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“Boredom’s Erotics”:
Stillness and Duration in Andy Warhol’s *Empire*

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Art History

by

Hannah Kahng

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Boredom’s Erotics”:
Stillness and Duration in Andy Warhol’s *Empire*

by

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Master of Arts in Art History
University of California, Los Angeles, 2015
Professor George Baker, Chair

This thesis examines the function of boredom as a critical operation in Andy Warhol’s *Empire* (1964), an eight-hour silent film that consists of a single shot of the Empire State Building spanning nightfall to the early hours of the morning. Through an analysis of *Empire* as well as several other silent films made by Warhol during the mid-1960s, this paper argues that boredom is not simply a passive affective state. In Warhol’s films, the bored gaze is inextricably tied to sexual pleasure. *Empire* proposes a model of spectatorship that does not derive pleasure from voyeurism or the production of knowledge; instead it produces a perverse pleasure that foregrounds the sensuousness of inanimate objects. This paper suggests that an analysis of boredom could expand *Empire*’s critical field beyond discussions of perceptual experience to include issues of ethics and desire.

This thesis of Hannah Kahng is approved.

Miwon Kwon

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University of California, Los Angeles

2015

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Introduction

In spite of the films which are intended to complete her integration, the housewife finds in the darkness of the movie theater a place of refuge where she can sit for a few hours with nobody watching, just as she used to look out of the windows when there were still homes and rest in the evenings.¹

-Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer

“Years ago, people used to sit looking out of their windows at the street,” Andy Warhol once stated in an interview. “This is my favorite theme in moviemaking—just watching something happening for two hours or so.”² The porch-sitter, the bench-sitter, and the window-watcher—these figures are alluded to repeatedly in Warhol’s interviews and writings as he describes the pleasures of the leisurely, absentminded gaze. And though it is with some nostalgia that Warhol recalls this kind of spectatorial engagement that seems antithetical to the rhythms of twentieth century modernity, the experiential qualities of window watching endure in cinema.

This is the mode of spectatorship that Warhol evokes in *Empire* (1964), the single shot, eight-hour silent film that came to epitomize the tediousness—and for some, the taunting antics—of Warhol’s cinematic practice.³ Surreptitiously recorded from the Rockefeller office on the forty-fourth floor of the Time Life Building, the film consists of a single, nearly motionless image of the Empire State Building spanning nightfall to the early hours of the morning. Though the Factory-regular John Palmer allegedly conceived the film’s concept at street-level, as he lugged bags of the publication *Film Culture* to a

¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 139.

² Kenneth Goldsmith, ed., *I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2004), 186.

³ Stephen Koch describes *Empire* as “less a challenge than a taunt” and “a familiar axiom among the mediocrities south of 14th street.” Stephen Koch, *Stargazer: Andy Warhol’s World and His Films* (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1985), 60.

post office in the Empire State Building, the film does not position its viewer on the street. Rather, the viewer seems to be suspended mid-air, gazing slightly upward at the skyscraper. What emphatically anchors the viewer to a specific location are the shadowy reflections of an office interior and the thin gridded bars of its windowpanes that are inadvertently recorded at the beginning of three of the film's reels (fig. 1). And so it is established that the activity that the viewer of *Empire* partakes in is staring out a window.

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer similarly compare cinematic spectatorship with window gazing, as they describe the housewife who finds respite from the travails of daily life in the movie theater. What she watches on screen hardly seems to matter. And although Adorno and Horkheimer do not find much that is redemptive in cinema, "this bloated pleasure apparatus," their description of film spectatorship suggests the productive power of this space of relaxation and boredom—the darkened theater provides audiences with a space in which they can dream and forge experiences that exceed the mass culture text provided onscreen.⁴

Certainly, artists during the 1960s recognized the potency and emancipatory potential of boredom. More than simply a pathos-laden emotional state, boredom emerged as an artistic strategy as artists refashioned the phenomenological relationship between spectator and artwork. Boredom is, Dick Higgins writes, "an opposite to excitement...a means of bringing emphasis to what it interrupts, causing us to view both elements freshly. It is a necessary station on the way to other experiences."⁵ Undoubtedly, Warhol's interest in boredom and the everyday was anchored in his formal investigations

⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno, 139.

⁵ Dick Higgins, "Boredom and Danger," in *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde 1966-1973*, ed. Larry Austin et al. (Oakland: UC Press, 2011), 179.

of contemporary avant-garde practices in various media. In the early silent films Warhol produced between 1963 and 1964, one can recognize the repetition of everyday gestures and task-like activity of Yvonne Rainer and the Judson Dance Theater; one can recognize the strategic manipulation of prolonged duration, repetition, and stillness often employed by John Cage and La Monte Young, Warhol's occasional collaborator.⁶ In fact, Warhol announced his intention to shoot an eight-hour film of a man sleeping shortly after seeing Cage's nearly nineteen-hour performance of Erik Satie's *Vexations*. Ultimately, *Empire*, rather than *Sleep* (1963), would take the infamous "eight-hour film" epithet.

Boredom dominated critics' discussions of *Empire* upon its release. "If I were the camera, I would faint with boredom staring that long at one thing, the Empire State Building," writes John Bernard Myers, scandalized by the film's premise.⁷ Amidst these claims that such films must be "mere gestures of provocation, at best warmed-over dada," few writers, most notably Parker Tyler, considered the eventlessness of *Empire* to be a serious strategy.⁸ Though it incites a bored gaze, *Empire* is not boring because "nothing happens" or because the film is, as Gregory Battcock proclaims, "simply, a big nothing."⁹

⁶ In 1964, La Monte Young wrote a soundtrack that would have accompanied the screening of *Eat, Sleep, Kiss*, and *Haircut* in the lobby of Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall. In 1963, Warhol collaborated with La Monte Young and Claes Oldenburg in short-lived band named The Druds that staged happening-like performances. Warhol admittedly sang badly. Glenn O'Brien, "Andy Warhol: Interview" *High Times*, August 1977, 34.

⁷ John Bernard Myers, "A Letter to Gregory Battcock," in *New American Cinema: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: EP Dutton, 1967), 138.

⁸ David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 65. In his 1967 essay, Parker Tyler coins the term "dragtime" to describe the tempo of Warhol's early films. For Tyler, time in *Blow Job* and *Kiss* literally drags on—here, drag evokes the delaying, dawdling, lingering pace set by Warhol's camera. "Passive attention of a fixed (that is, seated) spectator in a film theater...makes the viewing time required for his films into a drag exquisitely nuanced or excruciatingly redundant." Parker Tyler, "Dragtime and Drugtime; Or, Film à la Warhol," *Evergreen Review* 11.46 (April 1967): 29.

⁹ Gregory Battcock, "Notes on *Empire*: A film by Andy Warhol," *Film Culture* 40 (Spring 1966): 39.

Indeed, as Battcock suggests, *Empire* lacks the psychologically fraught confrontation between filmed subject and camera's gaze that is central to Warhol's other early silent films. But in *Empire* this confrontation is reoriented; it takes place between projected image and spectator. In the face of a virtually unmoving, continuous image, the viewer must confront the limits of her perception, that threshold between attention and boredom.

In more recent scholarship, boredom has been largely dismissed as a hackneyed response to Warhol's films. Viewers especially prone to fatigue and disinterest have missed the subtle transgressions of Warhol's compositional choices, or they have failed to sit through his films' entire duration.¹⁰ For both Douglas Crimp and Roy Grundmann, two scholars who offer insightful close readings of the film *Blow Job* (1964), the acknowledgement that nothing will happen, "nothing more than the repetition...of what we've already seen," does not result in boredom or inattention, but rather an intense interest that allows the viewer to forge queer forms of attachment with the projected image.¹¹ And though both Crimp and Grundmann recognize that their responses are to some extent predicated on their positions as gay male viewers, their analyses ultimately

¹⁰ Douglas Crimp, "Our Kind of Movie": *The Films of Andy Warhol* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 131.

¹¹ A rich body of scholarship has examined the queerness implicit in Warhol's work, and scholars have interpreted the eventlessness of his films as demonstrative of a queer temporality. Contextualizing Warhol's films in the 1960s gay imaginary, Thomas Waugh observes that gay narratives produce a different temporality than heterosexual narratives; queer time is disjointed, formless, and undergirded by "displacement, endless deferral, and open endings." Thomas Waugh, "Cockteaser," in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, eds. Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Estaban Muñoz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 57. Drawing upon Judith Halberstam's theorization of queer time, Hoday King argues that Warhol's 1965 Edie Sedgwick films partake in a rhetoric of queerness through their deferral of narrative. Queer time is characterized by those actions and activities that refuse to be assimilated in the progression of heterosexual reproduction; it exists outside the temporal frames of linear progression and goal-oriented action, which structure "bourgeois reproduction and family." Hoday King, "Girl Interrupted: The Queer Time of Warhol's Cinema," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 28.1 (Winter 2006): 98-120. Judith Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 1. Because these discussions of queer time revolve around issues of narrative temporality, they have been segregated from discussions of Warhol's non-temporal work in other media. Theories of boredom could not only bridge the divide between these two discussions but also uncover the affective mechanisms of queer time.

suggest that boredom and queer desire are opposed terms. However, *Empire* suggests that boredom and desire are complimentary in Warhol's work.

“Andy—A—had the patience never to be bored; or else he'd learned to plumb boredom's erotics,” Wayne Koestenbaum writes in his biography of Warhol.¹² Here I will assert that the latter is true—nowhere is pleasure so inextricably tied to boredom than in Warhol's early films. Through an analysis of *Empire* as well as several other silent films made by Warhol in the mid-1960s, I will argue that boredom is not simply a passive affective state. Warhol proposes a model of bored spectatorship that does not derive pleasure from voyeurism or the production of knowledge; instead it produces a perverse, non-normative pleasure of its own. An analysis of boredom could expand *Empire's* critical field beyond discussions of perceptual experience to include issues of ethics and desire. And it is here that I return to *Empire*.

Seeing / Knowing

Empire begins with a monochromatic bright white, an image bleached out by overexposed film (fig. 2). The grainy outline of a cityscape emerges, slowly gaining clarity and detail as if emerging from a thick white fog. There is a certain pleasure in anticipating then witnessing the iconic façade of the Empire State Building materialize from indeterminate whiteness. Front and center, its spindly antenna nearly brushes the top of the screen. The image, framed by Jonas Mekas and then approved by Warhol, emphasizes the singularity of the building's height. Whereas the Empire State Building spans the screen's vertical axis, diminutive buildings cluster at the base of the frame,

¹² Wayne Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), 9.

most notably the Metropolitan Life Tower, whose thin conical outline is topped with a small dot of light that blinks off for half a minute every quarter hour, keeping time throughout the film (fig. 3). In these moments before nightfall, the film records the atmospheric rhythms of the scene—the subtle dimming of sunlight, shifts in visibility, and the dissipation of haze.

But shortly after the image registers in full clarity, the scene begins to darken as night falls. In the film's most dramatic moment, the building's floodlights are turned on, illuminating its top thirty floors. The lights cast by the building's floodlights vibrate slightly, stretching and compressing almost imperceptibly, an effect produced by the film's slow projection rate (the film is shot at twenty-four frames-per-second and projected at sixteen frames-per-second). Once the sun has set, the scene is reduced to black and white—the spectrum of mottled greys and murky whites that dominated the first twenty minutes of the film have been stifled by the darkness of night. The sturdy bodies of high-rises are no longer visible; they have been replaced by an immaterial architecture of light. Even the Empire State Building has dissipated into a conglomeration of white streaks emanating from its top floors, a triangular composition of bright light against a black scrim (fig. 4). What is visible is not the building itself but rather the indexical marks made by floodlights hitting the sides of the tower. For hours, this image persists, and its stillness is interrupted only by the occasional *mélange* of bubbles and pock marks, remnants from the developing process that fester on screen in half-second intervals (fig. 5). Sporadic flashes of a light flare momentarily render the black night sky a stony grey (fig. 6). Though an accidental result of push-processing highly light sensitive, underexposed film, these light flares recall the occasional thin-inked print in Warhol's

silkscreen paintings or the white frames interspersed throughout *Kiss* and *Blow Job* that mark the points at which Bolex reels were spliced together.

What happens in these hours between Reel 1 and Reel 9 when a nearly stationary image relentlessly persists? A verbal description of *Empire*'s image can hardly account for the perceptual and cognitive effects that accompany a prolonged encounter with this sedate, virtually unmoving image. As the film progresses, the mind wanders from the Empire State Building and its iconic status. Warhol describes the scene as *Empire* was filmed: "It's like Flash Gordon riding into space," and alternatively, "An 8 hour hard-on!...It looks very phallic."¹³ As facetious these remarks may be, they are telling, for *Empire* always points to something other than the Empire State Building. Its three tiers of abstract white daubs, so divorced from the sturdy landmark from which they project, read as a set of ciphers, recalling rows of lit candles or a blurry-eyed view of an optometrist's Snellen chart.

During this long interval between Reel 1 and Reel 9, two images are in constant tension: the image observed on screen and the memory of the cityscape that was visible during the first twenty minutes of the film. As a result, *Empire* oscillates between paired poles: stillness and movement, flatness and depth, abstraction and mimesis. Though the pyramidal grouping of white streaks function as mnemonic markers of the Empire State Building's form, attempts to recall its structure are ultimately futile. At times, the image appears obstinately flat, and the white markers refuse to cohere into the contours of a volume in space. The image does not accommodate the spatial depth and atmospheric perspective that typically structures cityscape imagery. But in other instances, the white

¹³ Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema 1959-1971* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972), 151.

markers seem to project out of the screen, towards the viewer. The image's overall impression is never entirely one of depth or flatness.

The film's duration induces a kind of cognitive gymnastics, for *Empire* defaults on the promise typically made by a sustained study of a single object—a prolonged viewing of *Empire* does not result in a better understanding of the Empire State Building, but rather the fading of its meaning and the disintegration of its iconicity. This logic permeates Warhol's artistic production, from his silkscreens to his stencil paintings.¹⁴ “The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel,” he writes, explaining his preference for watching the same TV shows again and again.¹⁵ In *Empire*, the camera's fixed gaze on a single object drains it of its significance, thwarting the viewer's scopophilic desire to gain mastery of the image. We can see the Empire State Building, but we cannot know it.

Warhol's penchant for making his filmed subjects “visible to us without making them objects of our knowledge” is more apparent here than in many of his other films.¹⁶ This model of vision, which does not produce knowledge of the subject on screen, is central to the ethics of Warhol's anti-voyeuristic gaze, Douglas Crimp argues. Contesting prevailing interpretations of Warhol's films as intensely voyeuristic, Crimp suggests that various formal features in Warhol's films foreclose the spectator's ability to “know” his

¹⁴ Instead of reinforcing an image's identity, repetition and serialization in Warhol's paintings tend to deteriorate the identity of an image. As Hal Foster states, “Repetition in Warhol often either produces a sameness or releases a difference...both can be corrosive of the identity of the image.” This corrosion of iconicity is aggravated by Warhol's process of mechanical production, which blots, streaks, and obscures parts of the image. Hal Foster, *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 130-131.

¹⁵ Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol Sixties* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1980), 59.

¹⁶ Crimp, 35.

filmed subjects.¹⁷ In the 1964 film *Blow Job*, it is the sparse overhead lighting that denies the spectator's access to the face of an anonymous man who is purportedly receiving oral sex (fig. 7). Tilting his head back against the grey wall behind him in either ecstasy or frustration, his face is bathed in light, but when facing forward, large portions of his visage are obscured in darkness. For most of the film, his eyes are masked by dark triangular shadows that render his facial expression—which we suspect would indicate pleasure or excitement—only partially legible. Making eye contact with the man is out of the question. All this makes clear, Crimp writes, that “this face is not *for us*.”¹⁸ And when we do meet the gaze of the filmed subject, as in Mario Montez's *Screen Test No. 2* (1965), the produced effect is vulnerability and discomfort. Rather than sadistically identifying with the camera that relentlessly exposes Montez in his moment of humiliation, Crimp empathetically takes on the shame that Montez displays on screen: “I am thus not ‘like’ Mario, but the distinctiveness that is revealed in Mario invades me...and my own distinctiveness is revealed simultaneously. I, too, feel exposed,” Crimp observes.¹⁹ Though Warhol's camera makes queer subjects and sexual practices visible, it does not make them available for the spectator's epistemological scrutiny and inspection.

The pleasure of visibility, of inspecting involuntary reactions and machinations of onscreen bodies, has been a longstanding preoccupation in the history of cinema.

¹⁷ Koch writes, “Even more than it does most movies, voyeurism dominates all Warhol's early films and defines their aesthetic.” Koch, 42.

¹⁸ Crimp, 7.

¹⁹ Mario Montez, who appears in drag in *Screen Test No. 2*, is asked to unzip his pants and pull out his genitals by Ronald Tavel, who stands off screen. Montez becomes visibly uncomfortable, simultaneously bewildered and terrified. Generally, two potential spectatorial positions are offered to the viewers of Warhol's films: the viewer can sadistically identify with the gaze of the camera or masochistically identify with filmed subject. Crimp suggests that upon witnessing Montez's intense, spontaneous emotional response after being harassed by Tavel, a third spectatorial position becomes available—one that allows the viewer to identify with Montez's feelings of shame but not with Montez himself. *Ibid.*, 36.

Consider *Fred Ott's Sneeze* (1894), the Kinetoscope test film produced by Thomas Edison, who Warhol cited as a major influence on his filmmaking (fig. 8). Rendering Fred Ott in slightly decelerated motion, Edison makes his subject's minute facial tensions and twitches visible and available for examination; such bodily responses occupied the realm of the "partially unseen" prior to the advent of cinematic technology.²⁰ As Linda Williams argues in *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible,"* the cinematic medium developed hand in hand with the desire not only to clock and measure bodies but also to probe "the measurable, confessable 'truths' of a sexuality that governs bodies and their pleasures."²¹ It is precisely *scientia sexualis*, which aims to uncover the scientific truths of sexuality, that is evoked then swiftly denied by Warhol's compositional choices in *Blow Job*, according to Crimp's thesis.²² In early cinema, continuous stationary shots and monochromatic backdrops aided the viewer's scrutiny of bodies, enabling a sustained examination of human locomotion. Employed by Warhol, extended shots, slow projection rate, and minimal compositions create the pretense of scientific examination and study.²³ Even Warhol's formal choices in *Empire* recall those

²⁰ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Oakland: UC Press, 1999), 52.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

²² Borrowing the term *scientia sexualis* from Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Linda Williams describes *scientia sexualis* as "a hermeneutics of desire aimed at ever more detailed explorations of the scientific truths of sexuality." It constructs sexualities "according to a conjunction of power and knowledge that probes the measurable, confessable 'truths' of a sexuality that governs bodies and their pleasures." *Ibid.*

²³ Offering a contemporary reference point for Warhol's aesthetic choices, Thomas Waugh notes the compositional similarities of Warhol's early films and the mail-order beefcake flicks produced between 1950 and 1970 by Bob Mizer and Dick Fontaine. Scantly clad men pose, wrestle, and preen in front of a sparse backdrop. Mizer and Fontaine, like Warhol, seem to enact the "staggered reinvention of the 'primitive cinema,'" Waugh suggests. The formal similarities shared between early cinema, beefcake flicks, and Warhol's films reinforce the correlative ties between the erotic and empirical, scientific imagery. Waugh, 62-65.

used by the documentary filmmaker who records an extended shot of a scene to ensure that a fleeting event will be captured. But the drive for mastery over the image is rebuffed and converted into something else: fatigue, distraction, or boredom.

What *Empire* makes clear is that durational looking does not simply halt the production of knowledge—it reverses it. Upon finishing the film, I am more confused about the Empire State Building than I was during the film’s first reel—what were its contours, its environs, or the shape of its windows? The specific details of the building evade me but not simply because the body of the building is obscured by night for the majority of the film. As hours pass, my attention turns to the passage of sparkling, bubbling blemishes in the degraded film stock that cascade across the peripheries of the screen. My eye drifts across the surface of the screen, rather than penetrating the image’s depth. But something else is brought clearly into focus while watching *Empire*—the faultiness and the quavering inconsistencies of my perception.

Long duration triggers a shift in perception, drawing attention to the act of viewing, or as Warhol puts it, “[helping] the audience get more acquainted with themselves.”²⁴ The viewer becomes intensely aware of not only her perceptual registry of the projected image but also the somatic interplay of her own senses—the viewing subject occupies dual positions as both subject and object of self-examination. Lagging attentiveness, wandering eyes, and even the discomfort of a theater seat become extremely apparent during *Empire*’s projection time, as attention is relayed from the screen to the body of the spectator.²⁵ Hunger and physical discomfort become

²⁴ Michael O’Pray, *Andy Warhol: Film Factory* (London: BFI Press), 58.

²⁵ Many scholars have discussed *Empire* in terms the psychological and perceptual shifts triggered by its monumental duration. David James writes that “extended duration, together with their minimized sensory

particularly evident, Annette Michelson suggests when describing her very real concerns while watching a Warhol film: “Do I have time to go and buy some popcorn or to go the bathroom without missing anything?”²⁶

Testing

Describing his films in a 1967 interview, Warhol states, “They’re experimental films...I’m interested in audience reactions to my films: my films now will be experiments, in a certain way, on testing their reactions.”²⁷ This statement is significant for two reasons. First of all, Warhol suggests that his films are not experimental solely because they are formally innovative; they are experimental because they offer test situations in which spectatorial responses can be tested. Like the filmed subjects of *Henry Geldzahler* and *Eat*, the viewer of *Empire* is submitted to something like an “aptitude test” that assesses the viewer’s comportment in the face of the cinematic apparatus.²⁸ Second of all, Warhol’s assertion that his films are experiments poses a challenge to Crimp’s ethics of looking. What is an experiment but an attempt to produce knowledge of a

output, could produce perceptual changes in the spectator, sometimes as extreme as a trance; Warhol himself reputedly was wont to bliss out when watching his own work.” James, 65. Yve-Alain Bois describes the dilated temporality of *Empire* and *Sleep* as dead time. Watching these films, the viewer passes a “threshold of imperceptibility,” for the film exists in a temporality that is beyond our perception. Yve-Alain Bois, “Very Slow,” in *Formless: A User’s Guide*, eds. Rosalind E. Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois (Cambridge: Zone Books, 1997), 200. Similarly, in her discussion of Warhol’s early films Amy Taubin argues that the disjuncture between the time of events on screen and the spectator’s own experience of the passage of time “heightens the viewer’s alienation from the image.” The bodily clock of the filmed subject and the film viewer are out of sync. Amy Taubin, “My Time is Not Your Time,” *Sight and Sound* 4.6 (1994): 22.

²⁶ Annette Michelson, “‘Where Is Your Rupture?’: Mass Culture and the Gesamtkunstwerk,” in *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 105-106.

²⁷ Goldsmith, 58.

²⁸ Hal Foster, “Test Subjects,” *October* 132 (Spring 2010): 41.

subject's reactions and to discover a previously unknown truth? Crimp disregards the primacy of testing, drilling, and training in Warhol's work. Through an examination of *Empire's* own test situation, Crimp's notion of ethical looking can be reevaluated.

Warhol's predilection for subject testing is most apparent in his Screen Tests, four-minute film portraits produced from 1964 to 1966 with near mechanical uniformity: Warhol would seat his subject faced-forward in front of a monochrome scrim, instruct the subject to stay as still as possible, turn on his Bolex camera, then walk away. The resulting product recalls the institutional photographic portrait—each of these films could be likened to a temporalized mug shot or passport photo. Producing such images, Angell notes, Warhol takes up the role of “social historian or ethnographer... assembling a group portrait of considerable cultural and physiognomic complexity.”²⁹ The Screen Tests assess one's capacity to address the camera without becoming distracted, present oneself as image, and choreograph one's facial expressions so as to project an interior self. In other words, what is tested is how thoroughly the filmed subject has mimetically ingested of the logic of the cinematic apparatus. But also, the subject must function as photographic apparatus, for the camera's task of freezing is relegated to the sitter, who must present herself as still image. Describing the intermedia quality of the Screen Tests, Callie Angell has characterized the films as conceptual hybrids “balanced on the borderline between moving and still image, part photography and part film, part portraiture and part performance.”³⁰

²⁹ Callie Angell, *Andy Warhol Screen Tests: The Films of Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2006), 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

In his “Work of Art” essay, Walter Benjamin diagnoses the psychological vicissitudes of the test subject who is asked to perform a self in front of the camera. He compares the actor to the assembly-line worker, who executes mechanized tests of professional aptitude that are judged by a factory overseer. Facing the camera, the actor similarly must demonstrate an ability to conform bodily motions to the camera’s machine logic. The whole process of being filmed is “a complex kind of training.”³¹ Instructed to perform the same scene over and over again, the actor does not *practice* acting; instead, the actor is *drilled*.³² This kind of subject-testing, Hal Foster notes, “is not conducive to an ‘experience’ that lives on as a memory, but is often corrosive of this old building-block of the traditional self.”³³ But Benjamin suggests that there is an escape hatch for the subject in the face of this scrutiny and subjugation. Confronting the film apparatus, the most adept actors will not only internalize but also manipulate the camera’s unrelenting gaze in order to assert their humanity, “placing the apparatus in the service of [their] triumph.”³⁴ In doing so, filmed subjects take revenge on not only the film apparatus but also the vast apparatus of the socio-economic regime. To the delight of spectating office and factory workers who “relinquish their humanity in the face of an apparatus” on a

³¹ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 175.

³² *Ibid.*, 175-176.

³³ Foster, “Test Subjects,” 35.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version,” in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2008), 31.

daily basis, the actor demonstrates on screen that the human subject cannot be diminished to a cog in the mechanisms of technological modernity.³⁵

The difficulty of performing all these functions simultaneously is played out on Edie Sedgwick's face during her Screen Test. She widens and flashes her eyes, as if consciously posing, but later her face slackens slightly, perhaps fatigued from maintaining eye contact with the camera (fig. 9). In a valiant attempt to abide by Warhol's request to refrain from moving, Ann Buchanan stares directly at the camera without blinking (fig. 10). Aggravated by the harsh glare of arc lamps, her eyes water, and a tear rolls down her face. This involuntary somatic response highlights the physiological impossibility of presenting oneself as motionless image. Though some subjects are able to present themselves with self-assurance, staunchly meeting the camera's gaze, in nearly all the Screen Tests, one witnesses the gradual deterioration of the subject's facial composure and the crumbling façade of projected self.³⁶ In later Screen Tests, Warhol would sadistically attempt to accelerate this deterioration, deliberately staging the test to be as difficult as possible for his subjects by pointing bright lights directly into their eyes. Under such duress, the sitter struggles to simply maintain composure; it becomes near impossible to achieve the humanistic triumph that Benjamin describes. "More often than not," David James observes, "the Screen Tests do

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Scholars have debated over the agency of the Screen Test sitters in the face of the camera's unrelenting gaze. For both Hal Foster and Amy Taubin, the Screen Tests testify to the impossibility of asserting one's humanity in front of the camera. "For all its seeming passivity, Warhol's camera is a weapon," Taubin writes. "The would-be superstars flocked to the Factory to have their narcissistic investment in their own sexuality confirmed; the camera left them in shreds." Taubin, "My Time is Not Your Time." Foster, "Test Subjects." Alternatively, Brigitte Weingart interprets lapses in the testee's comportment, which Taubin and Foster construe as failings, as actively queered glamour codes. The mis-performance and misinterpretation of movie star presence allows for the production of queer and alternative subjectivities on screen. Brigitte Weingart, "'That Screen Magnetism': Warhol's Glamour," *October* 132 (Spring 2010): 43-70.

not document their subjects' ability to manifest an autonomous, unified self so much as narrate their anxious response to the process of being photographed."³⁷

Of all Warhol's superstars, the Empire State Building—by nature of being an inanimate object—provides the most consistent performance in front of the camera.³⁸ “The Empire State Building is a star!” Warhol exclaimed while shooting the film.³⁹ The building is an exemplary star, executing an eight-hour performance effortlessly, without any visible tells that reveal the laboriousness of self-presentation, which were evident on the faces of Sedgwick and Buchanan.

Facing the screen rather than the camera, the viewer of *Empire* is subject to a different set of rigors. The confrontation between projected image and spectator is not so much a test of performance as a test of the viewer's ability to consume visual material. *Empire* lacks the cues typically provided by the on-screen actor or filmmaker that guide the viewer's attention—emotive glances, body movements, pans, zooms, and montage. Without these cues, the undirected eye flits across the screen or languishes, inattentively settling on a single point in the image. Jonathan Flatley provides a description of the ensuing split between vision and attention in Warhol's cinema: “after looking at the same spot for a few moments, one's attention tends to drift away from that spot even as one's eyes remain focused on it. We are all familiar with this phenomenon: it starts to shift and shimmer, the space around collapses and folds, colors seem to hover where they had not

³⁷ James, 69.

³⁸ In her analysis of *Empire*, Callie Angell examines the building's status as a Warhol superstar. Cloaked in the darkness of light, the Empire State Building is not only a film star and architectural celebrity but also a celestial star, a luminous floating figure in the night sky. Callie Angell, “Empire,” in *Andy Warhol: Motion Pictures*, ed. Callie Angell et al. (Berlin: KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 2004), 28.

³⁹ Mekas, 151.

been seen.”⁴⁰ Inevitably, “the knot of attention is untied, and its strands are laid out before us anew.”⁴¹ In *Empire*, attention is not directed in a concentrated node; rather, it is laterally dispersed and unfocused. Warhol enthusiastically promoted this distracted mode of spectatorship that unhinged viewers from their contemplative positions. “You could do more things watching my movies than with other kinds of movies,” he once stated. “You could eat and drink and smoke and cough and look away and then look back and they’d still be there. It’s not the ideal movie, it’s just my kind of movie.”⁴² Warhol describes a viewer who repeatedly oscillates between states of engagement and withdrawal, absorption and retreat from the screen. One might associate this half-engaged, half-distracted mode of spectatorship with boredom.

During the nineteenth century, boredom became a critical issue of visual perception, for it demonstrated the eye’s vulnerability to distraction and fatigue. In his studies of vision, Jonathan Crary argues that the rise of capitalist modernity and “a social field increasingly saturated with sensory input” was accompanied by the scrutiny of the nature of attention, specifically, “problems of concentration, focalization, and distraction.”⁴³ It was this new imperative of attentiveness, loosely defined as “the relative capacity of a subject to isolate certain contents of a sensory field at the expense of others,” that spawned a slew of theories and techniques for sensorial manipulation that would

⁴⁰ Jonathan Flatley, “Like Collecting and Collectivity,” *October* 132 (Spring 2010): 97.

⁴¹ Koch, 39.

⁴² O’Pray, 58.

⁴³ Jonathan Crary, “Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory,” *October* 50 (Autumn 1989), 102.

tamp down boredom and distraction, making the human subject more productive and orderly.⁴⁴

The visual engagement incited by *Empire*, which disperses attention not only across the screen but also throughout one's own body, is diametrically opposed to the laser-point precision and sensorial focus of the attentive subject. Such experiences of boredom produce "alternate experiences of dissociation, of temporalities that are not only dissimilar to but also fundamentally incompatible with capitalist patterns of flow and obsolescence," Crary suggests.⁴⁵ Whereas the passage of time under capitalist modernity is experienced as an endless flow of present moments, "a growing multiplicity of neutral indifferent instants," the time-space of boredom produces an acute awareness of the passage of time. When bored, one becomes particularly attuned to the experience of each second and the slow shaving away of past from present. "Boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation," Benjamin proclaims, "Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience."⁴⁶ In *Empire*, the transgressions of the bored gaze are emphasized by the very fact that the film was shot in a corporate office—a workspace is used to look out the window rather than to do proper work. Rather than associating vision with mastery or the systematic production of knowledge, Warhol conceives of vision as resistant to those very activities. In summary, boredom seems to offer tacit resistance to not only the disciplinary regime of the test situation but also the capitalist rhythms of productivity. Though Warhol's treatment of his film viewers as test subjects evokes the sensory

⁴⁴ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁶ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 91.

discipline described by Benjamin, the kind of sensorial training that *Empire* calls for does not make the human subject productive in the traditional sense.

But what kind of productivity does *Empire* call for exactly? *Empire* requires its viewers to participate in the labors typically relegated to the on-screen actor or filmmaker. During the film's production, Warhol did not engage in directing or editing, the physical labors typically associated with filmmaking. In fact, the main physical exertions required for *Empire*'s production, the changing of reels, was assigned to the members of his crew. Unmoored from Warhol's authorial direction, viewers must produce their own meaning from the image.⁴⁷ Reflecting on the spectatorship required by his early films, Warhol states, "When people go to a show today they're never involved any more. A movie like *Sleep* gets them involved again. They get involved with themselves and they create their own entertainment."⁴⁸ *Empire*, like *Sleep*, requires its viewers to scan the surface of the image, searching for points of interest or moments of pleasure, producing "their own entertainment." Like the Screen Test sitter, the viewer of *Empire* mimics the operations of the film apparatus, but this mode of perceptual training does not resemble the drill, which the Benjamin associates with the assembly-line worker—"[the unskilled laborer's]

⁴⁷ My understanding of the labor of boredom is informed by Matthew Tinkcom's investigation of the labor of glamour. "Glamour often functions through spectatorial fantasy: we do the work of attributing special qualities to the image," he writes. Because glamour appears effortless, as if it were produced without investments of capital, time or effort, spectators produce "fantasies that surround the film's making." Finding pleasure in the glamorous image is "a labor borne largely by the viewer." Though glamour does not play a central role in my reading of *Empire*, I have adopted the inverse relationship between the perceptual work required of the viewer and the visible work done by the actor/filmmaker proposed by Tinkcom. *Empire* could certainly be read as a work that challenges the limits of glamour. Although the glamorous and the boring are seemingly opposed, the same formal mechanisms produce the two in *Empire*. Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital and Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 84, 94.

⁴⁸ Goldsmith, 168.

work has been sealed off from experience; practice counts for nothing here.”⁴⁹ On the contrary, the task of the spectator is akin to that of Benjamin’s storyteller, who must construct meaning from the vastness of everyday life, fashioning “the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way.”⁵⁰ Far from passive or soporific, Warholian boredom becomes a kind of perceptual labor in the realm of reception, a perceptual labor that produces experience.⁵¹

Though Warhol does not discuss boredom in a systematic way—if anything, his elliptical and at times contradictory statements seem to suggest multiple modalities of boredom—in his artistic practice, boredom is often coincident with liking. “I’ve been quoted a lot as saying, ‘I like boring things.’ Well, I said it and I mean it. But that doesn’t mean I’m not bored by them.”⁵² It is possible, Warhol suggests, to simultaneously like something and be bored by it. Boredom should not be equated with resigned indifference or apathy but rather an emotional flatness in the perception of all things. As Jonathan Flatley argues in his examination of Warhol’s collecting practices, undergirding Warhol’s boredom is a utopian impulse to distribute an even-keeled, democratic “liking” to all

⁴⁹ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 108.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Here, Isabelle Graw’s insights on Warhol’s conception of labor are apposite. For Warhol, everyday life was indistinguishable from work—even idle moments when “nothing [was] being done in the conventional sense” were subsumed by an invisible labor. Anticipating contemporary celebrity culture, Warhol ingests the post-Fordist condition, which instrumentalizes quotidian and private activities in the production and performance of self-as-product. After all, the Factory’s production consisted of not only silkscreen prints but also the subjectivities of his superstars. “We must consider the Factory as a kind of biopolitical theater that cannibalized people’s lives,” she writes. Isabelle Graw, “When Life Goes to Work: Andy Warhol,” *October* 132 (Spring 2010): 100, 107.

⁵² Warhol and Hackett, 64.

objects and people—through liking, things become alike.⁵³ In his personal collection, original drawings and art deco furniture received the same attention as newspaper clippings, cookie jars, and knickknacks that would otherwise be considered detritus. Warhol is explicit about the democratizing social function of boredom: “I love every ‘lib’ movement there is, because after the ‘lib’ the things that were always a mystique become understandable and boring, and then nobody has to feel left out if they’re not part of what is happening.”⁵⁴ When the particular becomes boring, difference acquires a banality and everydayness.

And so we return to the notion of ethical looking and more precisely, the ethics of the bored gaze. The concept of boredom can be used to expand what Crimp describes as Warhol’s ethics of looking; it operates not only by restricting the visibility of his subjects through framing and lighting but also by inciting bored spectatorship. Rather than a gaze that penetrates and comprehends, *Empire* calls for a gaze that scans the surface of the screen, searching for points of interest and entertainment. This kind of indiscriminate vision does not prioritize depth over surface, center over periphery, or action over inaction. Warhol’s nonhierarchical treatment of the screen parallels his treatment of his subjects, David James observes. “Warhol’s refusal to censor, to censure, or even to create hierarchies bespeaks a toleration, simultaneously ethical and aesthetic, that inheres in all

⁵³ Examining Warhol’s large collection of penis drawings produced during the 1950s, Flatley notes that Warhol’s emphasis on alikeness and similarity does not silence difference. In fact, difference and particularity only becomes visible in a field of similarity. “Outside the space of likeness...the image of a penis signifies first of all as ‘a penis,’ i.e., not something else. But alongside other penises, the specificity, the ‘story’ of each one emerges...In Warhol’s cock collections, we have a queer erotic economy based on a society of similarities and singularities, the more the merrier.” Flatley, “Like Collecting and Collectivity,” 72, 88.

⁵⁴ Andy Warhol. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 45.

his most characteristic gestures.”⁵⁵ *Empire* serves a pedagogical function—it trains its spectators to approach Warhol’s filmed subjects with this democratizing gaze. Whether the filmed subject passes or fails the cinematic test ultimately becomes unimportant. Under the bored gaze, Edie Sedgwick’s performance is no more or less interesting than that of Henry Geldzahler, who twitches, sweats, and slouches over by the end of *Henry Geldzahler* (1964). Through the labor of bored spectatorship, viewers are trained to become suitable recipients for Warhol’s visual product.

Repeating

Hal Foster, who has written extensively on Warhol’s oeuvre, has positioned boredom as a response to trauma. Trauma is central to several art historians’ readings of Warhol’s oeuvre: it is endured by the subject of Warhol’s photo-booth and snapshot portraits, who must parry the shocks of the camera’s fast-paced flashing and snapping; trauma is inflicted on the viewer who confronts Warhol’s silkscreen paintings; even *Empire* “offers a kind of perverse shock at endurance.”⁵⁶ Reconciling two opposing camps in Warhol scholarship, which he refers to as “referential” and “simulacral,” Foster proposes that Warhol invokes a “traumatic realism” in his work and life practice.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ James 67.

⁵⁶ Tinkcom, 85.

⁵⁷ “Referential” interpretations of Warhol’s work tend to fixate on the subject of his images—celebrity, fashion, gay culture, and death—and stress the political nature of his choice of imagery. Thomas Crow provides a notable referential reading of Warhol’s work, arguing that the artist examines “the open sores in American political life” in his Death and Disaster series. Thomas Crow, “Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol,” in *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 58. “Simulacral” interpretations, often rooted in a post-structuralist critique of representation, generally consider the subject matter of Warhol’s images to be arbitrary. As apathetic products of commodity fetishism, his paintings provide no place for subjective interiority. As Roland Barthes writes, “The Pop artist does not stand behind his work and he himself has no depth: he is merely the surface of his pictures, no signified, no intention, anywhere.” Roland Barthes, “That Old Thing, Art,” in *Post-Pop*, ed. Paul Taylor

Warhol presents himself as automaton, performing mechanical repetitions in his artistic production (churning out serial silkscreens and films) as well as his daily consumption (eating the same lunch everyday). This does not suggest a blank, anti-authorial subject, Foster argues, but rather a traumatized subject. Abiding by a self-mechanizing logic reminiscent of dada, Warhol “takes on the nature of what shocks him as a mimetic defense against this shock.”⁵⁸ Within this interpretation of Warhol’s work, boredom is a defense against and a symptom of shocked subjectivity. According to Foster, Warhol’s proclamation “I like boring things” reveals a desire to drain trauma of its significance and affect—boredom anesthetizes the shocked subject. “When you see a gruesome picture over and over again,” Warhol states, “it doesn’t really have any effect.”⁵⁹ This formulation of boredom—quite different from the “dream bird” described by Benjamin—recalls sociologist Georg Simmel’s description of the “blasé outlook,” which ultimately preserves the subject from the psychological threats generated by intense nervous stimulation. When the external world “agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all,” the blasé subject perceives all stimuli as equivalent; all appears in “an evenly flat and gray tone; no one object deserves preference over any other.”⁶⁰ The blasé attitude is a sociological correlative to the protective shield described by Freud, which can be raised to protect oneself from traumatic shock emanating from the external world.

(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 25. Hal Foster “Death in America,” in in *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

⁵⁸ Foster, “Death in America,” 71.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶⁰ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Patrick Frisby (Thousand Oaks, SAGE, 1998), 178.

For Foster, the operations of traumatic shock are especially evident in Warhol's Death and Disaster series. Urban high rises provide the backdrop for *Suicide (Silver Jumping Man)* (1963) and *A Woman's Suicide* (1962), paintings that depict small anonymous figures falling from tall buildings (figs. 11, 12). In his 1963 silkscreen painting *Suicide (Fallen Body)*, the heights of the Empire State Building take on a sinister dimension (fig. 13). Its repeated image, sourced from *Life Magazine*, depicts Evelyn McHale, a woman who had jumped off the Empire State Building's observation deck. Cradled by the dented car on which she landed, she lays face upward, seemingly in tranquil repose. The original photograph had garnered attention for the beauty and serenity of McHale's face. And yet her face, caked in dark pigment, recedes into the black metal of the car in the uppermost register of Warhol's painting. As one scans Warhol's multiple iterations of the image, the woman's figure oscillates between legibility and illegibility—each silkscreen rendering is riddled each various streaks, stains, and blank spots. At times her body merges with the metallic curvature of the dented car. Light reflecting off the car's punched-in metal hood confusingly reads as a sinuous three-dimensional form; it reads as a mangled, proxy right leg. When examining the painting, each attempt to locate McHale's body in a state of coherence and visibility is thwarted, disrupted by the "pops," "floating flashes," slips, and streaks in the material of the image.⁶¹ These moments of illegibility generated by Warhol's method of mechanical production, Foster claims, serve as a missed encounter with the real, the point of rupture in signification that activates the compulsion to repeat.⁶²

⁶¹ Hal Foster, "Death in America," 42.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Drawing on Jacques Lacan's writings on trauma, Foster argues that these repetitions function as a protective screen for the traumatic real, but paradoxically, this attempt to reduce the effects of trauma produces a trauma of its own. "Several contradictory things occur at the same time," he writes, "a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect *and* a producing of it."⁶³ Through repetition, one attempts to integrate the source of trauma into one's psychic economy as an act of mimetic defense, and yet the repetitions fail to be curative. Instead of mastery over trauma, repetition produces a fetishistic fixation on what is lost.

Although fetishistic fixation is still at play in Warhol's early films, his cinematic repetitions, which often go unnoticed, produce an effect that is quite different from the traumatic response induced by the serial repetitions of his silkscreens. Here, repetition does not produce trauma exactly, but rather, as Branden Joseph puts it, "a frustration or agitation as viewers find themselves caught within a time that refuses to advance."⁶⁴ Building on this observation, I will suggest that this frustration is intimately tied to the production of pleasure. In order to investigate the pleasures of repetition, my discussion will turn to *Sleep*. I will examine two modes of repetition at play in *Sleep*: the first troubles the boundaries between repetition and stillness; the second follows a masochistic structural logic.

Filmed over a period of several weeks, *Sleep* consists of twenty-two shots of John Giorno's sleeping nude body, several of which were reprinted and repeated throughout

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Branden W. Joseph, "The Play of Repetition: Andy Warhol's 'Sleep,'" *Grey Room* 19 (Spring 2005): 34.

the film. Rather than shooting the film in real time, Warhol admittedly “faked [*Sleep*] by looping footage, so although it was hours of a person sleeping, I hadn’t actually shot that much.”⁶⁵ The quarter-hour opening shot of Giorno’s softly breathing torso, which would be near impossible to identify if it were not for the presence of a bellybutton, consists of six repetitions of one four-minute shots. Viewers “*find* themselves caught within a time that refuses to advance”—this marks the difference between the repetitions in Warhol’s silkscreen and his films. To discern *Sleep*’s repetitive structure, one must recognize the recurrence of slight movements made by the sleeping Giorno or the momentary disturbances in the film grain that accompany each iteration of the shot.

Faced with the image of a nearly immobile object, the difference between repetition and stillness deteriorates. By obscuring the legibility of discrete, iterative units, the opening sequence in *Sleep* troubles the foundations of repetition. It stresses the inertia inherent to repetitive structures, which produces the sensation of time suspended or doubling back on itself. Similarly, in *Empire* the forward progression through time could be mistaken for a time that does not advance. Undoubtedly, this contributed to *Empire*’s initial reception—its first audiences and critics proclaimed that the film was a cruel joke. The audience’s inability to distinguish repetition from stillness fomented anxiety that the film’s middle reels in fact consisted of a single shot on loop, as if Warhol were duping his audiences.⁶⁶

In some of *Sleep*’s shots, the body becomes a strange grey landscape, a set of abstract compositions of line and shadow. Landscape—this word would take on explicitly sexual connotations in Warhol’s later work, for he often referred to his pornographic

⁶⁵ Popism, 63.

⁶⁶ Koch, 60.

photographs as “landscapes” in diaries.⁶⁷ Even in *Sleep*, there is an erotics at play in Warhol’s rendering of the body as inert object in close-up. Without clear signifiers of gender, skin is simply skin, a material substance whose curves and dimples could be likened to valleys and rivulets (figs. 14-16). But also, skin is screen. The body is mapped onto filmic material in such a way that the texture of Giorno’s skin is indistinguishable from the film grain. What results is confusion between intimacy with the body and intimacy with celluloid. In depicting the sensuality of inanimate matter, the film fosters a perverse desire for the screen itself.

Twenty years earlier, Willard Maas staged a similar analogy between flesh and landscape in his 1943 film *Geography of the Body*. Assembling extreme close ups of various nipples, quivering lips, palms, and twisting limbs, Maas charts the topography of the body as a series of fragments. As Annette Michelson suggests in her essay “‘Where is Your Rupture?’: Mass Culture and the Gesamtkunstwerk,” *Geography of the Body* presages the urge to render the body-in-pieces that would become a dominant trend, running “like an insistent thread, a sustained subtext” through the artistic production of the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁸ Not only in Warhol’s early films but also in Jasper Johns’s targets and Eva Hesse’s protruding breast-like formations, the body is fragmented, abstracted, disarticulated. Drawing on Melanie Klein’s theory of the part-object, Michelson traces this formative sadistic impulse to infantile development. During the process of weaning, the part-object under the infant’s scrutiny is the mother’s breast; it becomes the focus of the infant’s aggressive urge to devour, to punish, to rend and tear apart. For Michelson,

⁶⁷ “Took ‘landscape’ pictures of an ex-porno star Victor brought down.” “Victor had a ‘big black number’ coming over to his house that he wanted me to photograph as a ‘landscape,’ so we cabbed back.” Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Andy Warhol Diaries* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1991), 35, 149.

⁶⁸ Michelson, 96.

the sadistic desire to rend the body into pieces reaches something of a fever pitch in Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1974), in which the filmmaker-as-autopsist depicts the literal dismembering of a cadaver in a morgue. The human body is dissected not only on the autopsy table but also on Brakhage's editing table.

This urge to disarticulate the body is particularly evident in post-war American avant-garde cinema. Employing, extreme close-ups, fast-paced montage, and variable lighting, Yoko Ono, Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren abstract the body. Such is the case in Yoko Ono's 1970 film *Fly*, which tracks the expedition of what seems to be a single fly as it traverses a woman's body (fig. 17). As in *Sleep*, the body is splayed across the screen in a succession of parts, many of which are unrecognizable in close-up. Much of the body-terrain that the fly navigates consists of undifferentiated swaths of skin occasionally punctuated by hair follicles or a nipple. From the perspective of the fly, the metaphor of the body as a vast landscape is particularly appropriate, for it is transformed into a beige-toned desert that the fly scuttles across. Settling on nipples and in pubic hair, it indiscriminately traverses these "major points of voyeuristic interest"—the fly and the camera that tracks it are indifferent to the charge of these erotogenic zones. The fly lingers for just as long on fingers, stomach, and other areas of non-genital skin.⁶⁹

During these moments, Ono offers a kind of pleasure that is altogether different from the titillations of voyeurism. The pleasures offered by *Fly* are perverse in a non-pathological sense outlined by Freud in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, for the camera fixates on the sensuousness of non-erotogenic zones of the body, eschewing normal sexual aims (which are coincident with heterosexual reproduction, according to

⁶⁹ Chrissie Iles, "Fly," in *Yes: Yoko Ono*, ed. Alexandra Munroe et al. (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2000), 218.

Freud). Thickness of the flesh is privileged over gender, sexual orientation, or any other markers of subjectivity or identity. Part object cinema urges the viewer to indulge in the infant's polymorphously perverse desire for the part-object.

Though *Empire* does not seem to offer a body to examine or desire, Warhol assures us that “*Empire* is a—uh—pornographic movie. When the light goes on in the Empire State Building, it's supposed to represent.... (he smiled).”⁷⁰ If Warhol's early films constitute a phantasmatic body of fragmented parts—skin in *Sleep*, shoulder in *Shoulder*, and ass in *Taylor Mead's Ass*—*Empire* provides its cock. Reversing the analogy used to describe his nude photographs as landscapes, Warhol codes the cityscape as a kind of body of its own.

The correlation between corporeality and buildings is underscored in several moments in *Empire* when bodies are unintentionally superimposed onto the surface of the Time Life Building, the site where the film was shot. Partly due to the amateur guesswork involved in *Empire's* recording process (the lights of the office in which the film was shot were accidentally left on for several seconds) the shadowy reflections of John Palmer, Jonas Mekas, and Andy Warhol are visible at the beginning of reels five, seven, and ten.⁷¹ Their torsos, heads, and elbows are inadvertently mapped onto the cityscape. For the first ten or so seconds of the film's final reel, the screen is wholly consumed by the reflection of the office interior. In front of the thin bars of a gridded windowpane, Warhol mills around, unaware that the camera is recording his image. He runs a hand through his hair then shuffles to the right. In these moments, the building in

⁷⁰ Goldsmith, 186.

⁷¹ Angell has carefully recorded the identities and time marks of these reflections. Angell, *Andy Warhol: Motion Pictures*, 35.

which they are shooting is rendered as a screen, a surface on which light is projected, making bodies visible—a fortuitous mirroring of the cinematic apparatus and the glassy surface of the Time Life Building. As in *Sleep*, it becomes difficult to distinguish the material irregularities of the filmstrip from the sparse scene that is being recorded by the camera.

Suspending

There is a second kind of repetition at play in *Sleep*. The film’s complex editing structure weaves together tight shots of Giorno’s inert and moving body. Up close, repeated shots render Giorno inert and nearly unrecognizable. For minutes we confront a wiry tuft of hair, perhaps from an armpit, and later, a curved shape in dramatic chiaroscuro engulfs the screen, possibly the silhouette of his ass or the side of a shoulder. But before the viewer can forget that the filmed subject is a live man, Warhol returns to a shot depicting the slow up-and-down heave of Giorno’s chest or the fluttering of his throat as he breathes, reassuring the viewer that he is indeed alive. Watching *Sleep* is like witnessing a futile resurrection, as an inert object reanimates then petrifies again and again. It is Warhol’s repeated oscillations between inert skin and pulsating body that suspend Giorno between life (as moving body) and death (as inanimate matter). He is caught between these two states, unable to fully occupy either pole. *Sleep* produces a suspension between stasis and movement that corresponds to the temporal rhythms of masochism.⁷²

⁷² Grundmann also identifies masochist operations in *Blow Job*. He argues that masochism operates through the sitter’s deliberate, histrionic facial expressions and “flamboyantly melodramatic” performance. Drawing on Leo Bersani’s theorization of masochism, Grundmann argues that masochism is inherently

In his 1924 essay “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” Freud attempts to reconcile the pleasure principle with the masochist’s capacity to derive libidinal excitation from pain.⁷³ For the masochist, suspense and anticipation are prolonged in order to postpone climax, and this deferral produces both pleasure and frustration.⁷⁴ Suspension and its cognates—waiting, anticipation, dilatoriness—are crucial to masochism, for the masochist “always seeks to prolong preparatory detail and ritual and the expense of climax or consummation.”⁷⁵

Describing the formal logic of masochism in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s novels, and thus expanding discussions of masochism beyond the clinical realm, Gilles Deleuze notes a double suspension at play in the scenarios Sacher-Masoch describes: bodies are physically suspended (tied up, suspended in air) and temporally suspended. Masochism freezes action, arresting scenes before the point of narrative or sexual climax. The masochist is caught in a tableau vivant of frozen poses Deleuze likens to a photograph or painting. In these “photographic scenes,” the subject is petrified in the moment just before pleasure/pain is consummated—the masochist forever waits for the whip to fall and hit the body.⁷⁶

Warhol undoubtedly was invested in the erotics of waiting. The best thing to do on a date, he writes, is to wait in line for a movie: “The idea of waiting for something

performative: “pain is made to *pass* as pleasure... and all we are left with is melodrama.” Grundmann, 117-118.

⁷³ Sigmund Freud, “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” in *Essential Papers on Masochism*, ed. Margaret Ann Fitzpatrick Hanly (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 274-285.

⁷⁴ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge 1992), 199.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze. *Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 33-34.

makes it more exciting anyway. Never getting in is the most exciting, but after that waiting to get in is the most exciting.”⁷⁷ He suggests that consummation is not even necessary for suspense to be pleasurable—eschewing an end goal and failing to get into the theater “is the *most* exciting.” Like the photographic scenes Deleuze describes, the subjects of *Sleep* and *Empire* are similarly fixed in place, as if in tableaux vivants of a masochistic fantasy. As spectators, we watch these films with no expectation of immanent action. We look, but not *for* anything.

Thomas Waugh characterizes this strategy of suspension in Warhol’s work as teasing. The Warholian tease is best exemplified by *Blow Job*—though the viewer is titillated by its suggestive title and its subject’s provocative facial expressions, the camera refuses to reveal the sexual act taking place. “The cocksucker stays perpetually offscreen in *Blow Job* and everywhere else,” writes Waugh, noting that the dynamics of the tease infiltrate nearly all of Warhol’s films.⁷⁸ The tease is certainly at play in *Sleep*. As Branden Joseph argues, *Sleep* adopts the economy of pornography and the sexualized commodity: the relay of repeated body parts across the screen “simultaneously disappoints and instigates a renewed sexual desire apparently fulfillable through yet another representation.”⁷⁹ The sexualized commodity makes an illusory promise of access, but the viewer never grasps the object of desire on screen.

⁷⁷ Warhol, *Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 115.

⁷⁸ In restricting what his audiences can see, Warhol teases not only his audience, but also the censors that policed sexually explicit imagery under the auspices of the Production Code. Waugh suggests that the tease, emblematic of the erotic rhetoric of the 1960s, was in part a subversive method of presenting prurient imagery while eluding censorship. Waugh, 55.

⁷⁹ Joseph, “The Play of Repetition: Andy Warhol’s ‘Sleep,’” 44.

Perhaps Gary Indiana had this tease in mind when he called the Factory “The Church of Unimaginable Penis,” for in many of Warhol’s early films, genitals and sexual activity are often alluded to but remain invisible.⁸⁰ In *Blow Job*, the sexual act takes place off screen; the careful framing of *Sleep* obscures Giorno’s genitals; and often, the phallus is symbolically coded, for example, as a banana in *Mario Banana* (1964) and as building in *Empire*. Viewers are presented with “the thrill without the danger, the excitement without the release...the position of merely teasing the viewer without any real fulfillment of those expectations.”⁸¹

Ruminating on pornography, Stephen Koch describes this state of suspension as a kind of boredom:

It seems to me that pornography is dull because it is dull to wait—and pornography requires us to wait. We wait through it, hoping for the arrival of those few moments which actually touch the nerve of some private fantasy...The experience of *not* being excited is just as important. Watching, one sits through a vague dissociated sexual awareness, incessantly examining one’s own responses, wondering when the thrill will come.⁸²

One would imagine that the pleasure derived from pornography would be rooted in visibility and *scientia sexualis*, the “knowledge-pleasure” in being made privy to the secreted mechanisms of sexual functioning.⁸³ And yet Koch suggest that pleasure is not located in the image on screen, but by its very deferral. Boredom is central the erotics that he describes.

In a 1967 interview with Gretchen Berg, Warhol referred to his early silent works as “films using stationary objects,” a peculiar choice of words, since *Empire* is the only

⁸⁰ O’Pray, 184.

⁸¹ Waugh, 60.

⁸² Koch, 50.

⁸³ Williams, 35.

one of his silent films made between 1963 and 1964 whose central subject is an inanimate object rather than a person.⁸⁴ Though such statements seem to suggest that Warhol's camera indiscriminately makes objects out of the subjects it shoots, *Empire* serves as a reminder that this is not the case. There is a shared equivalence and fluidity between bodies, inanimate objects, and part objects when rendered as image by Warhol's camera. The bored gaze fostered by Warhol's films allows perverse attachments to form with bodies, buildings, and screens. Warhol himself seemed to be equally interested in skin and projected image as sensuous surfaces.

⁸⁴ O'Pray, 58.

Figures

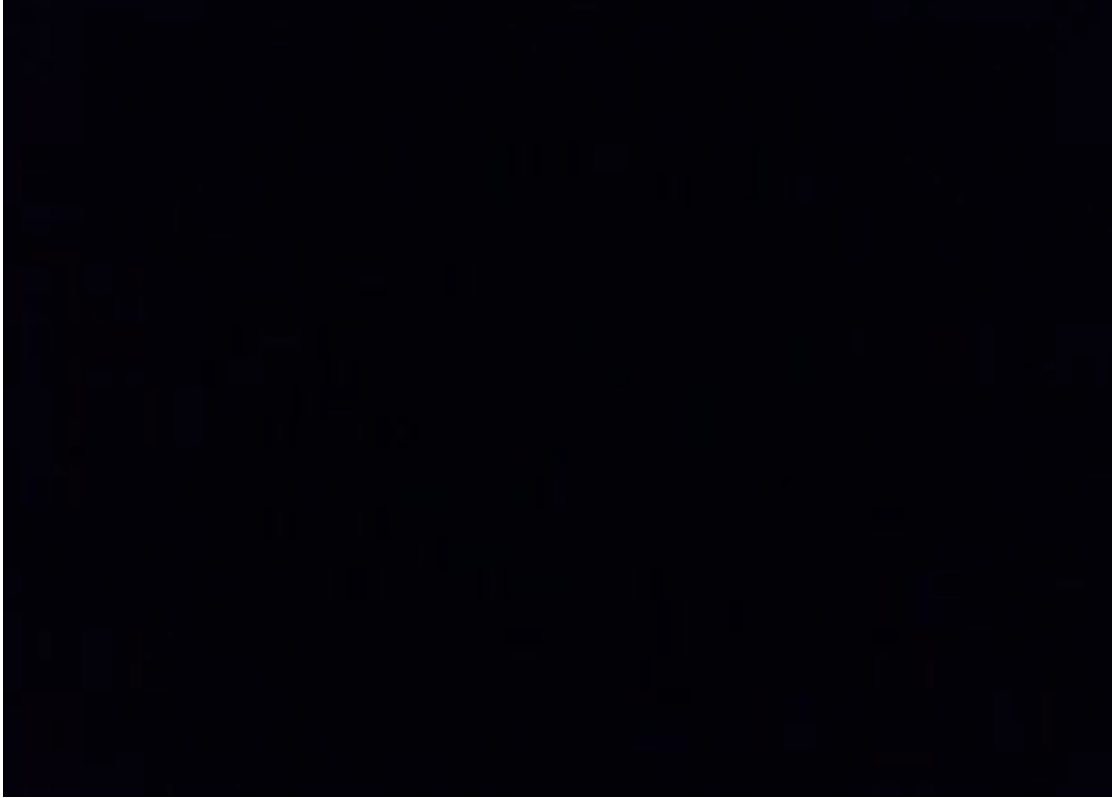


Figure 1: Andy Warhol, *Empire*, 1964, 16-mm film

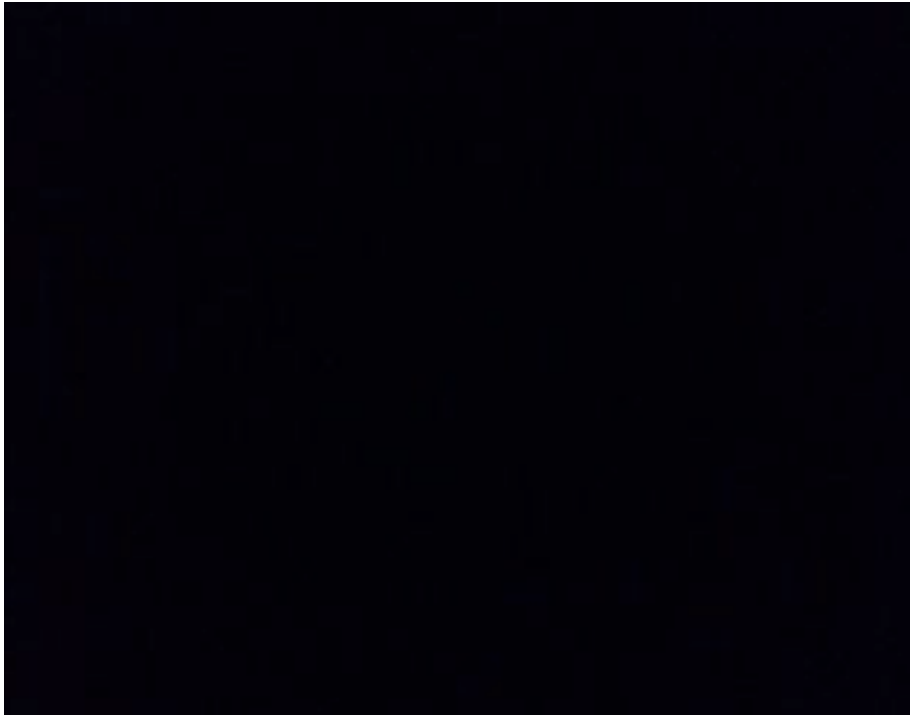


Figure 2: Andy Warhol, *Empire*, 1964, 16-mm film



Figure 3: Andy Warhol, *Empire*, 1964, 16-mm film



Figure 4: Andy Warhol, *Empire*, 1964, 16-mm film



Figure 5: Andy Warhol, *Empire*, 1964, 16-mm film



Figure 6: Andy Warhol, *Empire*, 1964, 16-mm film



Figure 7: Andy Warhol, *Blow Job*, 1964, 16-mm film

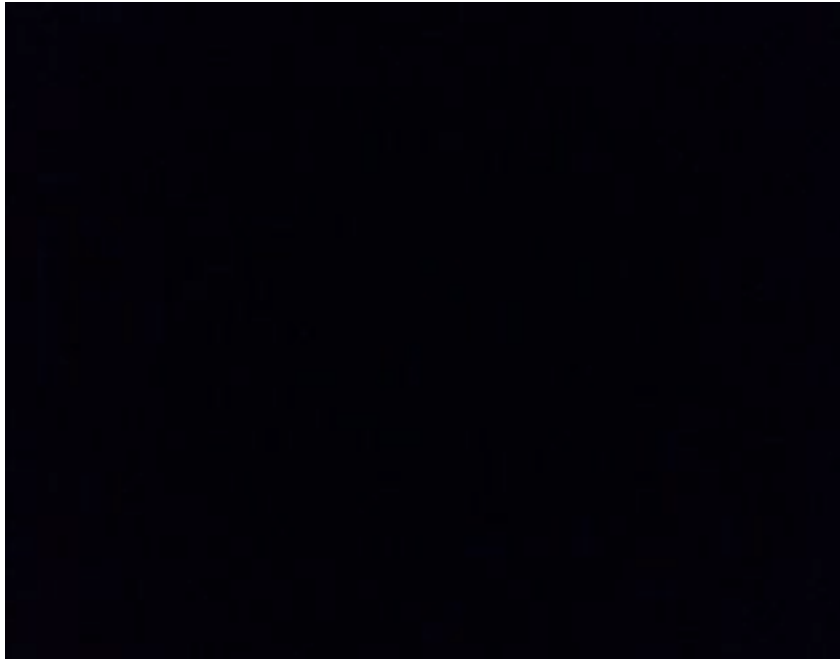


Figure 8: Thomas Edison, *Fred Ott's Sneeze*, 1894, kinetoscope recording

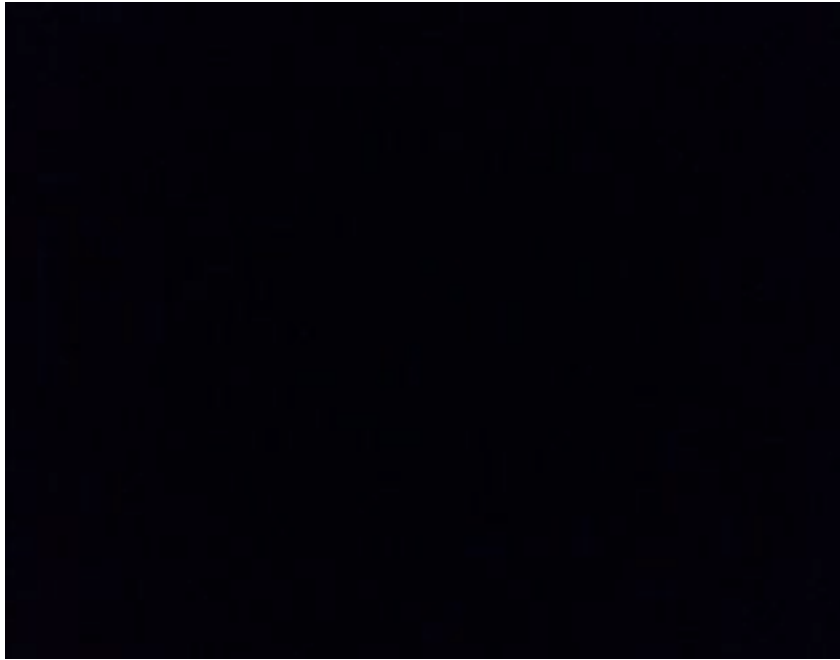


Figure 9: Andy Warhol, *Screen Test 3* (Eddie Sedgwick), 1965, 16-mm film

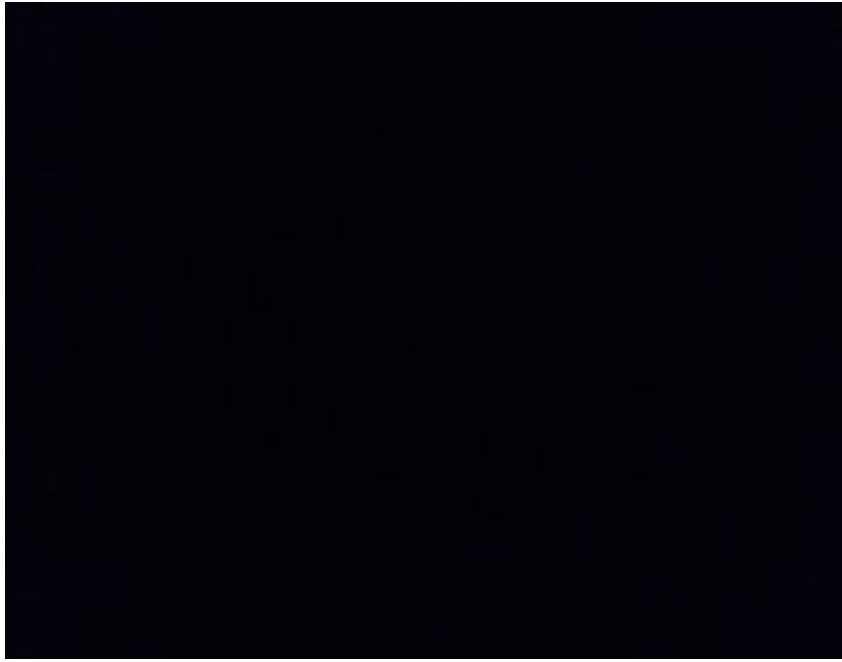


Figure 10: Andy Warhol, *Screen Test* (Ann Buchanan), 1964, 16-mm film

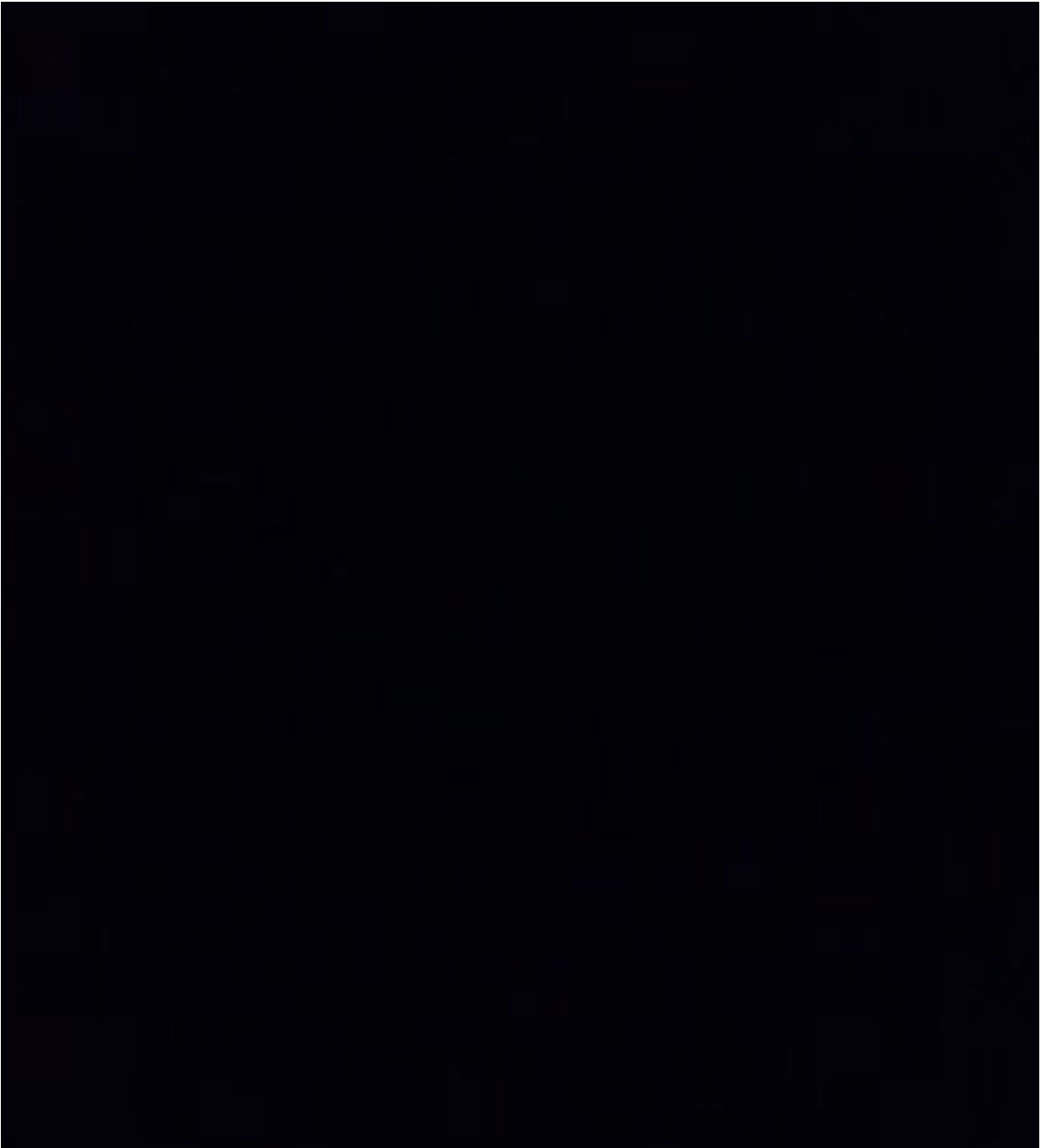


Figure 11: Andy Warhol, *A Woman's Suicide*, 1962, acrylic and enamel on canvas



Figure 12: Andy Warhol, *Suicide (Silver Jumping Man)*, 1963, acrylic and enamel on canvas



Figure 13: Andy Warhol, *Suicide (Fallen Body)*, 1963, acrylic and enamel on canvas

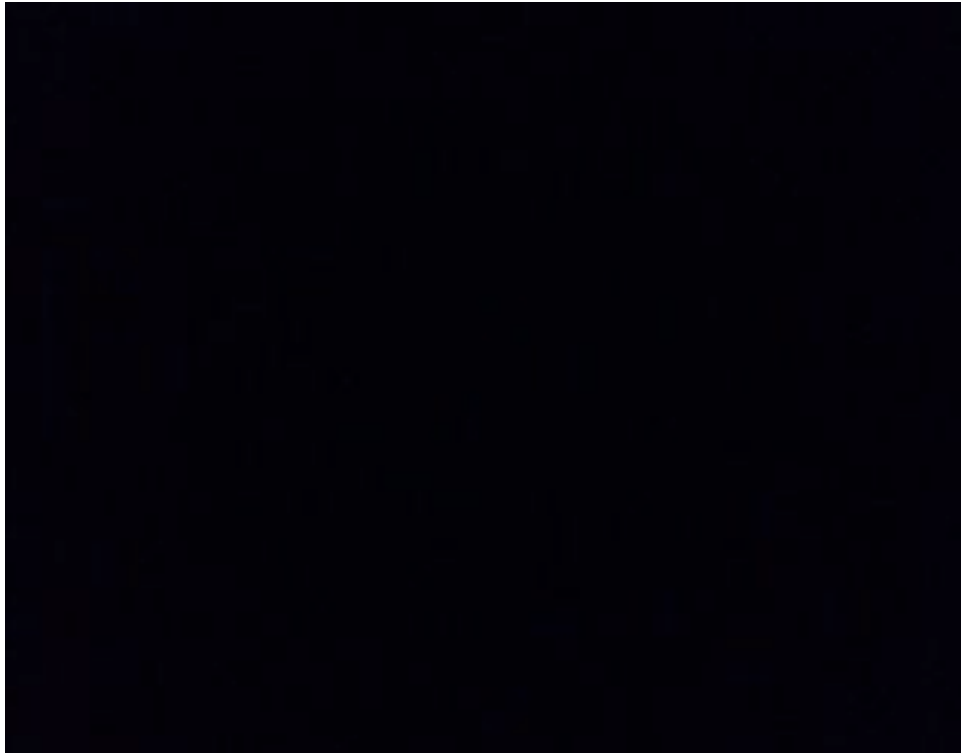


Figure 14: Andy Warhol, *Sleep*, 1963, 16-mm film



Figure 15: Andy Warhol, *Sleep*, 1963, 16-mm film

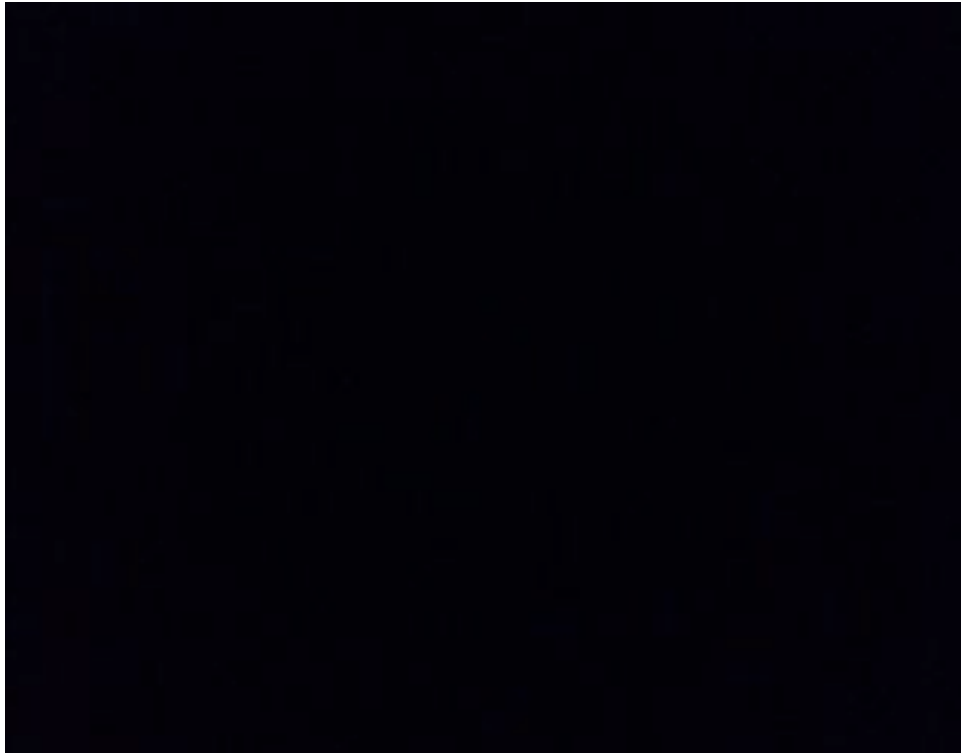


Figure 16: Andy Warhol, *Sleep*, 1963, 16-mm film

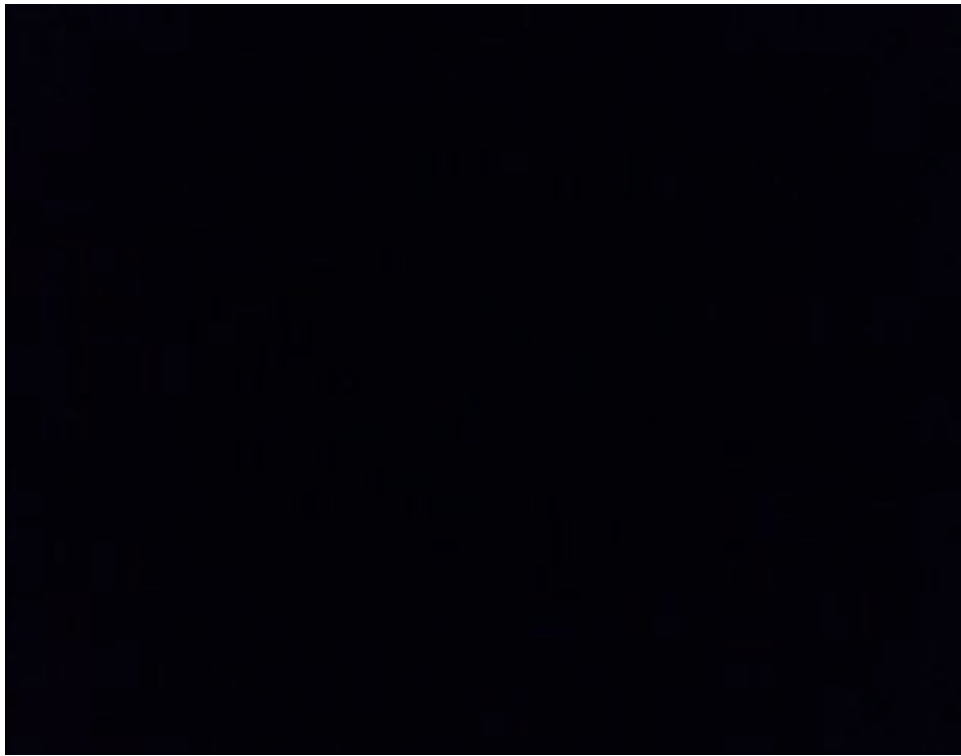


Figure 17: Yoko Ono, *Fly*, 1970, 16-mm film

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