

# CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

ONE OF THE FOUR CARNEGIE MUSEUMS OF PITTSBURGH

## Independent Filmmaker, George Landow (Owen Land), Lecture

Date of Recording: November 16, 1971

Location: Carnegie Museum of Art

Running Time: 84:42 minutes

Format: ¼-inch audiotape

Date of Transcript: November 2015

Department of Film and Video archive  
Lectures and interviews with artists  
ID: fv001/002/020

Sally Dixon: Good evening. Good evening. We're a little late getting started. Oops, sorry. Help! There. I'll stand back a little bit.

We have George Landow tonight as you full well know, I guess. George was born in New Haven for what's that worth, and from '70 to '72 was teaching at the Chicago Art Institute, where a number of filmmakers seem to have been stopping of late – distinguished filmmakers, of which he is one. He did leave and went to Vancouver, British Columbia where he's been since then until this trip I guess to Pittsburgh. He stopped in Chicago on the way here.

He's associated by many with a group that are known as the structuralists. None of them seemed to like being tagged at all. I don't think it's so much that tag as the idea of tagging, period. Nevertheless, he is one of that group and there was a show I guess for a week at the Vancouver Art Gallery – then maybe he can tell you more about that – that was showing the films of these people who seemed to fall into this category who are exploring form in film, various forms in film. I'm delighted to have him with us tonight and I trust you'll enjoy it. George Landow.

George Landow: I feel that the reason I make films is very specific and I have a particular mission in filmmaking: that is to evolve [00:02:00] a type of film that I see ... I don't see; when I say I see it, I've never seen this kind of film physically but I see it as a vision, an internal vision. Pretty much all my life, I've had this vision of a kind of film I'd like to see. I'm very disappointed with films that other people make, including myself. I'll refer to myself, I think in the third person tonight because I'm pretty far from all those films that you'll see. I'm pretty disappointed with all those films and that they don't come up to my expectations which are possibly, unfairly high because of this vision that I've had.

Anyways, somehow I feel that it's worth attempting so that's what I'm doing. I started making films when I was about 17. My background is in writing, in theatre, writing for the theatre, plays and poetry, and in painting. I started all those things about the same time, then I started formal study as a painter in New York for about four or five years. I concentrated pretty much on that and sort of forgot about the other things that I'd been doing. But eventually, film just came back to me [00:04:00] totally against my will. I didn't want to be a filmmaker. I wanted to be a painter but it just kept coming back and I had all sorts of very strange, sort of mystical experiences involving film, which I won't go into.

The general idea is that I've never been able to get away from making films. It seems to be following me. So I guess I'm stuck with it. Anyway, I started making films when I was about 17 or 18. An initial period of more or less copying other people's work, other filmmakers that I liked, experimental filmmakers like the Maya Deren type of film, psychodrama. Anyway, the first film I'm going to show tonight comes out of my days as an art student, as a

painting student. What I'm going to do is show this film, which is a very early film, and, in a sense, it's a good place to start because it deals with the very primal aspects of the film watching experience.

If you can divide watching the film, the primal things – I don't know, this is sort off the cuff, and I haven't thought this out – but the first thing is, well, you're sitting in a theater with other people. Then there's a flat screen there and you're watching the flat screen, so totally aside from any ideas of the content or the form of the film, there's that situation of watching a piece of plastic [00:06:00] moving through sprocket holes at a particular speed with a very strong illumination behind it onto a screen and all the other things that that implies.

This first film deals with that primal film-watching situation. I think it's really not fair to ask whether it's a good film by the standards that we usually apply to films, whether it's entertaining or interesting or anything because you have to see it in that context. It's an attempt to get at the first type of film experience. The other part of that film is that it uses as its subject matter things which not only are not generally used in films but are consciously avoided. The name of the film is *Film In Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Dirt Particles, Sprocket Holes, Etc.*

All those things, edge lettering and dirt particles and sprocket holes and even the "et cetera" are things which are always left out of films, always left out of what you see but always there behind the scene so to speak. Even though the sprocket holes go by, you don't see them. The dirt is supposed to be cleaned off, so you're not supposed to see it, and all the things on the edge of the film outside of the screen area is supposed to get matted off. The "et cetera" is an image of a girl who is the archetypal Kodak color test girl, who you've probably seen flashing by subliminally in thousands of films. It's been extended, and frozen, and repeated [00:08:00] so that ... in the strip I had, she happened to blink her eye which I guess is unusual.

And so, in this particular part, she's blinking her eye over and over again, which I guess is some sort of commentary on watching films too. I haven't seen this film in such a long time. I haven't really thought about it or looked at it but there's a lot that could be said about it. I think it's probably better not to say it because there's so much that can be read into it. There's so many metaphors and I don't think that they're necessarily very valid. I think what I said in the beginning that it is a sort of a wanting to start at the beginning, to begin at the beginning, by making a film which dealt with the first experience you have when you watch a film.

In a sense, that could be called a structural film but, I mean, it doesn't really say anything. Okay, I think that's enough about that. Anyway, the next film after that will be not the latest film that I've completed but a film which goes the farthest in I think the opposite direction that the first film I'll show goes in,

which is the secondary, at least, experience you have when you watch a film, which is psychological, the subconscious entering in the literary elements to an extent, although it's not exactly a narrative film, it's not a narrative film. It's more structured, like [00:10:00] a poem, with images that are woven together and repeated, a few images which have a very specific and very tight relationship to each other on all levels as much as possible.

In other words, it's an attempt to use images to their full power, economical use of film. It's a very short film and it has quite a few things in it. It could be stretched out a lot longer but I edited it down to make every image appear for the minimum that is necessary to comprehend it. It's sort of ... you can see the analogy to a certain types of poetry in that. It was working with all of the psychological implications of the images. It's a very personal film in a way, in that it's the first film I made that I appear in myself.

I guess that about covers the first two films. Then we'll go back and show a film that was actually the last film that I've completed but in a way sort of takes a step backwards and explores some other things. Part of the film watching process that I need to know, I need to explore now for things that I plan to do in the future and that has more to do with speech in film, and dialogue, [00:12:00] and actors and/or non-actors, but people who are being filmed and aware that they're being filmed, and also people who are not aware or don't really care that they're being filmed, which is the case in, say, documentary-type film.

Anyway, I'm trying to give you some idea of these films as being individual stepping stones toward a higher type of film that I'm trying to evolve, so don't think of them as achievements or attainments or anything but only as things on the way to something else. Now that I look back over them, a period of about 10 years, I see why I made each one and exactly what can be learned from it. I also see the weaknesses, what I fail to do and all of them and know what I have to do now. In some cases, it's a technical inadequacy. In other cases, it's conceptual or on some other level.

You will then see this film which is called *What's Wrong With This Picture*, and it is in two parts, and is more of an exploratory film on the conceptual level for me. And then you'll see a film called *Institutional Quality* which is kind of transitional. It was the first time that I really [00:14:00] started to deal with more conventional reality in films. The film is structured as a school test so that it borrows its structure – in a sense, I guess if you want to talk about the structural films, it's very clear where the structure of this comes from. The film is put into, it's just forced into an alien form which is a non-artistic form, which is something else I was trying out and still am.

If I'm going to evolve a new type of film, it's obviously not going to be in any traditional form, so a new form has to be created. So I started to search outside of the art frame of reference into other things, such as commercial

art, TV commercials, instructional films, promotional films ... that whole area which is non-artistic, which is done for some other reason where the aesthetic is only – if it exists at all – is totally at the service of the selling or the propaganda part of it.

*Institutional Quality* is an experimental film, I guess you'd call it, in the form of a schoolroom test. [00:16:00] Strangely enough, it's been shown a lot. It's also the first film of mine that really got shown to large audiences, because of the humorous aspect of it. It's a really popular film with audiences. Also it's been shown in schools and it's really popular with kids in school. So this is sort of odd, maybe not, but it gets back to the form that it's taken over. It reaches people who are aware of that form, I guess.

Also, I don't feel I made that film. In fact, I don't feel that I made most of them, now that I think about it. It's hard for me to conceive of how I ever could do such things. I just don't know where they come from, except the one called *What's With This Picture* which I understand exactly where that came from. *What's Wrong With This Picture* also borrows from another form. It borrows the form of an approximately 1938 instructional film made by Coronet Films who, by the way, I think make really beautiful films of that type. I really love them.

I think they're just great gems, the old Coronet Films, not new ones. I don't know if they still make them but from circa 1930 or '40. This one was called, *Are You A Good Citizen?* I was with some friends at a flea market and there was a big box and somebody said, "There's some film in here." We looked and we found these fragments from very old films. We found this fragment from *Are You A Good Citizen?* I was looking, [00:18:00] I needed something like a point of departure for a film and so it turned out that it was that. I don't know if that's a coincidence or not, but it doesn't seem like because it's so perfect.

We didn't even have the whole film. We had a fragment and from that fragment I took one scene which was clearly demarked by an opening shot of a window and then ended by a fade out. We took this one scene and we shot it in a set which was almost identical, strangely enough, to the original. It happened to be a house that one of the students in my class lived in. He looked at the film and he said, "My house looks like that." We went to see it and looked exactly like it. It was amazing.

The layout of the room was almost exactly the same. It was also in Evanston, Illinois which I think is around the area that Coronet was making films at that time, somewhere around there. So that film is another one that borrows from non-art and makes it art. I'm really interested in that process, like, what is the difference between something that's not a work of art and what is a work of art? I mean, is a real Coronet Film not a work of art and is ... oh, maybe it's a film by Stanley Kubrick or Hollis Frampton or Stan Brakhage. Are they works of art? Are some works of art and some not?

I'm really interested in that because I don't want to take anything for granted in evolving something new. I don't want to take anything old for granted. As far as I'm concerned, on one level anyway, [00:20:00] a work of art is something that for me works. A lot of things that I consider art other people don't, which doesn't really bother me, because a lot of my ideas are different from other people's ideas in other areas as well. So I guess that's consistent. Okay, so then we go back ... After you see the first two films, you will be going back in time each film and going in backwards progression.

The film that was made before *Institutional Quality* is called *The Film that Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter*. That, in a way, has a whole different context. It initially came from a dream that I had when I was maybe five years old. I don't remember exactly. It's something that I remembered. It possibly relates to a series of films that may or may not have been on television called "Out of the Inkwell" which is a series of animated films where ... I'm not sure if they're made by Max Fleischer, maybe someone knows. Anyway ... Yeah, I think they were. The same guy who did Betty Boop. It would start out with a live action scene of a cartoonist or animator ... no, a cartoonist.

He drew a figure of a clown and then the clown would become animated. It would become alive and do all sorts of mischief in the studio and run around. This really disturbed the cartoonist who always tried to catch him and get him back into the inkwell and then close the ink bottle up ... Higgins Ink. [00:22:00] Close it, you know, they have those real tight stoppers. Once he got him in the Higgins ink bottle, that was it. That really gets into an archetypal demon, the demon in the bottle thing. That probably never would've come out, or the dream I had which related to that may have never come out, but at the time, which is 1968, I was really involved in Tibetan religion.

Somehow it all ties together because Tibetan religion contains, well, more than that. It's based on a kind of demonology as opposed to theology. It's sort of a demonology. I saw these little figures which came alive on the animator's papers and cartoonist's papers as demons. As I looked at Tibetan mandalas, I saw figures which I could clearly relate to cartoon figures in cartoon films, animated films. I did a series of drawings. I just spent a long time taking Tibetan mandalas and drawing from them, drawing out figures from them and then evolving them to a kind of Walt Disney style.

So I had a cross ... I had a couple of figures that were a cross between Tibet and Walt Disney, which I think is a very interesting apex. In fact, when I started to get into this, everything came together. All figurative art, and religious art, and animation, and the whole idea of little kids [00:24:00] watching these little figures running around in their TV set and the Tibetans watching the little demons running around on their mandalas. The idea of the mandala, and the TV screen, and the animated film, and the experience that the animated film is for a young kid and how to fix his dreams and how these archetypal things

that have come down to us from God knows where and when are still with us. It just all came together and this film came out of it.

The title came out of the Upanishads. This constant reference to “the film that rises to the surface of clarified butter” which is ghee, but it’s used as a metaphor in the Upanishads, as a recurrent metaphor. Somehow all these things came together at that time, at that place and the film came out of it. This film was so strong in its subconscious aspect that I think the form of it got away from me. I couldn’t control it. I’ve never been really happy with the form of the film, but I really like the basic image. I’ve sort of wanted to go back and re-edit it but it just hasn’t happened.

So, in a way, this film is the extreme opposite from, say, the first film you’ll see which is very formal, formalist controlled, or even the second, third, and fourth films in which the form is much more controlled. Actually the second film, *What’s Wrong With This Picture*, I think ... oh, no. I’m sorry. That’ll be the third one, but *What’s Wrong With This Picture* is the most controlled formally, [00:26:00] at least the second part of it. Well, anyway, I guess that’s for you to decide. Then the last film, which is called *Diploteratology*, and used to be called *Bardo Follies*, but it’s now called *Diploteratology*.

That came out the same period, pretty much, that the *Clarified Butter* film did. It also has as its source Tibetan spiritual practices, the Tibetan Book of the Dead which describes the bardo. The film was an attempt to make an image, a sort of film bardo, a sort of place or area that no one has ever gone and no one ever could go, and only film could actually create it. The film created a space, actually a series of different spaces. The space in this film is totally unique to the film. It’s another film I feel I didn’t really make, although I was present when it was being made. I really like the image at the end, which is a very flat space as if it were maybe on a slide under a microscope but no, that’s not right either, but deeper than that, but larger, also large.

Well, you’ll just have to see it. It really got to me [00:28:00]. Anyway, so that film is a progression of different kinds of space. It starts out with a borrowed image from another non-art film, which was a travelogue of some place in Florida, and I just took one image from that film and repeated it. As the film starts out, you sort of think this is another film that has conventional film space in it. Then the image repeats and then in the space, when you repeat an image over and over again, somehow the space dies. It loses its reality because you know that it’s not really happening. You know more that it’s not really happening.

Then it splits up and so that spatially it laterally dislocates. Then you know it’s not real space at all, it’s film reality completely. Then that initial image which has ... at least, it implies the kind of depth, real three-dimensional depth. It dissipates. It decays. And that was done ... The process of making the film was taking that original image, that Florida travelogue and subjecting it to high

temperatures and then re-filming so that the image actual does decay or breakdown and the pigments, the essence of the film, the things that the film is really composed of but you don't see because you're looking at an image, [00:30:00] these things take over and start to form their own images. Heat plus essence of film then become artist in a sense and start making images.

That was really interesting because the film, well, it was automatic sort of process which I would never do now because I think it's very dangerous to let yourself be guided by external forces that you have no control over, which is a really ironic statement because everyone in this room, that's exactly what's happening right now. But to do it deliberately is just like jumping into a swimming pool without water in it or something. It seems really stupid to me. At least, if you're going to jump, have a parachute or something, but this was just a plunge into a no man's land that I'd never been into.

Amazingly enough, it worked, and I got these fantastic images. There's this whole section of the film which, for lack of a better term, I'll call the Beaulieu Section since it was shot with a Beaulieu, which is different from the rest of the film. It evokes other images. It suggests real things, like I see – Well, I won't tell you what I see because it might influence what you might see – but everybody sees things that are pretty much in their mind already in that section of the film. That was kind of amazing.

Then, the last section which for me is the most magical, because it's an image that I know and I don't know from where. It's an image I could lose myself in. I could just jump in there and be there forever. I think that's kind of dangerous too. [00:32:00] I associate that last image with drugs, not so much the experience of taking drugs but how drugs must look physically, chemically, if you could look at the molecules of a drug under a microscope that always seemed to me ... or viruses. All those things which are not naturally part of us but are outside things. Dangerous but seductive, sort of.

Anyway, these are just sort of my reflections on this film which I'm only capable of doing now that I've been away from it for so long. Because when I made all these films, I had no ability to see them objectively and I was just compulsively working inside of them. I dearly didn't know what I was doing, but now, it's very clear to me what I was doing, which is also interesting because it seems like somehow, I was guided. It all seems so logical now. Each one dealing with a very specific problem, yet at the time, I wasn't aware of it. I just knew that's what I had to do.

But that's really helpful to me now because I can look back and it helps me to know what to do, where to go, what of these experiments I can use and which ones I can't use. Like *Bardo Folies* or *Diploteratology*, I know that's something I don't want to pursue any farther, and the things that I got into in some of the later films are things that I wanted to pursue much farther, much, much farther. The films I want to make now are more closer to the narrative or



dramatic films that we've all [00:34:00] seen from early childhood. I always really rejected that kind of film because I thought well, this is a filmed play.

If I wanted to see you play, I can go to a theatre and see a play. I really liked plays. I was going to be a playwright before I got into making films. I like the theatre experience but I really rejected it secondhand via film. But now, I'm thinking, "Okay, it's a filmed play, but a filmed play is all right if on the filmic level something is happening." That's the problem with, say, the Hollywood film, or the conventional filmed play. It's got all of the things that a play should have. At least, say, a Broadway type play. It's got good acting, good lighting, good sets, good costumes, well-rehearsed, well done, all those things, but filmically, there's nothing happening.

I mean there's a certain ... a lot of people would disagree with me and say well, camera movements, beautiful smooth pans, photography from different angles, use of different kinds of lenses, things like that, but I don't think that's filmic. It's not filmic in the sense that I'm using the word. I mean its cinematography, sure, but it's a cinematography that was developed to film plays. It's kind of right back where you started. We have plays and sure, Kubrick makes better filmed plays than people who were working around the time of the Lumiere brothers say or Méliès. Although Méliès' films are a lot better than Kubrick's, but that's on another level [00:36:00]. As far as technically, Kubrick's films are a lot better because he's got the technology and equipment.

He films plays probably about as well as plays can be filmed, but they're still filmed plays. They don't get into using cinema as a medium that can stand on its own feet, because people haven't trusted cinema really. At least to make money, they haven't trusted cinema as being ... they don't think people will come and watch a film and pay. They'll come and watch a filmed play or they'll come and watch maybe a travelogue or documentary if the subject matter is interesting enough or of course, pornography – it doesn't matter how that's done. But as far as watching a film, people won't come. I think that's one of things maybe Michael Snow is getting into ... of trying to make a film.

I think the problem there is there's definitely something missing in that direction which is, we could say, the structural direction. That doesn't seem right to me either, because ... well, I don't really know. I didn't come to talk about ... Annette Michelson could talk about that. Anyway, I got to thinking, "Well, filming a play ... yeah, is okay, if something is happening on the filmic level," and *What's Wrong With This Picture Part 2* is just that. It's a filmed play. What I did was, after filming it in a very conventional way, I added a spatial change. [00:38:00] I added one spatial change. It goes from conventional space to blank space and then it goes back to conventional space again.

This is one solution that I found for making a film play. I'm really happy and excited about it because it will enable me to make dramatic films and I see a whole area opening up, which I don't think anyone has really gotten into, of using the dramatic, the narrative, and using things that have been pretty much just associated with experimental filmmaking together. It's a synthesis and that's what I guess I'm doing is trying to synthesize different things that have been floating around in experimental film or the theatre of the absurd, in the world of spiritual things and subconscious and trying to make a synthesis. It's pretty complicated work.

It's very, very slow and I turn out generally about five minutes or ten minutes of film a year. So that's about it. After the films, I'll answer questions. The only other thing I wanted to say is that one of the prints that I have, I just got today, I just saw it for the first time and the lab made a mistake so the dialogue is out of sync. That's not intentional. That's the film *What's Wrong With This Picture*. You'll be very aware of the mis-syncing between the lip movement and the sound. [00:40:00] It should be in sync so you have to kind of imagine it. It's unfortunate because it sort of throws the film. You lose the effect a little bit but there's nothing we can do about it. Okay.

Anyone else who wants to leave, leave and then we'll start. I'd appreciate asking questions. This may sound like a stupid thing to say, but ask me questions that you wouldn't ask anyone else. I mean, questions specifically that I can answer. Not questions like, "How many frames are there in a foot of film" because I don't even know. General, technical questions about the film medium, because this isn't a film class, it's specifically to ask me questions about my films. I say that because sometimes people ask me questions like, "How many frames in a foot of film," stuff like that. It's weird. Free film instruction. Okay.

Audience: Where did you get the narration...

George Landow: No, I didn't. That came to me pretty much the same way that that fragment, that Coronet Film fragment, came and the beginning of *Bardo Folies*. [00:42:00] I found it. Well, I'll tell you the story briefly. I moved into an apartment that someone else have been living in and they moved to Europe and they left all their things there. There was a whole collection of tapes and that was one of them. I changed it though. I edited it quite a bit. Originally it wasn't like that. I mean it makes a lot more sense in the original but I shifted it around so that statements contradict each other. She says, "Look at the picture" and she says, "Now don't look at the picture," that sort of thing. Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:42:48 - 00:43:25]

George Landow: No, because it was already gone. It had already dissolved at that point. There's no going back to it, but I have another version of that film. It's called *Five Diploteratological Stages*. It's a very short film. It's about three minutes

long. It uses all the same material. Very quickly, you see numbers. You see one through five and then very, very briefly after each number you see one stage. [00:44:00] The first one is a very quick shot of her waving at the boat, and the next one is the three images of her, and the next one is the two blobs, and then the next one is the thing coming in from the sides to the center, and the last one is the split screen. The whole thing is about three minutes long.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:44:23 - 00:44:37]

George Landow: Yeah, it has to do with space. That way it negates the idea that the film frame is sort of a window that you're looking through into a real space or ... there – proscenium arch ... Looking through a proscenium at a three-dimensional space. When you split it up, it no longer can be that. You've got contradiction. You've got things existing in space. I mean, that would be contradictory in reality.

Audience:

George Landow: And then back to one, you mean ...

Audience: [Inaudible 00:45:30 - 00:45:36]

George Landow: Yeah, well the reason that I went in that film from one to three to two back to one again, that seems contradictory to go back to one. The reason I put that section rather, why I put that section in that place has to do with the nature of the experience. That whole film is edited in terms [00:46:00] of the experience that you have when you watch it, which is something that I'm no longer doing. I don't believe in that kind of structuring anymore. That's not based on the images themselves. It's based on the experience you have.

In other words, it's a progressive experience which goes deeper, deeper into abstraction. It's based on a kind of meditative-type experience where you go from this reality which is the room you're meditating in, deeper and deeper, past illusory visions that might be conjured up hopefully into an ultimate experience of reality. Well, that's the kind of structuring that film has. That's why in a way, now I find it very boring because now I want, I think of structure in terms of relation of image to image, depending on what particular qualities the image has. It's very clear in the film that starts out with the girl sleeping and then you get an image of an audience and then someone running.

Each image there is edited into place. It's edited because of qualities that the image has and how they interact with each other. But that wasn't true in that last film. It was done so that you're progressively pulled into a certain kind of experience. In the sense, that film wasn't really edited. That's why I have an edited version of it ... As it was done in the camera, [00:48:00] yeah. In that sense, it's sort of a document of ... see, I was trying to keep myself out of it.

Keep myself from making decisions about what should go into the film and what shouldn't and just let it make itself.

The only stuff I really cut out are things which just didn't ... like, were accidents or just didn't work, but I didn't make aesthetic judgments to say this will go in and this won't. More or less just cut out what anybody would cut out.

Audience: [Inaudible]

George Landow: Yeah. It seemed to work at that time. At the time the film was made, it seemed like a thing to do but I never would do it that way now because I don't really trust ... I want to be in control of my films, at least in control of the editing part. I don't mind someone else making the images, but I like to be able to choose I want to use and then cut things down if I want to. Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:49:25 - 00:49:53]

George Landow: In way, that is almost answered by the last question. It had to do with the experience of watching that image [00:50:00] over and over again and seeing what would happen.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:50:08 - 00:50:22]

George Landow: Well, it's like in certain kinds of music where the structural principle is the drone, say in Indian music or some Tibetan music or the chant or the mantra. Repetition is used so even though here's the first time and the second time is the same as the first time, each time it's repeated, something happens synergetically. There's accumulated ... because of the repetition there's an accumulated experience which happens.

So that after you heard the same mantra 500 times, it's not the same as hearing it first. Ask anybody who's into chanting Hare Krishna why they do it so much. Why not just chant it once and forget it? That's it. I've done my duty as a Hare Krishna. I've chanted it once. But they keep doing it all their lives, over and over again. I suppose that's related ... or why people say Hail Mary over and over again, or, for that matter, why do people go to the same mass and listen to the same Gregorian chants? Why do we continue to do the same things over and over again?

It has to do with that. I don't really mean to defend the film and say, well, you missed it. It's really a great experience if only you had the perception to see it. I agree with you. I'm not into making repetitively structured films anymore. I think I'm pretty much bored by them now, but I showed it just to show you [00:52:00] where I was at then when I started making films. Anyone else? Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:52:13 - 00:52:51]

George Landow: Yeah. What about it? Is that a question or just a comment?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:52:58 - 00:53:18]

George Landow: The Structurists, they have a little office in Long Beach, California, down this dark alley. Actually, I'm not related to them, although ... no, seriously, it's not really a group, but there are a lot of people making films ... Well, I don't know a lot of people. What does that mean? There are maybe under a hundred people but more than twenty people, that I know about anyway, who make films that may have at one time or another [00:54:00] been labeled "structural." There are also people whose films have never been labeled that whose films probably would be if Annette Michelson or P. Adams Sitney saw them.

It's not a movement or anything. A lot of those people don't know each other or never saw each other's films, but there are a group of people in New York who do see each other's films and who I guess influence each other but they might not admit it. I don't know. It's not right for me to mention the films because if you've never seen them, it'll just be confusing. In any case, I guess you'd say it's a tendency which I find ... I'm not happy about it as a tendency in filmmaking. If my films had anything to do with starting that tendency, I don't feel too good about that, because it's not the tendency that I was tending toward.

I don't know if anybody has seen the kind of films we're even talking about so this may not be making any sense. They have ... Like the sort of film where you see a shot of a room or a corridor, which is a classic because there are several films using corridors, and then certain things start to happen. Essentially, the image of the corridor remains, or Michael Snow will do a very slow pan or zoom in a given space, maybe taking an hour or more. I think that's the kind of the film that's usually called structural. I think my films could only be included – I'm not even sure how my films can be included when I think about films like that. I can see some of the [00:56:00] early ones, in that they have the repetitive structure, but I don't know. Does this make any sense? Does it answer your question?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:56:16 - 00:56:24]

George Landow: Yeah. It doesn't. It really doesn't because what I'm doing is only maybe coincidentally – well, not coincidentally, but the relation of my films to anyone else's films ... I've got myself in such a mess. The relationship of these films to anyone else's films ... well, is not entirely coincidental, but is not particularly important. Okay. Any other questions? Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:56:55 - 00:57:40]

George Landow: The latest one is *What's Wrong With This Picture*. Yeah. [00:58:00]

Audience: [Inaudible 00:58:01 - 00:58:40]

George Landow: No. I mean, I don't know what to say. I don't know what to say about it. Can you be more specific?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:58:59 - 00:59:11]

George Landow: Well, what do you mean by disturbing?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:59:23 - 00:59:59]

George Landow: [01:00:00] What do you mean coherent? Well, part of that coherentness is an illusion I think. I've seen them so many times and I've had so much chance to reflect on them. But as I said, when I was doing them, I wasn't very clear about what I was doing the whole time. Not in terms of the subject matter. Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:00:37 - 01:00:44]

George Landow: No, not usually. I usually try to avoid an emotional response. I would think that they should be viewed in a very detached way. No, not being drawn in. Not being taken into another reality too much but yeah, keeping a distance and being able to ... just look at them, I don't know, as objects, as objects out there, as maybe samples or objects from another dimension that have sort of come into this dimension. But I usually try to avoid anything emotional. That's one reason there's very little music in these films. Music tends to really reinforce or in fact [01:02:00] create an emotional response in movies. Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:02:10 - 01:02:53]

George Landow: I'll think about that. Maybe you're right. Maybe we shouldn't be looking at ... then again, if we shouldn't be looking at them, should I still be making them? My problem isn't whether or not you should look at them. My problem is whether I should make them. You decide whether you want to look at them.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:03:14 - 01:03:28]

George Landow: It's already been replaced, by the movie projector. I don't want to replace it with another illusion. No. That's not an illusion. No. It's real. I can say that that screen is not an illusion, but as soon as an image is projected on it, [01:04:00] the image is an illusion. That's true. But if you know that the image is an illusion then you're not being deceived by it. I mean, I think this is very subtle and this gets into some sort of psychology which I'm not even equipped to deal with, like what happens.

I mean, I've seen movies that I've really gotten into and identified with characters – I didn't necessary even like the movies – and afterwards I came

out and thought, "That was really a bad movie." But while watching it, I was really involved emotionally. I knew, intellectually, that it was an illusion, that it was just a movie, but I don't think that's what we're talking about. There's something else. There's some other function of the brain that sort of, even though you know intellectually you're still sitting in the movie theatre, there's something else which kinds of gives up, relaxes and says, "Well, I'll pretend that this is reality," and it's that thing that I don't want to happen.

Why should it? I mean, it's not necessary first of all. I don't think it's particularly beneficial to do that. I don't think ... see, I think, the art experience as I perceive it from other works of art and not from movies so much, but my own background in just being a perceiver of works of art, I find the strongest works are works that do not require you to give up that kind of objective detachment [01:06:00]. Works that I find to be weaker ... it's much clearer to me when I look at paintings, because I know paintings much more than the films. Wait a second, I just want to finish this.

When I look at the painting and I know it's a good painting, I know it's a strong painting, I can step back from it, so to speak. Being detached from it and still appreciate it. Other paintings that I find are not good paintings, they have the tendency to want to get people emotionally involved in them. The most obvious and totally degraded example being certain types of commercial art, the *Saturday Evening Post* cover type of art. The whole response to that is emotional. This is an extreme example, of course, but I think it will illustrate that when you're involved with the imagery in an emotional way like that, you no longer have any criteria for looking at it as a work of art. But this again is a fine line. It doesn't say that art can never involve you emotionally. It has to also do that some way. Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:07:32 - 01:07:42]

George Landow: Wow. I've done that. Well, I have written several plays that have done that. In fact, one of them was the only one that's actually been produced. It's a scene, a very banal [01:08:00] scene, but kind of very conventional, dramatic scene which happens on a stage. And then, the scene ends and then where normally in a play, a new scene would begin, the same scene happens again. This happens several times, but each time the scene occurs, there's some change, like sometimes both the actors are speaking. Sometimes one actor is speaking and the other actor's voice is on tape recorder, or the other actors, or other variations on that, on the presence or non-presence of the particular actor. It was pretty much just as you described. The play was called "Irene Bordoni in Paris." It's pretty much variable, just like some of these films, which can be almost as long or as short as you want them to be.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:09:12 - 01:09:15]

George Landow: Yeah. It's very interesting when it becomes live, because the repetition is not just because the film is spliced together in both ends. It's really happening again and again. Each time it's different. That's why it's much more interesting when it's live, or why perhaps mantra chanting, when it's actually being done, is a lot more interesting than seeing it on a film because each time there's always a slight variation.

Audience: [01:10:00] [Inaudible 01:09:56 - 01:10:20]

George Landow: Yeah. It seems to me that's probably being done to some extent, or it should be. Probably film has influenced the novel. Well, yeah, I think maybe "Ulysses," by James Joyce possibly already shows an influence of the movie, but I'm not sure how much. I'm sure there are people now writing novels or doing literature that's influenced by films and all sorts of interphase things.

Right. Yeah. Just the opposite of one of the early Chaplin films which is the English musical stage scene done as a film. This would be just the opposite of that, the film scene done on the stage. Also you mentioned Javanese or Balinese theater and the kind of music the Gamelan orchestra makes is also a very ... I find a very, very strange repetitive experience and very different from western music. Even from eastern music for that matter. Did you have a question in the back?

Audience: [Inaudible 01:11:50 - 01:12:07] [01:12:00]

George Landow: I don't know. I think a lot of people have thought of that. I've read Brecht but I wasn't aware of that part of it.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:12:22]

George Landow: Which movies do you mean?

Audience: [Inaudible 01:12:37]

George Landow: Yeah. That's usually not projected in a theater like this. It's usually done as a sort of mural. It's in a room where you can walk around in the room as a rear projection.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:13:12 - 01:13:26]

George Landow: Yeah. I do in that ....

Audience: [Inaudible 01:13:12 - 01:13:26]

George Landow: Well, I think, in a sense, I mean I personally do. In another sense, I don't. I think there are both these things going on. Most of the attachment ... I mean, I feel like I'm responsible, since in a way I'm earning my living by making films



and showing them and being responsible for them and answering questions about them. I do feel attached to them and that gives me a lot of discomfort because I see things that are wrong with them. And I think, "Well, I want to go back and change [01:14:00] this." That's not easy to go back and change a film that's already totally out of your hands in distribution and already has a soundtrack on it, which means going back to the original and really starting almost from scratch ... well, not really from scratch, but pretty much as far as the editing.

I don't want to do that because I'm not interested in doing that, but as far as I feel responsible for the films I see how they could be better. So I feel it would be good to go back and make some changes, in that ideally, I would like to, if not destroy these films, sort of put them away and forget about them for a while. Make a whole bunch of new films where I can realize the things that I learned from those films and then I wouldn't have to worry about thinking I have to go and change this. That's what I'd like to do and I hope in a couple of years to have a couple of hours' worth of new films and I won't show these any longer.

I may or may not take them out of distribution, but I've already sold some prints to Anthology Cinema in New York. Every month they have a cycle of films, so they show them. So there's nothing I can do about that. I don't even know if they would allow me to go back and change the films that they already have. They probably wouldn't. Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:15:41 - 01:15:53]

George Landow: I don't know if the black box makes any difference, but they do have very good projections, very bright, and good sound system [01:16:00]. It's a good place to see films. Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:16:11 - 01:16:28]

George Landow: Well, only that they're a lot closer to the later ones that you saw than they are to the earlier ones, if you can kind of, in your imagination, extend the things that are being done in the new ones into ... well, I don't know. Since they haven't been made yet it's kind of hard to talk about it.

Do you mean the one with the words? Oh, yeah. Right, right.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:17:08 - 01:17:48]

George Landow: Okay. Well, then if you take the second film and you think about it ... this is hard to explain [01:18:00]. Well, some sort of a synthesis between what you see in the second film and the kind of things that you see in the other films, which is already there of course in the second film ... in '70, yeah. Yeah. Well, it's pretty much the last one except the other one, the one with the words.

That was an attempt to sort of ... it was more of an exercise. In a sense, you could say that the one you're talking about is the latest film as far as being a fully realized project. In terms of the kind of direction that I would go in, that's probably closer to what the new ones will be like. In terms of the footage I've already shot, I would say that's true, much more sensuous type of imagery. Yeah.

Audience: [Inaudible 01:19:08 - 01:19:46]

George Landow: Yeah. Well, that was really just a reinforcement of the visual rhythms. It was really noise [01:20:00] or sound, but not music. Yeah, well that's a lot closer I guess to the direction that I'm going in.

I guess that's it. Thank you all for coming. Okay.

# CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

ONE OF THE FOUR CARNEGIE MUSEUMS OF PITTSBURGH

Copyright © Creator, by permission. All rights reserved.

CMOA respects the intellectual property rights of artists and others. The CMOA website and all images and text contained therein are protected by applicable U.S. and international laws and regulations, and are owned by CMOA or used by CMOA with permission from the owners or under fair use or where otherwise specified. Copyright for some items are held by the artists and/or other third parties. You agree not to download, copy, reproduce, publish or transmit, or otherwise use any portion of the CMOA website (including any images or text contained therein), except for your own personal noncommercial use or “fair use,” as this term is defined by applicable copyright laws, without written permission from CMOA and/or other appropriate rights holders.

## **Commercial Use Is Restricted**

Unauthorized publication or exploitation of museum files is specifically prohibited. Anyone wishing to use any of these files or images for commercial use, publication, or any purpose other than fair use as defined by law must request and receive prior permission from the appropriate rights holder(s). CMOA reviews all requests on a case-by-case basis and may require payment of a license fee depending upon the intended nature of such use.

For additional information, see the Carnegie Museum of Art Terms of Use.