdity in a variety of sources; past and present films and literary texts emerge as new forms, exaggerated adaptations, humorous films.

Chapter One examines the use of parody within Land's films and describe his idiosyncratic means of recalling past forms as present mockery. The chapter will be loosely based on Land's *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (1970) and *Regrettable Redding Condescension* (1975) and their related films, film histories, and film figures. Whereas the former asserts the role of the viewer in the act of "reading" its various allusions to a history of film, the latter foregrounds an explicit parody—of *Remedial Reading Comprehension* and of Hollis Frampton's (*nostalgia*) (1971). Each parody may appear to ridicule the source of its imitation, but the method emerges as a tool for the preservation of experimental film, a reassertion of specific films within a canonical history of the movement.

Chapter Two builds on Land's use of parody in order to fit the genre within a broader analysis of humor throughout Land's films. My foundational

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 63.

theory within this chapter is Freud's *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, which is fittingly also a major source of influence behind Land's *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?* (1977-79). Within this film, Land parodies doctrinal texts in order to marry Christian hermeneutics and Freudian psychoanalysis. This, in turn, supports the filmmaker's penchant for word play, which may serve to mask the tendentious nature of his parodic adaptation. But the question remains: does Land aim toward ridicule or reverence?

Chapter Three takes as its subject the last film within Land's career, *Dialogues* (2007-2009). A two-hour long autobiographical project, *Dialogues* presents an apotheosis of Land's methods. Most explicit within this film is the equation of the libidinous body, which participates in a series of sexual "come-ons," with a site of textual convergence. In other words, the sexual body enforces the system of parody allusion throughout the film, issuing questions of sexual difference throughout. But since *Dialogues* is an autobiographical project, I question the feasibility of an autobiographical experimental film supported through sexual discourse.

Ultimately, Land emerges throughout this thesis not only as the maker of parodic films, but as the recipient of their mockery. When Stan Brakhage suggested to Land that one day Hollywood would make a film about underground film, Land took the comment as a challenge. In 1999, he produced the film himself, parodying the tenets of avant-garde film and mocking the posturing of

literary and film theory. He titled the film *Undesirables* in order to suggest the outcast status of the movement's members. But in playing with an association of the word "undesirable," the film might more appropriately be positioned as a personal commentary on Land's life and work, a consciously parodic exaggeration not only of avant-garde film but of oneself.



## Chapter One: On Parody

### Reading History, Reading Film

During the first two minutes of Land's *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (1970), a sleeping woman who resembles Maya Deren dreams of a lecture hall at the Walker Art Center (fig. 2).<sup>18</sup> Except for her illuminated face, which rests along the bottom of the film frame, the darkness of the underexposed pro-filmic scene envelopes the woman's sleeping body. From within this darkened void, an oneiric frame-within-a-frame emerges, implying not just the beginning of a new film (in this case, a film-within-the film) but the beginning of a new dream (fig. 3). Here, an audience assembles along rows of tiered seats in anticipation of the lecture. Some members of the audience face toward the front of the room—the place of the camera and the space of the viewer—as their muddled conversation contrasts the quiet of the woman's bedroom. Regardless, her dream persists: the film frame enlarges on screen then disappears then reappears in another form—as a different lecture hall—before overtaking the sleeping woman and filling the screen (fig. 4). From outside the frame, a voice shouts, “lights!” The image fades to black before a silhouetted filmmaker (Land) appears transposed, running through a mountainous landscape (fig. 5). Land layers another film within the film at the addition of this latter scene, which, we might assume, projects before the audience of the lecture hall. Regardless, Land again alludes to Deren, whose film *At Land* (1944) depicts the filmmaker immersed within the natural landscape,

---

<sup>18</sup> Pirotte and Strebelow, Introduction, 9.

appearing and disappearing behind a vast sea of sand dunes (fig. 6).<sup>19</sup> Beyond the allusion to Deren, one can draw a connection between the transposed image of Land and the final frames of Stan Brakhage's *Blue Moses* (1962) (fig. 7). Within both films, the torso of a male figure stands before the projection of another film to create an illusionistic unification of subject and scene. Each figure physically steps—or runs—into the film projected onto the wall before him. In consideration of the multiple layers within the dream or within Land's film, to whom do we, as viewers, direct our attention? Who is the protagonist within this disparate narrative?

As the first few minutes of *Remedial Reading Comprehension* have thus far shown, Land disproves any recognition of a singular, filmic subject within a spatially and temporally continuous narrative. Amidst the grainy blue and purple hues of the mountainous landscape, the running figure symbolically distances himself from the confines of the visionary traditions that historically precede him. Film historian P. Adams Sitney categorizes within visionary film poetic, lyric, and trance films—prevalent throughout the 1930s through 50s—as overtly subjective or personal works which “[postulate] the film-maker behind the camera as the first-person protagonist.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Land retreats from Sitney's visionary classification, taking with him the other characters of the film, their allusive

---

<sup>19</sup> Film historian Sarah Keller describes this scene in detail, showing how alterations to the linear structure of the film strip allow Deren to cover more land than is normally expected. This play with reality, according to Keller, highlights “cinema's flexibility in shifting between photography's realism and editing's ability to undercut that reality, held in relationship to each other through a unifying, observing body...” Keller, “Toward Completion and Control,” 97.

<sup>20</sup> Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 160.

significations, and any semblance of a singular filmic protagonist. Each figure attends to one of many verbal and visual allusions within the film, illustrating connections between their origin of influence and their parodic adaptation. To argue for the application of parody within Land's work, however, I must first examine the films's historiographic precedents, its historical sources. *Remedial Reading Comprehension* situates the viewer as the "reader" of its multiple allusions and influences. In this sense, the audience partakes within Land's diffusion of filmic authority; each project fragments the filmic subject and democratizes the author through the insertion of multiple adaptations and authorial voices.

As the running figure attempts to escape from the traditions that precede him, there is yet another level of distancing when Land borrows from advertising rhetoric to include the film's viewer within the space of the film. Amidst the heavy breathing and dog-barking, white text appears over the running figure: "THIS IS A FILM ABOUT YOU" (fig. 8). The runner reappears near the end of the film, completing the sentence: "NOT ABOUT ITS MAKER" (fig. 9). Taking the subject of the viewer directly into consideration from the outset, the film questions the propagandistic use of advertising language within television and film. A narrator interjects, reading over the running figure: "This is really a film about you. Let's suppose your name is Madge and you have just cooked some rice." "Madge" is only one instance of Land's obsession with anagrams, puns, and palindromes. For if the viewer recites their role as "I, Madge," they pronounce a variation of "image". But when an elderly woman appears on the screen (fig. 10),

we instinctively identify her as Madge. She addresses the camera, however, saying, “This rice is delicious, Madge.” As a result, our articulation of identities proves erroneous; the lie that has been presented to us—that the subject of the film is ourselves—not only automatically and inherently associates its maker as the conclusive subject, but also an ever-expanding network of adapted forms and figures drawn from an expansive history of experimental cinema.

Not long after the elderly woman appears on screen, a close-up of two grains of rice overtakes her, placing into sharper focus the film’s symbolic commentary on a history of experimental filmmaking. Before a black background, an unprocessed grain of brown rice sits adjacent to a processed grain of white rice (fig. 11); needles extend from out of frame to poke and prod each grain of rice, giving form and movement to the specimens. Shortly thereafter, a narrator interjects, accompanied by an uplifting soundtrack, to sing the benefits of processed rice: “Purer, whiter, cleaner, and rid of the hard-to-digest parts as seen in the unprocessed grain of rice on the left, processed, pre-cooked rice is now ready for the supermarket and for your table as the perfect addition to any meal.” If we are to interpret the difference between the white rice and brown rice as a disparity akin to the production of film, we might read the pair metaphorically as the distinction between avant-garde film and popular cinema, respectively.<sup>21</sup> The presence of the narrator, moreover, is the voice through which Land asserts the

---

<sup>21</sup> Land describes the symbolism of the rice in a note from 1972, writing, “Compare the two grains of rice—whole grain (brown) and processed (white). The white rice has lost its “essence” (the germ) just as the silhouette has lost its three dimensionality. One thing this suggests is the process of removing substance, which is done to food, art, environment, religion, etc. An art that becomes personal removes some of the substance to get a ‘purer’ product.” Sitney, “Landow’s Wit,” 222.

benefits of “pure film,” the very era of experimental cinema of which he is a part and to which he continuously alludes.

Throughout the 1960s, a minimalist or materialist approach characterized the production of a variety of “pure” or “structural” films, which contained, as David E. James writes, “precise analogues to minimal art’s insistence on the work’s own materiality and its search for a clarified rational shape for the whole work and for its relation to its parts...”<sup>22</sup> Such films as Land’s *Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Dirt Particles, Sprocket Holes, Etc.* (1965-66) (fig. 12) prompted Sitney’s list of filmic characteristics indicative of structural film: “a fixed camera position (fixed *frame* from the viewer’s perspective), the flicker effect, [...] and re-photography of a screen.”<sup>23</sup> To produce *Film in which...*, Land appropriated a color density film strip manufactured by the Eastman Kodak Company, repositioned its frames within frames, and surveyed its “errors.” The piece of test film reveals also a woman in a red dress who stands adjacent to a series of stacked color samples.<sup>24</sup> Static in her pose save an occasional blink, the

---

<sup>22</sup> James’s self-consciously “generalized assumption” parallels a Greenbergian model of modern painting. Greenberg writes: “It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered ‘pure,’ and in its ‘purity’ find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. ‘Purity’ meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance.” James, “Pure Film,” 240. See also Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 194.

<sup>23</sup> Sitney, “Structural Film,” 327.

<sup>24</sup> Commonly referred to as the “China Girl,” the woman is a variant of a motion-picture industry practice intended to ensure the standardization of a film reel’s color balance. The Eastman Kodak Company, which mass-produced such test strips as part of their Laboratory Aim Density system, routinely dedicated the first few frames of a reel leader to an image of an anonymous woman with a series of color samples. Despite their intended role as figures for industrial processes, as woman never intended to be seen by a wider audience, “China Girls” became the subject of several experimental films. Apart

woman appears divided and duplicated through the juxtaposition of the film strip's multiple film frames, sprocket holes, and edge lettering. After reprinting the appropriated film strip, thereby shifting the image frame and its attendant sprocket holes, Land instructed the employee of a local film processing lab to refrain from cleaning it.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the dust collected on the film's surface remained in its final screening as a relic of the mechanical process through which the material passed. Furthermore, Land's reprinted readymade alters not only the test strip's composition, but its temporal duration. The filmmaker loop-printed the woman's blink to advance the gesture in an extended, mechanical repetition. Thus, the subordination of the illusionistic image of the woman in *Film in Which...* follows the proposed self-referentiality of structural film. It is a film about film, a film about the basic materials and processes of the medium.

Although she is not listed in the title, the inclusion of the woman within the film is not fortuitous. She asserts herself as one element among many competing for the viewer's attention. This tension between the illusionistic image of the woman and the formal and material detritus of the altered readymade produces an indeterminate play between the pro-filmic scene and the mechanical

---

from Owen Land's *Film in Which...* "China Girls" also appear in Owen Land, *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops* (1976); Julie Buck and Karin Segal, *Girls on Film* (2005); Timoleon Wilkins, *MM* (1996); Morgan Fisher, *Standard Gauge* (1984); Thomas Draschan and Stella Friedrichs, *To the Happy Few*; Michelle Silva, *China Girls* (2006); and Mark Toscano, *Releasing Human Energies* (2012).

<sup>25</sup> Even in the processing of film, Land is not without humor. In a letter to Sheldon Renan in 1967, he recounts the production of *Film in Which...*, describing its proliferation of dust and detritus: "The printer insisted on cleaning it. I insisted he leave the dirt on. He left the dirt on—maybe for the first time in his career—when he got home did he take a bath?" The humor in Land's recollection lies in the wit of the proposition that the man's bath became a surrogate for the film's. Land and Webber, *Two Films by Owen Land*, 116.

processes of its production. Furthermore, as David E. James shows, the image (the state in which the film appears before the viewer) changes continuously, determined always by its history as well as its present condition within the film projector: “*Film in which...* orchestrates superimposed strata of filmic codes and material properties in such a way that any given datum’s assertion of itself as presence on one level simultaneously draws attention to its illusoriness on another.”<sup>26</sup> Beyond its immediate moment of production, therefore, the film strip’s evolving material properties substantiate the push and pull between surface and image. Several “generations” of projection and storage gather upon the surface of the film strip through evolving layers of dust and detritus. At any given screening, the film operates under new conditions as a new film. However, it is always and inherently subject to its history of screening and storage. From the adoption of the original found footage test strip to its reprinting in *Film in Which...* to any given moment of its projection, the film’s past is recorded on its celluloid surface.

In turn with the ontological investigations of structural film’s materiality, avant-garde filmmakers such as Ernie Gehr reassessed film’s history to either reference or revise its earliest stages.<sup>27</sup> When Hollis Frampton calls upon a “metahistorian” of film for the reinvention of its reigning aesthetic paradigms, he

---

<sup>26</sup> James, “Pure Film,” 245.

<sup>27</sup> Ernie Gehr sought to make “first films,” in which the beginnings of film were figuratively reconsidered through exploration of the medium’s materials. Gehr describes his 1970 film *History* by accentuating its elementary nature: “History. Film in its primordial state in which patterns of light and darkness—planes—are still undivided. Like the natural order of the universe, an unbroken flow in which movement and distribution of tension is infinitely subtle, in which a finite orientation seems impossible. (“At last, the first film!”: Michael Snow).” See Mekas, “Ernie Gehr Interviewed,” 37.

symbolically tasks the figure with “inventing a tradition, that is, a coherent wieldy set of discrete monuments, meant to inseminate resonant consistency into the growing body of his art.”<sup>28</sup> Writing in 1986, Noël Carroll builds on Frampton’s platitude:

It seems to me that over the past twenty-five years there has been a shift from essentialism as the basic form of analysis and, at times, of commendation in film theory and art criticism to an emphasis on history as the privileged historical framework. [...] Faith in essentialism has given way to a preference for history—especially for social and institutional history—as the accepted means for understanding film and the arts. Semiotics, genealogy, reception theory, all putatively sensitive to historical variability, have become favored tools of artworld theorizing, while, in film studies, these developments are also accompanied by the rise of an intensive interest in historiography.<sup>29</sup>

Carroll outlines Frampton’s concept of “metahistory” as a definitive and ultimately generative framework within literary and visual theory and practice of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Indeed, Land’s *Film in Which...* emblemizes such a transition between film “essentialism” and film historiography; the film’s foregrounding of materiality is matched only by its consideration of a history of film processing and production. Land seeks, therefore, to imbue each film with a historiographic—or, broadly, historicist—structure. Film historian Philip Rosen outlines the subtle differences within these terms, writing,

“by historiography I mean the object of the text, the ‘real’ pastness it seeks to construct or recount in and for the present. This entails the definitional proposition that historiography always has referential ambitions. By historicity, I mean the particular relations of the mode of historiography and the types of construction of history related by it.”<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Frampton, “For a Metahistory of Film,” 136.

<sup>29</sup> Carroll, “A Brief Comment,” 313.

<sup>30</sup> Rosen, Introduction, xi.



With Rosen's explanation in mind, Land necessitates a historiographic "reading" of a history of experimental filmmaking within the footage of each film. In the beginning of *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, Land assigns viewers as participants and as subjects, proposing we divulge the various allusions or quotations of previous or contemporaneous avant-garde films, filmmakers, and film critics or historians.

In the midst of the film's appropriated advertising imagery, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*<sup>31</sup> includes a minute-long exercise in reading. Within the second-half of the film, a sleeping Maya Deren returns, this time dreaming of herself. Her face and (now visible) afro wig appear duplicated (fig. 13). Floating above the dreaming Deren, she turns her face to the sound of electronic beeping. When a page of text manifests within her dream, its words are brought in and out of focus in quick delineation (fig. 14). The legibility of the text exists only momentarily, but one can make out the presence of such words as "pupil," "master," "teaching," "knowing," and "curiosity." It becomes obvious who, or what, is doing the teaching in this lesson: Land constructs a participatory exercise through the viewer's reading, interpretation, and comprehension of the text on screen. But the entire film functions as a book within which allusion and quotation abound.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> As Land writes, the original title for *Remedial Reading Comprehension* was *For Slow Readers*. This prompted a comment from Stan Brakhage: "That's good. I'm a slow reader." Land and Webber, *Two Films by Owen Land*, 86.

<sup>32</sup> J.D. Connor elaborates a history of reading comprehension tools, or tachistoscopes, developing in the 1930s. Connor, "Adaptation in Owen Land," 163.

By ending the film with an exercise intended not only to incorporate the viewer but to improve the viewer's ability to "read" the film, Land necessitates a scrupulous inspection on behalf of the viewer. *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops* (1976) likewise involves the viewer as a means of revealing its codes. A re-adaptation of an earlier film, it affirms Land's tendency toward personal revision. In the first iteration of *Institutional Quality* (1968), a non-diegetic female narrator directs an unidentified figure through a series of absurd "tests." "It is a test of how well you can follow directions," announces the narrator. "There is a picture on your desk. Look at the picture. It a picture of the inside of a house. Now listen carefully, and do not look at the picture." She continues, directing the viewer, "Turn on the television. Put a number three on what you would touch." Like the reading comprehension test within *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, the viewer assumes the role of the test-taker. The new and improved adaptation of *Institutional Quality* concerns rather the effects of the test on its taker and consequently fills the role with a graying, elderly man (fig. 15). At the end of the film, after completing many of the tasks assigned to him, the man falls into a trance—a direct allusion to the "trance film" and "triumph of the imagination" described by Sitney in his *Visionary Film*.<sup>33</sup> As he floats through his imaginative trance, he encounters two scenes from earlier Land films. A woman, framed by a series of color samples, wears a white cotton glove (used in the archival handling of film) which points at her blinking eye (fig. 16). The image is

---

<sup>33</sup> Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 374.

a re-creation of the found film strip used in Land's earlier film, *Film in Which....*

As the test-taker continues to float out of the frame, the film cuts to another scene, in which a man, running in place, wears a sign that reads, "This is a film about you" (fig. 17). *New Improved Institutional Quality* reiterates, broadly, the need to interpret the historiographic allusions within the film, whether they be homages to earlier avant-garde periods and styles (e.g. lyric and trance film) or reinterpretations of earlier films by the same filmmaker.

"Reading" Land's *Remedial Reading Comprehension* in order to explicate its adaptations or quotations signals its intertextuality.<sup>34</sup> The work, akin to a dialogic text, is constructed as a montage not only of film frames but of historical allusions. The multiple points of influence within the intertextual film converge upon the writer of the text or, for the purposes of this essay, the director of the film. Recall Land's strategies of self-conscious subjectivity within *Remedial Reading Comprehension*: the white text asserting the viewer as the subject of the film ("This is a film about you") also inherently includes its maker in the focus of the work; the diegetic narrator within the appropriated advertisement functions as a metaphor for Land's authorial production as well as his commentary on white rice and brown rice, or the differences between "good" and "bad" cinema; and the reading comprehension test, through its use of such words as "master" and

---

<sup>34</sup> My understanding of intertextuality is based, in part, on Julia Kristeva's literary theory, which itself is influenced by the Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin's writings. As Kristeva writes, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*." It must be noted, however, that Kristeva and Bakhtin argue for a concept of dialogism or intertextuality that extends to *all* texts. See Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," 66.

“teacher” directs the viewer’s reverence towards Land, the maker or creator. If these elements introduce the filmmaker within the film’s diegesis, they serve to “lay bare”<sup>35</sup> the construction of the film and to situate Land within its network of quotation and allusion. Land’s role as a filmmaker, then, exists in a relation of simultaneity with other filmmakers, their films, and relatable forms of intertextuality. *Remedial Reading Comprehension* and other works within Land’s oeuvre exist not as unitary, self-sufficient films, but rather as pluralistic systems relative to the filmic images and conventions of others. *Remedial Reading Comprehension* achieves its intertextuality through the de-centralization of authority, the democratization of the author. This is not to suggest the absence of the author, but rather the presence of the maker at the intersection of multiple historical allusions.<sup>36</sup> *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, through its allusive composition, is, in other words, comprised of additional authorial “voices” which speak through the adoption of their filmic fragments—their mechanical operations, figural placements, and verbal insinuation.

I digress chronologically in the interests of examining a film whose narrative accrues a considerable number of visual and verbal allusions. The introduction to *Remedial Reading Comprehension* offers the most immediate vision of its intertextuality: a narrator speaks over a black screen: “Early evening in the Universe—Universe Theater, the old movie house at Avenue B and 10th

---

<sup>35</sup> I borrow, here, from Victor Shklovsky. See Shklovsky, “Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*,” 27.

<sup>36</sup> Again, one may look to Bakhtin, who writes, “there is no unitary language or style in the novel. But at the same time there does exist a center of language (a verbal-ideological center) for the novel. The author (as creator of the novelist whole) cannot be found at any one of the novel’s language levels: he is to be found at the center of organization where all levels intersect.” See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 48-49.

Street, Lower East Side, New York. The theater manager says..." At this moment, two men appear on screen. The camera positions the viewer in conversation, so to speak, with the theater manager and the filmmaker (fig. 18). Behind them, figures move back and forth at increased speeds, blurred to the point of unintelligibility. Their commotion registers as background noise, but the conversation between the two men in the foreground is dubbed with almost comical re-readings. The balding man on the left, dressed in a suit, plays the theater manager. Across from him stands a young man with long hair and a striped shirt. The theater manager urges forward: "Hello Carl, yes good to see ya! D-Did you bring a film?" Carl retorts, "Yes! Yes, I brought a film. I have it right here." He lifts his left hand, in which he holds the metal casing of a 16mm film. The theater manager speaks again, this time offering a list of names—filmmakers to whom Carl should be introduced: "Oh, good, good. Do you know any of our local film poets? There's Stanton Verbeek! Have you seen *Heaven Tibet Sees?*" "Yes, says Carl. I think it's a great film. Is Stanton a saint? I hear that he's a yogi and a saint!" The theater manager assuages Carl's excitement: "Sure, he's a saint." The narrator interjects again: "The manager introduces them." The theater manager, speaking to a new figure in the scene, says, "Meet Carl Sheitas from Kansas City." The camera pans to show Carl and Stanton engaged in conversation, but their voices have not been dubbed, and the film falls silent except for the commotion of the extras behind them. The camera pans back to the theater manager, who speaks again to Carl: "We're all saints here! Saints, madmen, and geniuses!"

Pointing to a group of figures behind him, Carl shifts our attention from the filmmakers in the room to the film critics: “The film critics are there too. Sarkis Sarkisian, the journalist film critic; Carmine Avanio, the Italian-American film poets.” The narrator interjects: “Then Carl notices Marsha Rutnik.” “Hey! Why don’t you introduce me to her!” “Oh, you mean Marsha. Meet Marsha Rutnik.” Marsha walks over to greet them (fig. 19), and the theater managers introduces her, saying “She writes the film diary column in the Villager. Of course, she writes under the name Alice Vergängliche.” Carl, surprised, says “Alice Vergängliche? *You’re* Alice Vergängliche?” Because the film speaks of the social and aesthetic operations of the avant-garde—its exhibition venues, theater managers, filmmakers, and film critics, *Undesirable’s* visual and verbal construction is not specific to itself. More so than any of Land’s films which we have thus far examined, *Undesirables* explicitly foregrounds the sources of its characters, its settings, and its narrative conditions. Recognizing its intertexts, Land’s film comes to terms with the history of experimental cinema of which it is a part.

Historiographic metafiction pervades *Remedial Reading Comprehension* and *Undesirables*, re-inscribing the structure and sources of experimental cinematic movements within new, singular—albeit inherently relative—films by a single filmmaker. Furthermore, by offering tools and tests for the participation of the viewer, Land implores that we too “read” the films’s allusions to lyric, poetic, trance, and structural film.

## The Process of Pouring Red Paint

Land's *Undesirables* bridges the distance between the allusive characteristics of *Remedial Reading Comprehension* and the explicit, often biting or humorous, parodies of experimental film history. Literary theorist Margaret A. Rose necessitates within her theorization of parody the comic aspect of the intertextual exchange between forms of representation, between the original source of the parody and the parodic reinterpretation. Her conception of the term differs slightly from that of postmodern theorists like Linda Hutcheon and Fredric Jameson, who see parody as emblematic of the cultural politics of the period. Following in the path of Hutcheon, one can uncover a conception of parody that signifies "how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference."<sup>37</sup> But in generalizing parody through the adoption of various modes of intertextuality, Hutcheon and her followers distill from parodic modes their comic functions.<sup>38</sup> At the opposite end of the spectrum, Jameson makes a distinction between parody and pastiche:

"Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satirical impulse, devoid of laughter."<sup>39</sup>

Rose posits an alternative conception of parody more applicable to Land's films. She argues that parody be understood between the polarities inscribed by

---

<sup>37</sup> Rose, *Parody*, 93.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>39</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 17.

Hutcheon and Jameson, “as encompassing *both* the meta-fictional *and* the comic...”<sup>40</sup> As a result, I will seek to acknowledge Rose’s perspective on parody throughout my analysis of Land’s work. Like Rose’s writings, my articulation of parody is not without fault; the history, methods, and implications of parody are too vast to be addressed here. But taken this way, Land’s stylistic conscription of parody seeks to both ridicule and reinforce the aesthetics and politics of the American avant-garde. Land at once differentiates and reconstitutes himself and his adapted forms. In seeking to explore the parodic characteristics of his work, I hope to reveal within them the emergence of a hidden polemic, a more targeted quotation of other films, filmmakers, and film critics.

In films like *Remedial Reading Comprehension* one witnesses Land alluding to other filmmakers, but the filmmaker refrains from re-creating their films as explicit adaptation. Even in the first scene of *Undesirables*, the film draws upon the names of filmmakers and critics, but situates them within an entirely fictionalized setting where such characters engender their dialogue. Another scene within *Undesirables*, however, recreates Hollis Frampton’s *Critical Mass* (1971) through parodic refashioning. In Frampton’s original version, a young couple’s argument unravels against a blank, white wall (fig. 20). The film fetishizes the fragmentation and repetition of their dialogue, so that the soundtrack and the footage are composed as a “fugue.”<sup>41</sup> In Land’s parody, the camera adheres to a long take, oscillating back and forth between a young couple as they argue about a romantic affair (fig. 21). Rather than fragment the film,

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>41</sup> I borrow this term from Sitney’s description of the film. Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 418.



however, Land instructed the actors to repeat portions of their dialogue, mimicking the repetition within Frampton's original. A portion of the script reads as follows:

Young woman: What were you so busy doing? What were you so busy doing? What?  
Young man: I was just... I was just being interviewed. It was only an interview.  
Young woman: You know you could've called me. I was expecting you on Friday night.  
Young man: I'm sorry but I didn't have time. I just didn't have time. I couldn't get to a phone. It was a very spontaneous thing.  
[...]  
Young woman: You know what I can't understand is what you see in her. I mean you can't be attracted to her physically. It must be something else.  
Young man: It *is* something else. It is something else! It's the fact that she's brilliant! For one thing, she knows hell of a lot about Christian Metz. She's interviewed him for God's sake. She's read Barthes, Baudrillard, Lacan, Baudry, Saussure, Foucault, Derrida—some of them in French!  
Young woman: Are you trying to tell me that she has been lecturing you on semiotics and structuralism?  
Young man: Among other things, yes.  
Young woman: Oh, please. Don't tell me that you haven't been screwing her!  
Young man: So what difference does that make? I thought that we agreed to have an open relationship, Marsha.  
Young woman: You bastard! You have been screwing her so she would write about your films!  
[...]

Here, Land takes as the structure of his film an argument between two people.

The composition as well as the fragmentary nature of the dialogue alludes to Frampton's earlier film, but in this case, Land rewrites the script to induce a humorous reinterpretation of intellectual posturing. This scene parodies established, institutionally revered theoretical concepts and their authors while consciously employing said theories to produce an entirely new film. In other words, Land mocks Barthes, Baudrillard, Lacan, Baudry, Saussure, Foucault, and

Derrida only to recognize their prominence through an endorsement of their concepts, an investigation into structural linguistics, semiology, apparatus theory, etc. Land is subversive but only to a certain, laudatory degree.

The Russian Formalist Mikhail Bakhtin is careful to note the variabilities of such tension—between authors and between texts—when he writes,

When parody senses a fundamental resistance, a certain strength and depth to the parodied words of the other, the parody becomes complicated by hidden tones of polemic. Such parody already has a different sound to it. The parodied discourse rings out more actively, exerts a counterforce against the author's intentions. There takes place an internal dialogization of the parodistic discourse. Similar processes occur whenever the hidden polemic is coupled with a narrated story, and in general in all examples of the third type when there is a divergence in direction between the author's and the other person's aspirations.<sup>42</sup>

Bakhtin goes on to describe the “double-voiced” discourse as also “double-accented,” implying that both texts engender tones of indifference and animosity through their autonomous or polemical perspectives.<sup>43</sup> Land's *Undesirables* adapts the format of Frampton's fragmented fight not merely for the sake of appropriation; the film uses the tone of the heated debate between the two young persons to imply a polemical relation between Land and Frampton. Within this debate the absurdities of both films are revealed: Land's parody reveals the improvisational production of Frampton's fight as well as the scripted nonsense of its own adaptation, the highbrow listing of linguistic theorists and semioticians. In this regard, the hidden polemic within Land's parody is misleading. Indeed, *Undesirables* operates as biting commentary on *Critical Mass*, but its effects are

---

<sup>42</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 198. Quoted in Rose, *Parody*, 129.

<sup>43</sup> Bakhtin uses the word “dvogolosoye,” meaning “double-voiced”. Ibid., 230 f.

more productive than belittling. The film operates under a sense of “ironic affirmation,”<sup>44</sup> a perverse recapitulation of the film’s form and content.

P. Adams Sitney examines a shared affinity for irony throughout experimental film of the late 1970s and 1980s, classifying them under the genre of Menippean satires. As Sitney writes,

All the ideas proposed in Menippean satire are subject to irony; the very concept of a philosophical resolution becomes an occasion for parody. Fantasy and realism alternate or even coincide, more often than not with a concatenation of styles and perspectives. The Menippea frequently incorporates other genres and film-within-films.<sup>45</sup>

This genre appears in different forms throughout a history of American avant-garde cinema: while filmmakers like Yvonne Rainer and James Benning produced Menippean satires through “suggestive strings of aporias,” structural and lyric filmmakers like Frampton and Stan Brakhage composed their films as series of fragmented, autonomous units.<sup>46</sup> Land is often more explicit in his parodic montages, composing films about films that conjoin disparate conventions from many of the aforementioned filmmakers.

Take, for instance, Land’s 1975 film *Wide Anglo Saxon*. The film is composed of a series of typological allusions to both contemporaneous films and filmmakers and devotional texts like *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. But an “episode” within the film, a film-within-the-film entitled *Regrettable Redding Condescension*, parodies Hollis Frampton’s film from four years prior, (*nostalgia*). In (*nostalgia*), Frampton sets found family photographs on a hotplate

---

<sup>44</sup> I borrow this term from Marcel Duchamp. Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 411.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

so that we might watch them disintegrate in succession (fig. 22). As Frampton places a photograph, an anonymous voice (later identified as Michael Snow) describes the one that we about to see. Our memory of the description carries over for each with whatever subjective ability we have in maintaining it. As we review the photograph with preconceptions of justification or contradiction, the physical remains disintegrate. The metaphor of our own memory dissolves as we maintain our gaze of the burning photograph until it quite literally turns into a moving image. The fire often consumes the image from within, and as this illusory phenomenon of viewing takes hold, we recognize the distortion with which we are viewing Frampton's fragmented autobiography. Sitney describes the way Frampton uses language to further the notion of an incomprehensible narration of the displaced images:

In this way the correspondence between picture and description is postponed until the viewer makes the adjustment, which can be after several of the stills have gone by. This simple technique effectively unpacks the temporal category of the present in the film; the words anticipate the pictures, the pictures recall the words, so that as we look at the film we are induced to perform simultaneous acts: to imagine a photograph which would correspond to the description (and thereby to repeat again and again the recognition of the limitations of the pictorial imagination), to remember the earliest description and appreciate the irony with which it describes what we are seeing, and finally to experience, in the present, the disjunctive synchronicity.<sup>47</sup>

Frampton's narration forces the viewer to rely on his or her own memory in creating associations out of fragmented compositions. (*nostalgia*) attempts not to position itself in the present tense but rather to exhibit "a voluntary illusion, a deliberate invention of a pseudo-continuity to persuade us of the veracity of the

---

<sup>47</sup> Sitney, "Visionary Film," 378.

author's version of chronology."<sup>48</sup> If a linear conception of temporality is here subverted through its fragmentation, the mere act of the film's production is further satirized through Owen Land's trite humor.

*Regrettable Redding Condescension* puns not only Frampton's (*nostalgia*) but also Land's earlier and aforementioned *Remedial Reading Comprehension*. The maker of this new short film is Al Rutcurts, an anagram of "structural", mocking P. Adam Sitney's essay about film of the same name produced in the late 1960s.<sup>49</sup> Like Hollis Frampton's (*nostalgia*), Michael Snow's voice interjects within the film's soundtrack. He delivers a text reminiscent of (*nostalgia*):

Since 1966 I have been filming the process of pouring red paint on a wide variety of objects. A few weeks ago, I felt an urge to film another object being covered with red paint. What I believe I see recorded in that piece of film fills me with such fear, such utter dread and loathing that I think should never dare to make another film again. Here it is! Look at it! Do you see what I see?<sup>50</sup>

A portion of Frampton's original concludes with the same dramatic question:

Since then, I have enlarged this small section of my negative enormously. The grain of the film all but obliterates the features of the image. It is obscure. By any possible reckoning, it is hopelessly ambiguous. Nevertheless, what I believe I see recorded in that speck of film fills me with such fear, such utter dread and loathing that I think I shall never dare to make another photograph. Here it is! Look at it! Do you see what I see?

*Regrettable Redding Condescension* explicitly adapts (*nostalgia*) when a close-up image of a hot plate appears on screen. Rather than a series of vernacular photographs, however, Land pours red paint onto its surface (fig. 23). The paint fills the grooves of the labyrinth-like hot plate and, through its boiling, draws

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>49</sup> Sitney, "Structural Film," 327.

<sup>50</sup> Transcribed in Dika, "'Wide Anglo Saxon,'" 235.

abstract compositions as traces of images. Like the photographs of (*nostalgia*), the red paint of *Regrettable Redding Condescension* is to be “read” in the face of its deterioration. In this farcical allusion lies the fulfillment of Land’s wit: while *Remedial Reading Comprehension* is “to-be-read,” *Regrettable Redding Condescension* is “to-be-red.”<sup>51</sup>

As a tool for the construction of parody, word-play allows Land to construe the distance between the signified and the allusive signifier. The examples are endless and will be divulged in further detail in Chapter Two, but another notable instance appears at the end of the *Wide Anglo Saxon*, when an extreme close-up records the pouring of red paint on a woman’s face (fig. 24). Furthermore, in construing our enunciation of “red,” we can say the woman has been “effaced.” In other words, her image is erased, and the attention given to the texture of the paint and the material surface of the film recalls the aesthetic concerns of structural filmmakers. But “effacement” describes also Land’s technique through jokes and wit. As Freud later describes in *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, “Jokes, even if the thought contained in them in non-tendentious, and thus only serves theoretical intellectual interests, are in fact never non-tendentious. [...] A joke is a psychical factor possessed of power: its weight, thrown into one scale or the other, can be decisive.”<sup>52</sup> The seemingly absurd leaps between temporal, aesthetic, and even linguistic parameters must be made for the allusions to be realized, yet they often arrive with a tone of critical superiority. Even if “condescension” within *Regrettable Redding Condescension*

---

<sup>51</sup> Connor, “Adaptation in Owen Land,” 166.

<sup>52</sup> Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, 85.

and “effacement” within *Wide Anglo Saxon* reveal any semblance of disdain for the structural filmmakers with which Land is situated, the filmmaker’s parodic reinterpretation of their forms always necessarily suggests their historical significance.

*Regrettable Redding Condescension* produces disjunctive visions of traditional temporalities or filmic forms through non-linear narratives and comedic word play. But whereas Frampton’s (*nostalgia*) historicizes film through vernacular photographs, Land’s *Regrettable Redding Condescension*, an adaptation of (*nostalgia*), is less a “reprise of the past” than a parodic representation.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the film critiques (*nostalgia*)’s token close-up of disintegrating vernacular photographs by substituting the images with a bucket of red paint. But Land’s adaptation maintains not a destructive<sup>54</sup> but a constructive stance in the affirmation of Frampton’s canonical career. Land underscores the didacticism of parody in his meta-commentary on Frampton and, broadly, the American avant-garde; he utilizes the genre not just as a means of relativism but as a tool critical of avant-garde film’s conventions yet wholly reverent toward those notable figures and films within the history of experimental cinema.

---

<sup>53</sup> Hutcheon, “The Politics of Parody,” 91.

<sup>54</sup> Roland Barthes referred to parody as “l’ironie au travail” and classified the genre, along with irony, among the *écriture classique*, a chronological and stylistic antithesis of *écriture moderne*: “it proclaims itself a parody and thereby identifies its origins and paternity, the authority on which its utterances are based, the voice which gives it unity.” See Rose, *Parody//meta-fiction*, 52; Barthes, *S/Z*, 21, 42, 59, and 87. Cited in Hannoosh, “The Reflexive Function of Parody,” 116.

Moreover, Michele Hannoosh argues that “parody must even allow for a critique of itself such as it has performed on the original...”<sup>55</sup> Parodic reflexivity, therefore, positions the parody as a target susceptible to being criticized, rewritten, and ultimately parodied. Sitney discloses Land’s parodic reflexivity through an examination of *Remedial Reading Comprehension* and its parasitic endeavor:

*Remedial Reading Comprehension* is itself repeated and varied: a dream, a class, a film, an advertisement, the reading of a text. It is re-medial, and involved with a new origin and a new artist, to undo the patterns of aberration already inscribed in dreams, schools, films, advertisements, tests, and texts. [...] The realm depicted here is parasitic, continually shifting and displacing images taken from all that has already been made, including art, even the art of the “same” film-maker.<sup>56</sup>

Sitney acknowledges the repetition of filmic elements within *Remedial Reading Comprehension* and throughout Land’s oeuvre. While his films may be easily dismissed as satirical play, their critical and creative agency not only rewrite other films but also re-inscribe within themselves earlier works by Land. We might see a hint of personal subjectivity, the incessant incompleteness of the self, in the consistent revision of his own works. Land’s tendency to allude to his own films is, moreover, coupled by his interests in revising them. The issue of filmic revision occurs most notably in *Film in Which...*, *What’s Wrong with This Picture?* 1 and 2 (1971 and 1972, respectively) and *Institutional Quality*. On the other hand, some of Land’s projected were completed. These “failed” series

---

<sup>55</sup> Hannoosh provides a divergent article within a footnote, showing how the original source of the parodic adaptation need not always be the target of the parody: “In such cases, the original is a vehicle for parodying or satirizing a different target, usually something contemporary. *Don Quixote*, for example, parodies the romances of chivalry (among other forms).” Hannoosh, “The Reflexive Function of Parody,” 114

<sup>56</sup> Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 376.



include *No Sir, Orison* (1975), *Thank You Jesus, for the Eternal Present* (1973), and *Baroque Slippages* (1969). In constantly revising and alluding to his own films, Land presents an underlying continuity within his works that is only troubled by their perceived inadequacy, their compulsion to change.<sup>57</sup>

As I contend, parody evolves as the fundamental method of production within Land's films. Each work takes as its source a history of avant-garde film as well as specific films, filmmakers, and film critics within said history. Land's parodies mock and caricature, but as viewers, we must not relegate such works to the level of empty mimicry. Rather, in calling attention to the absurdities of structural film's methods and motifs, Land pays homage to and affirms the esteemed status of the films. He ultimately advances each film through quotation and, by doing so, reinstates them into a canonical history of experimental cinema.

---

<sup>57</sup> Sitney, "Landow's Wit," 214-215.

## Chapter Two: Semantic Antics

After *Regrettable Redding Condescension* and at the conclusion of *Wide Anglo Saxon*, the camera pans back-and-forth along the edge of a bed in which a woman lies asleep (fig. 25). Like the sleeping Maya Deren look-alike at the beginning of *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, the darkness of the underexposed profilmic scene renders her image as well as the source of her waking utterance nearly indiscernible. “Oh! It was a dream,” echoes a voice that we assume belongs to the woman. She awakens from her slumber and mutters to herself this private revelation, a statement of both surprise and reassurance.

Freud recognizes a slight variation of this enunciation when, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he writes “this is only a dream” [“Das ist ja nur ein Traum”].<sup>58</sup> As Freud describes, the phrase appears within every dream, a habitual signifier of the artificiality of an unconscious reality. Freud recognizes “this is only a dream” as a signifier of “secondary revision,” including also the “displacement of psychical intensities,” “considerations of representability,” and “condensation” in order to divulge the architecture of the dream, the translation of latent thoughts into manifest, unconscious visualizations.

*Wide Anglo Saxon* and *Remedial Reading Comprehension* foreground not only the latent visualizations of a woman’s dream but the humor in her absurd visions. In effect, both films draw a connection between Freud’s theories of “dream-work” and “joke-work.” As Freud asserts in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, “If my dreams seem amusing, that is not on my account, but on the

---

<sup>58</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 5:490. I draw here from Lippit, “Revisionary Cinema,” 150.

account of the peculiar psychological conditions under which dreams are constructed; and the fact is intimately connected with the theory of joke and the comic.”<sup>59</sup> While the space between the dream and the joke may be small, Freud’s theory on the latter assists in enlightening the source of humor within Land’s parodic films. This chapter will focus loosely on Land’s *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?* (1977-79), which, as its title suggests, parodies Freud’s text through the adoption of its jokes and psychical support. Moreover, *On the Marriage Broker Joke* emblemizes the role of humor throughout Land’s oeuvre; parodic exaggeration reveals the humorous absurdities of filmic convention. In other words, we laugh at Land’s films not to ridicule the sources of his parodies but to admire their familiarity, their resilience as the butt of the joke.

### Filmmaker as *Schadchen*

In the second chapter of *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud introduces his oft-cited marriage broker joke, in which the *schadchen*, or Jewish marriage broker, deceives the suitor through a jocular “application of double meaning with displacement.”<sup>60</sup> Both characters decide upon a contractual

---

<sup>59</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 405. Freud also writes in *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, “there is an intimate connection between all mental happenings.” See Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation*, 151.

<sup>60</sup> Freud, *Wit and its Relation*, 70. Jokes involving the *schadchen* are only a few among numerous Jewish-related jokes collected by Freud in his writing of *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*. As Freud’s pupil, the psychoanalyst Theodore Reik recounts, Freud’s Jewish jokes always operated within his texts not as mere play but under the service of specialized knowledge: “It was as if he brought the joke forward as an example of how

agreement suffused with devastating—albeit definitively humorous—word play.

The dialogue between the *schadchen* and the suitor is as follows:

The “*schadchen*” had assured the suitor that the father of the girl was no longer living. After the engagement had been announced the news leaked out that the father was still living and serving a sentence in prison. The suitor reproached the agent for deceiving him. “Well,” said the latter, “what did I tell you? Do you call that living?”<sup>61</sup>

Freud’s joke abuses the double meaning of the word “living.” The displacement technique emerges through the avoidance of its common usage—an antonym of “death.” The *schadchen* uses the word “living” instead in a colloquial sense, degrading the living conditions of the prison and, therefore, dismissing the liveliness of the father of the prospective bride. Through a “characteristic admixture of mendacious impudence and repartee,”<sup>62</sup> as Freud describes, the *schadchen* emblemizes the structure of the joke and the function of its wit.

It may come as no surprise, then, to find Freud’s marriage broker joke as the subject of Owen Land’s *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?* (1977-79).<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the title offers the source of the parodic re-adaptation, but Land’s film features two other variations of the joke within

---

wisdom is expressed in wit.” See Reik, *The Search Within*. 1956. Cited in Billig, “Freud and the Hidden Secrets of Jokes,” 142.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>63</sup> As Land recalls, “The film came about because Carmen Vigil recommended that I read *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* because he thought that what Freud was describing were things that occurred in some of my other films. So I started reading the book and I was struck by the fact that Freud keeps citing marriage broker jokes. They’re the only jokes that he uses as examples, and they’re bad jokes! Freud didn’t have any good material. He would have bombed in Las Vegas.” Land and Webber, *Two Films by Owen Land*, 108.

Freud's text. Each parody narrates still the tendentious meeting between the suitor, the *schadchen*, and the prospective bride. In the film's first adaptation of the marriage broker joke, the suitor arrives at his meeting with the marriage broker and the prospective bride. He steps into frame, where a close-up shot of his face evinces his immediate bewilderment (fig. 26). Before him, in a darkened room, the bride and the broker dance under a spotlight (fig. 27). The couple swings together as their silhouetted forms confuse shadow with body. As the suitor begins to narrate his experience, the film flashes between close-up shots of the suitor and abstracted compositions of the dancing couple. These images alternate with such rapidity that the two parties become superimposed; the bride and the broker appear to dance within the space of the suitor's face as he extradiegetically narrates the event:

By mistake, I arrived early at the place where the marriage broker had arranged the meeting. He said he had briefly met the prospective bride's family, but he had never met the prospective bride. When I opened the door, I heard music and then I saw the marriage broker and the prospective bride dancing together like they had known each other a long time. So obviously, the marriage broker lied to me. Why? Was he involved in a plot with the prospective bride? Why did she dance with him so lasciviously? Is she really a gold digger? And is the marriage broker merely some kind of a pander? I'll never trust another marriage broker.

Regardless of the animosity with which the suitor exits the scene, the distrust he subsequently carries for the marriage broker must be translated into the comedic function of the film. Land's *On the Marriage Broker Joke* dictates the sophistic interests of the marriage broker in much the same way as Freud's text, positioning the *schadchen* as its maker and marrying within the film two oppositional sects:

Christian hermeneutics and Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>64</sup> This bond, in effect, delivers the punchline within Land's film-as-joke.

*On the Marriage Broker Joke* begins abruptly with the repeating sound of an anonymous woman's orgasm. Although her face is blanketed in darkness, one can make out the slight illumination of her mouth (fig. 28), which remains centered within the space of the frame as an allusion to Andy Warhol's *Blow Job* (1964) (fig. 29). The camera prohibits a visualization of the sexual act implied in the orgasm, yet the viewer remains attentive to the singular gesture. Layered atop her image in bold, white text, the word "FOCUS" appears on screen (fig. 30). By projecting the command atop the woman's sexual climax, Land demands also the viewer's attention—his or her concentration of physical and psychical energy. Only in the release of this energy, Freud contends, will the viewer find pleasure through laughter.<sup>65</sup>

When Land syncs the sound of the woman's orgasm with the chant of a church choir, the filmmaker not only equates the sexual and spiritual human psyche but foreshadows an ensuing series of parodies of literary and theological texts. *On the Marriage Broker Joke* includes allusions to or quotations of three primary texts: the preface to the twelfth edition of Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*; John Milton's *Comus (A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634)*; and Freud's *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. Superimposed over the word "FOCUS,"

---

<sup>64</sup> Cite Sitney, "Landow's Wit," 215.

<sup>65</sup> Freud argues that tendentious jokes "are able to release pleasure even from sources that have undergone repression." Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, 185.

Underhill's text advances vertically across the screen (fig. 31). A portion of

Land's quotation reads,

Whilst we are less eager than our predecessors to dismiss all accounts of abnormal experience as the fruit of superstition or disease, no responsible student now identifies the mystic and the ecstatic; or looks upon visionary and other "extraordinary phenomena" as either guaranteeing or discrediting the witness of the mystical saints. Even the remorseless explorations and destructive criticisms of the psycho-analytic school are now seen to have effected a useful work; throwing into relief the genuine spiritual activities of the psyche, while explaining in a naturalistic sense some of their less fortunate psycho-physical accompaniments.<sup>66</sup>

Underhill's passage permits a study of mysticism that transcends the typical disciplinary boundaries of psychology, theology, and symbolism. Featured within *On the Marriage Broker*, Land reveals, "Underhill discredits the Freudian view of mysticism, while damning it with faint praise."<sup>67</sup> What the author calls the "remorseless explorations and destructive criticism" of Freud and his peers, however, offers productive reassurance the visions, desires, and dreams of the psyche. For the purposes of this essay, and for the application of Land's humor, the film's layering of sex and spirituality contrasts the social order that arises in the following scene.

An exhortation of Christian spirituality, delivered stoically from John Milton (played by Keith Anderson) in period puritan costume, follows Underhill's text. Milton, centered within a medium shot and placed before a solid white background, faces square into the space of the viewer (fig. 32). Like Underhill's text, Milton's lines must be received with a hint of irony; Land accentuates their curious but subtle mixture of sexuality and theology through an exaggerated,

---

<sup>66</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, vii.

<sup>67</sup> Land and Webber, *Two Films by Owen Land*, 110.

performative reading: “How charming is divine philosophy! / Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose, / But musical as is Apollo’s lute / And a perpetual feast of nectar’d sweets / Where no crude surfeit reigns.”<sup>68</sup> The comedy of this scene emerges in a broader contextual analysis of Milton’s lines from the Masque *Comus*. Surely, as P. Adams Sitney shows, Land must be familiar with the text, which was written for the Edgerton family in 1634 and performed by one of their sons, a nine-year-old boy against his older brother’s celebration of their sister’s chastity. The older brother follows in a poetic defense of her youthful purity: “But when lust / By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk, / But most by lewd and lavish act of sin, / Lets in defilement to the inward parts, / The soul grows clotted by contagion, / Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose / The divine property of her first being.”<sup>69</sup> Before concluding with an expression of his admiration for theology, the younger brother continues to divulge the sensuality of the female body. How charming too that Milton indicates his aptitude for play and wit through a description of the dream-like qualities of sex, the mysticism of “unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk.” Underhill and Milton play with the dichotomy between uncontrollable, individual sexual desires and the social laws or religious didactics. Land prefaces Freud’s marriage broker joke with a joke on Freud’s other projects, overtly psychoanalytic in nature. This joke calls attention

---

<sup>68</sup> In a footnote to his transcription of the film, Land writes: “Milton says in five words what Evelyn Underhills needs a long, over-wrought paragraph to say.” See Land, *Two Films by Owen Land*, 50.

<sup>69</sup> Milton, *The Complete Poems of John Milton*, 137; 463-69. Quoted in Sitney, Landow’s Wit,” 216.



to the absurdities of sex and social control, showing how neither is autonomous from the other.

Following his oration, Milton transforms into a “modern Milquetoast of a poetaster”<sup>70</sup> (played by the avant-garde filmmaker Morgan Fisher) (fig. 33) who delivers a poem as an ode to film’s sprocket holes:

There is no motion in a motion picture, / Only the projector moves the strip, / Pulled along by wheels with sprockets, / The protruding teeth to get a grip. / The teeth fit into holes on the border, / Finely sculpted panels of light, / They always line up in perfect order, / Like stars upon the clearest night. / In Rochester, some inspired bards, / Working in the dark like moles, / Relieve by occasional games of cards, / Invented the name sprocket holes. / The importance of holes is no delusion, / To them we’ll always be the thrall, / For providing us with all the illusion of movement, / On a flat white wall.”

Fisher appears later in the film to divulge the structure of the narrative, but he is filmed here, awkwardly reading his lines to situate the very irony of the film-viewing process. Through Fisher’s catchy poem, we are reminded of the illusion of motion pictures. His poem points to the material construction of the film strip, which is a series of developed stills pulled through a projector with the assistance of sprocket holes. Their quick transfer through light provides the image upon the screen. Therefore, when faced with the falsity of that object of veneration, the comedy of our viewing experience urges us to laugh at our own entrapment. But something more emerges from Fisher’s involvement with the film: Land provides his own spiritual text in addition to those previously parodied. Fisher’s poem, which borders on romantic appeal and religious testament, parodies not a specific spiritual or religious text, but the very genre of such doctrines.

---

<sup>70</sup> Sitney, “Landow’s Wit,” 214.

### Textual Corruption

Two pandas seated in a room decorated with various black and white patterns quickly assume the role of the filmmaker (fig. 34). The absurd situation grows even more absurd in the recognition of their being humans in panda costumes. As they start to discuss their plans for a “game” to play (perhaps they are representative of the “inspired bards” from Fisher’s poem), they decide to first share marriage broker jokes, then to pretend to be avant-garde filmmakers making films about said jokes. In exaggerated voices, they converse:

First Panda: What’s a “structural film”?

Second Panda: That’s easy, everybody knows what a structural film is. It’s when engineers design an aeroplane, or a bridge, and they build a model to find out if it will fall apart too soon. The film shows where all the stresses are.

First Panda: Okay, I’m ready. My film is going to be introduced by a fake panda and it’s going to be about Japanese salted plums, among other things.

Second Panda: Among other things? What do salted plums have to do with marriage broker jokes? I don’t see how you can combine those two things alone without being too confusing.

First Panda: Just leave it to me. [...]

Like the second panda, the viewer struggles to comprehend the feasibility of an avant-garde film about salted plums. Reluctantly, however, we oblige; we watch as a new film begins and a little person emerges from within an artificial jungle to motion its start with a clapperboard. After the little person exits the scene, a panda steps forward to address the viewer: “There is a company in Japan that sells Umeboshi plums...” According to the panda, the Japanese company stages a new marketing campaign for their plums, which entails renaming and redesigning the brand. The decision is made to name the plums “Marriage Broker Brand Plums”

and to trademark the brand with the image of the suitor, the marriage broker, and the prospective bride. After its introduction, the panda proceeds to carry in a projection screen, to which the camera zooms and a new film—another film-within-the-film—begins.

A medium shot frames a Japanese man—here characterized as a brand executive—in a suit and tie (fig. 35). He is seated before a white wall with a can of Marriage Broker Brand Plums on the table before him. The brand executive begins to describe the varying sizes of jars that the company will offer, yet because he glances off screen intermittently to read his lines, he presents himself feebly before the camera. “Now all that needs to be decided,” states the brand executive, “is the number of jar sizes which we will offer. I say small, extra-small, medium, large, and extra-large.” Following his proposition, a different, non-diegetic voice emerges within the film to join the conversation. The brand executive acknowledges the space of the viewer as the source of the voice, the presence of a second brand executive. This voice, more confident in his choice of possible plum jars, offers another sequence of sizes: “No. There should be small, large-small, small-large, large, extra-large, and jumbo.” The first executive interrupts, retorting “but you left out medium.” Their debate continues, testing the patience of the viewer through an absurd tautology concerning the production of a medium-sized plum jar.

Once again, Land’s characteristic wit emerges through the overly complicated construction of a pun on “medium-specificity”. Neither brand executive can agree on a name for what is to be the medium-sized jar of salted

plums. They are, quite literally, not specific about their medium. Land's decision to illustrate this pivotal twentieth-century aesthetic debate not in the context of aesthetics but through a meeting of marketing executives proves the degree to which inside-joking structures the content of *On the Marriage Broker Joke*. This point is further elaborated through an association of Milton's poetic oration from earlier in the film. As J.D. Connor shows, Milton's "'divine philosophy' gives way to doggerel."<sup>71</sup> When Milton recites, "a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets/Where no crude surfeit reigns," the dialogue regarding the salted plums appears to be a comedic adaptation, where no crude medium size reigns.

If this concludes the first panda's avant-garde film, the viewer is now fully aware of the pervasive wit within *On the Marriage Broker Joke*. Various puns and instances of word-play form the majority of the film's comedic moments, though some of the most absurd have yet to be expounded. This task is left to the "modern milquetoast," who returns after the first marriage broker joke to teach the origin of the word "panda" and its relation to the marriage broker triad. Fisher stands adjacent to a green chalkboard with the words "marriage broker," "panda," and "pander" listed and diagrammed though relative arrows (fig. 36). He looks out to the viewer, and states:

Of the many theories that have been proposed there are few which, in my opinion, merit serious consideration. Of the more credible hypotheses, the following stand out. The marriage broker is merely a pander, and the so-called prospective brides are in fact prostitutes. Textual corruption has in some versions changed the word pander to panda—p.a.n.d.a.

---

<sup>71</sup> Connor, "Adaptation in Owen Land," 169.

Fisher points toward each letter to accentuate the difference in spelling between “pander” and “panda.” He recognizes their similarity, however, and offers the issue of “textual corruption”; errors of interpretation, or slippages of meaning, abound within the film’s text.

In addition to the wordplay relating pander to panda, Land’s persistent witticism draws the comedic operations of his filmmaking. As we have seen in *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, the enunciation of “I, Madge” forces the association of “image.” Likewise, the film of which *Regrettable Redding* *Condescension* is a part, *Wide Anglo Saxon*, is a play on the phrases “Wide Angle” and “White Anglo Saxon.” The actual origin of the title, however, suggests the spontaneity of Land’s quick wit; as the filmmaker recalls in an interview with Mark Webber, the title was discovered in 1973 while Land was driving with his soundman for *A Film of Their 1973 Spring Tour Commissioned by Christian World Liberation Front of Berkeley, California* (1974).<sup>72</sup> Land misheard his soundman, whose heavy southern drawl construed “white” as “wod.” Land, therefore, heard something more like “Wide Anglo Saxon” in place of “White Anglo Saxon.” Word associations such as these litter Land’s films, and their function is best described through Freud’s writings on jokes and wit, which reveal the function of the word- or form-technique in which language is expressed in playful forms and processes.<sup>73</sup> What Freud considers “*the universal characteristic*” within all jokes is the process of condensation, where a word

---

<sup>72</sup> Land and Webber, *Two Films by Owen Land*, 105.

<sup>73</sup> Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, 9.

within the joke is substituted with multiple meanings.<sup>74</sup> First, the word must remain without association. A second iteration (whether it be restated within the joke or whether the recipient of the joke rehashes the phrase in her mind) reveals the word fragmented; its syllables and new associations provide an entirely different meaning and enlighten within the reader a comedic reaction. When this equation is applied to film, the relation between the text or dialogue and its multiple meaning conjures its humor.

Like *Wide Anglo Saxon* and *On the Marriage Broker Joke*, Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic-Cinéma* (1926) flirts with textual corruptions and plays with the sexually explicit interpretations of various words or phrases. In Duchamp's film, a series of concentric circles rest atop a rotating disc (fig. 37). The camera, positioned directly above the spinning circles, provide the illusion of a spiraling cone in a three-dimensional space. The film cuts between shots of concentric circles and discs with spiraling words. The manifestations of words form phrases and subsequently exploit Duchamp's ingenuity for word-play. Apart from the film's title—an anagram of “cinema”—the spirals of text read explicit insinuations: “The child who nurses is a sucker of hot flesh and does not like the cauliflower of the hot glass-house. / If I give you a penny, will you give me a pair of scissors? / Incest or family passion, in blows too drawn out. / Have you ever put the marrow of the sword into the stove of the loved one?”<sup>75</sup> These short

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 21. Freud uses the term “condensation” to describe also “that process of the dream work by which many dream thoughts can be consolidated into a single image.” See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 313.

<sup>75</sup> Translations from Duchamp's French text are found in Martin, “Anémic Cinéma,” 53-60. The original French sentences appear as follows: “L'enfant qui tête est un souffleur de chair chaude et n'aime pas le chou-fleur de serre chaude.” “Si je te donne un sou, me

phrases are small and unassuming in their language, but their associations arouse sexuality and myth as methods of shock. Both Duchamp and Land employ the construction and reconstruction of words and phrases for the fragmentation of the film. As Katrina Martin writes,

Throughout *Anémic-Cinéma* is this ambivalent perspective present at once in the anagram, the mirror, the pun, and the revolving spiral. In the tightly wound phrases, horizontal consonance and vertical dissonance create a unique set of linguistic chords which move upon each other in time like the motion of the spiral. Each component part of the work is so thoroughly exploited that its linearity explodes and it is freed to operate dynamically to create a multi-dimensionality within which reverberates an elusive infinity.<sup>76</sup>

Martin's description of *Anémic-Cinéma* describes the way in which words and phrases move in real time to the delight of the viewer. Their linguistic components rearrange and re-emerge in an ever-adaptive game of interpretation. Land is similarly invested in the aesthetic, social, and humorous possibilities of words and phrases. His films are an accumulation of elusive (and allusive) word-associations that serve to complicate the interpretation of his films's meanings.

The marriage broker joke appears again, albeit in a different form, near the end of Land's *On the Marriage Broker Joke*. This time, the comical academic poet, standing before the chalkboard and dressed in a three-piece suit, narrates the construction of the scene and its implied comical effect (fig. 38). His droll tone accentuates the dialectic of the situation, between the tragedy of the marriage proposition and the comedy of its jocular displacement. The academic poet explains the situation: "I am pleased with your choice," says the suitor. "She is

---

donneras tu une paire de ciseaux?" "Inceste ou passion de famille, à coups trop tirés."  
"Avez vous déjà mis la moëlle de l'épée dans le poêle de l'aimée?"

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 60.

beautiful and cultured.’ ‘That’s true,’ says the marriage broker, ‘but she is not my choice. This one is already married. It is her impoverished, sick, widowed mother whom I have chosen for you.’” A laugh-track layers the conclusion of the academic poet’s narration before the audio of his explanation is repeated and his image replaced with a filmic rendition of the joke. The image cuts to two men (fig. 39), presumably the marriage broker and the suitor, engaged in conversation as we hear, again, “‘I am pleased with your choice,’ says the suitor.” Beyond them, in a red dress within a dark, indeterminable room, stands the bride. As viewers, we anticipate the conclusion of the joke: the young woman in the red dress steps towards the camera before proceeding out of frame. Her mother, meanwhile, emerges from behind her to the displeasure of the suitor. The film focuses upon the elderly woman (fig. 40)—merely a man in drag—before cutting to another scene.

The poet offers us a lesson on the film’s multiple interpretations and the allegorical relation between the marriage broker, the suitor, and the prospective bride. Deconstructing the variations of the panda and the marriage broker joke, he reveals:

two opposing schools have developed. One claims that the panda referred to is *Ailurus fulgens*, the himalayan panda, having the face marked with white and a long bushy tail marked with pale rings. The other school insists that the panda referred to is *Ailuropoda melanoleuca*, of Tibet and southern China, which is white with black limbs, shoulders, and ears and with a black ring around each eye. Another interpretation has it that the entire situation is in fact really an allegory. The marriage broker represents God, the suitor is Christ, and the prospective bride is fallen humanity, undeserving of the redemption which Christ offers it through the grace of God but willing to put its faith in the ability of the marriage broker to affect a match.



By situating the triad of the marriage broker joke—the suitor, the broker, and the prospective bride—as an allegory for Christ, God, and fallen humanity, the poet offers an interpretation of the narrative which parallels that of the viewing experience, a connection between the viewer, the film, and the filmmaker.<sup>77</sup> But the issue of the failed marriage proposal persists; the humor of the marriage broker joke is displaced by the tragedy of the arrangement and the aggression of the suitor. This question is resolved in the final sequence of *On the Marriage Broker Joke*, when we watch as a woman wakes from her bed. From outside the scene, a voice recites lines from a letter written by Mrs. Jonathan Edwards: “Last night was the sweetest night I ever had in my life. I never before, for so long a time together, enjoyed so much of the light and rest and sweetness of heaven in my soul.”<sup>78</sup> Superimposed over the image of the woman is the text transcribed in small, capital letters (fig. 41). Simultaneously, another voice appears, presumed to be that of the woman in bed. She recites a passage adapted from Freud’s *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* in which Freud (and Land) divulges the significance of the marriage broker jokes. As she states,

in the marriage broker jokes [veiled aggression] is directed against all the parties involved in the betrothal—the suitor, the prospective bride, and her parents. The object of attack by wit may equally well be institutions, persons, in so far as they may act as agents of these, moral or religious precepts, or even philosophies of life which enjoy so much respect that

---

<sup>77</sup> Arthur, “Joker at Play in a Sea of Holes,” 44.

<sup>78</sup> Owen Land accounts for the inclusion of this text, writing: “This text is by Mrs. Jonathan Edwards, wife of the American Puritan theologian who lived from 1702 to 1758, and wrote books with long titles, e.g. *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*.” Land and Webber, *Two Films by Owen Land*, 73. Edwards’s text is quoted in James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

they can be challenged in no other way than under the guise of a witticism, and one veiled by a façade at that.<sup>79</sup>

The resultant discord from the failed marriage arrangement, as Freud argues here, need not only be directed at the triad immediately involved in the joke. Rather, the “veiled aggression” may point to larger, more indirect institutions or ideologies (i.e. the institution of marriage, the *schadchen* as a religious figure, etc.). Yet because of their social and cultural solidity, such institutions are only to be critiqued through tendentious play, a method of jocular adaptation which seeks to veil the cruelty in its banter.

There is an upside to all of this, however. Land inserts his own commentary on the marriage broker jokes following his quotation of Freud. As the woman in bed states,

What these stories wish to indicate is that the suitor really makes himself ridiculous when he collects together so sedulously the individual charms of the prospective bride which are transient after all, and when he forgets at the same time that he must be prepared to take as his wife a human being with inevitable faults.

Like the suitor, Land recognizes the faults, or holes, or textual corruptions within the marriage broker jokes and within his films. He admits to his own comic infidelity in the construction of a film built upon the displacement of original texts, and he proliferates his use of puns in order to mask the texts’s critical interpretations.

Only at the conclusion of *On the Marriage Broker Joke* does Land answer the question within the film’s title: can the avant-garde artist be whole? According to the marriage broker jokes within the film, the avant-garde artist will

---

<sup>79</sup> Quoted from Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, 160-161.

be replete with faults, holes, and corruptions. But it may be possible, as the academic poet recites toward the beginning of the film, for the avant-garde artist to be “sprocket-holed.”<sup>80</sup>

Land’s humor emerges not only through word play—through double meaning and displacement—but through the parody of the foundational theory behind humor and word play. As viewers, we find in *On the Marriage Broker Joke* an awareness on behalf of Land to the absurd possibilities of jokes on film. In addition to the parodic techniques outline in Chapter One, jokes ridicule, mock, and jest the incongruities of experimental filmmaking. There is an irony in each joke, however, that reaffirms the target of its ridicule. Like the pandas in *On the Marriage Broker Joke*, filmmaking is but a game drawn out by salted plums and (sprocket) holes.

---

<sup>80</sup> Sitney, “Landow’s Wit,” 220. Sitney examines this pun as it quadrupled throughout *On the Marriage Broker Joke*. As Sitney writes, “Can the avant-garde filmmaker unite and make a holistic vision of sexual ecstasy and the mystical insight in *Wide Anglo Saxon*?”

### Chapter Three: Sex, Self, *Dialogues*

Building upon P. Adams Sitney's observation that mythopoeia<sup>81</sup> and autobiography are central "subjects" to the works of avant-garde filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>82</sup> Land applies traces of his own subjectivity to the perversion of sexual and spiritual humor within his last film, *Dialogues* (2007-2009). The two-hour film with fifty short episodes was released shortly before his death in 2011. "It was self-analysis," says Land in an interview a year before his passing, "when you get old, you think about writing your autobiography."<sup>83</sup> Far from any conventional autobiography, however, Land's *Bildungsroman* retells a period of the filmmaker's life from 1984 to 1985, when he returned to Los Angeles following a grant-funded trip to Japan. This formative period spent in Tokyo, Fukuoka, and Okinawa was his 'midlife un-crisis': "He had just turned forty. He left his American girlfriend, an artist and part-time stripper, and met a Japanese woman, who was a bar hostess and part-time stripper. It was a time for much soul searching about his relationships with women (and with strippers)."<sup>84</sup>

While *Dialogues* is the first explicitly autobiographical film within Land's career, basing its events off the filmmaker's own personal experiences, such a classification should be taken lightly. Contrary to convention, Land utilizes autobiography as a space in which truth and fiction abound,<sup>85</sup> in which mythopoeic allusions commingle with sexual fantasies in order to construe the

---

<sup>81</sup> As Parker Tyler argues, Hollywood is "a sort of mundane Olympia where men and women led the 'ideal' lives of gods and goddesses." See Tyler, *Underground Film*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Sitney, *The Avant-Garde Film*,

<sup>83</sup> Pfeffer, "Interview with Owen Land," 43.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

reality of actual events. Myth, sex, and self, therefore, determine the disparate narratives of the film.

The most explicitly parodic and humorous film within Land's oeuvre, *Dialogues* represents the apotheosis of an absurd, undesirable career. This chapter begins with an examination of the libidinous body as the site on which each episode's system of parody and allusion converge. Although *Dialogues* forgoes the illicit physical contact featured within its semi-pornographic precedents, the film's erotic dialogue borders pornographic foreplay. Apart from the artificiality of its production—its amateur aesthetics and unconvincing acting—the project enlightens a discussion around sexual difference within Land's films.

Finally, this chapter provides also consideration of the role of autobiography in Land's final film before his death in 2011. Whether autobiography befits the film depends upon the translation of the filmmaker's personal and aesthetic tendencies, the medium's inherent untranslatability, and the auteur's manner of reconciliation. Coupled with multiple variations of sexual "come-ons," *Dialogues* exposes Land's interest in self-parody and self-embodiment.

### Deconstructing Libido

"How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is thy love than wine! And the smell of thine ointments than all spices!" *Dialogues* begins not with a line from Genesis but with this quote from Solomon, asserting Land's religious tendencies through an expressive reverence for female sexuality. As

Land notes in an interview with Susanne Pfeffer, “my insight was that the female body was the Creator’s greatest creation.”<sup>86</sup> Land continues, corroborating his claim with an allusion to one of his many religious associations, writing, “in Tantric yoga, the female Shakti is the embodiment of all the gods.”<sup>87</sup> Land’s reverence for female sexuality, however, borders on a show of bodily irreverence; depictions of human sexuality (specifically to illustrate the filmmaker’s and female libido) pervade the entirety of the film through humorous yet caustic narratives. Most episodes function as short stories involving unhindered sexual relations. All but one of the episodes which feature Land include also a female character engaged in a sexual contract (with Land). Even in the exception to this rule, which appears at the beginning of the film, we find a notable assertion regarding the project’s affinity for sexual difference. The film begins with Land (Trip Davis) standing alone against a gray background (fig. 42). Dressed in a black shirt and a black leather jacket, his image stipulates the rigidity of the interview (one question, one answer). This is not to suggest, however, that his answers are any less explicit. In fact, each response sustains the film’s odd ambiguity. Alluding to P. Adams Sitney’s remark in *Modernist Montage* that Land’s films “locate the axis of truth at the point of maximal absurdity,”<sup>88</sup> the first interviewer asks, “Critic Wilbur Widebody says that your films locate the axis of truth. Where is the axis of truth?” Land answers, reinforcing his aptitude for puns and wordplay: “Well, the axis of truth is between the wheels of

---

<sup>86</sup> Pfeffer, “Interview with Owen Land,” 35.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Sitney, “Landow’s Wit,” 213.

falsehood.” More text appears on screen to suggest the passage of time: “Ten years later I was asked the same question.” The question appears again, this time introduced by a second interviewer: “Critic Wilbur Widebody says that your films locate the axis of truth. Where is the axis of truth?” Land obliges the interviewer with a different answer: “The axis of truth is between a maid’s legs.” If we take as Land’s answer an assertion of the filmmaker’s source of reason, his inspiration emerges from within the meeting of libidinous bodies.

Through this allusion to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*,<sup>89</sup> Land provides the viewer with a glimpse of one of the foundational tenets of *Dialogues*: an emphasis on the libidinous body as a source of divine creation and, consequently, as the inspiration behind the production of the film.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, the libidinous body functions as the locus of a system of representation and allusion, fostering a mode of experimental cinema which parodies and subverts. *Dialogues* abuses the workings of phallocentrism to deconstruct its threat. Moreover, the materiality of the film, maintained by carnivalesque meetings of bodily subjectivities, enacts its characteristic irreverence for aesthetic “theologies” as dictated by traditional avant-garde film.

---

<sup>89</sup> Land quotes, here, from Shakespeare: Hamlet, speaking to Ophelia, states, “That’s a fair thought to lie between a maid’s legs.”

<sup>90</sup> Similarly to Augustine’s *Confessions*, other theologies are involved within the narrative, which makes it difficult to distinguish between concepts of Christianity, Neoplatonism, Manichaeism, and all their doctrinal subsets. While such teachings are meant to be about truth—theology about truth—unrelenting impudence may be reason for Land’s filmmaking: “...for all [of Augustine’s] intellectual cleverness, and searching, and proficiency in the *de jure* of Church business and polemics, Augustine’s mind seemed most happiest, most fertile and most powerful, when it was in just such *de facto* mode and impatient...” See Hollingworth, “Augustine and Spiritual Biography,” 119; 123.

Another episode introduces a nude female body molding, moving, and bending backwards into an awkward contortion. *Bending Over Backwards: fragment of an egon* positions within the film frame the character Liisa Liikala, a Finnish performance artist who worked for a time in Helsinki (therefore a “lap dancer for the lapps”). After describing the way she had to bend over backwards to properly view Egon Schiele’s *Two Women* (1915) (fig. 43), and while having been bent over backwards been “so Egon Schiele,” Liikala reenacts her “performance.” It is an expressive reenactment of a singular gesture abstracted through its simplicity. Liikala, nude except for red garters that rise mid-thigh, stands against a bright red wall illuminated by a spot light (fig. 44). Slowly, she bends her body backwards, abstracting her nude figure flat against the red wall and mimicking the contorted bodies within Egon Schiele’s oeuvre. The woman’s posture and scant dress particularly echo Schiele’s *Nude with Red Garters* (1911) (fig. 45), in which a woman, positioned frontally within the composition of the painting, pulls back her robe to reveal her nude body. A saturated red watercolor stains draw connections from her garters to her pudendum, her nipples, her lips, her blushed cheeks, and her pressed brow. Like Schiele’s painting, Liisa Liikala folds and pushes her body against the screen of the film, loosely fitting her body within Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of “grotesque realism.” Bakhtin’s celebration of grotesque realism recognizes that body which eats, digests, copulates, and defecates. Such specific variations of bodily discharge are absent throughout *Dialogues*, but, like Liisa Liikala in *Bending Over Backwards...*, the nude body that is either productive of or subjected to libidinous desire may be construed as



situated within a wider category of grotesque realism. For Bakhtin, grotesque realism, humor, and caricature are forms of subversion which lead unto a collective transgression against established tradition, a compendium of expressive exuberance characteristic of what he terms the carnivalesque.<sup>91</sup>

As Mary J. Russo describes, “the grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change. The grotesque body is opposed to the Classical body which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world.”<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the body persists as a representation in and of itself, connected through systems of social, linguistic, and aesthetic elements. It is bound, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue, through a sequence of “transcodings and displacements effected between the high/low image of the physical body and other social domains.” Stallybrass and White continue in their description of the grotesque by divulging the functions under which the concept operated productively in Bakhtin’s pre-

---

<sup>91</sup> As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White write, “Carnival in its widest, most general sense embraced ritual spectacles such as fair, popular feasts and wakes, processions and competitions, comic shows, mummary and dancing, open-air amusement with costumes and masks, giants, dwarfs, monsters, trained animals and so forth; it included comic verbal compositions (oral and written) such as parodies, travesties and vulgar farce; and it included various genres of ‘Billingsgate’, by which Bakhtin designated curses, oaths, slang, humour, popular tricks and jokes, scatological forms, in fact all the ‘low’ and ‘dirty’ sorts of folk humour.” Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Bakhtin’s concept of the grotesque emerges from a description of Kerch terracotta figures: “This is typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine senile, decaying, and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed.... Moreover, the old hags are laughing.” Russo, “Female Grotesques,” 62. See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 25-26.

capitalist Europe:

[grotesque realism] provided an image-ideal of and for popular community as an heterogeneous and boundless totality; it provided an imaginary repertoire of festive and comic elements which stood over and against the serious and oppressive language of the official culture; and it provided a thoroughly materialist metaphysics whereby the grotesque ‘bodied forth’ the cosmos, the social formation and language itself.<sup>93</sup>

I would like to expand on this last function, specifically the “bodying forth” of language through grotesque materiality, in order to reconsider the importance of the libidinous body as a social and linguistic tool within *Dialogues*.

A democratizing free-play of sexual relations seems to abound throughout *Dialogues*. As we have seen in *Bending Over Backwards: fragment of an ego*, even inconsequential meetings of unfamiliar strangers facilitate sexual suggestion. But this notion of libidinous fluidity is complicated by the fact that every instance of sexual relation occurs strictly through linguistic narration, through the scripted dialogue that plays out between characters. An example of this linguistic displacement can be found in *Cognitive Dissonance: Criticizing the Critics*. Rose Thorndike (Summer Helene), a blonde-haired woman in a red dress with thick-framed glasses, sits next to Land (Trip Davis) on a leather couch (fig. 46). The camera centers on a close up of Thorndike reading the May 1981 issue of *Art in America*, the cover of which features a image from John Baldessari’s *Blasted Allegories (Colorful Sentence)* (1978), in which Baldessari superimposes colored stills of television programs with randomly assigned words. The variations of textual constructions produced through Baldessari’s *Blasted Allegories* series

---

<sup>93</sup> Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 10.

presage the allegorical discursivity of Land's perverse linguistic play.<sup>94</sup> The camera pulls out to settle on a medium shot of Land and Thorndike seated on the couch. Thorndike rests the issue of *Art in America* on her lap and turns her head to face Land, saying, "Paul Arthur says you like to use words with a long o-sound." Land retorts with a clever assertion of his affinity for both short and long o-sounds: "That's preposterous. Oger Oblinsky ogled that Olga Oblamov only to oblam of polyhedrenous oak trees, yellow ocher ocean seascape and Okinawa owns... oh, enunciating in yoga olfactory oats... oh but, odiferous odometer...." Thorndike rolls her eyes and lowers her magazine before shouting at Land, "Enough!" She raises the magazine to her face once again, blocking her view of Land. Land, however, tests Thorndike's patience by pressing the top of the magazine so as to regain her attention: "Oh! Sorry, Rose. What other absurdities does Paul Arthur have to say?" Rose pauses, takes off her glasses, and uses them to point to another passage in the *Art in America*. She turns toward Land to answer, "None. But Ian White says you're a nihilist." The humor in this exchange of words emerges not in an articulation of a long o-sound but rather in a long e-sound: Rose asks Land, "Are you a nihilist, Owen?" Her enunciation of "nihilist" rhymes with knee, which prompts Land to say, "I don't know; let me see you knee." Rose lifts the edge of her dress just past her knee, and Land, reaching out his arm, places his hand atop (fig. 47). Caressing her knee, Land sits in introspection for a moment before replying in sexual insinuation, "Yes, I am a nihilist."

---

<sup>94</sup> See Owen, "The Allegorical Impulse".

Like many of the episodes throughout *Dialogues, Cognitive Dissonance: Criticizing the Critics* positions the meeting of two libidinous bodies as contingent upon the exchange—or flirtatious play—of language.<sup>95</sup> Land constructs an entire scene on a phonetic misunderstanding<sup>96</sup> that construes “nihilist” with one who fetishizes knees. As a result, the escalating sexual relations between Land and Thorndike are purely textual. Granted, the meeting of bodies occurs at Land’s touching of Thorndike’s knee, but the preemptive editing of the film prohibits any possibility of either literal or fantasized sexual fruition. As far as the viewer is aware, the film ends with the conclusion of Land and Thorndike’s dialogue; there is no ensuing possibility of sexual climax. Ironically, the sexual or textual free play with which Land’s surrogates engage throughout *Dialogues* is a merely a pretext; Land constitutes the structure of the film through a predetermined and prohibitive narrative, a scripted reliance on textual exchange.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> I draw here from Joseph Allen Boone’s literary examination of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, on which *Dialogues* is, in part, based. Boone’s analysis considers two episodes of Joyce’s novel, “Circe” and “Penelope,” and the ways in which Joyce foregrounds textual and narrative techniques in order to filter the erotics of libidinous bodies. As Boone writes, “By staging a textually mediated version of the Freudian return of the repressed in these episodes, Joyce uses his touted discursive and linguistic free play both to acknowledge and to celebrate the libidinal fluidity and desirous possibilities of the unboundaried subject. At the same time, as we shall see, what might be called *Ulysses*’s textual unconscious complicates, indeed at times overwrites, this apparent *jouissance*, drowning out free play in acts of authorial derring-do and mastery.” See Boone, *Libidinal Currents*, 150–151.

<sup>96</sup> This is a common parlance within his films. For example, the title of his film *Wide Anglo Saxon* was determined after Land heard an acquaintance with a thick southern drawl pronounce “White Anglo Saxon.” Likewise, the pandas in *On the Marriage Broker Joke* were drawn from a misunderstanding of the word, “pander.” See Land and Webber, *Two Films by Owen Land*, 106.

<sup>97</sup> As Boone writes, “...despite the illusion of textual autonomy or authorial erasure affected by the episode’s dramatic format, Joyce’s fascination with the mechanisms of

Land's textual authority is most explicit in those moments of punning and "verbal bravado," when the scripted relations between himself and others becomes most apparent. His libidinous, authorial extravagance, therefore, is made manifest in the film's dialogue. Whether nihilist or *nihilist*, Land's affinity for word play determines the sexuality of the bodies who enact it. In another episode of *Dialogues, Paradox Now: how to miff a spliff and sluff a muff*,<sup>98</sup> set in British Columbia in 1972, Owen Land (Trip Davis) is offered a joint by Susannah Elder (Josetta Rose). As The Zombies play in the background—an homage Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963) and its adaptation of pop music—Elder offers her joint (fig. 48). Text appears on the screen, narrating their conversation: Susannah begins, "Want a hit before it goes oat, eh?" Land replies with "No, I'll stick to Nanaimo bars." Susannah's remark (this time her name is misspelled as "Susanna") reads "You're one of those spiritual types, aren't you? It's all you ever talked about at the Vancouver Cinematheque, for God's sake." Land's answer plays upon her word choice: "I hope it was for God's sake! I'm interested in things of the spirit, aren't you?" The camera cuts momentarily to Elder, who holds the joint between her fingers as her lips silently move: "No. Are you one of those people who don't like to make love because it's not spiritual?" Land replies, saying "I think making love can be very spiritual, if it's done in the right spirit. Would you like to try it?"

That Land finds within the play of theology and linguistics the opportunity

---

narrative control inscribe within 'Circe' a narrative erotics that often contradicts its proclamations of polymorphous fluidity." See Boone, *Libidinal Currents*, 158.

<sup>98</sup> The title may be a pun on the film *Paradise Now*.

to make sexual advances on Elder reveals the filmmaker's literary mastery. I should clarify, however, that Land's filmic brashness should not be construed negatively; such instances of authorial assertion should not be equated with mere authorial exhibitionism. Rather, each of Land's episodes seeks to deconstruct the symbolic forms of its male and female representations as well as the implicit desire between their libidinous bodies. *Dialogues*'s mixing of fictional and semi-autobiographical episodes, its conflation of sexuality and theology, and its pervasive intertextuality alerts the viewer to the filmmaker's hubristic, fascinating, and at times envious representations of women. Therefore, a list of misogynistic images or female stereotypes within Land's film fails to account for the undermining of the grounds of filmic female representation. As Karen Lawrence writes, "the deconstruction of presences poses a relationship between the metaphor of woman and a writing practice that disrupts patriarchal signature and conventions."<sup>99</sup> Julia Kristeva supports by making a connection between the disruption of male patriarchal discourse and feminine repression; she argues for what she calls "the inseparable obverse of the writer's very being, the other [sex] that torments and possesses him."<sup>100</sup>

### Autobiography and Embodiment

Land's interest in an autobiographical project may have been entirely

---

<sup>99</sup> Lawrence, "Joyce and Feminism," 74. Lawrence's extrapolation of Joyce's feminine writing criticizes Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's examination: "Gilbert and Gubar's emphasis on Joyce's linguistic 'puissance' and patriarchal mastery ignores his radical skepticism of the possibility of 'lassoing' essences, including that of the 'vaulting feminine libido.'"

<sup>100</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 208.

influenced by the production of a final film. While he could have easily taken a historical approach to the retelling of his autobiography, it would not have been in the author's typical fashion. We can trace the progression of Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Words* to reveal a similar methodology in Land's *Dialogues*. Purpose, for Sartre, evolved throughout the time he was writing the book, between 1954 and 1964. In 1955, Sartre adopted the view of a historian, whose story is defined by the connection that the subject has with the period of history in which the story is being told. However, a shift took hold of the writing in the book in 1957, when Sartre revealed his intentions in an interview:

He now announces, however, that his primary intention in writing his autobiography is the elaboration of a biographical methodology designed 'to determine the meaning of a life and purpose that fills it.' In his study of Sartre's practice of biography, Douglas Collins confirms this motive, placing *The Words* in a context that includes Sartre's studies of Baudelaire, Genet, and Flaubert. It is the task of Sartrean biography to reveal the decisive moment of choice in which the individual selects the project that will in turn constitute his essential totality as a person.<sup>101</sup>

Sartre's intuitive autobiographical decision mimics the manner in which Land conceived of his own autobiography. It is expressive and descriptive in, and it reveals a period of the author's life that is important in his own formation as an avant-garde filmmaker.

Throughout *Dialogues*, two actors portray Land through dichotomous personalities. In an early episode entitled *The Divided Self*, the viewer is introduced to each protagonist. "Loki the Trickster" (played by Trip Davis) assumes the right half of the composition; he is dressed in a black t-shirt and a long brown wig which upsets any suspicion of visual likeness to the filmmaker

---

<sup>101</sup> Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, 128-129.

(fig. 49). Beside him, in a white t-shirt, stands “Parsifal the Pure Fool” (played by Eric Michael Kochmer), who is a taller, more robust, and ultimately more ideal image of Land. Loki and Parsifal stand before the camera illuminated by an uncanny haze of studio light. Loki initiates their dialogue, stating, “I’m Owen Land in his aspect as Loki, the Trickster. I’m a low-key Loki. Hey, turn up the key light, please!” The two become illuminated in commercial film-studio lighting. After a momentary pause, Parsifal speaks. His chin raised slightly, he looks directly into the camera, stating, “I’m Owen Land in his aspect as Parsifal the Pure Fool.” They go back in forth in wild succession; Parsifal acknowledges himself as the “visual Owen Land” and Loki counters by exclaiming, “I’m the literary Owen Land. Women like him because they feel pity for the poor fool.” Parsifal, however, addresses Loki in quick admonition: “That’s *pure* fool! Women like him because he tricks them into bed.” Loki responds with a terse clarification apt for a mythological personification: “I don’t trick women! I only trick evil gods, doofo.” In return, Parsifal offers a diatribe in the form of a question and, as a result, divulges the falsity of both Loki’s claim to trickery and Owen Land’s autobiographical endeavor: “How can anyone believe him?”

Given the absurd confluence of mythology and self-description (arguably self-deprecation), how can anyone believe *Dialogues* to be an autobiographical film, to be personally informed and truthfully representative?<sup>102</sup> Autobiography is

---

<sup>102</sup> It must be noted here that the “personal” avant-garde film is not, however, unfamiliar. In 1978, film historian P. Adams Sitney dedicated a chapter to his critical survey, *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism* to autobiography. At the time of its authorship, Sitney’s chapter notes a progression of twenty years that the word “personal” had been attributed to the genre, nearly enough to form a “history”. See Sitney, *The Avant-Garde Film*, 199.



itself an approach to the structuring of language, one that is derived from being personal yet focuses itself on a retelling of the author's past. The filmmaker, in his or her attempt at autobiography, functions in a different realm from that of the literary author seeking to do the same. As Sitney describes, "Whereas the writer has a language fully developed for the substitution of sentences for past events, the film-maker is at a loss to find veracious film images for the foci of his memory. He can, of course, invent an autobiographical fiction...."<sup>103</sup> Land heeds to the construction of a fictional autobiography by fragmenting any factual representation of his narrative. He persists, moreover, in the fictionalization of his autobiography through the fragmentation of his own subjectivity; *Dialogues* functions upon an anti-Cartesian model of self-representation in which the filmmaker is at once the auteur and the protagonist and the source of the film's multiple impersonations. In this way, Land offers the film as a synecdochic representation of a complex reality, though he gives himself up to the absurdity of myth, religion, and sex as a means of subjective re-embodiment.

Rather than draw upon the plausibility of each narrative within *Dialogues*, "testing," so to speak, the fictionalization of the scenes against their non-fictional origins, I hope to examine the performance of the director as an auteur as well as

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 200. As a literary genre, fictionalized autobiographies are the subject of Paul John Eakin's *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. As Eakin shows, "[Twentieth-century autobiographers] no longer believe that autobiography can offer a faithful and unmediated reconstruction of a historically verifiable past; instead, it expresses the play of the autobiographical act itself, in which the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness." My examination of autobiography in Land's film will be influenced by such examples of literary theory, though my discussion will be moreso based on film as an autobiographical genre. See Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, 5.

a protagonist within the film. Furthermore, in seeking to place the embodiment of the author within the film, I intend to complicate the notion of a fixed identity within the autobiographical project. Elizabeth Bruss argues for the inherent fragmentation of subjectivities within the production of an autobiographical film:

The unity of subjectivity and subject matter—the implied identity of author, narrator, and protagonist on which classical autobiography depends—seems to be shattered by film; the autobiographical self decomposes, schisms, into almost mutually exclusive elements of the person filmed (entirely visible; recorded and projected) and the person filming (entirely hidden; behind the camera eye).<sup>104</sup>

Whereas Bruss's proposition finds two selves within the autobiographical film (the self as subject and the self as director), Land further disrupts any semblance of autobiographical homogeneity through the division of the self as subject. *The Divided Self* emblemizes Land's interest in self-separation; Loki and Parsifal, engrossed in debate, reinforce the fictionalization and fragmentation of Land's artistic selfhood while asserting the autobiographical disposition of *Dialogues*.

Perhaps this is reason for Frank D. McConnell's remark that "the world seen cinematically" is "the world seen without a self."<sup>105</sup> As McConnell reasons, the author cannot be at once both the person seeing and the person seen—an unattainably singular figure.<sup>106</sup> Bruss too accounts for the impersonality of the

---

<sup>104</sup> Bruss, "Autobiography in Film," 297. Bruss's definition of a classic autobiographer relies on Philippe Lejeune's equation of the central character of a text with its author. See Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique*, 13-46.

<sup>105</sup> Bruss, "Autobiography in Film," 298. See also McConnell, *The Spoken Seen*.

<sup>106</sup> McConnell, *The Spoken Seen*, 113. This issue is reflected in Christian Metz's writings on filmic signification. As Metz explains, "The perceived is entirely on the side of the object, and there is no longer any equivalent of the own image, of that unique mix of perceived and subject (of other and I). [...] it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am the *all-perceiving*. [...] the spectator [...] [is] a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of

filmic eye, arguing that the presence of the filmmaker within the frame of his own film imparts upon the viewer the feeling “that a rootless, *inhuman* power of vision is wandering the world....”<sup>107</sup> In joining similar identities through disparate characters, it seems as though “no one is in charge”<sup>108</sup> and the film thereby exhibits a dissolution of the self rather than any illusionistic representation. Bruss continues in her explication of the variations of autobiographical films, typologizing the genre into two opposing groups: those films that stress the person filmed and those that stress the person filming—“between the ‘all-perceived’ and the ‘all-perceiving.’”<sup>109</sup>

*The Divided Self*, a source for understanding the construction of selfhood in Land’s autobiographical film, rests somewhere between the polarities espoused by Bruss. If we place the episode into the first group, emphasizing the roles of Loki and Parsifal as representations of Land, we must resolve the promotion of biography over autobiography. To privilege both personifications is therefore to devalue Land’s self-perception. Conversely, if we place *The Divided Self* into the second group and emphasize the role of Land in the filming of his own autobiography, we must contend with the translation of Land’s personality, which at any given moment may “collapse in the opposite direction, into abstract

---

transcendental subject, anterior to every *there is*.” See Metz, “The Imaginary Signifier,” 49-51.

<sup>107</sup> Bruss, “Autobiography in Film,” 309. My emphasis. Bruss borrows here from French screenwriter and film director Pascal Bonitzer, who writes, “les trajets d’un regard sans nom, sans personne.” Bonitzer, “Les deux regards,” 41.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

expressionism, fantasy, or surrealism.”<sup>110</sup> Like *Dialogues, The Divided Self* fluctuates between both distinctions, between filmmaker and representation(s), between biography and autobiography, and between objective image and surreal fictionalization.

My examination of autobiographical film departs from Bruss’s at this juncture between perceiver and perceived. Rather than argue for the *inhuman* impersonality of the filmic eye, where, in variations of bodily representations, no body seems to be in control, I hope to reveal the *human* interests of the embodied subject where the body foregrounds the complexity of Land’s autobiography. Additionally, the embodiment of subjectivity within *Dialogues* suggests, for Land, the sexual relations between bodies. In another episode, *The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine*, Eric Michael Kochmer conforms to the identity of Land, though not without asserting an embodied subject by becoming awkwardly entangled in a humorous sexual affair. As the film begins, we find ourselves seated around a table with a Bowdoin College professor named Don Skoller<sup>111</sup> (played by Howard Liebgott) and an undergraduate student named Bridgid McBride (played by Bridget McBride) (fig. 50). A bowl of apples and bananas joins two coffee mugs on the kitchen table before them. Almost immediately, Don

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. Perhaps therefore Bruss makes a unique distinction of those films in which abnormality plays a key role. Bruss argues, “Yet so powerful is the myth of total cinema, the ideal of automatic reproduction, that to be distinctive a filmmaker must be exceptional, a violator of norms. We assume that each text has its author, but we credit the existence of an auteur only when there is something odd, exceptional, idiosyncratic in the composition.” As such, a disruption of illusion, which calls the viewer’s attention to the presence of the auteur, supports an autobiographical signification.

<sup>111</sup> In usual Land fashion, “Don Skoller” is surely a play on words and may “translate” to “Don Scholar.”

risers from his seat and exits off-screen to answer a telephone. Upon his return, Bridgid asks, “Who was that?” The professor answers feverishly, “Owen Land! He needs a place to stay for the night. I told him he can stay here. He’ll be here soon.” The episode progresses without disruption to the illusion of Land’s autobiography. Don and Bridgid momentarily discuss Land’s attendance at Bowdoin and Bates College prior to Land’s arrival.<sup>112</sup> Their conversation is cut short when Land enters the room, and the semblance of the film as a controlled autobiographical project—in which the relationship between actor and director, surrogate and source, Kochmer and Land grows increasingly disjunctive. While the viewer struggles to posit Kochmer as an accurate, indexical representation of Land and Land’s living experience, the intensifying sexual tension between Land and Bridgid Doherty only hinders the feasibility of their meeting. Land greets Bridgid with an awkward “hi” to which Bridgid responds, “hello,” while she reaches for a banana. The film shows a close-up shot of Bridgid eating the banana—an explicit sexual reference—while Land stands adjacent to the table, his torso extending out of frame (fig. 51). Don, the professor, exits the scene by saying, “It’s late. I have to get to bed. Good night.” Land sits in the professor’s seat and turns to Bridgid, who offers to show him his room. The camera cuts to Land and Bridgid in the guest bedroom; they start to remove their clothes and embrace each other, kissing passionately (fig. 52) until the door reopens and Don peers in (fig. 53): “Do you have everything you need, Owen?” Land answers as

---

<sup>112</sup> To my knowledge, there is no evidence to support Land’s travels to either Bowdoin University or Bates College. Don Skoller states that Land received a master’s degree at Bates, though this is not true.

Bridgid jumps into the bed to hide under the covers: “Oh yeah, I’m fine. Thank you.” Don exits and the episode ends, leaving the viewer bewildered and uncomfortable though entirely aware of their own complacency in witnessing an autobiographical project.

*The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine* highlights the autobiographical embodiment that occurs throughout *Dialogues*. Granted, Elizabeth Bruss’s description of an autobiographical self that “decomposes, schisms, into almost mutually exclusive elements”<sup>113</sup> maintains its relevance within this short episode. Land’s identity fractures through the doubling that occurs when Kochmer enters the room. He is at once Land and not Land, and as viewers, we recognize the break within the filmmaker’s autobiographical project. But wherein Bruss finds an inhuman absence of bodily subjectivity, Land’s absurd insertion of a sexual “come-on” reinforces the importance of the autobiographical body, albeit a fragmented body.

We might look to Vivian Sobchak’s writings on the films of Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski to impart another perspective from which to consider the embodied auteur. While Sobchak is not explicit in her interest of an embodied filmmaker within the frame of the film, she reveals the presence of a haptic authorial representation by divulging a haptic spectatorial experience:

Kieślowski’s cinematic vision—and, in key moments of reflexive awareness, the gaze of his characters—*expands* to admit something *within* existence that is always potentially both awful and awesome in its obdurate materiality, its nonanthropomorphic presence, and its assertion of the *existential equality* of all things, human or animate or otherwise.... Thus, whether filmmaker, character, or spectator, depending on one’s perspective and depending on how willing one is to concede to the

---

<sup>113</sup> Bruss, “Autobiography in Film,” 297.

seemingly secure fixity of human identity and privilege, experiencing oneself as the subject—or object—of such an expansive and nonanthropomorphic gaze can be threatening or liberating.”<sup>114</sup>

The vision which Sobchak articulates with such fervor extends between the director of the film and the characters within. By disclosing the workings of this vision, so too does she expand that vision unto herself—the viewer of the film—thereby establishing a shared continuum of gazes.<sup>115</sup> But what exactly is the vision that, for Sobchak, “*expands* to admit something *within* existence?”<sup>116</sup> As Linda Haverty Rugg argues, “It is the representation of a nonhuman or extrahuman vision, an objective gaze that levels everything within the frame (and, by extension, everything outside the frame as well), removing the privileged perspective of ... the human gaze.”<sup>117</sup> Such a vision imparts, as Rugg argues, the embodiment of the viewer. But this leveling of gazes necessitates also the embodiment of the maker, the inclusion of Land within his own autobiographical film. Land’s “cinematic vision,” in which a fictional autobiography fragments the self through multiple false representations, reasserts the embodied self through sexual play.

---

<sup>114</sup> Sobchak, *Carnal Thoughts*, 91.

<sup>115</sup> Rugg, “The Director’s Body,” 39.

<sup>116</sup> Sobchak, *Carnal Thoughts*, 91.

<sup>117</sup> Rugg, “The Director’s Body,” 39.

## Conclusion

Within Owen Land's oeuvre, parodic imitation and allusion determine the placement of frames, the naming of subjects, and the tone of narratives.

"Characters" within each work draw names and likenesses from past or present avant-garde filmmakers, theologians, or authors. Various scenes subtly reference or explicitly recreate other film scenes, and (extra-)diegetic narration or dialogue allude to film critics, historians, and filmmakers as sources of antagonism. Yet within each work, the absurdities of generations of avant-garde film emerge in playful, often humorous, ways. Land emphasized and exaggerated various filmic idiosyncrasies ranging from film mechanics to self-representation in order to revel in their adaptability. By recreating films in semiautonomous works (always relative to the sources of their parody), Land resituated the original films and their makers within a canonical history of avant-garde filmmaking.

In some of Land's earliest works, viewers "read" not explicit adaptations but implied allusions and influences. As *Remedial Reading Comprehension* illustrates, advertising language associates the viewer as a participant—at times, the subject—of the film. By including the viewer within the space and duration of the filmic narrative, *Remedial Reading Comprehension* layers allusion with authorial voices. As a result, the film's immediate network of image, text, and subject includes also a broad history of experimental filmmaking and viewing. Land's historiographic method references the very movement with which he began filmmaking. Structural filmmakers like Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, and Michael Snow reemerge on screen as stylistic influences within Land's films.



Land's films adopt a more parodic tone when metafictional influence inscribes mocking, comical commentary. Parody is most explicit as a genre within Land's *Regrettable Redding Condescension*, a film within the film *Wide Anglo Saxon*. Playing directly on the content of Hollis Frampton's (*nostalgia*), Land recreates the film by boiling red paint instead of vernacular photographs. But Land's parody mocks also the disjunctive temporality asserted through Frampton's film, "postponing" the film through its very recreation at a later date. Furthermore, *Regrettable Redding Condescension* calls attention to Land's tendency towards self-revision, suggesting not just the parody of other films but the parody of earlier films by the same filmmaker. This incompleteness of films parallels the incompleteness or very absence of the self throughout Land's oeuvre.

In order to assuage the tendentious contrast between adaptation and original, humor joins the play of Land's parody. *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?* offers a complicated joke that unfolds over the course of multiple scenes including theologians, pandas, salted plums, and an academic poet. The film's prolific word play, its textual slippage and corruption, affirms the cohesion of its disparate scenes. Word play, moreover, directs the film's parody toward the films, theorists, and theologians that make up each scene, qualifying their faults and holes as inevitable and unavoidable but worthy of praise.

The last film within Land's career, *Dialogues*, presents an apotheosis of the filmmaker's characteristic parody, humor, theology, and sex. Each episode

within the film depicts Land engaging in sexual “come-ons” with various women, yet forgoes the exhibition of sexual contact between libidinous bodies.

Regardless, Land situates the libidinous female body as the site where the filmmaker’s networks of allusion and parody converge—an often misogynistic endeavor seemingly aware of its own absurdity. The sexualized body exerts the construction of language, thereby displacing the narrative’s dialogue and the humor associated with characters’s exaggerated situations.

Land’s attempt toward an autobiographical project exposes the filmmaker’s play between fiction and reality, self and surrogate, and sex and embodied subjectivity. Because of the impossible cohesion between filmmaker and film subject, an autobiographical project may further suggest the absence of Land from his film. But the sexual content within *Dialogues* embodies the filmmaker within the space of his representation, thereby situating him alongside the parodic adaptations and allusions that pervade the entirety of the film.

From a marginalized position within the American avant-garde film movement, Land’s parodic adaptations reveal the issues involved in the formation and nomination of a subversive aesthetic movement. But within these mocking, tendentious moments of filmic allusion and humor, Land edifies the movement on whose periphery he continues to remain.

## Appendix of Figures



Figure 1: Owen Land, “Sic Transit Gloria Mundi: when good things happen to bad people.” In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD. [01:19:56]



Figure 2: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:14]



Figure 3: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:29]



Figure 4: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:01:22]



Figure 5: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:02]



Figure 6: Maya Deren, *At Land*, 1944 [00:13:50]



Figure 7: Stan Brakhage, *Blue Moses*, 1962 [00:08:59]



Figure 8: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:01:54]



Figure 9: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:04:39]



Figure 10: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:16]





Figure 11; Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:27]



Figure 12: Owen Land, *Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc.*, 1966. Color, silent, 20 minutes [00:01:06]





Figure 13: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:03:04]

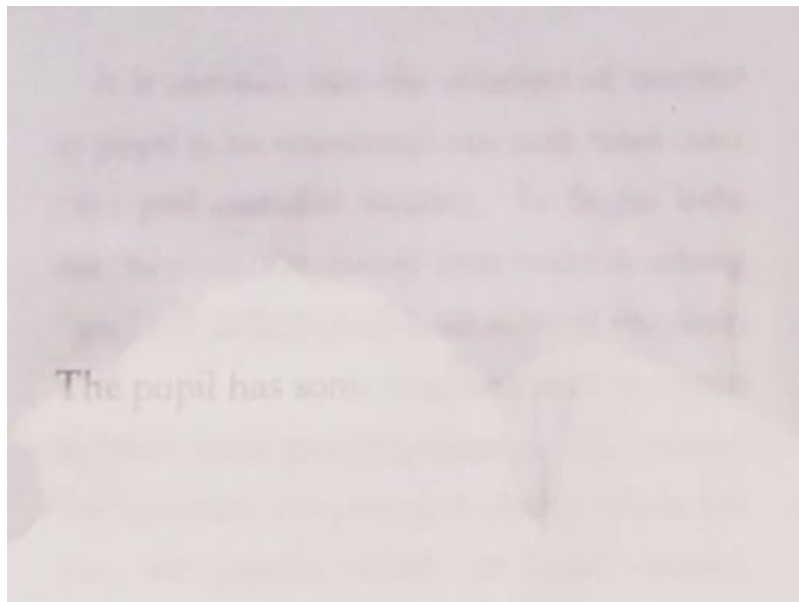


Figure 14: Owen Land, *Remedial Reading Comprehension*, 1970. Color, sound, 5 minutes. 16mm. [00:03:28]



Figure 15: Owen Land, *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops*, 1976. Color, sound, 10 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:26]



Figure 16: Owen Land, *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops*, 1976. Color, sound, 10 minutes. 16mm. [00:08:25]



Figure 17: Owen Land, *New Improved Institutional Quality: In the Environment of Liquids and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes Develops*, 1976. Color, sound, 10 minutes. 16mm. [00:08:57]



Figure 18: Owen Land, *Undesirables (Work-In-Progress)*, 1999. Black-and-white, sound, 12 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:30]



Figure 19: Owen Land, *Undesirables (Work-In-Progress)*, 1999. Black-and-white, sound, 12 minutes. 16mm. [00:01:44]



Figure 20: Hollis Frampton, *Critical Mass*, 1971. [00:02:41]



Figure 21: Owen Land, *Undesirables (Work-In-Progress)*, 1999. Black-and-white, sound, 12 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:52]



Figure 22: Hollis Frampton, *(nostalgia)*, 1971. Black-and-white, sound, 38 minutes. [00:03:55]

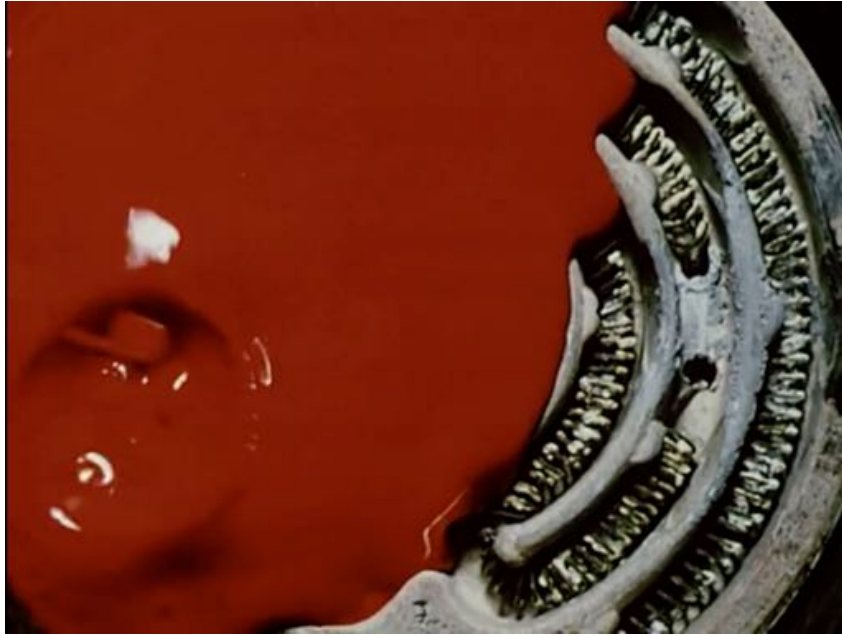


Figure 23: Owen Land, "Regrettable Redding Condensation." In *Wide Anglo Saxon*, 1975. Color, sound, 22 minutes. 16mm. [00:15:05]



Figure 24: Owen Land, *Wide Anglo Saxon*, 1975. Color, sound, 22 minutes. 16mm. [00:18:29]



Figure 25: Owen Land, *Wide Anglo Saxon*, 1975. Color, sound, 22 minutes. 16mm. [00:20:55]



Figure 26: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:10:02]





Figure 27: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:10:04]



Figure 28: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:19]





Figure 29: Andy Warhol, *Blow Job*, 1963. Black-and-white, silent, 35 minutes. [00:01:54]

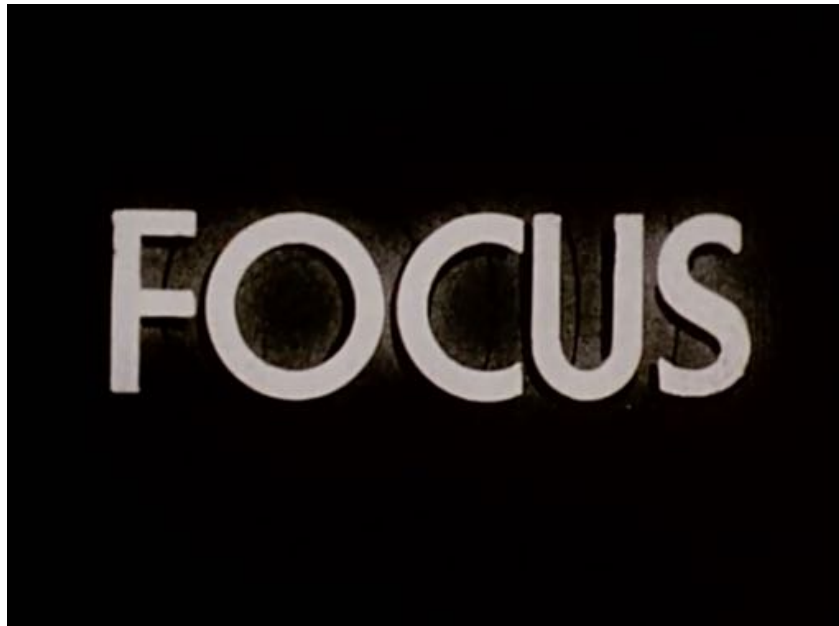


Figure 30: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:14]

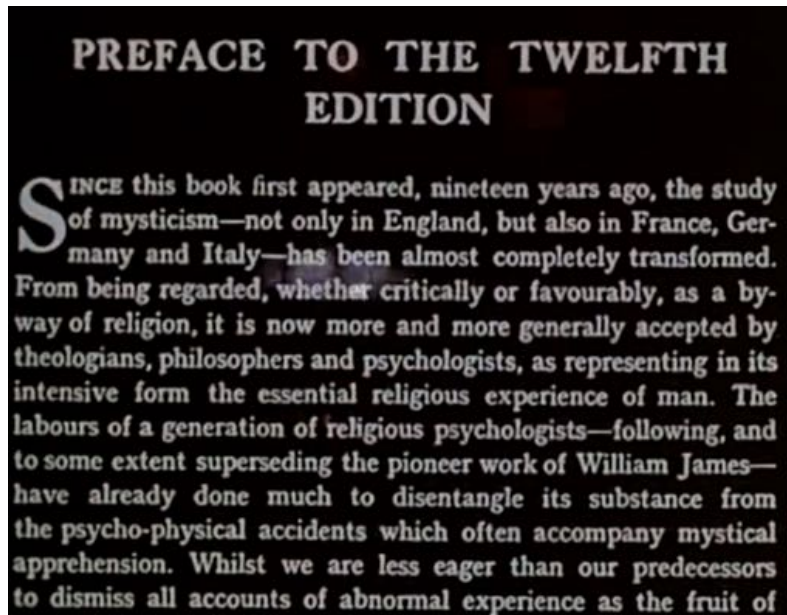


Figure 31: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:00:29]



Figure 32: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:01:15]



Figure 33: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:02:09]



Figure 34: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:03:25]



Figure 35: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:06:23]

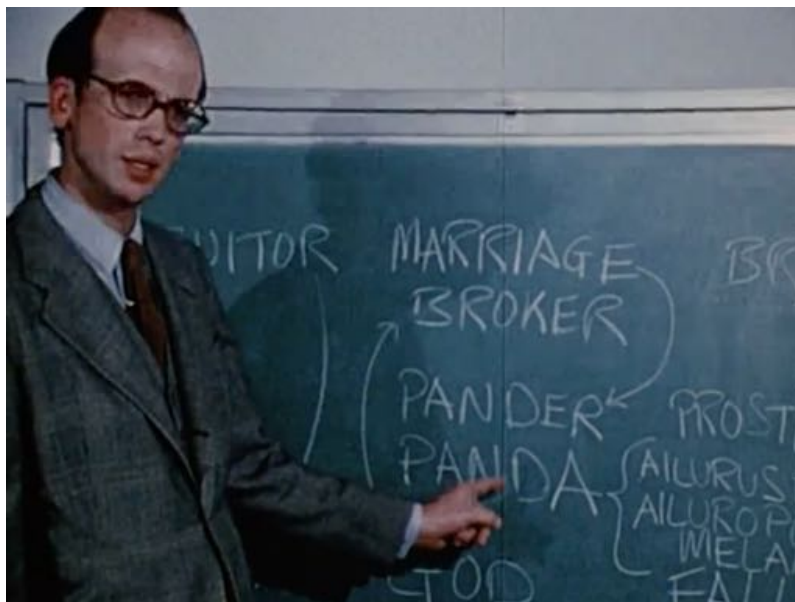


Figure 36: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:12:47]



Figure 37: Marcel Duchamp, *Anémic Cinéma*, 1926. [00:01:51]



Figure 38: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:13:58]



Figure 39: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:14:21]



Figure 40: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:14:30]





Figure 41: Owen Land, *On the Marriage Broker Joke as Cited by Sigmund Freud in Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*, 1977-79. Color, sound, 18 minutes. 16mm. [00:15:13]



Figure 42: Owen Land, "Owen Land Interviewed." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:01:36]



Figure 43: Egon Schiele, *Two Women (Due donne)*, 1915.



Figure 44: Owen Land, "Bending Over Backwar: fragment of an egon." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:47:47]



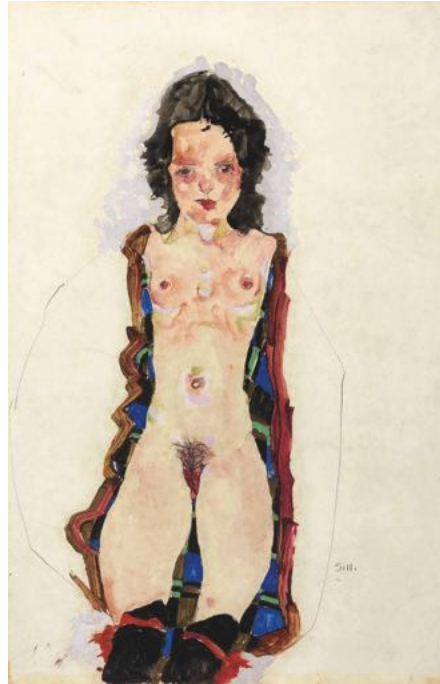


Figure 45: Egon Schiele, *Nude with Red Garters*, 1911.



Figure 46: Owen Land, "Cognitive Dissonance: criticizing the critics." In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:26:05]



Figure 47: Owen Land, “Cognitive Dissonance: criticizing the critics.” In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:26:58]



Figure 48: Owen Land, “Paradox Now: How to Miff a Spliff and Sluff a Muff.” In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:15:24]



Figure 49: Owen Land, “The Divided Self.” In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:02:30]



Figure 50: Owen Land, “The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine.” In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:05:43]



Figure 51: Owen Land, “The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine.” In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:06:16]



Figure 52: Owen Land, “The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine.” In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:06:54]



Figure 53: Owen Land, “The Silence of the Consonants, or ciao, Maine.” In *Dialogues*, 2009. Color, sound, 129:09 minutes. Video Transferred to DVD [00:07:16]

## Bibliography

- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Arthur, Paul. "Joker at Play in a Sea of Holes." *Film Comment* 41:5 (Sept./Oct. 2005): 42-44.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- . *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- . *Rabelias and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z: An Essay*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- . "The Structuralist Activity." In *Critical Essays*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Author as Producer." In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. Edited by Peter Demetz. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Billig, Michael. "Freud and the Hidden Secrets of Jokes." In *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humor*. London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2005.
- Boone, Joseph Allen. *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998.
- Bruss, Elizabeth W. "Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film." In *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Edited by James Olney, 296-320. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Carroll, Noël. "A Brief Comment on Frampton's Notion of Metahistory." *Millennium Film Journal* 16-18 (Fall/Winter 1986/1987): 200-205.

- Connor, J.D. "What Becomes of Things on Film on Film: Adaptation in Owen Land (George Landow)." *Adaptation* 2:2 (2009): 161–76.
- Dika, Vera. "Wide Anglo Saxon: An Examination of the Film Viewer as Reader." *Film Reader* 3 (1978), 222-238.
- Eakin, Paul John. *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Frampton, Hollis. "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses." In *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton*. Edited by Bruce Jenkins, 131-139. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by Joyce Crick. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. Translated by Joyce Crick. New York: Penguin Group, 2002.
- . *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. Translated by A.A. Brill. New York: Moffat, Yard, and Company, 1916.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Modernist Painting." *Art and Literature: An International Review* 4 (Spring 1965): 193-201. Reproduced in Gregory Battcock, ed., *The New Art: A Critical Anthology* (E.P. Dutton: New York, 1966), pp. 100-110.
- Hannoosh, Michele. "The Reflexive Function of Parody." *Comparative Literature* 41:2 (Spring 1989): 113-127.
- Hollingworth, Miles. "Augustine and Spiritual Autobiography." *The Expository Times*, 27:3 (2015): 114-123.
- Hutcheon, Linda. "The Politics of Parody." In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 89-113. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
- James, David E. "Considering the Alternatives." In *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*, 3-28. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

- . “Pure Film.” In *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*, 237-239. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: New American Library, 1963.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Keller, Sarah. “Toward Completion and Control: *At Land*, *A Study in Choreography for Camera*, and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*.” In *Maya Deren: Incomplete Control*, 81-134. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- . “Word, Dialogue and Novel.” In *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi, 34-61. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Land, Owen and Mark Webber. “Remedial Reading Comprehension.” In *Two Films by Owen Land*. Edited by Mark Webber, 86. London: LUX and Österreichisches Filmmuseum, 2005.
- Lawrence, Karen. “Joyce and Feminism.” In *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge, 237-58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Lebel, Robert. *Marcel Duchamp*. Translated by George Heard Hamilton. London: Trianon Press, 1959.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *Le pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Seuil, 1975.
- Lippit, Akira Mizuta. “Revisionary Cinema.” In *Ex-Cinema: From a Theory of Experimental Film and Video*, 150-168. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Martin, Katrina. “Anémic Cinéma.” *Studio International* 189:973 (1975): 53-60.



- McConnell, Frank D. *The Spoken Seen: Film and the Romantic Imagination*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.
- Mekas, Jonas. "Ernie Gehr Interviewed by Jonas Mekas, March 24, 1971." *Film Culture* 53-55 (April 1972): 25-38.
- . "Notes on the New American Cinema." *Film Culture* 24 (Spring 1962): 6-16.
- Metz, Christian. *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Translated by Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti. Bloomington and Indianapolis: 1982.
- Milton, John. *The Complete Poems of John Milton*. Edited by John T. Shawcross. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971.
- Owen, Craig. "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism." *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67-86.
- Pfeffer, Susanne. "Interview with Owen Land." In "*Dialogues*"—a film by Owen Land. Edited by Philippe Pirotte and Julia Strebelow, 37-45. Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 2010.
- Pirotte, Philippe, and Julia Strebelow. Introduction to "*Dialogues*"—a film by Owen Land. Edited by Philippe Pirotte and Julia Strebelow, 7-13. Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 2010.
- Reik, Theodore. *The Search Within: The Inner Experiences of a Psychoanalyst*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956.
- Rose, Margaret A. *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- . *Parody//meta-fiction: An analysis of parody as a critical mirror to the writing and reception of fiction*. London: Croom Helm, 1979.
- Rosen, Philip. Introduction to *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory*, xi-xxv. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota, 2001.
- Rugg, Linda Haverty. "The Director's Body." In *Self-Projection: The Director's*

- Image in Art Cinema*, 35-68. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- Russo, Mary J. "Female Grotesques." In *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Shklovsky, Viktor. "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary." In *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, edited by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, 25-57. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.
- Sitney, P. Adams. "Owen Land: (1944-2011)." *Artforum International* 50:3 (November 2011): 63-64, 66.
- . "Structural Film." In *Film Culture Reader*, edited by P. Adams Sitney, 326-349. New York: Cooper Square Press, 1970.
- . *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*. New York: New York University Press, 1978.
- . "Theology vs. Psychoanalysis: Landow's Wit." In *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature*, 211-225. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- . *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde. 1943-2000*. Third. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Sobchak, Vivian. *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Tyler, Parker. *Underground Film: A Critical History*. Boston: De Capo Press, 1995.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*. New York: Image Books, 1990.