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**Andy Warhol's Blow Job: Toward the
Recognition of a Pornographic Avant-garde**

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Boredom is not far from bliss: it is bliss seen from the shores of pleasure.
—Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*

* According to Andy Warhol, the first public screening of his 1963 film *Blow Job* occurred at Ruth Kligman's Washington Square Art Gallery, located at 530 West Broadway in downtown New York, in the fall of 1964 (Warhol and Hackett 1980, 79).¹ At Warhol's request, Kligman had invited some friends to the screening -a decision she later regretted.² Although Jonas Mekas's Film Culture Non-Profit Organization sponsored the screening, the event remained unadvertised due to the recent seizures of sexually explicit experimental films and the costly and tedious legal battles that ensued. Only a few months before, in the spring of 1964, Mekas himself had been arrested in New York on obscenity charges for screening Jack Smith's sexually explicit film *Flaming Creatures* (1963) along with Jean Genet's *Chant d'amour* (1950) (James 1992, 11).³ Presenting *Blow Job* at a respectable art gallery was a practical attempt to elude the censors,⁴ but it also signified the tension between "high art" and "pornography" that structured cultural reception during the early sixties.⁵

By 1969, *Blow Job* would land in exhibition spaces more compatible with Warhol's own preference for prurience.⁶ At the peak of Warhol's fascination with the "beaver craze" that had moved east from San Francisco,⁷ Blow job was finally shown in movie theaters specializing in gay porn, with "the ad-

monition to call the theater to find out its name" (Hoberman 1991, 182).

Only five years separate the surreptitious attempt to pass *Blow Job* off as a film worthy of exhibition in an art gallery and the film's "coming out" as pornography, but the landscape of film culture would have changed significantly from 1963 to 1969. Nineteen sixty-three marked Warhol's debut as a filmmaker with titles such as *Kiss*, *Sleep*, *Eat* and *Haircut*, but by 1969, Warhol's career as film director had been over for at least a year.⁸

Despite Warhol's early retirement from the cinema, avant-garde film had reached a level of respectability by 1969.⁹ Screenings of experimental works still suffered constant shutdowns and necessary relocations, as well as perennial financial obstacles. Nevertheless, by 1969, Mekas, P. Adams Sitney, and Jerome Hill had already begun the creation of the Anthology Film Archives, a permanent center for the exhibition and study of avant-garde cinema, which would have its grand opening on December 1, 1970.¹⁰

Experimental film was not the only sphere of cinema caught in transformation. The exhibition of sexually explicit moving images underwent momentous changes in the decade that culminated in Stonewall, radically modifying the conditions of mainstream, art house, and pornographic film spectatorship. Jon Lewis notes that the top twenty box office films for 1969 included four adult titles: the studio film *Midnight Cowboy* (dir. John Schlesinger) (despite its self-imposed X-rating, the film had managed to obtain Oscars for best picture, director, and screenplay), *I Am Curious Yellow* (dir. Vilgot Sjöman) and *Three in the Attic* (dir. Richard Wilson) (both of which were released by non-MPAA members), and *Easy Rider* (dir. Dennis Hopper) (which had been independently financed and produced) (2000, 153).¹¹ The legalization of hard-core pornography in 1969 opened up new theatrical possibilities for both gay and straight porn, but a small industry of peepshow loops, "for individual screening by Andy Warhol and others," had been operating in Times Square since 1966 (Waugh 1996a, 359).

The primary goal of this article is not to document the shifting parameters of the exhibition of sexually explicit images in the sixties,¹² but to analyze Warhol's *Blow Job* in relation to the multiple historical and aesthetic factors that influence, *without determining*, the film's erotic charge. By introducing this essay via a brief discussion of *Blow Job's* history of exhibition, I hope to at least afford a glimpse of the complex cultural negotiations that surround the film's emergence and that continue to inflect its contested textual status. By focusing exclusively on *Blow Job*, I do not mean to suggest that the film is unique in its status as avant-garde moving-image pornography. On the contrary, it is important to note that the film emerges from

a historical moment ripe with formal transgressions and sexual transgressors; the postwar American avant-garde was replete with films that engaged the viewer both corporeally and cognitively. Jack Smith's notorious *Flaming Creatures* and Barbara Rubin's extraordinary but rarely screened *Christmas on Earth* (like *Blow Job*, both of these were made in 1963) are only two examples of experimental films camped at the borderlands between art and pornography during this period. While I hope that these films, and others like them, will inform the background of the following discussion, I have chosen to focus on *Blow Job* because it seems to best articulate the inadequacies of our present modes of classifying and theorizing the diverse pleasures of pornography.

Although much of the American underground cinema of the 1960's and 1970's was consumed with the body moved to sexual excitation, the "on/scenity" of sexuality in avant-garde film has been neglected by critical discourse. Despite their shared investment in corporeality, pornography and the avant-garde are often positioned at odds. Theoretically, it is difficult to compare two traditions that regularly deploy conflicting modes of address and divergent formal vocabularies. Historically, however, it is necessary to breach the divide that still separates the high from the low, and which has myopically-and inaccurately-segregated the domain of art from the possibility of sexual excitation. As an avant-garde film that specifically addresses what is considered pornographic subject matter, *Blow Job* inaugurated the era of structural film with an explicit gesture toward the sex act.

Warhol's cinema emerged from his lifelong interest in sexuality, from his experience as both as a producer and consumer of sexual images. Although the present discussion shall focus exclusively on Warhol's moving images, celluloid was neither the first nor the last medium in which Warhol created sexually explicit documents. Throughout the fifties, Warhol worked on a series of genital illustrations, or "cock drawings," for a proposed "cock book" (Koestenbaum 2001, 42). Since these were never exhibited during Warhol's lifetime, and are still relatively obscure, the centrality of the cock drawings in Warhol's imagination remains rather overlooked.¹³ Nevertheless, these drawings prefigure one of Warhol's later hobbies: taking thousands of Polaroids of the "cock and balls" of any willing visitor to the Factory (Warhol and Hackett 1980, 294). And although critics have remarked more on Warhol's connoisseurship of beaver films in the late sixties than on his interest in earlier forms of sexploitation, it is certain that Warhol was an avid consumer of soft-core porn by the time he began to make movies.¹⁴ *Blow Job* may have had its public premiere at a respectable art gallery,

but its dialogue with pornography-both implied and explicit-undermines this early attempt to sanctify the film as "legitimate" art. Tom Waugh insists on the significance of this other relation; he writes that "porn, pure and simple, is exactly the contextual framework that is indispensable for understanding [Warhol's] films" (1996a, 64-65). It is undeniable that Warhol's cinema manifests the conditions and possibilities of its specific historical moment vis-à-vis pornography-the liminal period of experimentation after the stag era but prior to the rigid legal and discursive codification of hard-core porn in the early seventies. Nevertheless, his films simultaneously parody the very circumstances that enable their existence. Warhol took advantage of the dissipating limits of sexual representation as the sixties progressed; the culmination of his directing career comes with his 1968 film *Blue Movie*, a.k.a. *Fuck*, in which Viva and Louis Waldon are seen engaging in both oral and vaginal intercourse." In *Blow Job*, however, Warhol addressed the notion of "the limit" itself as the generative mechanism of pleasure, a nuance lost in the intervening years with the insistence on maximum visibility in hard-core porn.

If it can be argued that any such thing as "common knowledge" exists about *Blow job*, it is that "nothing happens," that the film's sexually frank title (which never appears in the actual film) is the only erotic thing about the entire viewing experience. The film's trajectory, however, only partially justifies this attitude. For the entire length of the film,¹⁶ the frame displays the face and neck of a young man in high-contrast black-and-white as he leans against a stone wall. The young man's face is angular and smooth-skinned; his chin and jaw are rugged and his lips pale. His skin is fair, and he has his hair cut short. He appears to wear a black leather jacket, although we only glimpse the collar and shoulders of his apparel. Although the man's face appears in dose-up during the entire film-which lacks both sound and color-his face is lit from above, so that his eyes are transformed into hollow, black cavities when he looks at the camera. On several occasions during the film, the man's face is cast in such deep shadow that only the bridge of his nose and his forehead are truly visible (figure 1).

Throughout the film, the man's facial expressions appear to respond to something off-screen; presumably the action occurs below the frame. As his interest in this ambiguous event waxes and wanes, the muscles in the young man's face rhythmically tense and relax. He throws his head back in surges of boredom and ecstasy barely distinguishable from each other. His eyes wander, dart, close, and wince; his hands periodically intrude into the frame to wipe his mouth or scratch his nose. Several times throughout the film,

1. In *Blow Job*, the face is subpoenaed to provide visual evidence of the corporeal exchange that purportedly occurs below the frame. Spasms associated with sexual pleasure bear a great resemblance to expressions of boredom, irritation, and pain. Courtesy of the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a museum of the Carnegie Institute.

the man cradles his head in his palms or runs his fingers through his hair. Occasionally, the man straightens abruptly; at other times, his face droops slightly out of the frame as if his knees are sagging. Although the camera does not budge, Warhol uses his standard cartridge technique throughout the film, punctuating the "action" with the white flicker of the emulsion. Near the end of the film, the man's slight convulsions appear to quicken. His position adjusts slightly, and he lights and smokes a cigarette. Soon after the young man has finished his cigarette, the film ends just as it began—abruptly, without title or credits.

While the presence of these awkward gestures of corporeal adjustment in the final, unedited film attest to the presumed authenticity of the sex act, their inclusion simultaneously threatens to undermine the rapt attention of the pornographic consumer. As Roy Grundmann has observed in his book length study of the film, "the signification of the sex act itself is constantly threatened to be subsumed under the possibility of heightened nonsexual extremes, such as pain and psychological anguish" (1993, 33). For Grund-

mann, the absence of the type of affect traditionally associated with pornography is not the problem for spectators of Warhol's film. Grundmann points out that although *Blow Job* lacks the kind of "conspicuously obscene facial expressions" that typify performances in hard-core pornography, these expressions have not always been required components of the pornographic text (4). On the other hand, Warhol's "autopsy" of the sex act engages the ambiguity of the body in motion in ways that disarm the viewer. In *Blow Job*, the expressions signifying boredom, pleasure, and pain are situated in an illegible visual lexicon where meaning has become inaccessible. The arrival of pleasure is indistinguishable from the trace of pain; movement itself has lost its abrogated function as a transparent sign.

The still camera never as much as glimpses the blow job explicitly advertised by the film's title. If there is an actual blow job occurring below the frame—which seems entirely questionable—the spectator is given no visible proof of the exchange. One wonders whether anything at all is happening in the unseen space of the film narrative. Although "it does seem to be a real live blow job that we're not seeing" (Koch 1973, 47), nothing indicates that Warhol has not faked the entire display, instructing his actor to masturbate, or merely to act as if he is being brought to sexual climax. What is the status of this off-screen "blow job"? Is it real or imagined? Is the exchange heterosexual or homosexual? Do the man's facial expressions and gestures bear witness to the actual occurrence of fellatio, or is his mute testimony merely another put-on? If the blow job did in fact transpire, has the man actually been brought to orgasm, or "organza," as Warhol liked to say (Koestenbaum 2001, 44)?

These questions remain unanswered in Warhol's film, and they have become the subject of much critical musing. Unlike those of the hard-core pornography that succeeded them, the temporal and visual regimes of Warhol's films are, literally, missing in action. Not only does the blow job proposed by the title occur outside of the frame (if at all), but the moment of sexual climax is signaled belatedly and ambiguously by the presumably post-fellatio smoking of a cigarette (figure 2). Part of the frustration involved in watching *Blow Job* is, obviously, the way the film withholds the vision of fellatio to which the spectator feels entitled. There is both a missed space in the film (the space of the supposed fellatio) and a missed time (by the time the cigarette is lit, "it" is already over). Since we do not actually see the fellatio that the film's title promises (and its action seems to imply), we are left in an unresolved state of apprehension. We wait interminably for the moment of orgasm, only recognizing that it may have occurred when it is already "too

2. By the time the cigarette is lit, the audience realizes that it" is already over. This post-coital ritual stands in as incomplete proof of the film's authenticity. From *Blow Job*, courtesy of the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a museum of the Carnegie Institute.

late."18 The orgasm happens without our seeing or knowing it; the lighting of the cigarette induces a "minor shock of recognition" or a "small jolt in the mind," communicating to the audience that the moment we have waited for has come and gone without our perception (Koch 1973, 47). *Blow Job* situates the viewer in a realm of missed temporalities and lost opportunities. For the spectator, the "action" passes without him or her having arrived at the "scene." The spectator only learns of the sexual climax belatedly, through the "traces" of the sexual event. Like the detective at the scene of a crime, or like the observer of Eugene Atget's photographs, the spectator of *Blow Job* must reassemble the details of the sexual exchange from clues-facial gestures, murmuring lips, and cigarette smoke-without witnessing the event itself.

Although we do not witness the genital space of fellatio in *Blow Job*, the film is hardly eventless. Film critic J. Hoberman describes *Blow Job* as "the most conceptual work of porn ever made" based on its ability to redefine what counts as pornographic "happening" (1991, 182). Hoberman

3. The intrusion of the subject's hand in the frame signifies the escalating intensity of the hard-core action that remains unseen. The slightest transformation of compositional elements constructs not only a cinematic but a pornographic 'event.' From *Blow Job*, courtesy of the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a museum of the Carnegie Institute.

continues: "When the subject's hand intrudes to scratch his nose, it's like the introduction of a new character-an event" (182). In a similar vein, Douglas Crimp argues that "what defines 'happening,' what counts as incident, event, even narrative, what we see and notice and think about is very different in a film like *Blow Job* than in other kinds of films we've seen" (1996, 114). *Blow Job* transforms what is most often considered peripheral to the erotic experience into the sexual spectacle itself. Furthermore, by projecting the film at silent speed, Warhol recuperates those details ordinarily traversed rapidly in the pornographic presentation of pleasure.

I do not wish to privilege the film's moments of negation and repudiation at the expense of considering those aspects of *Blow Job* that *assert*, rather than *withhold*, sexual and aesthetic pleasure. Rather than regarding *Blow Job* as having failed porn's quest to offer proof of sexual pleasure, we must consider the possibility of alternative pleasures made available by the film. *Blow Job* does deliver proof of sexual pleasure, only via a code so completely antithetical to conventions of hard-core representation that it has become al-

most unrecognizable to contemporary audiences. The film resignifies the pornographic image by exploring pleasure's intimate relationship to duration, deferral, boredom, and, ultimately, dissatisfaction. By solely regarding *Blow Job* as *destructive*, or deconstructive, of the expectations of temporal coincidence and visibility in pornography, we fail to recognize that the film was, and is, *productive* of a new kind of erotic plenitude.

This erotic plenitude is, necessarily, subject to definition. One of the primary interests of this essay is to investigate the pleasures of looking at the face as a kind of visual pornography. Long considered to reveal the internal struggles of the subject, the face is often cited, in reflections on film and other visual media, as an instrument of unmediated access to psychological interiority. The relationship between portraiture and porn proves particularly compelling: both traditions are invested in accessing the hidden truth of the subject, albeit through different visual means. Pornography radically redefines the relation of the face to interiority; it interpellates the face not as proof of the soul, but as proof of the pleasures of the body. *Blow Job*, as a pornographic portrait, complicates this relation even further. By analyzing the face in *Blow Job*, determining what is revealed and withheld, I shall attempt to articulate the relations between visual pleasure, pornography, and the portrait.

The crucial difference between *Blow Job* and mainstream gay and straight pornography can be located in what we could call the different "face-work" mobilized by each product. Whereas mainstream pornography has traditionally relied on facial gestures to signal the moment of orgasm, the ecstatic face is treated as merely one register of pleasure in hard-core's *mise-en-scène*. The face, in other words, is displayed in addition to the throbbing genitals and ejaculating penis as a supplemental marker of authenticity. In the hardcore pornography that comes after *Blow Job*, the facial expression anticipates and then confirms what is ultimately the genitals' job to prove.¹⁹ On the contrary, *Blow Job* supplants genital "proof" with the grimaces of the face; the *mise-en-scène* of the film consists entirely of the face. In *Blow Job*, face-work is not supplemental to the genital action—it is the action.

The Perversion of Narrative According to Freud

Despite the long-standing artistic tradition of showing ecstasy in the face, from Bernini's sculpture of Saint Teresa to dose-ups of Jeanne Moreau in *The Lovers* (dir. Louis Malle, 1958), Warhol's insistence on the face borders on perversity. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud defines per-

versions as "sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union; or (b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim (2000, 16). *Blow Job* does not merely extend the visual focus of the film to nongenital regions of the body. In fact, the film entirely substitutes nongenital space for the genital action to which its title refers. The entire film is devoted to the significance of a nongenital part of the body, as if the face contained as many erotic possibilities as the penis. In hard-core pornography, the face of a performer in the throes of sexual ecstasy is important for establishing the action of the sexual number. However, it is presumed that the image of the face will be, as Freud puts it, 'traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim.'

Blow Job not only lingers but literally "gets stuck" in the perverse space of nongenital happening. The film is a reflection on the missing "meat shot," or the display of genital penetration. According to Linda Williams, the meat shot constitutes the "quintessential stag film shot: a close-up of penetration that shows that hard-core sexual activity is taking place" (72). The meat shot is the expression of what Freud would call normal, rather than perverse, sexuality: it is proof of the achievement of genital union. While feature length pornography since the 1970's has incorporated the meat shot as only one (albeit important) step along the way to firmer narrative proof of sexual satisfaction (the "money shot," or ejaculating penis), during the era of the stag, the meat shot signaled the zenith of narrative activity.

Historically, *Blow Job* is situated slightly before the transition from meat to money, from stag films to feature-length hard-core films. Although the money shot was not yet a popular convention in pornography, *Blow Job*'s occlusion of the sight of the penis certainly constitutes a deliberate choice to frustrate the audience. Keeping the genitals off-screen when the title of the film so titillatingly implied the penis's on/scenity was, indeed, a sign of the times, but the cruelty of the prank exceeded historical necessity. Waugh evokes Warhol the "cockteaser," explaining that the director "coined titles that served to lure prospective audiences with a promise, or merely a *tease*" (1996a, 51). Waugh urges viewers to situate Warhol's work historically, to recall an era in which "the promise of gratification was routinely deferred and rarely fulfilled" for gay porno consumers accustomed to snatching pleasure from the perusal of officially nonerotic art or exercise instructions (61-62). Nevertheless, close-ups of male genitals—like the kind so conspicuously missing in *Blow Job*—were not entirely absent from the spectrum of gay

pornographic production. Although "explicit sexual photos were rare compared to physique nudes and beefcake," Waugh, in his book *Hard to Imagine*, notes that illicit photography did take up the "crotch shot close-up" around the thirties. While these close-up shots never became as popular with underground consumers as the "long symmetrical compositions of the partouze sensibility," they did remain in circulation and would have been available to someone like Warhol without much difficulty (1996b, 324).

In many ways, *Blow Job's* presentation of the sexual show is closer to the stag tradition than it is to the Post-1970s incarnation of the genre with which we are more familiar. Like much of the work produced at the Factory, *Blow job* mimics the primitivism of stag films: the film is silent, without color, has limited narrative action, and lacks the identification of the star or any of the crew.²⁰ This should not surprise us; technically, the film does come almost a decade before the on/scene explosion of feature-length hard-core film in the early seventies. Nevertheless, *Blow Job* cannot be read as complying with the conventions of sexual representation in the stag film either. Not only is *Blow Job* twice as long as the longest stag film, but the absence of any evidence of genital penetration aligns *Blow Job* with the surreptitious turn-on of the mail-order physique loops popular with gay audiences from 1950 to 1970. As Waugh so perceptively argues, the bare-bones posing of these primitive physique loops prefigured the "minimal structure, duration and 'meta-genre' experiments by Warhol.

Freud would deem many of the pleasures available to gay audiences in the early sixties perverse. In his early discussion of fetishism in *Three Essays*, he defines fetishism as those cases in which "the normal sexual object is replaced by another which bears some relation to it, but is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim" (2000, 19). Since Freud's conception of the normal sexual aim is limited to genital contact, rapt or excessive attention to those parts of the body that surpass his formulation is inevitably deemed perverse. Freud writes, "The situation only becomes pathological when the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object and actually takes the place of the normal aim" (20). He never takes into account the possibility that excessive focus on nongenital parts of the body may develop from historical circumstances, in which access to the genitals is precluded by law, censorship, or social taboos. For Freud, perversion is defined as any type of extension or dilation of sexuality that supplants the genitals as its primary focus.

In this sense, *Blow Job* is not only a perverse film but a film that takes on the subject of perversion as the organizing principle of its narrative and

visual structure. We do see something in *Blow Job*, but it is neither what we expect to see, nor what we desire to see. The film fails to deliver the sight of the penis, as well as the site of oral penetration. In the place of genital activity, the film offers a face. Hard-core's dual regime of maximum visibility and temporal coincidence can be aligned with Freud's theory of normative sexuality. Hard-core delivers the genital event as the norm of sexuality, within a time frame that avoids unnecessarily lingering over "irrelevant" spaces of the body. The spectator of *Blow Job*, however, misses not only the sight of sexual climax but the temporal awareness of it as well. We are notified of sexual climax only after the fact. Struggle as we may to reconstruct the moment of orgasm, its precise location in time remains impossible to retrieve. Whereas later hard-core features would provide the audience with the well timed, well-lit money shot, *Blow Job* only offers the postorgasmic smoking of a cigarette. Whereas hard-core porn shows you dick, *Blow Job* only gives you head.

Problematic as it may now seem, the perverse collisions of avant-garde art and pornography in the sixties had begun to seem inevitable to their observers. For Stephen Koch, the uncomfortable marriage of avant-garde and pornographic modes of address was "an inevitable consequence of Warhol's mind" (1973, 49). Similarly, Hoberman writes, "The trajectory of Warhol's film career leads inexorably toward pornography, which back in the early '60's scarcely enjoyed the sanctioned existence it has today" (1991, 182). Although the "primacy of sexual representation in Warhol's oeuvre" cannot be underestimated (Waugh 1996a, 52), Hoberman's claim requires some unpacking. In what ways does Warhol's work "lead inexorably toward pornography," and how is this "drive" simultaneously resisted by Warhol's actual films?

Blow Job may have the most explicit title of Warhol's early cinema, but the film is not unique in focusing exclusively on a discrete bodily activity. "At the time he made *Blow Job*," Koch writes, "Warhol was involved in a model of desire that might have made him the most interesting pornographer of the century—certainly an ambition he entertained and cherished on a grand scale" (1973, 49). How exactly can we characterize Warhol's "model of desire" in the early films? *Kiss*, *Sleep*, and *Eat*—made the same year as *Blow Job*—all pare down the visual and narrative field to concentrate on a single bodily "event." Indeed, many of the elements of pornography already exist in Warhol's first year of filmmaking: a close-up of couples kissing (*Kiss*), the contemplation of a nude man in bed (*Sleep*), and the focus on "low" activities of the body (*Eat*). "Orality is a constant theme of the silents," writes Paul

Arthur (1989, 150); as is the locus of the bed or couch as a kind of pornographic space.

Arthur has noted that "the appeal to certain bodily sensations" in Warhol's early cinema "becomes almost pornographically direct" (150). Warhol admitted as much during his lifetime. In his discussion of the nude theater craze that hit San Francisco in 1969, the artist wrote, "I'd always wanted to do a movie that was pure fucking, nothing else, the way *Eat* had been just eating and *Sleep* had been just sleeping" (Warhol and Hackett 1980, 294). In this comment, Warhol reveals the pornographic gaze that mobilizes his early films. He confesses his obsessive desire to record "the 'thing' itself" (Williams 1989, 49), to focus on a singular bodily activity without distraction. What appears to be missing from Warhol's autopsy of pornography, however, is the phallus, yet this only holds true if we restrict our discussion of pornography to the Warhol films that involve human characters. Warhol's fixed-shot minimalist epic of the Empire State Building (*Empire*, 1964) amounts to an eight-hour hard-on, supplying more uninterrupted phallus than any but the most tireless spectator could endure.

Despite the "pornographically direct" gaze of Warhol's camera on bodily sensations, an important psychoanalytic difference exists between the structure of Warhol's early films and mainstream pornography. In *Three Essays*, Freud writes: "Perhaps the sexual instinct may itself be no simple thing, but put together from components which have come apart again in the perversions" (2000, 28). In Williams's discussion of sexual numbers in hardcore porn, she notes that "a little something is offered to satisfy a diverse, but not all-inclusive, range of sexual tastes" (1989, 126). Hard-core porn is interested in resolving the often contradictory parts of sexual spectacle into a unified whole. "Although built on the premise that the pleasure of sex is self-evident," Williams observes, "the underlying and motivating anxiety [of hard core] is that sometimes it is not." She concludes, "Out of this contradiction comes the need for a combined solution of narrative and number" (134). Hard-core desperately seeks to keep intact the sexual instinct. The genre's combination of narrative and number, as well as the integration of diverse sexual performances into a unified whole, aligns hard core with Freud's notion of normative sexuality. Warhol's early films, on the other hand, attempt to dissolve the sexual instinct back into its component parts. A list of Warhol's early films reads like a catalogue of perversions; each film devotes itself to an activity that has been severed from its relations to the other component parts of the sexual instinct. In Warhol's films, the integration of narrative and number is virtually nonexistent; the number is the narrative.

When Hoberman writes, "Warhol's film career leads inexorably toward pornography," it is as if he imagines all of Warhol's component parts coming together to re-form the sexual instinct that has come apart.

Portraiture and Porn: The Erotics of Knowledge

Rather than "being preparatory to the normal sexual aim," the pleasure of looking at the face in *Blow Job* "supplants" the genital gaze of hard-core pornography. However, while this diversion may initially strike the (non-face fetishizing) viewer as perverse and frustrating, Warhol's strategy calls attention to the often overlooked erotics of the face. Instead of regarding *Blow Job* as the embodiment of the failure of normative sexuality that Freud describes, I contend that the film presents a different, but equally suggestive, kind of erotic presence. The face that has been substituted for the genitals in Warhol's film is, indeed, endowed. Jonathan Flatley observes that "the promise enacted by the title leads us to read the pleasure of the blow job into the face" (1996, 125). As a result, the slightest grimaces of the face take on both a pornographic and an aesthetic fascination, superimposing the prurient gaze on the artistic one. Wayne Koestenbaum astutely and elegantly points out the ways in which Warhol's work "respects the pornographic impulse to build an archive of hunger's object," recognizing "that each body needs to be documented, for every man possesses an individuating detail -a pattern of hairs on the arm, a slope of the nose, a sufficiency of the lips" (2001, 42). Against our initial frustration at the camera's inflexibility, we catch ourselves enraptured by the idiosyncrasies of the image.

In his essay about *Blow Job*, Douglas Crimp argues for the "sexiness" of the film on the basis of its erotic "face value" (1996, 114). Rather than concentrating on what the frame leaves out-what we do not see—Crimp makes a compelling case for the "sumptuous beauty" of the face that we do see (114). Crimp's close reading of the anonymous performer's face pays detailed attention to the subtle gestures, expressions, and contortions to which we, as observers, are privy. He also suggests that it may be more useful to situate *Blow Job* outside of the pornographic moving-image tradition and inside the tradition of artistic portraiture (118). Crimp's insight concerning the usefulness of portraiture as a model within which to contextualize *Blow Job* is crucial. Nevertheless, Crimp here, perhaps unwittingly, asserts the need for a rigid dichotomy of cultural products, in which porn and art are erected as mutually exclusive categories. (If we are to situate *Blow Job* within the tradi

tion of portraiture, Crimp implicitly argues, then we must wrest it from the tradition of pornography.)

Koestenbaum compares the face of our fellatee to Maria Falconetti's expressive visage in Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, remarking how both portraits more closely resemble paintings than films (2001, 84). While Koestenbaum should never be accused of minimizing the sexual dimension of Warhol's work—in fact, quite the opposite is true of his seductive biography—it would be easy to imagine a situation in which this type of comparison could result in the sacralization of *Blow Job*, rather than the eroticization of Joan of Arc. Unfortunately, critics invested in breaching the divide between high and low often attempt to do so by exalting the "degraded" object to the status of high art, thus "redeeming" it from the trash heap to which it was relegated. To me, the opposite transformation seems more compelling. Rather than sacralizing the pornographic in an attempt to legitimize it, it seems more productive to consider the degree to which even enlightened works of so-called high art partake of a pornographic imagination. Why shouldn't we consider the possibility that the intense suffering inscribed on Falconetti's face in Dreyer's silent masterpiece could turn spectators on?

Blow job forces us to recognize that a single text may participate in multiple histories, genres, and traditions simultaneously, as it calls forth divergent and often contradictory codes and practices via its presentation. Rather than dividing the history of porn from the history of portraiture, it is more productive to *juxtapose* these two traditions, to compare them as parallel attempts to access the interiority of the subject through visual representation and the power/pleasure dynamic. Portraiture is not without its own libidinal yield; one must only think of Edouard Manet's painting of Olympia to visualize this blurring of generic boundaries.

Tony Rayns, in an essay entitled "Andy's hand-jobs," relates Warhol's work to what he calls an "erotics of detachment," in which the prurient element of portraiture proves central (1997, 83-87). Detachment, however, may not be the most accurate way to characterize the effect of the portrait on its observers. The intertwined histories of painting and photography remain beyond the scope of this essay, but we can observe that close-ups of the face have been instrumental to both the history of cinema and the history of film theory. Written nearly half a century ago, Bela Balázs's formulation of the close-up still remains the most compelling account of the effects that film portraits have on spectators. With the advent of the close-up as a cine

matic technique, film was able to show the spectator "the hidden life of little things" (Balázs 1952, 54). For Balázs, close-ups of the human face-especially Maria Falconetti's, his most insistent example-made for indispensable tools with which to access psychological interiority-"dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surfaces of appearances" (56). By focusing on the human face, and magnifying it to larger-than-life proportions, Balázs believed that cinema close-ups revealed subconscious feelings otherwise inaccessible. For Balázs, the close-up of the human face advanced the quest for human knowledge that has been integral to the discursive inscription of the cinematic apparatus. Balázs theorized that the close-up possessed the ability to divulge the meanings behind the intricate play of facial features, rendering "objective" the "most subjective and individual of human manifestations" (60).

Through the "microphysiognomy" of the face, amplified by the close-up on the cinema screen, Balázs claimed to be able to "see to the bottom of the soul by means of such tiny movements of facial muscles which even the most observant partner would never perceive" (63). For Balázs, unconscious, uncontrollable twitches of the face prove especially important for registering what he calls "passions" (72). He writes, "The most rapid tempo of speech lags behind the flow and *throb* of emotions; but facial expression can always keep up with them, providing a faithful and intelligible expression for them all" (72; emphasis added). Balázs defines the close-up of the human face as a kind of unwilling confession of interiority otherwise inaccessible through language. The close-up is erected as proof of the innermost workings of the subject. According to Balázs, that which is not "utterable" in language can be articulated only through the involuntary convulsions of the body-most notably and significantly, in the twitches of the face. Balázs was most interested in "certain regions of the face which are scarcely or not at all under voluntary control and the expression of which is neither deliberate nor conscious and may often betray emotions that contradict the general expression appearing on the rest of the face" The close-up removes the mask of false expression and reveals the "truth" of the subject. Like pornography, the close-up is animated by a drive for knowledge about the subject. We can even detect in Balázs's writing (particularly in his suggestive use of words such as flow and *throb*) the movement toward what Williams calls the "out-of-control confession of pleasure, a hard core 'frenzy of the visible'" that characterizes pornography (1989, 50). Moving-image porn and portraiture share an epistemology of the body, or a will to knowledge. For both traditions, the moment of convulsion signifies the bodily confession of truth.

Recuperating Aura: Specters of Distance, Allegories of Proximity

The pleasures of watching the face in close-up are akin to the pleasures of watching the body in thrall. For Balázs, the face becomes a type of genital space on which an observer can witness the confession of the truth of subjectivity. Although Balázs claims that his interest in the close-up revolves around what it can tell us about the "soul" of man (interestingly, most of his examples are not of men's faces, but of women's), he employs distinctly corporeal metaphors. In this way, Balázs's project resembles Warhol's. Balázs attempts to read the close-up epistemologically; in his text, the face is transformed into an endless source of knowledge about the subject. By "reading the face" as if it were a text, Balázs aims to "take possession" of the subject's interiority. Warhol's early film experiments challenge precisely the kind of knowing to which Balázs aspires. Like Balázs, Warhol inscribes his challenge on the body of the subject—in this case, the performer. For Warhol, however, the body is presented in order to refuse access to the subject's interiority. While Warhol's framing asks the spectator to treat the face as if endowed with genital meaning, the actual lighting of the film prevents the spectator from taking possession of the object through looking. Crimp analyzes this phenomenon in great detail: "Warhol's camera captures this face and the sensation it registers, but simultaneously withholds it from us; and he does this through a simple positioning of the light, as if, by chance, a bare light bulb hung from the ceiling just above and slightly to the left of the scene. We cannot make eye contact" (1996, 111).

Rather than viewing the effects of the obscure lighting as a kind of withholding of voyeuristic pleasure, as Crimp does, I interpret this with a slightly different, Benjaminian emphasis. In his classic essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin defines that elusive quality known as the "aura" as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close [the object] may be" (1968, 222). According to Benjamin, the aura of a work of art "withers" in the age of mechanical reproduction because of the "desire of the contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly" (222–23). He writes, "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction" (223). Benjamin's discussion of aura may prove extraordinarily useful to a discussion of pornography. The history of porn can be described as the history of the attempt to bring the object of sexual pleasure closer "spatially and humanly." In this sense, hard core can be read as the most compelling

generic example of the contemporary masses' wish to bring the object of desire - in this case, the body in the throes of sexual ecstasy - closer in order to achieve access to the subject's innermost corporeal secrets.

Perhaps *Blow Job* attempts to restore the aura previously lost in the representation of sexual pleasure. By reinstating the forfeited sense of distance-in-proximity, *Blow Job* gives us something more, rather than something less, than hard-core porn. Michael O'Pray has written that Warhol "attacked the aura of art" (1989, 10), and while this claim may accurately inform many of his paintings and silk screens, it does not seem to hold true for an analysis of his films. By lighting the face from above, as Crimp has observed, Warhol casts the face of the anonymous man - especially the eyes - in deep shadow. Crimp writes, "If there is any sense of frustration in *Blow job*, it derives, I think, not from not seeing the sexual act-we really don't expect to-but from not being truly able to see the man's face" (1996, 115).

By withholding the "maximum visibility" of the object on two levels, Warhol reintroduced the aura of sexual pleasure to the image. Not only did Warhol make the image of sexual penetration unavailable to the viewer; he also made the object that stood in as substitute notoriously hard to grasp. Benjamin observed that early photographs constituted the last refuge for the aura potentially emanating from a human face (1968, 226). Perhaps Warhol's strange primitivism is able to recapture some trace of the mood inscribed in early photography, "heightened with the mystique of an ungraspable aura" (Shaviro 1993, 212). By transforming the representation of the sexual act into an elusive, shadowy portrait, Warhol offered his audience the suggestive distance from the object that they had lost through the ubiquity of the mass-media image.

Shot at sound speed but projected at silent speed (Angell 1994, 9), deprived of the human sounds that accompany sexual satisfaction -and are so important to authenticating pleasure in hard-core porn and so conspicuously absent in stag movies—*Blow Job* succeeds in making the representation of the sexual act strange. Slow motion has the effect of distancing the viewer from the object by reducing the field of action to an otherworldly pace in which the continuity of motion is uncannily disturbed. Like early silent films, *Blow Job* transforms movement into drift, continuity into a succession of jolts and spasms, and presence into absence. The tempo of the film empties the body on screen of its vitality; the face is made ghostly by the shadows that surround it and the pulse that fails to animate it. Slow motion allows the viewer to experience distance as a lapse in time, a temporal distinction between the world of the viewer and the world of the image. *Blow*

Job shows the face in close-up-bringing the object into the foreground but at the same time, the film makes the action, and the face itself, seem far away. We cannot quite make out the face we are presumably staring at, we cannot hear the noises that the face and body emit, and the movements of the face appear in modest slow motion, as if they are happening at a great distance from us.

Labor, Boredom, Bliss

What is the relationship between aura and the erotic, between distance and sexual pleasure? Is the perception of aura pleasurable for an observer of pornography? What sensations do viewers have when they watch *Blow Job*, and how do these sensations differ from those we experience when watching sexual representations more accessible to us?

The most commonly articulated response to watching *Blow Job* is boredom. However, this claim is neither as transparent nor as universal as it appears. What does it mean to be bored by an image, and are *boredom* and *pleasure* mutually exclusive terms? (See Zabet Patterson's essay in this volume for some interesting answers to these questions in relation to cyberporn.) Does *Blow Job* move its audience and, if so, how? Rex Reed relates an anecdote, in which Warhol decided to screen *Blow Job* at Columbia University in 1966, worth quoting at length. He writes,

The audience sat attentively during the first few minutes of the film, which showed a boy's face. That's all. Just a face. But something was obviously happening down below, out of camera range. The audience got restless Some of them began to sing "We Shall Never Come." They finally began to yell things at the screen, most of them unprintable. Total chaos finally broke out when one voice (a girl's) screamed: "We came to see a blow job, and we stayed to get screwed!" Tomatoes and eggs were thrown at the screen; Warhol was whisked away to safety through the raging, jeering, angry mob and rushed to a waiting car. (Qtd. in Bockris 1989, 210).

Clearly, this audience had been moved to a frenzy, in which its members literally could not control their outbursts. In her book *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler writes, "Indeed, it may be that what is unanticipated about the injurious speech act [substitute, injurious film act] is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control" (1997, 4). Thirty years after its initial release, Crimp was able to write, "These days, when

we see Andy Warhol's *Blow Job*, we have no expectation of really seeing the act of fellatio the film's title announces" (III). In 1966, this was not always the case. Audiences expected to see the act of fellatio and were often enraged when the film denied them this vision. The sense of injury—of "getting screwed"—experienced by historical audiences was inseparable from the anticipation of the sexual display. Although this kind of reaction is not the kind sought after in hard-core porn,²¹ on a certain level, the spectators' rage very much evidences their own "convulsive" passion. The audience experienced the lack of any real sexual content in Warhol's film as a kind of impossible distance. Does this mean that the experience was not pleasurable—that the joys of hollering at the screen, ejaculating tomatoes and egg, and literally engulfing the director were nonexistent?

In an interview in 1967, Warhol discussed the effect his earlier films had on audiences: "[They] were made to help the audience get more acquainted with themselves. Usually when you go to the movies, you sit in a fantasy world, but when you see something that disturbs you, you get more involved with the people next to you You could do more things watching my movies than with other kinds of movies; you could eat and drink and smoke and cough and look away and then look back and they'd still be there" (qtd. in Berg 1989, 58). Warhol's observations about the unusual activity of his films' audiences prove revealing with regard to the status of intersubjectivity in his work. Contrary to the disciplined, motionless audience we incorrectly imagine as viewers of Warhol's cinema—and to which we, as critics, often belong—Warhol and Reed describe an audience very literally moved by the image on-screen. While the type of activities described by Warhol (eating, drinking, smoking, and talking) clearly do not equal the involuntary movements activated by "body genres,"²² avant-garde films also have the capacity to move their audience in multiple ways.

In his essay about Scott Stark's film *NOEMA* (1998) (in this volume), Michael Sicinski argues for the centrality of the laboring body in pornography. Whereas Stark's film foregrounds the laboring body within the frame (the porn performer), Warhol's cinema often calls attention to the laboring body in the audience (the film spectator). Although many of Warhol's early films are straightforward (*Eat* is really about a man eating, *Sleep* is really about a man sleeping), they are not "easy" or unambiguous. By refusing so many of the conventions of mainstream cinema (and, as we have seen, the conventions of other "predictable" genres like pornography), Warhol's films compel spectators to "find their own way," to entertain themselves when bored, to make sense of conflicting modes of address, and to sustain physically de

manding exercises in duration. *Blow Job*, in other words, makes us *work*. The action promised by the title is implied but never so much as glimpsed; if spectators leave the theater with the impression of having "watched" a blow job (and certainly not everyone does), then this results from the spectator's own perceptual labor. *Blow Job* moves its observer to produce the image of the fellatio that is not recorded, and that may not even have existed.

Tony Rayns describes the tendency of viewers "to mentally edit or redirect movies, to take from them what's interesting, exciting or sexy and to repress or ignore the rest" (1997, 84). Similarly, David Ehrenstein writes, "The pornographic audience partakes of certain images, ignores others, annexes others. The pornographic film is in a continual state of re-editing" (65). If we are to believe these critics' claims, then the observer of *Blow Job* must be a particularly skilled laborer, not only as an editor but also as a cameraperson. *Blow Job's* spectator must be capable not only of editing out all that is tedious in the film but also of actually lowering the camera in his or her mind in order to see below the frame. Crimp, however, takes a different view of the situation. Rather than regarding the activity of the spectator as a compulsion to visualize what is not there, he views the experience of watching *Blow Job* as liberating. Rather than describing an experience of frustration or boredom, he limns an unparalleled sense of freedom in which the spectator is "freed to look differently" (1996, 114).

While I appreciate Crimp's thoughtful and compelling reevaluation of *Blow Job*, I am again not certain that boredom and pleasure need to be formulated as mutually exclusive categories. I find it particularly compelling to locate Warhol's work at the site of exchange between these two experiences. Warhol writes, "I've been quoted a lot as saying, 'I like boring things.' Well, I said it and I meant it. But that doesn't mean I'm not bored by them" (Warhol and Hackett 1980, 50). Both pornography and the avant-garde are often accused of being boring; conversely, avid fans of either genre often defend the films by denying these claims. In both cases, the division between boredom and pleasure is perceived as intransigent. Rather than regarding pleasure as something achieved when boredom is bracketed, I would argue that the pleasure of the Warhol text—and possibly of much of pornography and the avant-garde—inseparably derives from the experience of boredom. Stephen Koch writes,

It is interesting that so many people complain that pornography is boring. *It is boring*, of course; anyone who has ever tried to do more than dabble in it knows how boring it is. Yet it is also passionately interesting. It seems

to me that pornography is dull because it is dull to wait-and pornography requires us to wait Pornography is a patient art. Those who speak of its immediacy are speaking in very considerable confusion. Those who speak of its excitement are being evasive with half truth. 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, why one doesn't feel it here or there, searching for the well-springs of arousal *While waiting one invents* (1973, 50-51; emphasis mine).

Boredom is thought to occur when either the body or the mind (or, in the worst case, both) is not sufficiently occupied. Patrice Petro observes that boredom is "typically thought to describe a subjective experience—a time without event, when nothing happens, a seemingly endless flux without beginning or end" (1995, 265). Petro, like Koch, associates boredom with waiting and "the expectation of future orientation of subjectivity devoid of anxiety and alienation" (*Petro 1995, 270*). Waiting, however, does not imply the bracketing of possibility. Rather, boredom invites speculation and the imagined posturing of desire. Along these lines, the French theorist Michèle Huguët has observed that "the subject experiencing boredom is not suffering from an absence of desire, but from its indetermination, which in turn forces the subject to wander, in search of a point of fixation" (qtd. in Petro 1995, 271). Rather than designating a mode of subjectivity bereft of stimulation, boredom may imply "an anxiety of abundance," an overstimulation of both body and mind that constitutes a typical condition of modernity (Petro 1995, 271). Much has been written about the effect of this kind of sensory abundance on subjectivity, but none of it sufficiently addresses boredom's very tangible effect on the body—its corporeal impressions. Jonathan Crary has argued that the collapse of the camera obscura model of vision inserted the human body—with all of its imperfections and idiosyncrasies—into discourses and practices of vision. He writes: "The body that had been a neutral or invisible term in vision was now the thickness from which knowledge of the observer was obtained" (1999, 150). At no time is Crary's insight about the thickness of the body more apparent than when the subject is overcome by boredom. Boredom renders the thickness of the body and the density of the mind excruciatingly palpable. It is precisely when we find ourselves bored that we are most aware of our own "carnal density"—of the turgidity of our thighs, the heaviness of our eyelids, and the dull but unbearable pulsing of genitals. Like pornography, "boring" experimental films such as Blow

Job return us to our bodies, impregnating us with apprehension, imagination, and desire. When we are bored, our minds are saturated with thought: we feel ourselves thinking.

In mainstream hard-core pornography, the seemingly endless repetition of predictable outcomes induces boredom; the sense of knowing how each sexual number will end, imbues the spectator with a simultaneous sense of monotony and arousal. For avant-garde spectators, boredom often intervenes when, to borrow from Ivone Margulies, "nothing happens" (1996). Whereas the boredom of pornography seems to derive from its uninterrupted and sustained fullness, the ennui of the avant-garde is often generated by the lack (or perceived absence) of narrative event or conventional character development. Can we compare the boredom of satiety with the monotony of lack? Do these two seemingly antithetical categories interact phenomenologically? While waiting, what does one invent?

It would prove too facile an interpretative gesture to conclude that while waiting, the observer transforms what is "wrong" with the pornographic *mise-en-scène* of plenitude and supplies what is "missing" from avant-garde minimalism. Although the boredom generated by pornography and the ennui generated by the avant-garde are not the same, they come together in Warhol's film *Blow Job* to produce a sustained simultaneity of sexual fullness and structural lack. Roland Barthes cryptically observed that "boredom is not far from bliss: it is bliss seen from the shores of pleasure" (1975, 26). Boredom, in other words, is the bliss experienced while one is pleased; it is the simultaneity of experience and perception rendered banal by the gesture of fulfillment. By endlessly deferring the gesture of fulfillment (recognized in later hard core as the money shot), *Blow Job* expands the temporality of bliss ad infinitum, stranding the spectator on the excruciating shores of pleasure, in the extraordinary space of the unfulfilled.

Notes

1 In their book *Midnight Movies*, J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum state that this screening actually occurred in the summer of 1964 (1983, 62).

2 According to Warhol's biographer Victor Bockris, Kligman—who had been Jackson Pollock's girlfriend and had been in the car with Pollock when he died—expressed both disgust and confusion in regards to the screening: "I showed the film but I didn't like it. Even the word blow job offended me. There were all these strange people I couldn't relate to who were all on speed. And there was a kind of prurience I didn't like" (qtd. in Bockris 1989, 149).

- 3 The first time the New York City police seized one of Warhol's films occurred in March 1964. His three-minute newsreel entitled *Andy Warhol Films Jack Smith Filming "Normal Love"* was mistaken for one of Smith's own films (Warhol and Hackett '980, 79).
- 4 Like many of Warhol's films, *Blow Job* was also casually screened at the Factory in a manner that evokes the atmosphere of a post-Thanksgiving dinner homemovie screening (albeit one attended by speed queens and aspiring socialites). In her rather snide memoirs, Warhol superstar Ultra Violet recalls the time she "jump[ed] at the chance to attend a screening of *Blow Job*," in the fall of 1964 at the Factory (1988, 31). She reminisces: "On a Sunday night the audience assembles in the dimly lit Factory, on and around the battered couch, which is so piled with bodies that it looks like a lifeboat. The images... are projected onto a white sheet hung between two silvery pillars" (31). Ultra Violet (née Isabelle Collin Dufresne) describes the experience as "mind-numbing" (32). She writes, "I see faces in the audience moving up and down in sync with the unseen protagonist. Is that what you call audience participation?... I begin to long for an explosion to bring an end to this submissive-what can I call it? Treatment" (32). Despite Ultra Violet's insistence on her own lack of response to the film ("I'm not for it or against it. I'm not repelled, not attracted, not indifferent, not captivated" [32]), she later admits that "among the girls [at the Factory] we talk about *Blow job* for days. It takes us a while to recover" (34). According to Ultra Violet, Ingrid Superstar (reputedly considered the "retarded Superstar"— see Koestenbaum 2001, 120) supposedly even went so far as to demand, "what's avant-garde about two fairies sucking?" (34). Although I don't know how the author could have remembered this bit of dialogue nearly twenty-five years after it was spoken, the question itself reveals how the collision of the vanguard with the pornographic in Warhol's films made even the filmmaker's own cadre of hipsters uncharacteristically uncomfortable.
- 5 Most contemporary discussions of the segregation between the avant-garde and low forms of mass culture begin with Clement Greenberg's important, albeit polemic, essay from 1939, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Although Greenberg's distinction between kitsch and the avant-garde fails to take into account the significant ways in which these traditions intersect, this bifurcation has remained one of the most persistent legacies of aesthetic modernism. Lawrence Levine argues that the aggressive separation between the high and the low was instituted in cultural practice by the end of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, Linda Williams claims that by this same period, the observer of the avant-garde and the consumer of low culture both shared a similar experience of spectatorship. Building on the work of Jonathan Crary, she writes, "The loss of perspective of the camera obscura model of vision plunged both the high-modern and the low-popular observer into a 'newly corporealized' immediacy of sensations" (Williams 1995a, 7; Crary 1999). By the sixties, the distinction between high and low became even more problematic than it had ever been before; Andy Warhol

is only one of the many artists whose work breached the boundaries between the high and the low. See Banes 1993 for a more complete description of avant-garde artists who employed low or popular techniques in the early sixties.

6. Warhol boasts of his love of pornography on several occasions. In *POPism*, he writes, "Personally, I loved porno and I bought lots of it all the time-the really dirty, exciting stuff. All you had to do was figure out what turned you on, and then just buy the dirty magazines and movie prints that are right for you, the way you'd go for the right pills or the right cans of food" (Warhol and Hackett 1980, 294). When interviewer Leticia Kent asked Warhol about *Blue Movie*, which had recently been declared hard-core pornography, Warhol insisted that the "misty color" he used while filming made it "soft," rather than "hard" core. He continued: "I think movies should appeal to prurient interests Movies shoulduh-arouse you I really do think movies should arouse you, should get you excited about people, should be prurient" (Kent 1970, 204). When Warhol's film *Blow Job* was screened at the Park Cinema in Los Angeles alongside the sexploitation film *Nudist Beach Boy Surfers* in July of 1968, he must have been ecstatic. (See the illustration of the fantastic poster advertising this joint screening on page 69 [no pun intended] in Waugh 1996a.) As Warhol's collaborator Paul Morrissey admitted, "Degenerates are not such a great audience, but they're a step up from the art crowd; we would always rather play a sexploitation theatre than an art house" (qtd. in Waugh 1996a, 67).
7. See interview with Warhol quoted in Wayne Koestenbaum's brilliant biography, simply titled *Andy Warhol*. Characteristically deflecting the interviewer's question about his films being a kind of therapy, Warhol extols the splendors of the split beaver and the influence his films had on the beaver crowd (Koestenbaum 2001, 88).
8. Warhol continued to produce films throughout the seventies; many of the films Paul Morrissey directed under Warhol's name, including *Flesh*, *Trash*, *Heat*, *Flesh* for Frankenstein, and *Blood for Dracula* are still mistakenly attributed to Warhol.
9. Sally Banes argues that avant-garde film "had already become fashionable, co-opted by the mainstream" by 1965, even though the 1963-64 season (with films such as Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, and Barbara Rubin's *Christmas on Earth*) had outraged the bourgeoisie, the critics, and the law (1993,173). With Jonas Mekas standing in as experimental cinema's own minister of propaganda, Warhol film star Baby Jane Holzer christened as 1964's Girl of the Year, and the co-optation of underground themes and techniques by popular films like *Easy Rider* and *Midnight Cowboy*, the avant-garde was gaining momentum as a recognized and acceptable cultural force. Jonas Mekas himself commented on its transformation from "vanguard army" to institution. He writes, "By autumn... the magazines and the uptown decided to join the underground and make it part of the Establishment" (qtd. in Banes 1993, 173). By the end of the decade, the "strict censorship laws that had for several generations driven sexual content and other forms of 'obscenity' into hiding were being

gradually dismantled" (Banes 1993, 174), reconfiguring the cultural landscape in ways that had not yet materialized in the early sixties.

- 10 See Jonas Mekas's "Autobiographical Notes" in the appendix to James 1992.
- 11 The popularity of John Schlesinger's film *Midnight Cowboy* provides a perfect example of the type of cultural transformation that had occurred by 1969. Warhol himself writes that the film marked a crucial turning point in the history of film, when themes associated with the counterculture moved "right up into the mainstream of society," generating "mass commercial success" by saying and doing "radical things in a conservative format" (Warhol and Hackett 1980, 250). *Midnight Cowboy* had begun filming while Warhol was in the hospital recovering from a near fatal gunshot wound inflicted by Valerie Solanas. Before Warhol had been shot, Schlesinger had asked him to appear in the film, playing an underground filmmaker in the big party scene. Many Warhol superstars, including Geraldine Smith, Joe Dallesandro, Ondine, Pat Ast, Taylor Mead, Candy Darling, Jackie Curtis, Geri Miller, and Patti D'Arbanville were invited to participate in the film, but only Paul Morrissey, Viva, and Ultra Violet actually appeared in the final cut. Warhol admits to a certain jealousy about the entire project, and not only because he was in the hospital missing all the fun. Up until 1967, Warhol writes, "the underground was one of the only places people could hear about forbidden subjects and see realistic scenes of modern life" (280). With *Hair's* success on Broadway, and *Midnight Cowboy's* success at the box office, Warhol felt that mainstream society was moving into his territory. He had taken on the subject of the male prostitute as early as 1965, in his film *My Hustler*, and he felt that the "attitude" of the Hollywood version lacked the honesty of his own production. (This is one of the few times that Warhol extols the sincerity of one of his own products.) Hollywood's treatment of the hustler "looked better," but was "much less threatening" (280).
- 12 For a more complete history of the legal battles over sexually explicit cinemas, see Williams 1989, in addition to the aforementioned titles by Thomas Waugh and Jon Lewis.
- 13 See Koestenbaum's discussion of these drawings (2001, 41-48).
- 14 See Waugh 1996a, as well as his chapter "Art and Arousal" in Waugh 1996b. In both of these pieces, Waugh quite convincingly argues for Warhol's familiarity with both gay stag films and physique soft-core porn. Waugh also argues, in his chapter entitled "(Oh Horror!) Those Filthy Photos': Illicit Photography and Film," that "a distinct gay illicit cinema" emerged as a historical possibility after 1960, noting that "a proliferation of about one hundred all-male stag films is documented" from this decade. These 8 mm porn films would have been available in "dubious magazine shops in large urban areas," such as New York's Times Square neighborhood (1996b, 359-60). One of the films Waugh mentions, and which I have not been able to view, seems particularly interesting for contextualizing *Blow job*, although it is unclear from his description how productive the juxtaposition of the two films would be. Waugh writes that *David* 44 "appar-

ently from the early sixties, shows a promising interest in auto-fellatio and demonstrates through some curious syntax of simultaneous jerk-offs that gay porn need not have gone the historic route it would soon take: the formula of linear narratives leading inexorably to orgasmic release" (361). This brief description strikes me because of its suggestion of an alternative route for gay pornography that would not necessarily lead to a film like *Boys in the Sand* (dir. Wakefield Poole, 1971), but could encompass less linear, more autoerotic film experiments (like *Blow Job?*). Perhaps my imagination is overeager here.

15 *Blue Movie* is neither the only Warhol film in which genitals are visible, nor is it the only film to show the sex act: *Haircut* (1963), *Couch* (1964), *Tub Girls* (1967), and *Eating Too Fast* (1966) are also sexually explicit. The police seized *Blue Movie* in August 1969 after it had been screened at the Garrick Theater in New York. The next month, the film was ruled obscene (Koestenbaum 2001, 153, i6).

16 The video that I have watched most recently presents a version of the film slightly over thirty minutes in length. In print, I have seen references to a thirty-five minute version (Koch 1973, 47) and a forty-one-minute version (Crimp 1996, 111). It is unclear to me whether these discrepancies constitute errors or whether several different versions of the film actually circulate.

17 Linda Williams argues that hard-core pornography involves a regime of temporality, as well as one of visibility. She explains, "Non-sadomasochistic pornography attempts to posit the utopian fantasy of perfect temporal coincidence: a subject and object (or seducer and seduced) who meet one another 'on time!' and 'now!' in shared moments of mutual pleasure that it is the special challenge of the genre to portray" (1995b, 154).

18 Video technology, as well as the existence of a bootleg videotape of the film (both of which were unavailable to the historical spectators of *Blow job*), has allowed me to play and replay *Blow Job* at my own leisure and to my heart's content. Many times, I have searched for the moment in the film that signals orgasm, in the vain hope of determining the moment of bodily "truth" of the anonymous performer. Yet no matter how many times I replay the video, and how fixed to the screen I am, I have never been able to determine when and if the performer actually ejaculates. Certainly, I am not as familiar with the bodily codes of male orgasm as some, but it seems clear to me that even for the most educated ejaculators, this moment is impossible to ascertain.

19 According to Williams, the "principle of maximum visibility" operates in porn in order to deliver hard-core, authentic "proof" of the body in the throes of sexual pleasure. In hard-core porn, proof is demanded not only of the actual occurrence of genital penetration but of the body's involuntary, ecstatic response to it. The principles of maximum visibility originally included privileging the closeup over other shots, overlighting the genitals, and positioning the performers in order to best display bodies and organs, but they have expanded since the 1970s to include the still ubiquitous convention of the externally ejaculating penis, known within the industry as the "money shot" (1989, She writes, "Hard

core tries *not* to play peekaboo with either its male or female bodies. It obsessively seeks knowledge, through a voyeuristic record of confessional, involuntary paroxysm, of the 'thing' itself" (49). It is interesting to note how many of the principles of maximum visibility are elided in Warhol's work, and how the only one he actually observes in *Blow Job* (the privileging of the close-up) is used in order to withhold, rather than deliver, evidence of penetration.

20 See Williams's discussion of the primitivism of the stag film (1989, 60-72).

21 Carol Clover has designated genres such as honor and pornography "body genres" because they aim to move spectators toward a convulsive response (to jump with fear in honor films, or to convulse in sexual ecstasy in pornos). Building on this, Williams has argued that porn consumers are literally encouraged to participate in the action depicted on the screen. Pornography aspires to propel the body of the spectator to "an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on screen" (1995b, 143). For spectators of hard-core pornography, there is an implicit contract between the text and its audience, which stipulates that the viewer will not only see but also experience explicit sexual pleasure. Richard Dyer '85 makes a similar point about gay pornography. He writes, "The goal of the pornographic narrative is coming; in filmic terms, the goal is ejaculation, that is, visible coming. If the goal of the pornographic protagonist (the actor or 'character') is to come, the goal of the spectator is to see him come (and, more often than not, probably to come at the same time as him)" (28).

22 According to Williams 1995b, body genres include honor, pornography, and melodrama (see previous note).

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