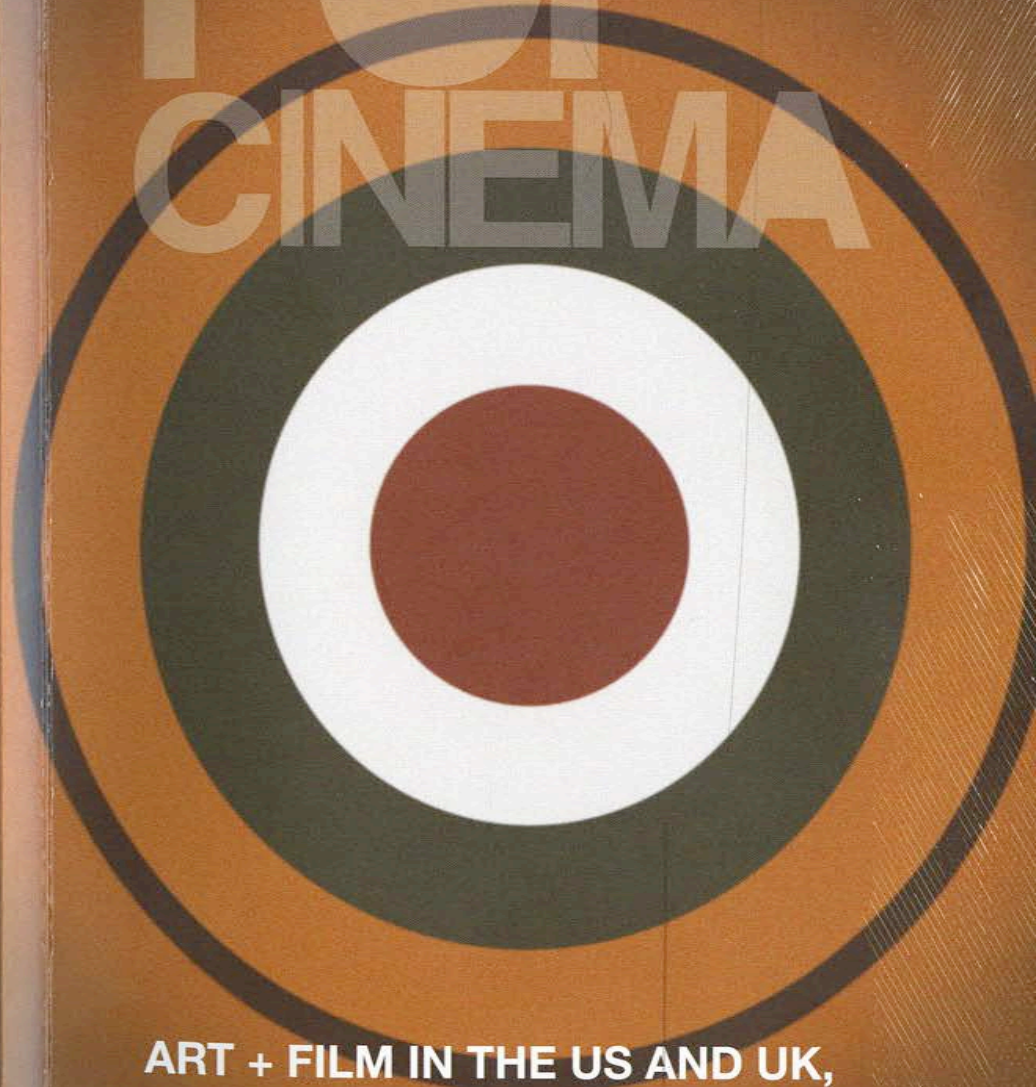


WILLIAM KAIZEN

POP CINEMA



ART + FILM IN THE US AND UK,
1950s-1970s

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE PHILADELPHIA

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WHAT IS POP CINEMA?

When William Kaizen initially asked me to consider this question, my mind jumped to some of the more predictable figures in art history. Andy Warhol, the world's most famous Pop artist, made hundreds of films, and while his work offers one glimpse at what Pop Cinema is, it doesn't come close to capturing the full range of Pop Art's interaction with underground cinema. Kaizen has since organized a program that truly answers the question. While Warhol does figure into this program, the emphasis is on a broader spectrum of filmmakers and artists whose work expands the notion of how Pop Art and cinema intersected.

Film @ International House has for many decades now examined some of the most significant movements and innovative ideas within the world of cinema. It is with great enthusiasm that we present *Pop Cinema: Art + Film in the US and UK 1950s–1970s*. The program includes some of the key figures in film and art history while exposing the social and cultural backdrops for these artistic experiments. These films represent ideas and themes very much grounded in an era when mass-produced popular culture intersected with the underground. What Kaizen terms "Pop Cinema" is an altogether new approach to synthesizing these works. By uniting examples from the UK, such as works from the Free

Cinema movement and other pop documentaries, with film from the US, such as the collage films of Stan VanDerBeek and Bruce Conner, or the high-camp, low-budget films of the Kuchars, *Pop Cinema* is a fresh rereading of film and art history. Kaizen, in his essay, identifies several common elements in these films that link them to a larger cultural milieu. Some of these films have rarely been seen by cinema audiences, particularly in this context. The screenings are a rare opportunity to view works that are often overlooked in other avant-garde film programs together with films that have yet to be evaluated as examples of Pop Cinema.

In addition to the screenings, we invited several distinguished guests from the field to join in a symposium that will further examine the connections between Pop Art and cinema embodied in the films chosen. Jacob Proctor, Kalliopi Minioudaki and Derek Boshier each bring a unique perspective to the *Pop Cinema* program, and it is our hope that this public dialogue will lead to a continued discussion of the topic among scholars and viewers alike.

Jesse Pires
Program Curator
International House Philadelphia

WHAT
IS
POP
CINEMA?



WILLIAM KAIZEN

NOTES ON POP CINEMA

While the influence of cinema is acknowledged in histories of Pop Art, the production of cinema itself in relation to Pop has been almost completely neglected. *Pop Cinema* is the first program in the United States to bring together a significant number of films made in the context of Pop Art. It features rarely screened British and American films that operate at the intersection of popular culture, popular art and the cinematic avant-garde, made from the early 1950s through the early 1970s. From the outset I should be clear that "Pop Cinema" is a category of my own invention.¹ There has never been a movement called Pop Cinema, and few artists declared themselves makers of Pop films. "Pop Cinema" is useful as a retrospective term inasmuch as it identifies a variety of films whose concerns align them not only with Pop Art but with each other. Upon seeing these works together, the sum is greater than the parts because new light is shed on film as a medium in which Pop Art flourished, and on film as a popular art form. From the early 1950s to the early 1970s, a host of filmmakers (often visual artists become filmmakers) turned to the world of the mass media as the subject of films that were made largely outside the commercial film industry. All of these works share a focus on the entanglement of the mass media and everyday life during a time when the daily presence of media, and particularly mass-produced entertainment, was increasing. Like the film program itself, this essay is a preliminary attempt to map the field of Pop Cinema, with special consideration given to defining the shared characteristic of these films.²

During the late 1950s British art critic Lawrence Alloway began using the phrase "the aesthetics of plenty" to describe the emerging world of postwar abundance represented in the mass media.³ Riding a wave of postwar prosperity, during the 1950s both the media itself and the goods it proffered were becoming widely available in the US and increasingly in the United Kingdom, despite the latter's ongoing postwar austerity. Alloway saw that the various mass media were vehicles for a profusion of images of affluent lives based on consumption. He also saw that the consumption of images was becoming the basis of an affluent life. Turning away from a previous generation's rejection of mass-produced entertainment as kitsch, the world of plenty and its images became increasingly seductive to the avant-garde and its supporters. First in the UK and then in the US, Alloway and numerous others both admitted to an

appreciation for this material and showed a desire to more critically understand its seductions. Rather than dismiss the world of the mass media as a vampire sucking the blood of the avant-garde for commercial purposes, these artists and critics undertook a more open-minded examination of the media, recognizing that even mass-produced goods have their own aesthetics. Without denying the inherent tendency for the mass media to skew to the lowest common denominator, they saw that artistic greatness could reside in low as well as high culture, and that the elitism of high culture often masked fine-art productions that were as superficial as any kitsch. They also saw that against their former categorical separation the aesthetic codes of high and low art could be fertile mixed. By the early 1960s artists on both sides of the Atlantic had become connoisseurs of the aesthetics of popular culture, with the obsessive fan's nuanced ability to

distinguish between good and bad examples coupled with a more critical ability to recognize the impositions made on the public by pop culture. As it emerged over the course of the 1950s and early 1960s, Pop Art was created by artists who forged their own variations on the aesthetics of plenty.

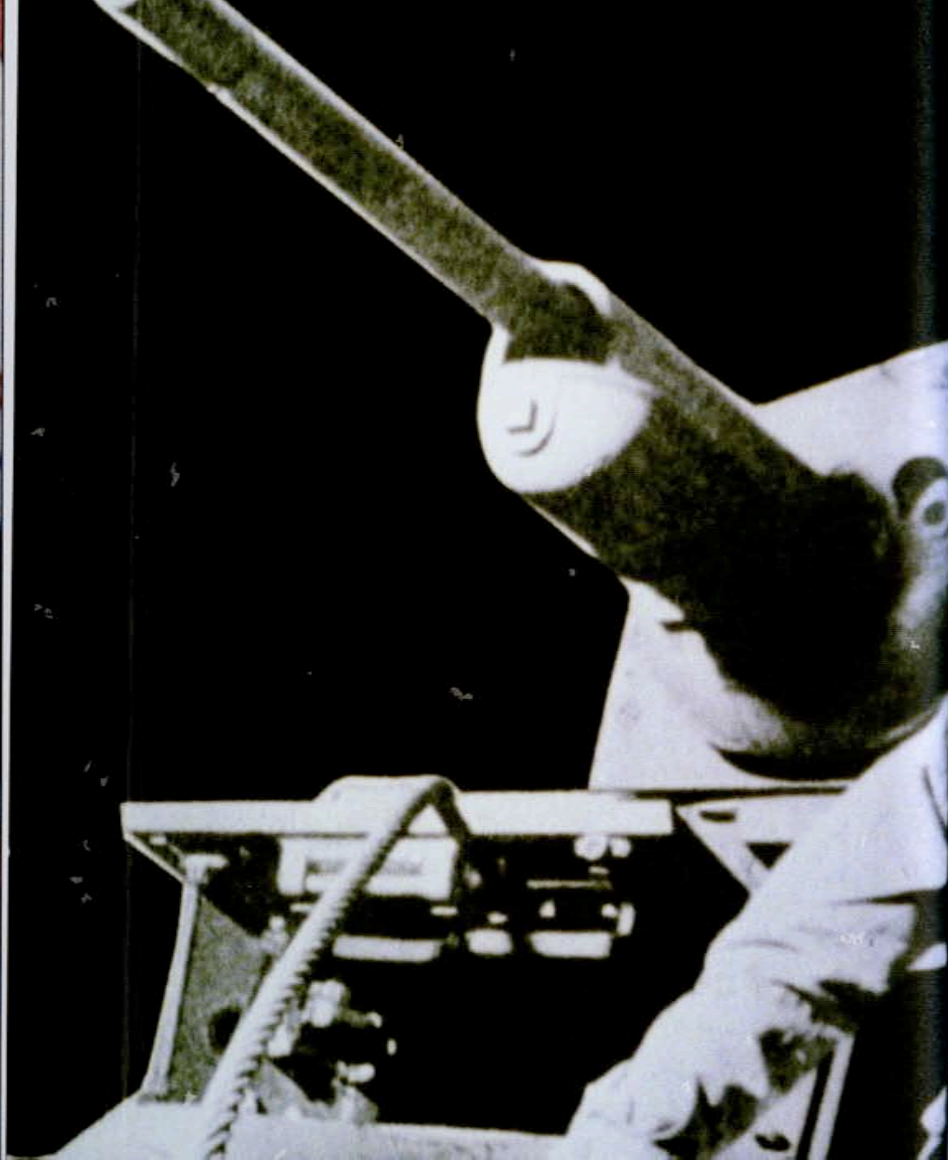
Although unacknowledged in most art histories, what many art historians recognize as the inaugural moment of Pop Art actually was a proto-cinematic event. This took place in 1952 at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, in a presentation Eduardo Paolozzi made to some like-minded colleagues who had gathered after hours.⁴ Paolozzi had been making collages of images he had cut from American magazines. Using an opaque projector, he showed a selection of these collages, scanning across them like a documentary filmmaker tracking across old photographs. One of the most

famous brings together the cover of an issue of the pulp magazine *Intimate Confessions* featuring a half-dressed woman with a pasted-on revolver that points to her head. Out of the gun's barrel the word "POP!" emerges in a puff of smoke, deftly exposing the figure of the woman as a popular commodity fetish.

By projecting these images in a cinema-like event, Paolozzi was able to use the screen as a place for remixing the aesthetics of plenty. The screen became a surrogate pinboard, that favorite tool used by fans of pop culture for the collection and display of mass-produced images.⁵ The movie screen as pinboard is a recurring motif in Pop Cinema, and was used literally in Ken Russell's film *Pop Goes the Easel*, shot in 1962 for the BBC. Russell depicted Pop artists Peter Blake, Peter Philips, Derek Boshier and Pauline Boty as obsessive fans whose consumption of pop culture sustains both

THE WORLD OF PLENTY AND ITS
IMAGES BECAME INCREASINGLY
SEDUCTIVE TO THE AVANT-GARDE
AND ITS SUPPORTERS

THE SCREEN BECAME A SURROGATE PINBOARD



their work and lives. The film opens with a pan across a wall plastered with hundreds of photographs. Most are of pop stars, many of whom are American. Images of Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis Presley completely fill the screen until the camera pans down to reveal the host, and that the images have been pinned above and behind his desk, fully covering the wall. While the pinboard wall in the opening sequence was constructed in the television studio, every one of the artists' studios contained a similar wall, and images of these return continuously throughout the film. Setting the audience up for what follows, the host describes the world of Pop Art as consisting of things like "film stars, the Twist, science fiction and pop singers," a world these four artists take seriously, and not as "tawdry" or "second rate." Like it or not, the host acknowledges, we all live in this world today, and these artists are coming to grips with it, as their work space as much as their work demonstrates.

Paolozzi himself would eventually turn to film, as did numerous other artists, including Boshier. The moving image added another dimension to the pinboard's accumulative abilities by allowing its images to change rapidly over time.⁶ As prefigured by Paolozzi, film could transform the pinboard from a static table to a tabular image whose data is constantly shifting, heightening the phantasmagorical effect of the mass media's flow. As Alloway said of Pop Art's appropriation of the mass media's aesthetics of plenty, "To achieve an effect of plenty in art it is necessary to have an endless supply of imagery (supplied by mass culture) and an omnivorous all-overism."⁷ For many artists, film provided a particularly engaging way of producing just such an omnivorous all-overism as a means of working through mass-mediated abundance.

THEY CALLED THEIR WORK "FREE CINEMA" BECAUSE OF THE DISTANCE THEY SOUGHT TO PUT BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE BRITISH DOCUMENTARY FILM TRADITION

Instead of discussing all of the films in the *Pop Cinema* program, I think it is more useful to layout a general typology for these films, focusing on selected works from the program alongside other works that are useful as points of comparison. (See the filmography for information on each film in the program.)

There are three main types of Pop Cinema, all of them aligned with the avant-garde. The first are documentary films on the consumption of popular culture and the effects of this consumption on everyday life, shot using avant-garde techniques. These include the many films made about Pop artists, who were frequently portrayed as expert consumers of popular culture. The second are collage films made of readymade images taken from the world of pop culture. The images used in these films were either shot firsthand by the filmmaker as new footage, or they were recycled secondhand from previously shot film, taking the film strip itself as a readymade. They also include music films in which pop music becomes yet another

readymade element used in counterpoint to the flow of images. The third type are sub-z movies that take the genres of commercial film as a readymade—and then recast them in ultra low-budget, deviant forms, using non-professional actors and semi-narrative storytelling.

The earliest examples of Pop Cinema were made in the context of the Free Cinema movement in England. These largely documentary films took a careful look at the lives of working-class Britons whose free time was increasingly occupied by mass amusement. Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reitz, Tony Richardson and Lorena Mazzetti first showed their work together in a screening in 1956. They called their work "Free Cinema" because of the distance they sought to put between themselves and the British documentary film tradition handed down from John Grierson. Rejecting voice-of-god narration, they turned toward the more experimental camerawork and editing found in avant-garde cinema. They also turned away from the far-off

communities of anthropological film, focusing instead on the sociology of working-class British life, more sympathetically than had previously been captured on film.

In several of the films shown at the first Free Cinema screening, mass entertainment as a release from workday drudgery was an especially important theme. Anderson's *O Dreamland*, from 1953, is at once a tribute and a rebuke to the modern carnival as a popular spectacle. Filmed at the Dreamland amusement park in the seaside town of Margate, often with the camera hidden to get more spontaneous images, Anderson captured the dazed fascination on the faces of the fair-goers. He depicts Dreamland as a cheap fantasia of mechanical technologies where the public is seen, not entirely favorably, responding to lowbrow fun. Reisz and Richardson's *Mama Don't Allow*, 1956, captures a moment when postwar teen culture was emerging in the UK, just

before the onset of rock 'n' roll and the increased mechanization and mass production of the pop music industry. The filmmakers celebrate the culture of working-class youth in fast-paced shots of teddy boys and shop girls ecstatically Lindy hopping to the Chris Barber Band in the Wood Green Jazz Club in North London after their long work days. The same year that Reisz and Richardson filmed *Mama Don't Allow*, Lonnie Donegan—a member of Barber's band—would have a huge hit with his rollicking cover of Lead Belly's "Rock Island Line," leading to the displacement of jazz and the Lindy by rock and the Twist. John Lennon, Jimmy Page and many other future rock stars got their start in skiffle bands inspired by Donegan.

In adopting avant-garde strategies, the Pop documentary began to unite its subject and its form. By leaving behind narrative and increasing the pace of its editing, it approached the

flow of pop culture, where a stream of products (including entertainment) is endlessly and quickly renewed. American photographer William Klein began making films in 1957 with his city-symphony *Broadway by Light*. Klein impressionistically shot the neon signs in New York City's Times Square, fragmenting them into bursts of artificial light illuminating the night sky. His camera cuts from sign to sign, moving from product logos and brand names to close-ups that reduce the signs to spectacular abstractions. The shifting rhythm from one brand to the next is subsumed by the whole as a dazzling ode to the hypnotic powers of advertising. Documentaries that focus on the work of Pop artists, such as Juan Drago's *Superartist*, 1967, on Andy Warhol, and James Scott's *Richard Hamilton*, 1969, also use a variety of devices designed to fragment the film's structure in order to capture a sense of the shifting vagaries of pop culture.

By the middle of the 1950s several American artists-turned-filmmakers would begin to make collage films. Leaving traditional forms of documentary entirely behind, these films were even

more closely aligned with avant-garde than Pop documentaries were. A strong precedent for this practice existed in Joseph Cornell's 1936 film *Rose Hobart*. Cornell cut a print of George Melford's 1931 film *East of Borneo* down to individual scenes focused on Hobart, the film's star. He then reedited these snippets by combining them with other bits of film footage. Projected at the slightly slower speed of silent films and through a blue-colored piece of glass, while accompanied by a record playing pop songs, *Rose Hobart* surreally evokes the star as an object of desire. By exaggerating Hobart's role in the film, she becomes a figure who continually reappears in a world whose narrative logic has come unglued, leaving only her costar's obsessive longing for by her. Working only with recycled footage, Cornell transformed the whole of the film into a readymade. Numerous others followed suit, making films that either partially or wholly consisted of readymade footage.

Robert Breer made his first collage film, *Un Miracle*, in collaboration with Pontus Hulten in 1953. Just one minute long, it features a cut-up and animated

photograph of the pope in which he juggles his own head. Breer would go on to make several other films in the 1950s that used the same cut-up animation technique. These include *Jamestown Balloos* from 1957, with similarly ridiculous animations of soldiers, along side rapidly scanned images of newspaper and magazine pages and a host of other animation techniques. Stan VanDerBeek would begin making similarly animated films during the mid-1950s that also used cut-up images culled from the mass media as their primary medium. He won numerous film prizes for this work and directly inspired the animated sequences made by Terry Gilliam for *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

Unlike Breer's or VanDerBeek's films, Bruce Conner's *A MOVIE*, 1958, is solely focused on the reuse of previously shot films. Highly influential, it would set the tone for his own and many other filmmakers' subsequent collage-based work. Conner was inspired both by movie previews, with their condensed, often surreal use of narrative, as well as his own lack of money; it cost him less to buy old rolls of pre-shot film than to shoot his own. He recut this found material,

which ranged from bits of stag films, b-movies, and industrial films and wartime documentaries, into new sequences focused on scopophilia and the dark side of cinematic voyeurism. After an opening shot of a half-nude woman taking off her stockings, *A MOVIE* speeds through bomb explosions, car crashes and sports accidents as if behind all those teen adventure movies lurks a more terrible reality. He uncovered the deeper drives that underlie consumption, which the marketplace represses. A tone of desublimated cold-war anxiety mixed with black humor runs throughout. The soundtrack (Ottorino Respighi's "The Pines of Rome") swings from lighter to more serious tones while the images ironically do the opposite. The use of the soundtrack as yet another readymade, collage element is contrasted with the images, a common practice in subsequent works of Pop Cinema.

Most of Breer's, VanDerBeek's and Conner's collage films are extremely fast-paced and are composed solely of a montage driven by the rapid alternation of one mass-media image after another. Because of their disinterest in documentary filmmaking, their rapid

pace and their lack of an overall (or any) narrative, they are not compilation films, nor do they use traditional, Eisensteinian montage. Instead, they focus on the radical juxtaposition of images primarily recycled from the mass media. With little narrative development, these films become correlatives for the flood of mass-mediated images in contemporary life. They amplify this flood by quoting from it at such high speed and in such profusion that watching them often leads to an experience of overload. The rapidity of their quotations emphasizes the cut and therefore the caesura not as a pause or closure but as an interruption or division in an endless field—as in “we interrupt this story for a special bulletin.” While one thread is repeatedly interrupted for another, mini-narratives bubble up nevertheless, generating recurring

themes without recourse to a unified story or plot. Even in films like Conner's *REPORT*, 1963–67, which focuses on the media coverage of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, historical narrative is replaced by repetition and ellipsis.

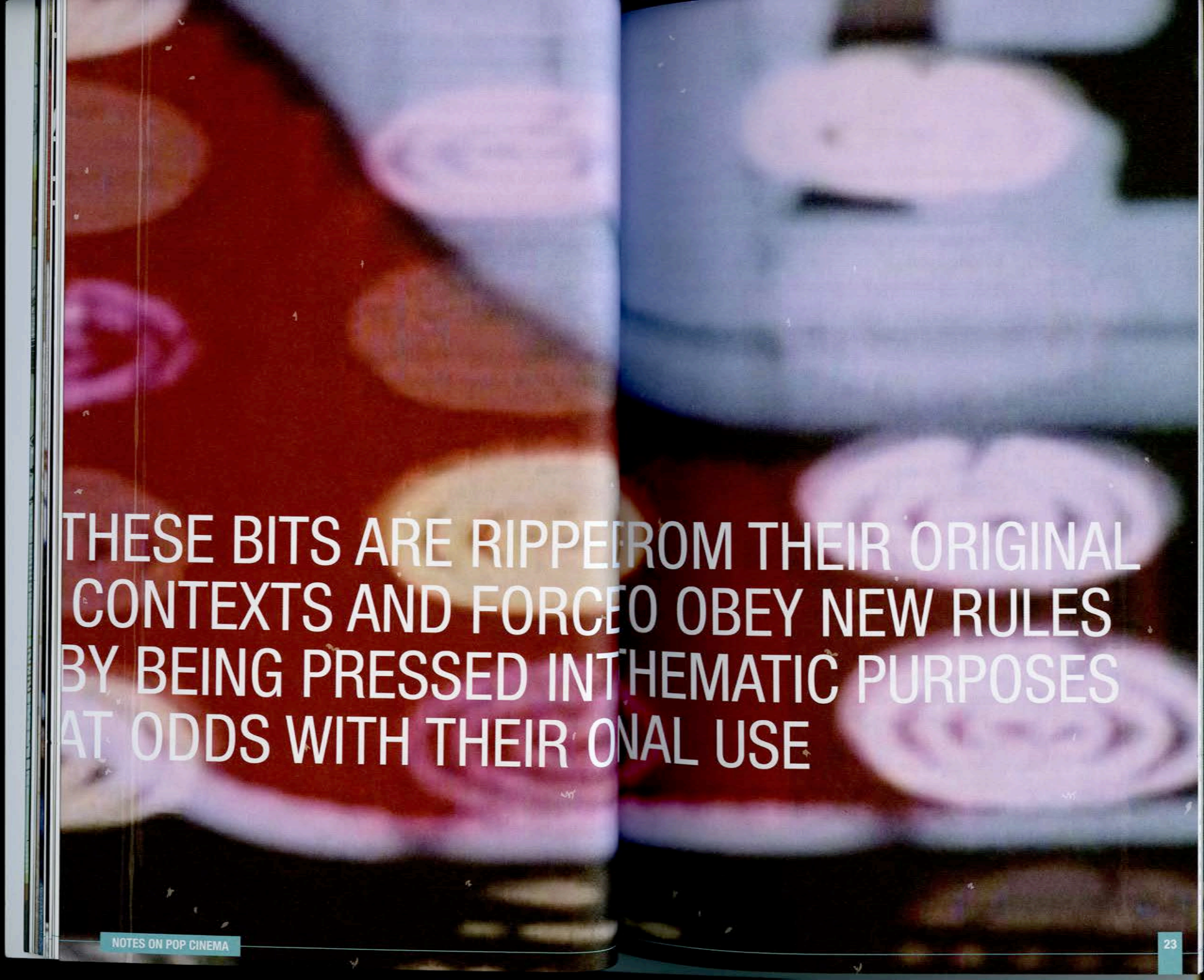
Pop collage films are based on the strategy of paradigmatic substitution first developed in surrealist film. Unlike surrealist film, where one unlike thing is made to relate to the next by the sheer force of succession (as in the famous sequence of cuts between a hand filled with ants, a woman's hairy armpit, and a sea urchin in Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*), in Pop collage films like *A MOVIE* and VanDerBeek's *What, Who, How*, 1957, or *À la Mode*, 1959, one similar commodity follows the next, as in

the endless substitution of more of the same in the mass media. Radical heterogeneity gives way to radical homogeneity in a critique of the sameness of the mass marketplace. These films become the visual equivalent of the pinboard, where one quoted pop image bumps up against the next, creating a portrait of the marketplace for mass-manufactured amusements as a whole. The viewer can recognize, always generally but often specifically, the sources of the quoted bits. And yet these bits are ripped from their original contexts and forced to obey new rules by being pressed into thematic purposes at odds with their original use. Pop collage films generate ironic tension by harnessing this allegorical double valence as the reused images individually say one thing while, in their new succession, doing another.

The soundtrack, which is also often based on recycled popular material, adds yet another layer to the allegorical ironies.

As the sixties progressed, pop music became an important addition to the collage film. Marketed to teenagers, pop music, and especially rock 'n' roll, fascinated underground filmmakers, including those involved in making Pop Cinema. Rock transformed the popular song into a mass-manufactured novelty item that could generate enough passion in its teenage audience to incite riots. After *Mama Don't Allow*, Conner's *COSMIC RAY*, made in 1960, is one of the earliest examples of the music-based variant of Pop Cinema. At a dizzyingly fast pace set to the rhythm of Ray Charles performing “What I Say,” it collages together newly shot footage of a nude

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THESE BITS ARE RIPPED FROM THEIR ORIGINAL
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AT ODDS WITH THEIR ORIGINAL USE

go-go dancer with readymade footage that includes film leader, war films and Mickey Mouse cartoons that also show war scenes. Conner ironically counterpoints his collaged footage with the song by crosscutting military images with the nude dancer while the song rises to a climax until a cartoon cannon fires an enormous shot then flamboyantly goes limp, literalizing the song's urgency. Conner would go on to make several more song-length music films in which collaged material is rhythmically counterposed against a pop song.

Conner's music films, and those made by other avant-garde filmmakers like Peter Whitehead, are often cited as the precursors to the music videos of the 1980s. While Conner and Whitehead made some remarkable music films, there was a whole host of similar works called "music promos" made on behalf of record producers as advertisements for their hit songs. Music promos were shown on television and on scopitones, jukeboxes that included small projection screens. There was little difference between the majority of these films and television studio performances done for broadcast. Most were campy scenes of the performer lip-synching against a colorful backdrop or location, with scantily clad back-up dancers. One of Whitehead's first jobs as a professional filmmaker was for the BBC's television music program *Top of the Pops*, where bands performed their latest hits. Whitehead was hired to film bands that were unable to appear live, and he made promos for numerous artists, including the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix and Nico. Rather than shoot straight concert footage, his promos often mixed performance with strategies drawn from the avant-garde. One of his earliest, made in 1965, was for Eric Burdon and the New Animals, performing their song "When I Was Young." Given that the music promo is one of the crassest forms of pop advertising, it

is remarkable that Whitehead's film sends an antiwar message. "When I Was Young" ironically looks back at World War II and the sacrifices made by the previous generation as a reflection on the escalation of war in Vietnam. Fast-paced

collage footage of military planes is intercut with the band performing in the studio. Whitehead reused documentary footage in reference to the representation of war in popular cinema as a heroic enterprise in which the good guys always win. The song's already ironic lyrics, in which Burdon casts himself as a WWII veteran longing for more peaceful days, are heightened by images which acknowledge that little has improved as one war begets yet another.

CONNER'S MUSIC FILMS, AND THOSE MADE BY OTHER AVANT-GARDE FILMMAKERS LIKE PETER WHITEHEAD, ARE OFTEN CITED AS THE PRECURSORS TO THE MUSIC VIDEOS OF THE 1980S

Beyond his promos, Whitehead made a number of other films that focused on rock, including *Charlie is My Darling*, 1966, on the Rolling Stones; *Tonite Let's All Make Love in Love in London*, 1967, subtitled a "Pop Concerto for Film" and featuring the work of Pink Floyd and others along with footage of Pop artists such as David Hockney; and *Led Zeppelin: Live at the Royal Albert Hall*, 1970. Not all of these are collage films, but all are deeply engaged with the intersection of popular culture as an art form and its impact on those who passionately consume it. The same is true of several of Kenneth Anger's films from the same period. *Scorpio Rising*, 1964, and *Kustom Kar Kommandos*, 1965, both use pop songs as their soundtrack as if the singer was a readymade character commenting on the images from offscreen.

IN POP CINEMA WOMEN ARE TYPICALLY DEPICTED AS COMMODIFIED FIGURES OF DESIRE

Complementing the collage film with its reuse of bits of other films, sub-z movies histrionically reuse the structure of mainstream films. They pastiche better-made films, allowing the seams to show through as their production continually breaks down and narrative dissolves. These films are hyper-camp, aping camp cinema with such impoverished means that they become something beyond—or beneath—even the z-movies produced in the outer orbits of Hollywood. Forgoing collage, the sub-z movie is a pure ersatz imitation (of the z-movie) of an imitation (of the b-movie) of Hollywood filmmaking. Sub-z movies rely on amateur acting and improvisation. Their studied incompetence distinguishes them from the unacknowledged, self-serious incompetence of truly camp or amateur films. The main practitioners of the sub-z movie were Jack Smith, Andy Warhol and the Kuchar brothers, and much has already been written on the subject.⁸ Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, 1963, one of Warhol's first major films, *Tarzan and Jane, Regained Sort of*, 1964, and George Kuchar's *Hold Me while I'm*

Naked, 1966, are key examples. One of the earliest of these films, *I Was a Teenage Rumpot* by George and Mike Kuchar, made in 1960, stands in as the sole representative of these films in the *Pop Cinema* program. What makes these films Pop is their shared concern with mainstream genre conventions. They take film genres as readymades to be used like collage elements, cutting up and shuffling the codes of genre as yet another recyclable form of popular imagery. The primary genre they all imitate is the z-movie, with its bad acting, its thin plotting and its hyperbolic tone. They secondarily imitate the subgenres of z- and b-movies: biker films, erotica, science fiction, melodrama. Some focus on a single genre, while others combine or blur the lines between genres. *I Was a Teenage Rumpot* turns the "I was a teenage vampire, mummy, zombie, etc." horror genre on its head by using the far more prosaic subject of alcoholism, but played to high ridiculousness rather than melodrama. Pop music figures as prominently in the soundtracks to sub-z movies as it does in other forms of Pop Cinema, including the Kuchar brothers' films.

One recurring theme that deserves closer attention is the role of women in Pop Cinema. Eroticized women frequently appear in many of these films, from Paolozzi's initial presentation of his collages, to Pauline Boty's glamorously projected sexuality in *Pop Goes the Easel*, to Conner's nudes. In Pop Cinema women are typically depicted as commodified figures of desire. They appear either at secondhand in mass-media images or at first hand in imitation of these images, which were originally produced for male sexual consumption and female aspiration. Reusing these images is difficult because there is a very thin line between reproducing gender stereotypes and critiquing them. Marie Menken—one of the few women filmmakers whose work can be at least partially associated with Pop—admirably responded to this problem in her film *Wrestling*, from 1964, which explores the production of masculinity in the mass media. *Wrestling* consists of a series of highly sped-up shots of professional wrestlers that Menken filmed from a television broadcast. Shooting directly from a TV set, Menken used her signature handheld camerawork to distort the figures

on screen. With no sound and edited to hyperbolic levels of animation, the masculinity of the he-men she captured becomes a ridiculous caricature that ultimately gives way to a lyrical evocation of semi-abstract bodies in motion. The roll and raster of the television's scan lines become a compositional element used to contrast with the blur and grain of her film stock. She reclaimed the male wrestler for formal purposes by reusing an emblem of popular masculinity in a feminist gesture that mirrors the recycled images of femininity deployed by so many male Pop artists and filmmakers.

I chose to end the program with two films that, while they fall somewhat outside the purview of Pop Cinema, respond directly to the mass media's representations of women. Activist film collective Third World Newsreel's *Up Against the Wall Miss America!*, 1969, is a documentary on the protest held against the 1968 Miss America beauty pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The protest itself became a hot media item when the women performing street theater outside the pageant hall were erroneously accused of setting fire to their bras, leading to

endless quips about bra-burning feminists. Peter Whitehead and Niki de Saint Phalle's *Daddy*, 1973, is a gothic fairytale in which de Saint Phalle takes metaphorical revenge on the father who had molested her as a child. The filmmakers turn erotica on its head by grappling candidly with the consequences of sexual abuse.

Pop Cinema would prove influential on a wide range of film and video practices that followed. To this day, collage-based work centered around the reuse of material culled from the mass media remains one of the most important avant-garde moving-image practices. Feminist film- and videomakers were particularly important in continuing this type of work into the 1970s and '80s. MTV and the music video were direct descendants of the music promos and the television programs that screened them in the 1960s. With their radical fragmentation and heterogeneity, eighties music videos hewed even more closely to the form of the Pop collage film than the majority of earlier music promos. Scratch video in the UK was another avant-garde variant on the Pop music promo. In the US, trash, punk and no-wave cinema,

aka "the cinema of transgression," took direct inspiration from the sub-z movie.⁹ The work of John Waters, Nick Zedd, Richard Kern and Scott B and Beth B, follows closely from that of Smith, Warhol and the Kuchars. Pop Cinema is one of the most significant early instances of what curator Nicholas Bourriaud calls "postproduction," or the recycling of popular works from the past (particularly mainstream films) as the basis of new works of contemporary art.¹⁰ More recently, the world of online video too, with its mash-ups and easily made amateur productions, echoes themes explored in Pop Cinema.

Looking ahead, one crucial problem to address is the reuse of popular moving images and the ability or inability of Pop Cinema and its offshoots to effectively critique the world of the mass media. Given that in the new media age the aesthetics of plenty have become even more bountiful, the history of Pop Cinema now seems particularly significant.

THE WORLD OF ONLINE VIDEO TOO, WITH ITS MASH-UPS AND EASILY MADE AMATEUR PRODUCTIONS, ECHOES THEMES EXPLORED IN POP CINEMA

¹ Or largely of my own invention. David James makes a suggestive nod toward Pop Cinema in his writings on avant-garde film in the 1960s. His work, as well as the work of William Wees on the use of found footage in film, has been influential on my account. See David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); and William C. Wees, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993).

² I plan on developing an expanded version of this project that will also cover parallel developments in France, in the film works of the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals.

³ Lawrence Alloway, "The Long Front of Culture" (1959), in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. David Robbins (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 165.

⁴ These colleagues would soon take on the name The Independent Group. For more on the British origins of Pop, see *The Independent Group*.

⁵ In his description of 1950s and 1960s art as predicated on a "flatbed picture plane," Leo Steinberg likens the formal structure of this art to both "bulletin boards" and "a projection screen." Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 82–91.

⁶ Unfortunately Paolozzi's films were not available for this program.

⁷ Alloway, "The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty," in *The Independent Group*, 50.

⁸ For example, in James, *Allegories of Cinema*.

⁹ Jack Sargeant, *Deathtripping: The Extreme Underground* (New York: Soft Skull, 2008).

¹⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, ed. Caroline Schneider, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002).

POP
CINEMA

POP CINEMA
FILMOGRAPHY

William Kaizen and Jesse Pires

— (aka *Short Line Long Line*), 1966-67



— — (aka **SHORT LINE LONG LINE**)

THOM ANDERSEN and MALCOLM BRODWICK, DIRECTORS

US, 1966-67, color, 11 minutes

Following a rigorous structure of image/sound relationships, this early work by Andersen and Brodwick is a rapid-fire sequence of rock music iconography. The film is propelled by a percussive rhythm of short bursts of music and dialog synched to concert footage, street scenes and objects commonly associated with the manufacture of records. While containing elements of a documentary film, *Short Line Long Line* is more of an impressionistic portrait of mid-sixties popular youth culture. (JP)

ACHOOOOO MR. KERROOSCHEV

STAN VANDERBEEK, DIRECTOR

US, 1960, b/w, 2 minutes

In *Achooooo Mr. Kerrooschev* VanDerBeek takes collaged images of the USSR's fearsome leader at the height of the Cold War and turns him into a Chaplinesque figure who bumbles through a carnivalesque world. Khrushchev's head is continually knocked off with a hammer that sends it rolling onto other bodies, including a B-52 bomber and King Kong. Physical humor is raised to new absurdity as VanDerBeek jingoistically takes his revenge against the US's most feared enemy, or at least the specter of this enemy as paraded in the daily news. The soundtrack is speeded up and looped martial music, which heightens the antic fun. (WK)



AIRBORN

CHAS WYNDHAM, DIRECTOR

US, 1969, color, 3 minutes

Little is known about the filmmaker or the origins of this film, which makes *Airborn* a fascinatingly mysterious artifact of the psychedelic era. The film juxtaposes what appear to be warplanes in flight with a breezy pop tune. The brightly colored abstraction of the images reveals a kind of *Ballet Mécanique* for the rock 'n' roll generation. (JP)

AMERICAN TIME CAPSULE

CHUCK BRAVERMAN, DIRECTOR

US, 1968, color, 3 minutes

A depiction of the tumultuous history of America is assembled into an almost strobe-like montage of pictures culled from library reference books ranging from early Native Americans, the Revolutionary War, segregation and presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy. The speed at which the images – mostly of paintings and photographs – race by creates an illusion of motion that is punctuated by the free-flowing drum beat on the soundtrack. Braverman's *Time Capsule* is less of a history lesson than a reflection on the popular mythology of the US's rise to power. (JP)

Broadway by Light 1958

BROADWAY BY LIGHT

WILLIAM KLEIN, DIRECTOR

US/France, 1958, color, 12 minutes

A scintillating choreography of illuminated advertising signage, Klein's *Broadway by Light* captures the postwar excesses of American capitalism at its grandest. This was the photographer's first foray into filmmaking and the result is a panoply of movement and color. Consisting almost entirely of animated logos and text from various marquees around Times Square, the film is a testament to the names and brands that tantalized the American consumer. (JP)

Marvo Movie 1967-68

CINEBLATZ, WHITE LIFE and MARVO MOVIE

JEFF KEEN, DIRECTOR

UK, 1967-68, color, 9 minutes

The three films in this trilogy represent Keen's earliest experiments using 16mm film. *Cineblatz* is a rapid-fire sequence of animated figures cut from magazines and newspapers intermingled with hand-drawn elements. The soundtrack is a mélange of shortwave radio static. With a nod to z-grade filmmaker Ed Wood, *White Life* uses black-and-white negative film shot by Keen in a surreally haunting vision. The film's soundtrack was created by coloring and scratching on the soundtrack portion of the film stock. *Marvo Movie* is the most complex of the three. Originally designed as a double projection, Keen instead combined the two films to create a hypnotic experiment which combines newly shot footage with the cut/paste collage effects of *Cineblatz*. (JP)

COSMIC RAY

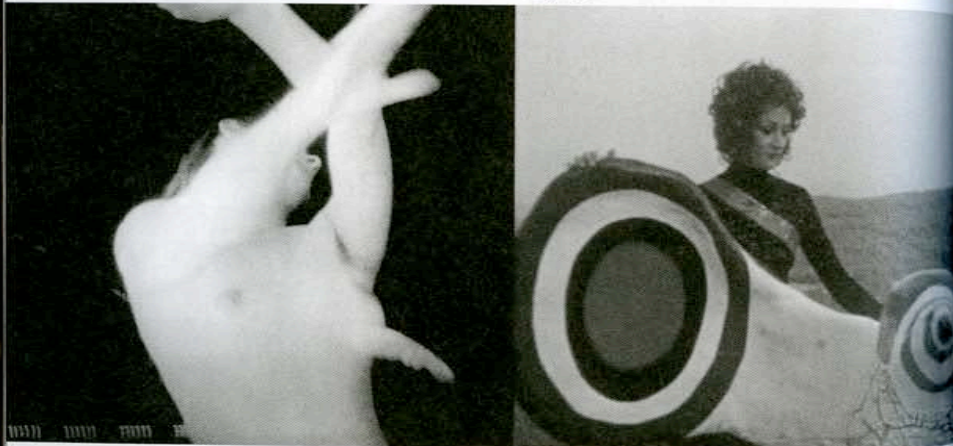
BRUCE CONNER, DIRECTOR

US, 1961, b/w, 4 minutes

COSMIC RAY is a dizzyingly paced collage film of readymade and newly shot footage set to Ray Charles' "What I Say." The reuse of images is especially notable as the song reaches its climax. As Charles sings "baby shake that thing" at an increasingly fevered pitch, military parades march past, rapidly intercut with scenes from a Mickey Mouse cartoon and of a nude go-go dancer. At the peak of Charles' excitement a cartoon cannon fires an enormous shot, which is followed by a series of real cannons shooting and fireworks exploding. The cartoon cannon reappears only to go limp like a spent phallus, flamboyantly drooping to the ground and literalizing, ironically, the longing embodied in the song. (WK)

Cosmic Ray, 1961

Daddy, 1973



DADDY

NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE and PETER WHITEHEAD, DIRECTORS

UK/France, 1973, color, 90 minutes

Daddy introduces itself as a "bedtime story," yet the film quickly devolves into a series of psychosexual vignettes centered around an abusive father and the daughter (de Saint Phalle) who returns to take revenge on him. The disturbing and surreal tale is augmented with artworks by de Saint Phalle that explore themes of sexual power and violence. *Daddy* unfolds in a dream-like manner that vacillates between the grotesque and the whimsical. (JP)

I Was A Teenage Rumpot, 1960

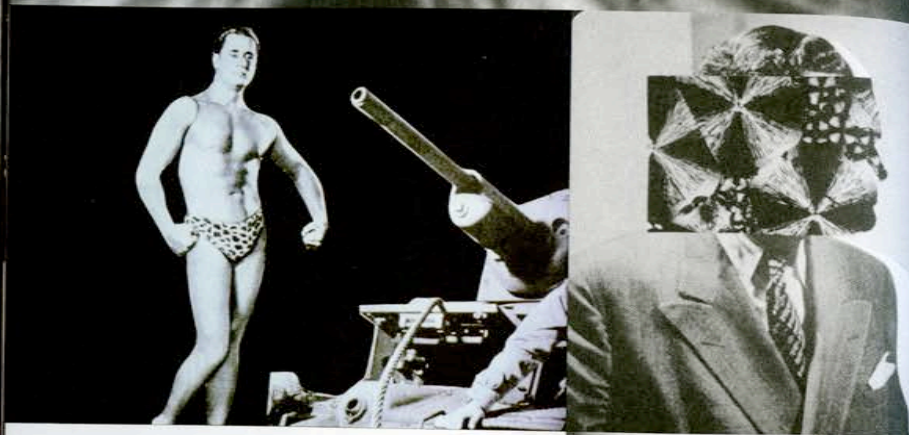
I WAS A TEENAGE RUMPTOT

GEORGE AND MIKE KUCHAR, DIRECTORS

US, 1960, color, 12 minutes

The early 8mm films of the Kuchar brothers are notable for their outright appropriation of Hollywood tropes that often veer toward absurdity. A combination of amateur experimentation and twisted, tongue-in-cheek satire, the film epitomizes the sub-z genre of filmmaking that would later be a trademark in many of Andy Warhol's works. The abrupt shifts in mood on the soundtrack, originally due to the fact that vinyl records were used to augment the silent 8mm format, often creates a hilarious and somewhat disturbing homage to the melodrama of early commercial cinema. (JP)





JAMESTOWN BALOOS

ROBERT BREER, DIRECTOR

US, 1957, color, 6 minutes

An early Breer collage work, *Jamestown Baloos* is divided into three parts and set to a military-style fife-and-drum march. An array of cut-out, geometric shapes interact with a succession of images from magazines and newspapers. World leaders parade through the frame as pinup models pose and frolic. As with most of Breer's work from this period, household objects (combs, springs, pieces of string) are incorporated into the action, reinforcing the readymade elements throughout the film. (JP)

KUSTOM KAR KOMMANDOS

KENNETH ANGER, DIRECTOR

US, 1965, color, 3 minutes

Set to a girl-group cover of Bobby Darin's "Dream Lover," *Kustom Kar Kommandos* treats the rebuilt car as a dream object. Shot in front of a bright pink backdrop so that it would look like an album cover, the car's young owner sensuously runs an enormous powder puff over its surface. Anger tracks across both the man's and the car's bodies in close-up, reducing them to commingled part-objects by confusing their bodies into a hybrid human/auto sexual fetish. The baroque pop arrangement of the song—with its bells, harpsichord and breathy vocals—heightens the tone of the film's desirous imagery. The song and its singer become a third character lustily commenting on the image from offscreen. (WK)

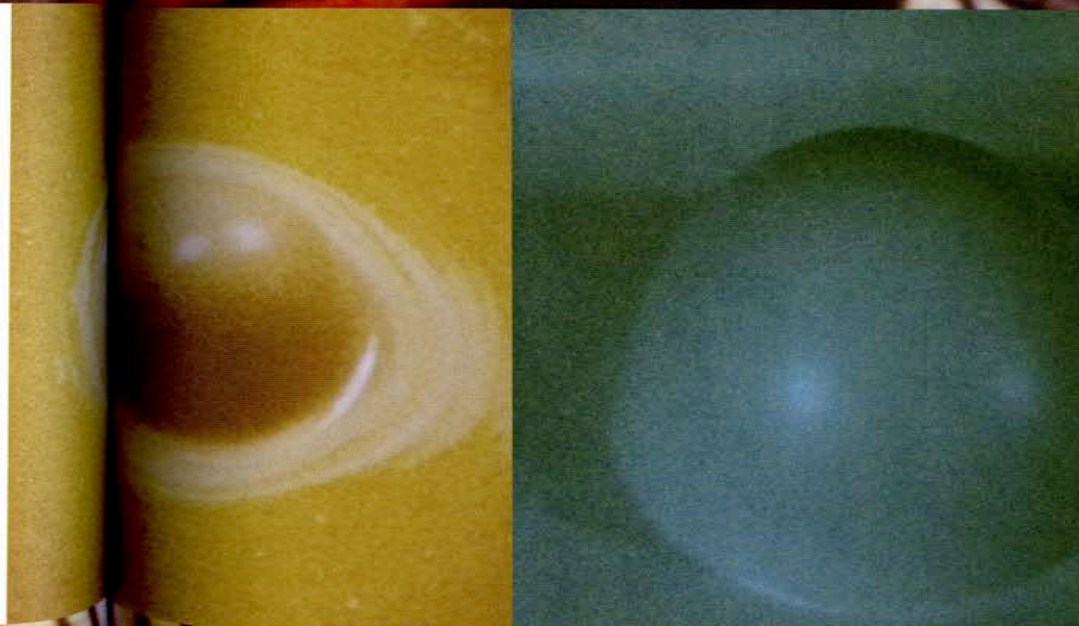


LINK

DEREK BOSHIER, DIRECTOR

UK, 1970, color, 14 minutes

Boshier, who was one of the most recognized British Pop artists and one of the stars of *Pop Goes the Easel*, made a series of his own films in the early 1970s. *Link* playfully explores simple morphology using a mix of readymade and newly shot footage of objects associated by their shape. Set to an abstract soundtrack of machine-like sounds and analog synthesizer tones, the film moves at a stately pace through a sequence of related forms (domes, pyramids and squares) as found in the natural as well as the man-made world. As in a children's game or an elementary lesson in visual rhyme, Boshier's film connects one object to the next by endlessly recombining nature and culture through the play of formal substitution. (WK)



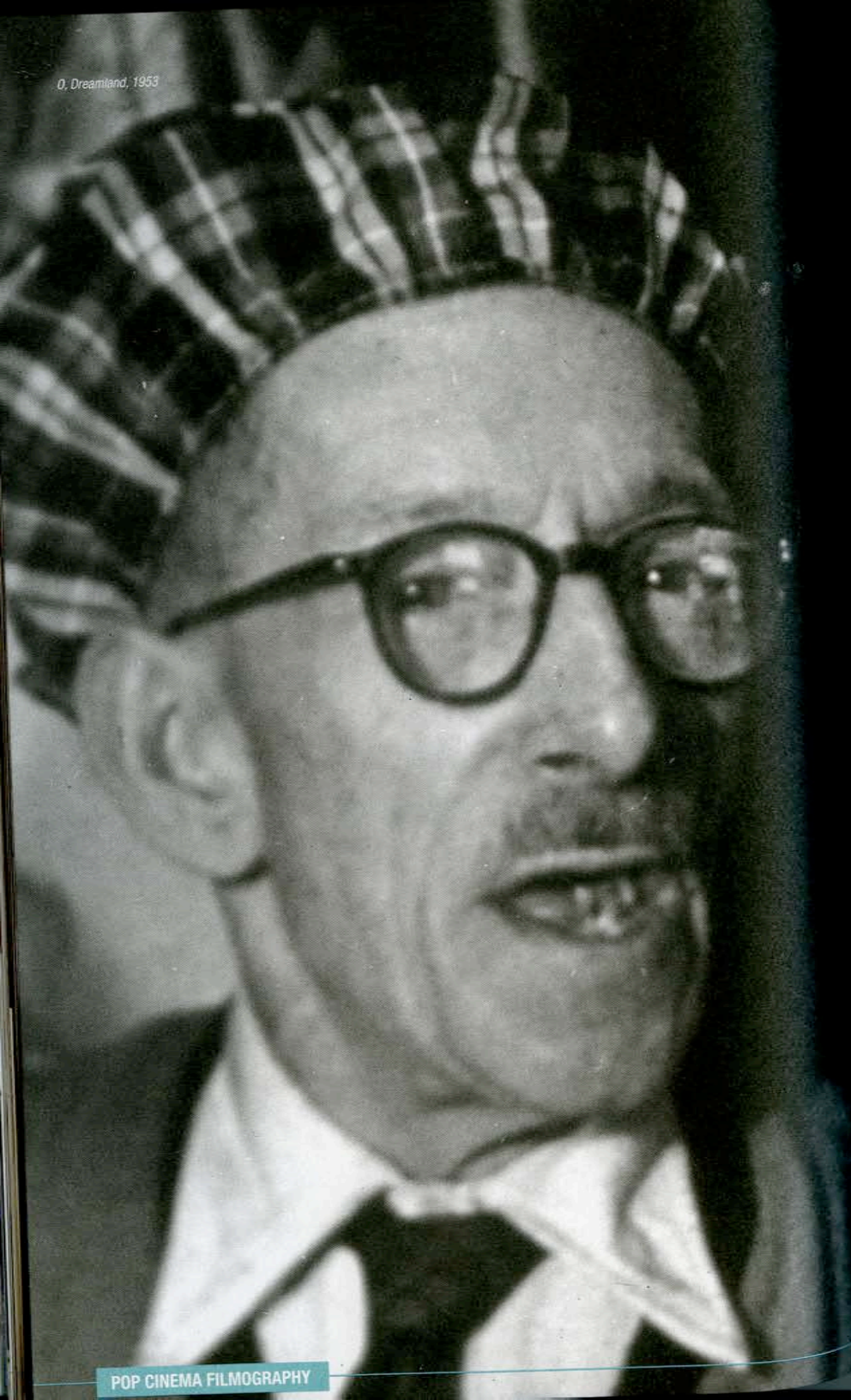
MAMA DON'T ALLOW

KAREL REISZ and TONY RICHARDSON, DIRECTORS

UK, 1956, b/w, 22 minutes

In *Mama Don't Allow*, teddy boys and shop girls Lindy hop to the Chris Barber Band at the Wood Green Jazz Club in North London. Both the band's Dixieland music and the audience's style of dance hark back to earlier, more prosperous days that were just far enough away to serve as a fantasy retreat for chasing away the blues of postwar austerity. The filmmakers celebrate the exuberant culture of working-class youth by contrasting their fun with a group of upper-class party crashers who never quite get into the swing of things. (WK)





O DREAMLAND

LINDSAY ANDERSON, DIRECTOR

UK, 1953, b/w, 12 minutes

When filming at the Dreamland amusement park in the British seaside town of Margate, Anderson often hid his camera to capture more spontaneous images.

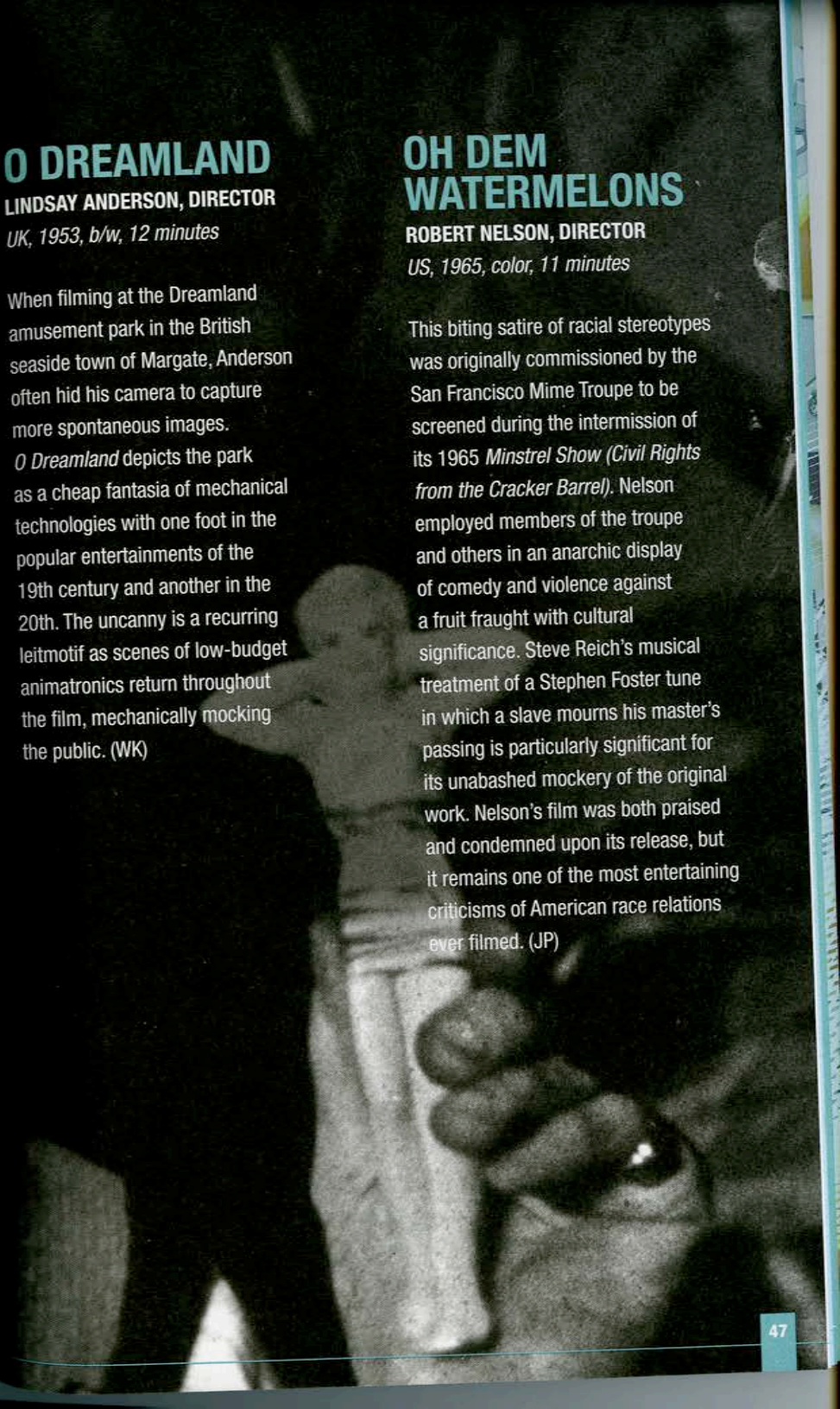
O Dreamland depicts the park as a cheap fantasia of mechanical technologies with one foot in the popular entertainments of the 19th century and another in the 20th. The uncanny is a recurring leitmotif as scenes of low-budget animatronics return throughout the film, mechanically mocking the public. (WK)

OH DEM WATERMELONS

ROBERT NELSON, DIRECTOR

US, 1965, color, 11 minutes

This biting satire of racial stereotypes was originally commissioned by the San Francisco Mime Troupe to be screened during the intermission of its 1965 *Minstrel Show* (*Civil Rights from the Cracker Barrel*). Nelson employed members of the troupe and others in an anarchic display of comedy and violence against a fruit fraught with cultural significance. Steve Reich's musical treatment of a Stephen Foster tune in which a slave mourns his master's passing is particularly significant for its unabashed mockery of the original work. Nelson's film was both praised and condemned upon its release, but it remains one of the most entertaining criticisms of American race relations ever filmed. (JP)



POP GOES THE EASEL

KEN RUSSELL, DIRECTOR

UK, 1962, b/w, 45 minutes

In its portrayal of a coterie of hip, young British painters made for broadcast on BBC television, *Pop Goes the Easel* created a key early image of Swinging London. Each featured artist—Peter Blake, Derek Boshier, Pauline Boty and Peter Phillips—gets their own dedicated section of the film, which are bookended by scenes of them having fun together. Individually they discuss the connections between their art and pop culture; together they frolic at an amusement park. They close out the film at a party, twisting with friends including David Hockney. (WK)

Pop Goes The Easel 1962



RICHARD HAMILTON

JAMES SCOTT, DIRECTOR

UK, 1969, color, 24 minutes

Made in collaboration with the artist, *Richard Hamilton* features a retrospective of Hamilton's work accompanied by his musings on pop culture. He reads from his essay "Urbane Image" on the seductions of advertising, illustrated by shots of images taken from magazine pages. Other readymade images recur throughout the film as Hamilton discusses his menswear paintings, his painting based on Douglas Sirk's early film *Shockproof*, and his paintings of Marilyn Monroe, the Rolling Stones and Bing Crosby. The film's construction echoes Hamilton's artistic practice as both the images and the soundtrack continually shift between representations of popular culture in his work and their original sources. (WK)



Richard Hamilton 1969

ROCKFLOW

BOB COWAN, DIRECTOR

US, 1968, color, 9 minutes

Bob Cowan, a friend of the Kuchar brothers who acted in many of their films, made numerous films of his own, including the psychedelic *Rockflow*. The film incorporates the pulsing, swirling colors associated with light shows that played behind live music performances during the era. The film was originally created for a mixed-media performance at New York's Electric Circus and later expanded to its current form. Set against the backdrop of the Chambers Brothers' pop/rock soundtrack, the film is the quintessential sixties document, replete with gyrating dancers and outrageous fashions. (JP)

SUPERARTIST

JUAN DRAGO, DIRECTOR

US, 1967, color, 21 minutes

Made in collaboration with Aaron Sloan and Bruce Torbet, *Superartist* is a documentary on Andy Warhol that was filmed mostly in the summer of 1965. Shot in a style that emulates Pop painting, it features extensive footage of Warhol using portable videotape equipment that he borrowed from Norelco, including scenes of him shooting his mixed video and film piece *Outer and Inner Space*. Throughout Warhol discusses his work far more openly than in most of his on-screen appearances, discussing unrealized plans to make films based on William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* and Jean Genet's *Our Lady of Flowers*. (WK)

UP AGAINST THE WALL MISS AMERICA!

NEWSREEL FILM COLLECTIVE,
DIRECTOR

US, 1968, b/w, 6 minutes

A document of the 1968 Miss America Pageant and the protests that surrounded it, *Up Against the Wall...* mixes satirical folk songs, street theater and ironic images from popular culture to capture the emergence of the feminist movement at a particularly volatile moment in its history. While the protests are often called a significant moment in the Women's Liberation movement—including the fabled, and mislabeled, bra-burning episode—the film itself is a fascinating snapshot of American hegemony under fire. The juxtaposition of scenes from outside with images of the pageant itself captured from a television set are particularly striking. (JP)

When I Was Young, 1965



WHEN I WAS YOUNG

PETER WHITEHEAD, DIRECTOR

UK, 1965, b/w, 4 minutes

Whitehead uses the music promo to send an antiwar message. Made in 1965 to promote Eric Burdon and the New Animals' song "When I Was Young," it ironically looks back at World War II and the sacrifices made by the previous generation as a reflection on the escalation of war in Vietnam. Fast-paced collage footage of fighter planes and bombers is intercut with the band performing the song in the studio. Reused documentary footage from WWII is an allegorical reference to the heroic representation of war in Hollywood cinema. The song's already ironic lyrics, casting Burdon as a veteran longing for more peaceful days, are heightened by the images which acknowledge that little has improved as one war begets another. (WK)

WRESTLING

MARIE MENKEN, DIRECTOR

US, 1964, b/w, 8 minutes

Menken, who was a mentor to Andy Warhol and other members of the Factory crowd, is best known for her dynamic handheld camera work. She shot *Wrestling* directly from a television screen, speeding up the images of the spectacular he-men she captured to hyperbolic levels of animation. The film gently critiques the masculinity of professional athletics in a caricature that ultimately gives way to a lyrical evocation of bodies in motion. By capturing the television's scan lines in combination with the grain of her film stock, she heightens her abstraction of the male body. (WK)

IMAGE CREDITS

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Pop Cinema: Art + Film in the US and UK 1950s-1970s was a three-night program of films organized by International House Philadelphia and curated by William Kaizen. It was accompanied by a scholarly panel and this publication. *Pop Cinema* featured films made in the context of Pop Art in the United Kingdom and the United States from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. It was the first program in the US to bring these works together.

Arts @ International House unites contemporary and emerging forms with classical traditions. We present a unique cross section of performance, media and visual arts and cinema which foster the arts as a powerful means of expression and as an avenue for greater cultural, political and social understanding. It is our mission to communicate these disciplines to everyone who has the curiosity to learn about the world.

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William Kaizen is assistant professor of aesthetics and critical studies at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, where he teaches courses on art history and media theory. His current book project is *The Immediate*, on early video art and media politics.