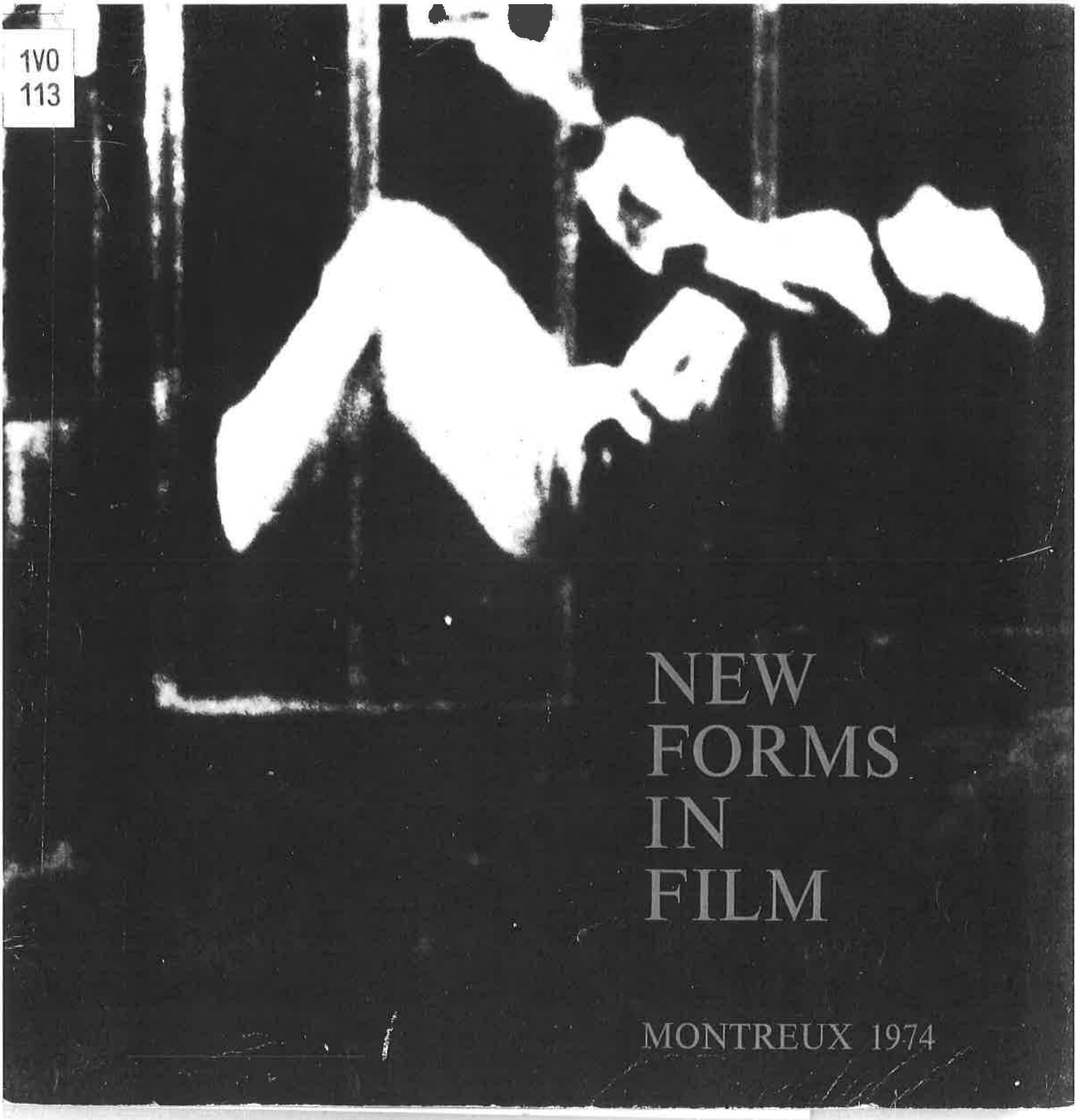

NEW FORMS IN FILM

MONTREUX 1974

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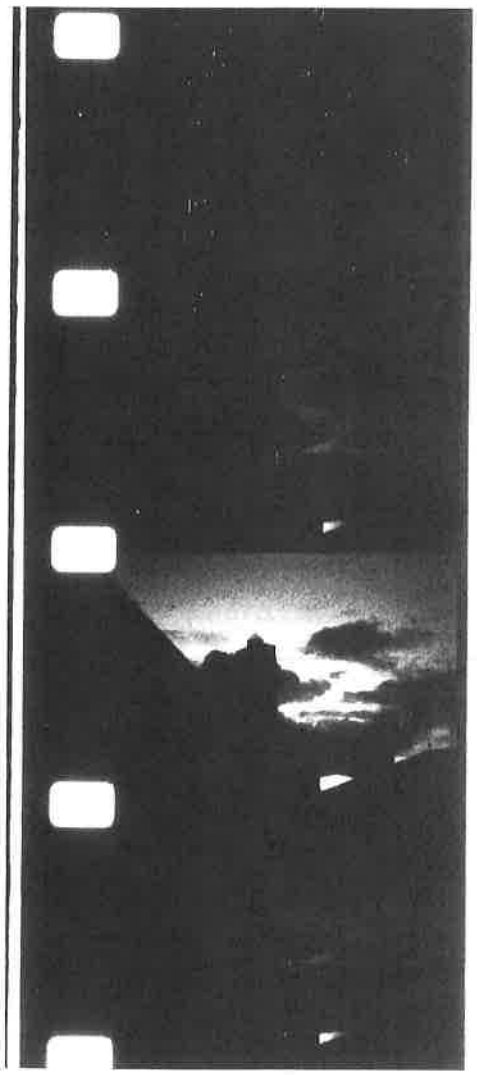

NEW FORMS IN FILM

MONTREUX
AUGUST 3/24 1974

EXHIBITION DIRECTED
CATALOGUE EDITED BY
ANNETTE MICHELSON

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NEW FORMS IN FILM represents a first attempt to present for a European audience the work of a generation which has brought to maturity the movement hitherto known as "The American Underground". Produced independently and committed to a sustained impulse of innovation these films, revising the modes of fiction and document, constitute a body of work which now takes its place beside the prestigious achievements of American music and painting.

We are dealing with forms that have been, until now, scarcely documented. For this reason I have many thanks to offer those persons and institutions who have helped in the assembling of films, the preparation of historical and biographical material, and of photographic illustration.

First and foremost among those persons is my assistant, Ms. Helene Kaplan, whose help is not to be measured. With her I wish to thank Mr. Jonas Mekas without whose characteristic generosity this project—and indeed the forms which it celebrates—would not have come into being.

It as largely due to the initiative of M. René Berger, Director of the Lausanne Museum of Art, that this project, conceived more on the lines of an exhibition than a festival, was undertaken. The collaboration between New York and Montreux which has made our work possible was brought about by his friendly support. For this, the film-makers and myself are grateful.

The Anthology Film Archives and *Film Cutlure* Magazine, headed by Mr. Mekas and Mr. P. Adams Sitney were at every point helpful in the preparation of this catalogue and in other ways, too numerous to mention. I want particularly to thank Ms. Kate Mannheim, Ms. Pola Chapelle and Ms. Amy Taubin for their assistance.

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A. M.

The organizers thank the "Galerie Impact" in Lausanne whose happy suggestion originated the realisation of New Forms in Film.

PATRONAGE

Mr. P. Adams Sitney, Director, ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVE
Mr. James Wood, Director, ALBRIGHT-KNOX GALLERY
Mr. John Coplans, Editor, ARTFORUM Magazine
Mr. David Oppenheim, Dean of the School of the Arts, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
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Photo Peter Hujar

FILM AND THE RADICAL ASPIRATION: an Introduction

by
Annette Michelson

The history of Cinema is, like that of Revolution in our time, a chronicle of hopes and expectations, aroused and suspended, tested and deceived. To speak of Film and the Radical Aspiration is necessarily to evoke instances of convergence and dissociation.

Two statements, first, however: not mine, but drawn from the writings of men of quite dissimilar sensibilities and vocations, living and working at a distance of almost two generations. The first, Benjamin Fondane, a writer and critic, and man of the left, died, when still young, in a German concentration camp. Writing in 1933, he said,

"We are committed with all our strength to the denunciation of a world whose catastrophic end seems more than ever before inevitable. We demand its rightful liquidation, whether that liquidation produces an irremediable vacuum of nothingness or a sovereign renewal through revolutionary means. Such should be—and this regardless of the deep inner wounds inevitably involved in such an aspiration—the aims of will and consciousness today... As for film, the curve of its development has rapidly ascended, only to sink into an immediate decline. Stuffed to bursting, tricked out with an absurd and meretricious pomp, with every kind of frill imaginable, it has hypertrophied into a monstrous industry. The attraction was merely potential, the magic contained... the seeds of an unpardonable decay until, with the abruptness of a volcanic eruption, the huge shambles collapsed beneath the weight of its own emptiness. And yet, the cinema continues to interest us for that which it is not, for that which it failed to become, for its ultimate possibilities... It may be that film is the expression of a society unable to sustain a world... of the mind. It may be that this tardily conceived art, child of an aged continent, will perish in its infancy. It may be, too, that the Revolution is not utterly to be despaired of."

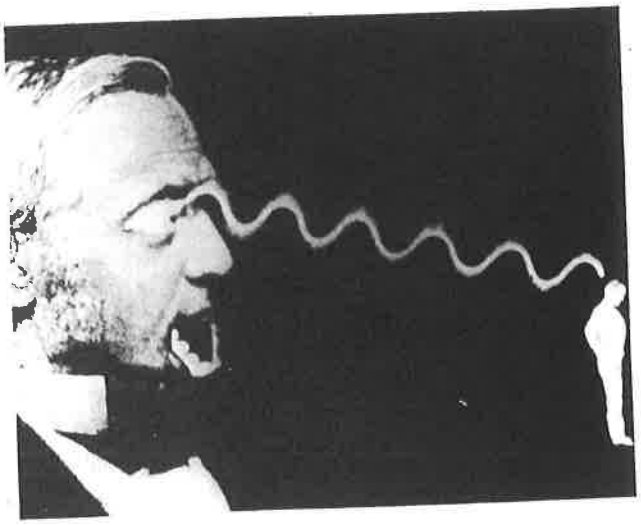
The second statement—just one sentence—was written by a Movie Star and published in *Film Culture*. The Movie Star in question, a performer of quite extraordinary charm and originality, is Taylor Mead, who has said, "The movies are a Revolution".

Film, our most vivacious art, is young enough to remember its first dreams, its limitless promise, and it is haunted, scarred, by a central, ineradicable trauma of dissociation. The attendant guilt and ambivalence, their repressive effects, the manner above all, in which a dissociative principle has been alternately resisted or assumed, converted into an aesthetic principle, the manner in which this resistance or conversion modifies or redefines cinematic aspirations are, like everything concerning film, unique in the history of western culture.

A dream, a presentiment of the medium, inhabits and traverses the 19th century. Almost every form of popular diversion characteristic of the era—the family album, the wax museum, the novel itself, the panopticon in all its forms—can be read as an obscure, wistful prefiguration of cinema. My own revelation of the wax museum as prefiguration came when I chose, as a Christmas treat, to accompany a bright little American, French-educated boy to the Musée Grevin. It struck me, as we went slowly through the long, dark, labyrinthine corridors, punctuated by the rather grand and spectacular tableaux which chronicle the whole of French history, from early Gauls until the Gaullist regime, that the wax museum, in its very special, hallucinatory darkness, its spatial ambiguity, its forcing of movement upon the spectator, its mixture of diversion and didacticism, is a kind of proto-cinema. And of course the historical mode of discourse is, above all, that of the earliest films which celebrated state occasions, public festivities, followed monarchs to christenings and assassinations. The extraordinary rapidity of the cinema's growth seemed to confirm that vision of a century's wistful fantasy (only seventy years have passed since Méliès witnessed the Lumières' demonstration and produced his own first reel). So, too, did the general climate of anticipatory enthusiasm and accord which animated filmmaking and criticism in their early, heroic period. That climate seems, in retrospect, Edenic.

Consider the atmosphere surrounding the early theoretical discussions: the Eisenstein-Pudovkin debate on the nature of montage, involving the conception of images as "cells, not elements" engaged in dialectical conflicts, as opposed to the "linkage of chains". Or the discussion, somewhat less familiar to historians, of the function of the subtitle as it crystallized during the 1920's in France:

Kirsanov's elimination of the title in the interest of visual explicitness. René Clair's reduction of the title's role to the strictest minimum, the stress placed by Desnos and Surrealists on its exclusively poetic use, on the subversion of "sense in the interests of poetry". While the controversy developed—and with the unique intensity and



inventiveness which characterise critical discourse in France—technology was preparing to transcend the problem. The claim that the "shriek" or "grinding of brakes" was no less real or "present" for being understood rather than heard was rendered comically irrelevant; the problem was simply cancelled by the arrival of sound.

Generally speaking, however, discussion, fruitful or academic, took place within a context of broad agreement as to the probable or desirable directions of the medium. Styles, forms, inventions and theoretical preoccupations were largely complementary, not contradictory. A spectrum, rather than a polarity of possibilities was involved. The Surrealist's admiration of American silent comedy, reflected in the work of Artaud and Epstein among others, the universal excitement over the achievements of Russian film, Eisenstein's openly acknowledged debt to Griffith, testify to a certain community of aspiration. Eisenstein, in the very beautiful essay on "Griffith, Dickens and the Film Today", said that "what enthralled us was not only these films, it was also their possibilities". And speaking of montage: "Its foundation had been laid by American film-culture, but its full, completed, conscious use and world recognition was established by our films."

The excitement, the exhilaration of artists and intellectuals not directly involved in the medium was enormous. Indeed, a certain euphoria enveloped the early film-making and theory. For there was, ultimately, a very real sense in which the revolutionary aspirations of the modernist movement in literature and the arts, on the one hand, and of a Marxist or Utopian tradition, on the other, could converge in the hopes and promises, as yet undefined, of the new medium.

There was, among the intellectuals concerned with cinema's revolutionary potential, both social and formal, a general and touching reverence for an idea of its specificity. There was, above all, an immediate apprehension, cutting quite across theoretical differences, of its privileged status, its unique destiny.

In the celebrated essay on "The Work of Art in the Era of Reproduction Techniques", Walter Benjamin attacked as reactionaries, men such as Werfel, who, by relegating the movie to the articulation of fantasy and faery, were engaged in a reduction of its scope, a tactics of repression. The most intensely euphoric expression of the new passion, of the convergence of modernist aesthetics and an Utopian ideology is Elie Faure's "Art of Cineplastics", really an essay in aesthetics-as-science-fiction which predicts the cinema's radical transformation of the very nature of spatio-temporal perception, of historical consciousness and process.

Anticipations and speculations and, more significantly still, the inventions and achievements of the Americans, Russians, French, Germans and Scandinavians were predicated, then, upon complementary apprehensions of the morphological and syntactical possibilities of the medium evolving within a framework of concord and mutual recognition, shattered, ultimately, by the growing awareness of a principle of dissociation inherent in the art and its situation.

The point of shock is easily located in history: that moment, at the end of the 1920's in which the "hermaphroditic" nature of a craft which had already expanded and hardened into an industry, could no longer be ignored. The classical instrument of industrial revolution being division of labor, a generation of hardy adventurers, artist-entrepreneurs, director-producers, such as Griffith, were replaced by paid employees. The ultimate consequences involved something analogous to a dissociation of sensibility, which, in turn, rapidly engendered a register of limits and conventions that have acted to inhibit, displace and reshape cinematic effort.

We are dealing with a Fall from Grace. For men like Griffith, Eisenstein, von Stroheim, Welles and many more of the most brilliant and radical talents, it created, as we know, in the gardens of California, an irrespirable atmosphere, a corruption which was to impair much of the best work done anywhere.

Intellectuals and filmmakers alike, here and abroad, reacted with an immediate tension of distrust and, in many instances, withdrawal. The widespread resistance to the introduction of the sound track, for example, could certainly be shown to mask or reflect an hostility to the prospect of the medium's accelerated development into an instrument of mass culture. A philosopher of my acquaintance claimed to have stopped going to the movies in 1929. For Fondane, "the sound film is good only in so far as it is dumb". And for Artaud, "cinematic truth lies within the image not beyond it". The resistance to sound—and it was a resistance to the Word, not ever to music which had, from the beginning, found a place in cinematic convention—expressed a nostalgia for an era of mute innocence and untested hope. It was, in short, a pastoral attitude.

The disenchantement, the sense of moral and esthetic frustration expressed by Fondane, was general. The history of modern cinema is, nevertheless, to a large degree, that of accommodation to those very repressive and corrupting forces of the post-1929 situation. A complex register of limits and conventions engendered by that situation has been *productively* used. Historical precedents abound, but few or none have attained a comparable degree of dialectical paradox, intricacy, and scandalousness.

It is the acceptance of the dissociative principle, its sublimation or conversion to aesthetic purposes, which characterise recent, advanced filmmaking in France and elsewhere in Europe. It is the almost categorical rejection of that principle and the aspiration to a radical organicity which animate the efforts of the "independent" filmmakers who compose something of an American *avant-garde*. All discussion of the nature and possibilities of advanced filmmaking today, of film aesthetics and of future possibilities must, I believe, take this divergence into account. It must also take into account the fact that the question is, as Walter Benjamin remarked, "not whether we are dealing with an art" (and some, apparently, still ask that question), "but whether or not the emergence of this medium has not transformed the nature of all art."

The growth of American Independent Filmmaking, beginning in the late 1940's, was predicated on a series of decisions that are political in their implications. The film industry of this country had adopted as its native paradigm that supreme achievement of capitalism, the automotive industry. The organizational methods and divisions of the automative labor processes were consequently introduced into cinematic enterprise. For the Americans the rejection of that system meant the commitment to total responsibility for all aspects of cinematic production and distribution. It made of the American film artist not a "director", but a "filmmaker". He was and is his own cinematographer, editor, sound engineer, scriptwriter and distributor.

The New American Cinema must therefore be seen as a powerfully explicit critique of the existing economic and social order upon which Hollywood, like Detroit, is founded. The formal radicalism of these artists is to be understood as grounded in the economic and social radicalization of the filmmaking process itself.

The general resistance to the notion of this transformation assumes its most crucial aspect, not in circles unconcerned with film, but rather in those presumably animated by a commitment to its development. The discomfort and hostility of many, indeed most, film critics to those aspects of contemporary cinema which bypass,

contradict or transcend the modes and values of psychosocial observation is familiar. The generally *retardataire* character of film criticism reflects a regressive anxiety about the manner in which post-war cinema, in Europe and America alike, has, at its best, transcended the conventions of a sensibility formed by the pre-modernist

canon of a primarily literary 19th-century. If the crux of cinematic development lies—as I think it largely does—in the evaluation and re-definition of the nature and role of narrative structure, we may say that the history of academicism in filmmaking and film criticism has been that of the substitution of novelistic forms and values for theatrical ones—and this in a century which saw a flowering of American poetry, music and painting.

Lucien Goldmann, writing some years ago in *Les Temps Modernes* of the supposed atrophy of historical and social consciousness in the New Wave directors, remarked with a sign that political energy and vitality seemed concentrated in the Left, while cinematic talent was reserved for the Right. Goldmann's characteristically Lukacsian conservative taste and aesthetics aside, the problem needs to be restated—and far more explicitly than one can do here and now. Most briefly put, however, one might formulate it in the following manner: if, for the young Russians of the immediately post-Revolutionary period the problem was, as Eisenstein said, "to advance toward new and as yet unrealized qualities and means of expression, to raise form once more to the level of ideological content," the problem for our film-makers is to accommodate ideological content to the formal exigencies of a modernist sensibility. Ultimately, ideology of any kind—whether that of Surrealism, Marxism, or the anti-humanism of the New Novel—provides, at best, a fruitful working hypothesis for the artist. Eisenstein's conception of montage as the triadic rehearsal of the Dialectic was aesthetically regenerative. The energy, courage and intellectual passion which sustained both theory and work were, of course, among the noblest of our century. Eisenstein is a model of the culture of our era—in his defeat as in his achievement, and down to the very fragmentary quality of his work !

There is a passage in his writings and it is the most tantalizing page he has bequeathed us—in which he describes a cinema of the mind, a film "capable of reconstructing all phases and all specifics of the course of thought". * He is shifting, at this point, from a pristine conception of "intellectual cinema" which had culminated in a projected film version of *Capital* and its rendering of analytic method to another aspiration, more complex, even more problematic: the rendering of the movement of consciousness itself. He envisages the filmic "interior monologue" as the agent of the dissolution of "the distinction between subject and object", first undertaken in the novels of Eduard Dujardin, that "pioneer on the stream of consciousness", a dissolution completed in the work of Joyce. *Ulysses,* then, becomes the other prime Utopian project of the 1930's out of which Eisenstein's notion of "intellectual cinema" continues to be refined. He informs us, in his excitement, of a period of preliminary work upon his script for *An American Tragedy,* another project of that period which stimulated this sort of speculation, and of the "wonderful sketches" produced in the process.

> Like thought, they would sometimes proceed with visual images. With sound. Synchronized or non-synchronized. Then as sounds. Formless. Or with sound-images: with objectively representational sounds...
>
> Then suddenly, definite intellectually formulated words—as "intellectual" and dispassionate as pronounced words. With a black screen, a rushing imageless visuality.
>
> Then in passionate disconnected speech. Nothing but nouns. Or nothing but verbs. Then interjections. With zigzags of aimless shapes, whirling along with these in synchronization.
>
> Then racing visual images over complete silence. Then linked with polyphonic sounds. Then both at once.
>
> Then interpolated into the outer course of action, then interpolating elements of the outer action into the inner monologue.
>
> As if presenting inside the characters the inner play, the conflict of doubts, the explosions of passion, the voice of reason, rapidly or in slow-motion, marking the differing rhythms of one and the other in slow-motion, marking the differing rhythms of one and the other and, at the same time, contrasting with the almost complete absence of outer action: a feverish inner debate behind the stony mask of the face.
>
> ...The syntax of inner speech as distinct from outer speech. The quivering inner words that correspond with the visual images. Contrasts with outer circumstances. How they work reciprocally...

And Eisenstein ends by noting that "These notes for this 180° advance in sound film culture languished in a suitcase—and were eventually buried, Pompeii-like, beneath a mass of books..." There they remained. Sound was to

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* Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form, Essays in Film Theory,* ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, p.

take Eisenstein in quite another direction, to the splendidly hieratic exacerbation of *Ivan the Terrible.*

This buried page, however, might figure as a blueprint for a cinema that was still to come. Its affirmation of disjunction, of abstraction, of the shifting relations of image and sound, its stress on polyphony, upon the use of silence and of the black screen as dynamic formal elements are familiar to us: Eisenstein, in a dazzling leap of the imagination, had invented on paper the essential tenor, the formal strategies of American Independent Cinema of our own last two decades.

It is exactly nineteen years—about the time we say we take to come of age—since "Cinema 16", a pioneer film society presenting work by artists of the independent persuasion to a New York audience, held a symposium on "Poetry and the Film". The proceedings, published in somewhat abridged form,* constitute a document of enormous and multiple interest. Re-reading it now one is startled by an intensity and level of exchange to which we have grown unaccustomed in the present proliferation of such occasions; the text now stands as a major document of the period, a chapter in a polemical mode of the intellectual history of its time, its scene.

That time, that scene are the early '50's, and here are its players: Parker Tyler, a film critic already distinguished and actively involved, from the time of its wartime exile in New York, in the Surrealist tradition; Willard Maas, filmmaker; Arthur Miller, then the white hope of a certain native theatrical realism and Dylan Thomas, the visiting star performer of that period, are there as "prose" and "poetry". With Maas acting as chairman or "moderator", as we've come to say, film and film-as-poetry are most strongly represented by Maya Deren, unquestionably one of the most gifted filmmakers and theoreticians of her generation.

The occasion fuses and opposes forces, notions about what such an occasion might be, its use, pre-suppositions about the conventions of a possible discourse on film. Inscribed within it, by the way, is the plain evidence of what it was to be both a woman and an independent filmmaker at that time—someone exposed to the lordly contempt affected by intellectuals for seriousness in film and seriousness in women. Thomas' wit and grandstanding joviality are thus directed against Deren's passionate attempt to define a subject about which they might profitably converse.

* *The Film Culture Reader,* P. Adams Sitney, ed., Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970.

Miller, les narcissistic and more interesting, has obviously given more thought to the general matter at hand and there is, near the end, a remarkable moment, when he suddenly says, "I think that it would be profitable to speak about the special nature of any film, of the fact of images unwinding off a machine. Until that's understood, and I don't know that it's understood (I have some theories about it myself), we can't begin to create on a methodical basis, an aesthetic for that film. We don't understand the psychological meaning of images—any image—coming off a machine. There are basic problems, it seems to me, that could be discussed here." The remarks are offered, most likely, as antidote to what Miller obviously considers to be the questionable rhetoric of Deren's poetics, but the trajectory towards the assumption of that challenge is, of course, the history of our American filmic avant-garde and the re-examination of the materiality, the conditions and practical contingencies of filmmaking and projection have inflected an avant-garde which moves from the psychological to the epistemological mode of discourse.

Deren had proposed the poetic film as representing "an approach to experience in the sense that a poet is looking at the same experience that a dramatist may be looking at". Distinguishing it somewhat more specifically, she describes it as "vertical" in structure,

> "an investigation of a situation, in that it probes the ramifications of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned, in a sense, not with what is occurring but with what it feels like or what it means. A poem to my mind, creates visible or auditory form for something that is invisible, which is the feeling, or the emotion or the metaphysical content of the statement. Now it also may include action, but its attack is what I would call the vertical attack, and this may be a little bit clearer if you will contrast it to what I would call the horizontal attack to drama which is concerned with the development, let's say, within a very small situation from feeling to feeling. Perhaps it would be made most clear if you take a Shakespearean work that combines the two movements. In Shakespeare, you have the drama moving forward on a "horizontal" plane of development of one circumstance—one action leading to another and this delineates the character. Every once in a while, however, he arrives at a point of action where he wants to illuminate the meaning to 'this' moment of drama and,

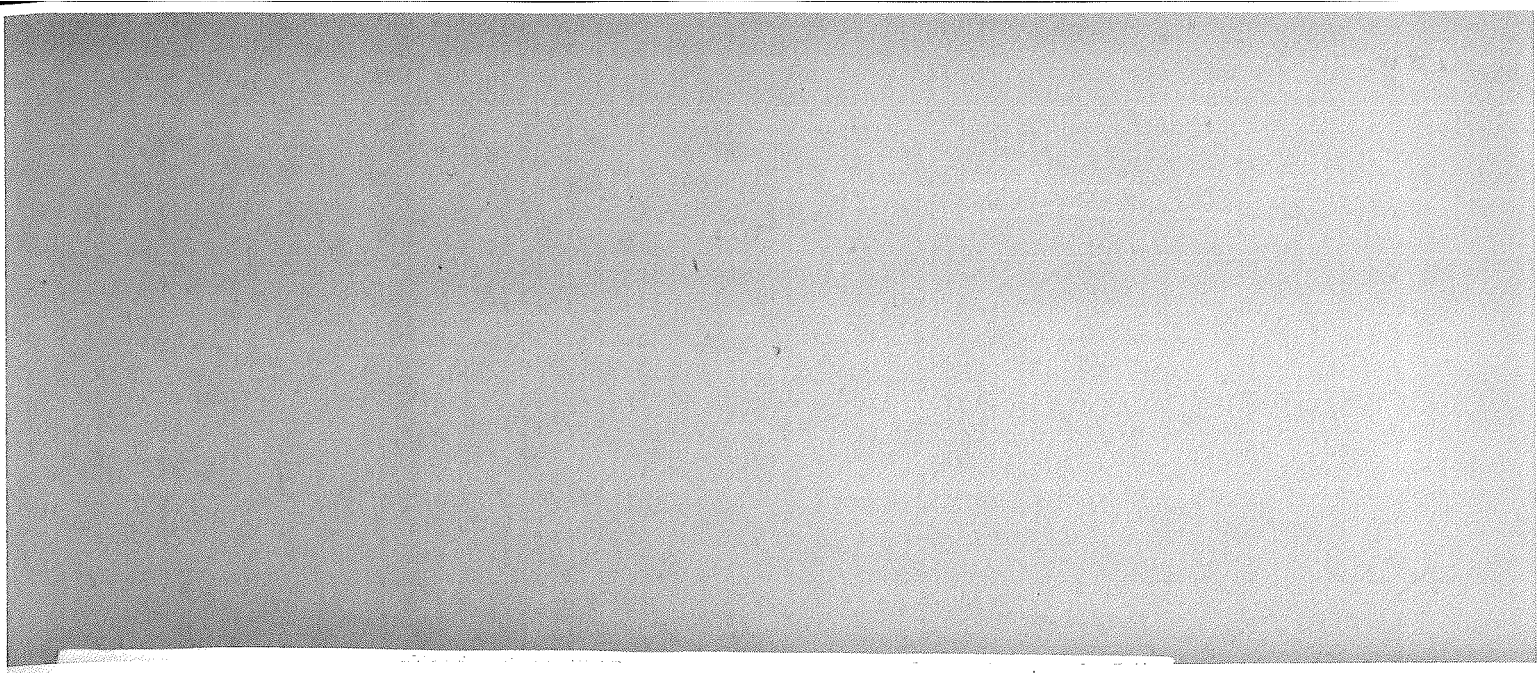
at that moment, he builds a pyramid or investigates it 'vertically' if you will, so that you have a 'horizontal' development with periodic 'vertical' investigations which are the poems, which are the monologues. Now if you consider it this way, then you can think of any kind of combination being possible. You can have operas where the 'horizontal' development is virtually unimportant —the plots are very silly, but they serve as an excuse for stringing together a number of arias that are essentially lyric statements. Lieder are, in singing, comparable to the lyric poem, and you can see that all sorts of combinations would be possible."

One thing we note immediately: Deren is defining poetry in a manner quite natural, indeed endemic in her time, as being exclusively of the lyric mode. And referring to the tradition of the "lied", she assumes this as well to be quite unrelated to or disengaged from, the narrative. Though one might argue that view of "Gretchen am Spinnrade", one might dispute it for "Der Erlkonig". She is arguing, in any case, passionately and well for something one does sense as fundamental for her and her time. In positing her horizontal and vertical structures, she is positing disjunctiveness against linearity, claiming for film the strategic polarity of discourse which Jakobson, examining the structure of speech through its disorders in aphasia, proposed in the metonymic and metaphoric modes. Some questions, then: are such polarities valid, do they hold, do they concern us here and now?

We, I think, may now say, "No, they are not and do not," but the last of these three questions is the one of major interest to us and demands our assent.

These polarisations serve to crystallize for their own time the thinking, feeling and, above all, the working impulse of a major filmmaker initiating a tradition of criticism. Deren's concern with the lyric was essentially a step towards a radical revision of filmic temporality as a source of formal innovation. Reflecting 19 years later upon the best and most innovative of recent work in this country, one realizes that its common critical context is to be found not through definition of aspects of style or texture—not even that style and texture which have been called "structural"—but rather through the recognition that the best of recent work takes its place as an extended moment in a continuum of inquiry, constituting the most recent and most complete interplay of "verticality" and "horizontality" within that continuum.

Deren's own preoccupation with the "vertical" begins as an extension of that extraordinary intuition of film's temporal vistas which inserts within the literally split (spliced) second of a tower's crash, that Odyssey of a "Poet" whose "blood" had congealed, somehow, into a film. And that "Poet" had, indeed, spattered himself over that film's entire surface. Here are the models of his appearance: the narrator's voice, the signature, the plaster masks of hand and of face, the wire mask revolving in space, the autobiographical tableaux, the autobiographical incidents climaxing in a snowball fight which intensifies the referential dimension, recapitulating as it does



the opening scene of an already celebrated work, *Les Enfants Terribles.* And then there is the opening dedication, the injunction to read, to decipher, the work as a coat of arms, the homage paid in the "Poet's" name, to the masters of Renaissance perspective from one who confesses his reluctance to "deform" space. Fearing no doubt the "Caligarism" which is the French film world's name for an expressionism more generally feared and detested, the Poet confines himself to a play, an assault upon, the time of action while respecting its spatial integrity.

Deren, then, arguing for "her" "personal", "vertical", "poetic" film was to work in a direction which reversed Cocteau's. Rather than splice through a moment of time in which she could insert the integrality of a film, she attempted to work with the moment, distending it into a structure of exquisite ambiguity, underwritten by the braver spatial strategies that came perhaps more easily to the developed kinetic sense of a dancer.

It then came to Stan Brakhage to radicalize the revision of filmic temporality in positing the sense of a continuous present, of a filmic time which devours memory and expectation in the presentation of presentness. To do this one had, of course, to destroy the spatio-temporal coördinates by which past and present events define themselves as against each other. The assault of Brakhage upon the space of representation, then, is the final and most radical break with that spatial integrity which Cocteau had been at pains, neo-classicist that he was, to preserve. It consummates the break with narrative structure, and Brakhage now moves into the climate of expressionism, pushing the abstractive process, contracting the depth of the visual field to the point where he destroys the spatiality of narrative, redefining time as purely that of vision, the time of appearance. In doing so he replaces the scene of action by the screen of eidetic imagery, projecting, as it were, the nature of vision itself as the subject of a new temporal mode. His editing style, at once assertive and uniquely fluid, creates that "convergence of a hundred spaces" which Klee had called for and which only a radically redefined cinematic temporality could provide. It is Utopian.

Doing this, Brakhage was to do more still—re-examining the photographic and projective processes themselves, opening them up as it were, reclaiming them for inclusion in the total work. Thus, in an unmailed proposal written for the Guggenheim Foundation:

> These films would be created not only with a sense of the projected experience but also (as in all my work recently) with an eye to their speaking just as strips of celluloid held in the hand and to the light which can illuminate their multi-colored forms. They will be created out of the deepest possible conviction that such a viewing (or any other, such as a frame at a time through a slide projector) can and should be so integral with the projected experience as to add another dimension to that projected experience. Please understand that I arrive at such a conclusion from a working relationship with film and a realization that all my significant splices (adding moving image to moving image) are the result of viewing the film to be edited both through the editor at an approximate 24 frames a second and also as stilled strips of film. Similarly, out of an aesthetic understanding of time relativity, I have the sense that my finished films should be viewable either 16 frames a second or 24 frames a second. Very recently I have begun working toward a filmic realisation which will retain its integral form (considering the structure of the work of art as integral with all its emotional and intellectual statements) even when run backwards.*

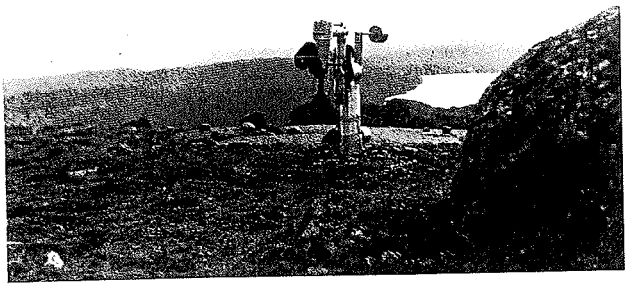
The assault, then, upon the space of representation is accompanied by a reclamation of the elements and materials of the filmmaking and film-viewing experience, an extension of the ways in which light may be projected through the film, the creation of another surface through which the image is perceived, the painting, scratching or application of "foreign matter" to the surface of the film, so that our heightened sense of a surface through which the image is viewed brings with it the heightened sense of the illusionism in which that apperception is grounded. All this, then, meant proposing—as Stein had done—that everything, including the materiality and contingencies of the making process, was food for poetry.

It is this proposal and—through a curious prank of history—Arthur Miller's, that is accepted and developed in the best of recent work. The assertion of the still photographic frame composing the strip, the assertion, through the flicker, of the medium as projection of light, the assertion of the nature of projection through the use of sound, the assertion of the persistence of vision in the work of Jacobs, Sharits, Frampton, Gehr, Landow, Wie-

* Stan Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision", *Film Culture,* No. 30, Fall 1963.

land and Snow, all propose the terms of an epistemological concern with the nature of filmic process and experience which will require another space, another time, those of a new cinematic discourse.

For that discourse, then, spatio-temporal coördinates had to be re-invented and they quite naturally have been. In *Wavelength,* in the empty loft traversed by the zoom, Snow, voiding the film of the metaphoric proclivity of montage, re-creates a grand metaphor for narrative form. In the redefinition of "action" as the investigation of space through camera movement, Snow redefined the



filmic form as the narrative of "one thing leading to another". *La Région Centrale* explores a landscape, pushes one's sense of space inward, obliterating the coördinates once again in the interests of an increasingly kinetic sense of seeing. Frampton plays in *Nostalgia* on the tension of past and present, of memory and expectation. Jacobs, distending the time and space of *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son,* inscribes within a single work a history of film. Gehr, positing in *Still* a space which we must interrogate, saying to ourselves, "Where is the surface in relation to which I am seeing what I see?" thereby poses the question of the time and space which might contain the multiple duration of superimposition. Landow, playing viewing against reading and reading against mis-reading, multiplies the modes of perception in time. Sharits substitutes or exchanges, as in *N.O.T.H.I.N.G.,* cause for effect. And Wieland prints and holds 1933, a static sign of time whose existence is made problematic by the continuous action in her loop film.

The cinemia of *this* time, then, articulates an investigation of the terms of cinematic illusionism. It turns, from the fascinated consciousness of the eidetic, lyric mode, to precisely that "course of genuine investigation" which so preoccupied Eisenstein in his speculations upon the nature of "intellectual cinema" as instantiating the dynamics of analytic consciousness, recalling to us the view of Marx: "Not only the result, but the road to it also, is a part of the truth. The investigation of truth must itself be true; true investigation is unfolded truth, the disjunct members of which unite in the result." *

1974

*Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense,* ed, and trans. by Jay Leyda, New York: Harcourt Brace and World, p. 82.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION AND BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Annette Michelson was born in New York City. Graduate studies in art history and philosophy at Columbia and Sorbonne Universities were followed by a fifteen year period of residence in Paris. From 1957 until 1961, Ms. Michelson was Art Editor of the Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune.* From 1957 through 1963, she acted as Paris Correspondent for *Arts Magazine,* and from 1962 through 1966 she was Paris Correspondent for *Art International.* She has been, since her return to the United States in 1965, Editor for Film and Performance of ARTFORUM Magazine and Associate Professor in the Department of Cinema Studies of New York University. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Anthology Film Archives.

Ms. Michelson has acted as Advisory Editor in Charge of Film Publications for Praeger Publishers in New York. She organised the first series of NEW FORMS IN FILM for the Guggenheim Museum in the summer of 1972, and the Symposium and Retrospective Festival held in New York in honor of the 75th anniversary of S. M. Eisenstein's birth in February, 1973.

Ms. Michelson's published writings include studies of the work of Duchamp, Robert Morris, Michael Snow, Eisenstein, Vertov, Kubrick, Bresson, Brakhage, among others. She is presently at work on a critical reconsideration of the Soviet cinema in the immediately post-revolutionary era and is preparing for publication an English-language edition of the theoretical writings of Dziga Vertov.

She is the recipient of an Ingram-Merrill fellowship and a grant for research given by the National Endowment for the Arts. The Frank Jewett Mather Award for distinction in art criticism was given to her in 1974 for her theoretical and critical writing on film.

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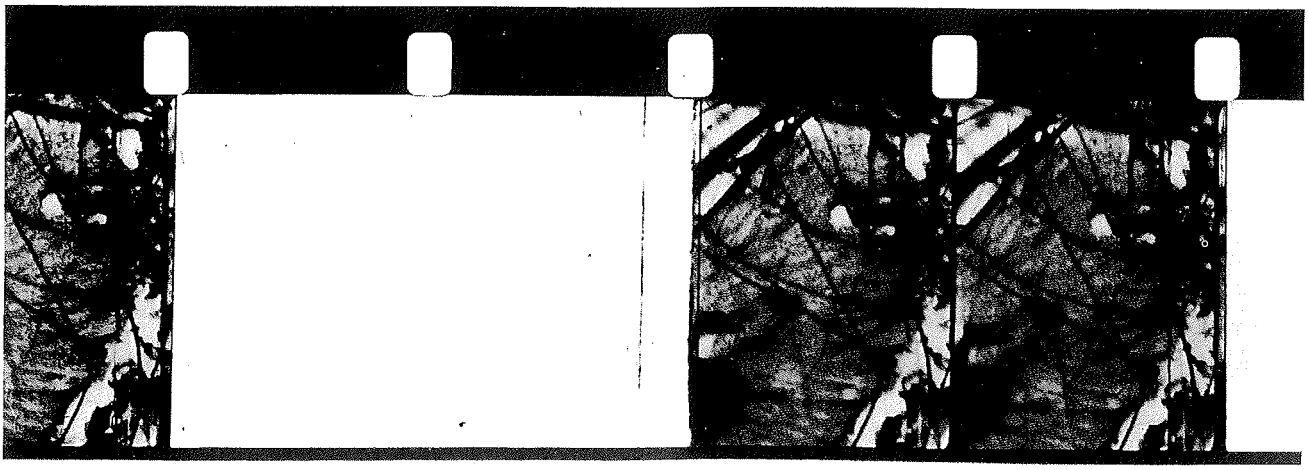
Helene Kaplan was born in New York in 1950. She studied film at the State University of New York at Binghamton and received her B.A. in 1972. Ms. Kaplan received an M.F.A. in Film-making and Cinema Studies from Columbia University in 1974. Since 1973 she has been the Film Curator for the New York Jazz Museum. In January, 1974 Ms. Kaplan had her first solo film showing in New York. She is currently involved in a research and analysis of the films of Tod Browning.



BRUCE BAILLIE

Mass for the Dakota Sioux, 1963-64, 24 minutes, black and white, sound

Quixote, 1964-65, 45 minutes, black and white and color, sound

All My Life, 1966, 3 minutes, color, sound

Castro Street, 1966, 10 minutes, black and white and color, sound

Valentin de las Sierras, 1968, 10 minutes, color, sound

1931 Born, Aberdeen, South Dakota
Served in Korean War

1955 B.A. in Art, University of Minnesota

1959 Attended London School of Film Technique

1960 Lived in San Francisco, began shooting first film

1961 Founded Canyon Cinema and Canyon Cinema News

1966 Received grant from Rockefeller Foundation

1973 Taught at Bard College

Lives in Berkeley, California and in Oregon

STAN BRAKHAGE

Photo Robert A. Haller

Anticipation of the Night, 1958, 42 minutes, color, silent
Window Water Baby Moving, 1959, 12 minutes, color, silent
Prelude: Dog Star Man, 1961, 25 minutes, color, silent
Fire of Waters, 1965, 10 minutes, black and white, sound
Scenes From Under Childhood, Part I, 1967, 30 minutes, color, silent
Scenes From Under Childhood, Part II, 1969, 40 minutes, color, silent
Scenes From Under Childhood, Part III, 1969, 27.30 minutes, color, silent
The Machine of Eden, 1970, 11 minutes, color, silent
Eyes, 1971, 35.30 minutes, color, silent
Deux Ex, 1971, 33.15 minutes, color, silent
Songs 1-14, 1964-5, 63 minutes, 8 mm *, color, silent

1933	Born, Kansas City, Missouri
1950	Attended Dartmouth College
1952	Completed first film (INTERIM) with friends in Denver, Colorado
1952	Attended Institute of Fine Arts, San Francisco
1955	Went to New York, worked with Joseph Cornell
1955	Maya Deren's Creative Film Foundation Award
1956	Worked at Raymond Rohauer's theatre in San Francisco in exchange for screening rights to his collection
1958	Married Jane Collom, who has collaborated with him on films
1958	Received award given in protest by Brussels World's Fair Pre-selection Film Jury
1962	Received Independent Film-makers' Award, given by *Film Culture*
1965–69	Avon Foundation Grant
1967–69	Rockefeller Fellowship
1970–74	Taught at The School of The Art Institute of Chicago
1971	Retrospective one-man show at Museum of Modern Art, New York City
1973	Citation for Creative Achievement, Brandeis University
1974	Colorado Governor's Award for Arts and Humanities

* All other films are 16 mm.

ROBERT BREER

Jamestown Baloos, 1957, 6 minutes, black and white and color, silent and sound

A Man and His Dog Out For Air, 1957, 3 minutes, black and white, sound

Eyewash, 1958-59, 3 minutes, color, silent

Inner and Outer Space, 1960, 4 minutes, color, sound

Blazes, 1961, 3 minutes, color, sound

Horse Over a Tea Kettle, 1962, 6 minutes, color, sound

Breathing, 1963, 6 minutes, black and white, sound

Fistfight, 1964, 11 minutes, color, sound

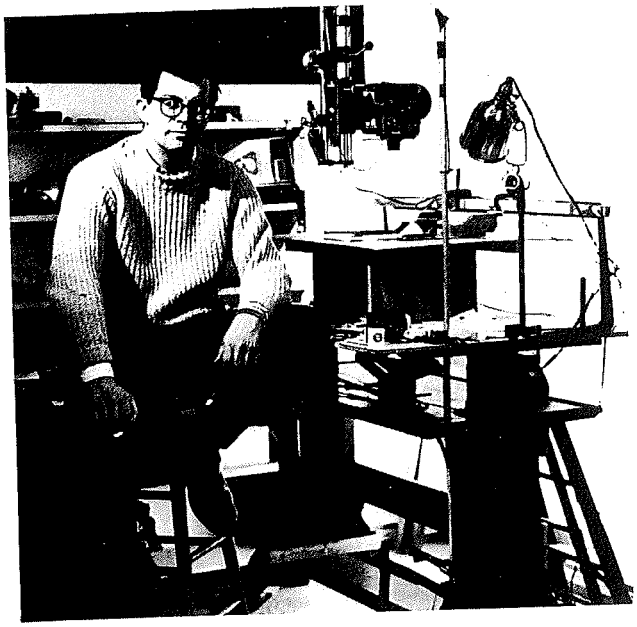
66, 1966, 5 minutes, color, sound

69, 1968, 5 minutes, color, sound

70, 1970, 5 minutes, color, silent

Gulls and Buoys, 1972, 6 minutes, color, sound

Fuji, 1974, 7.5 minutes, color, sound



1926 Born, Detroit, Michigan
1949 Graduated from Stanford University
Stanford University annual painting award
Moved to Paris
1957 Creative Film Foundation Award
1959 Returned to the United States
1960 Bergamo Award (special diploma)
1961 Creative Film Foundation Award and Award of Distinction for *Inner and Outer Space*
1969 Max Ernst Award
Visited Japan to collaborate with Experiments in Art and Technology group (E.A.T.) on Pepsi-Cola Pavilion, Expo '70, Osaka
1970 Further visits to Japan

Lives in Palisades, New York

HOLLIS FRAMPTON

Maxwell's Demon, 1968, 5.30 iminutes, black and white, silent

Surface Tension, 1968, 10 minutes, color, sound

Palindrome, 1969, 22 minutes, color, silent

Artificial Light, 1969, 25 minutes, color, silent, 16 frames per second

Zorns Lemma, 1970, 60 minutes, color, sound

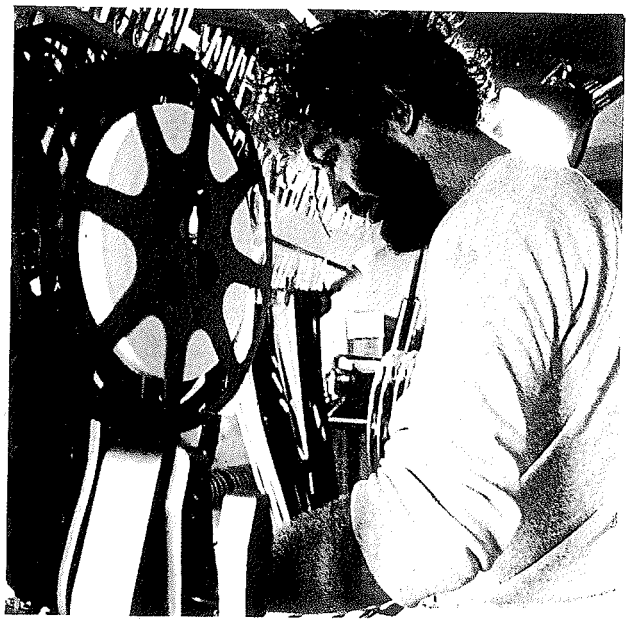
Nostalgia, 1971, 36 minutes, black and white, sound

Apparatus Sum, 1972, 2.30 minutes, color, silent

Poetic Justice, 1972, 31.50 minutes, black and white, silent

Winter Solstice, 1974, 33 minutes, color, silent

Photo Marion Faller



1936	Born, Wooster, Ohio
1951–54	Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts
1954–57	Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio
1957–58	Visited daily with Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital
1958	Moved to New York City "People I met there composed the faculty of a phantasmal 'graduate school'."
1959–66	Primarily engaged in still photography
1961–60	Worked as laboratory technician, still photography and film, specializing in dye-inhibition color processes
1962	"First fumblings in cinema"
1965	First one-man show (still photography), Peninsula Gallery, Palo Alto
1966	"First films I will publicly admit to making."
1969–71	Taught at Hunter College and Cooper Union
1970	Moved to Eaton, New York
1971	Since January, member of Visiting Artists Program of the New York State Council on the Arts
1973	Professor at Media Center, State University of New York at Buffalo

ERNIE GEHR

Wait, 1968, 7 minutes, color, silent, 16 frames per second

Reverberation, 1969, 25 minutes, black and white, 16 frames per second, sound-on-tape per second

Serene Velocity, 1970, 23 minutes, color, silent, 16 frames

Field, 1970, 19 minutes, black and white, silent, 16 frames per second

Still, 1969-71, 60 minutes, color, sound

Photo Babette Mangolte

Biographical information withheld at the request of the film-maker

BARRY GERSON

Fluidity (Window, Water, Contemplating), 1969, 26 minutes, color, silent, 16 frames per second

Vernal Equinox (Sunlight, Floating, Afternoon), 1970, 26 minutes, color, silent, 16 frames per second

Photo Robert Parent

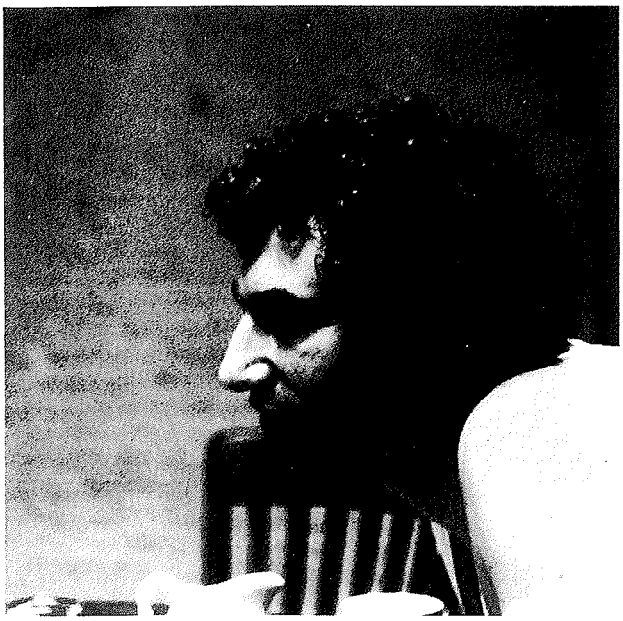
1939	Born, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1958–60	Attended Temple University
1959	Studied still photography with Harold Feinstein
1961	Began making films
1965	Moved to New York
1973	Taught at Bard College
1973	Taught at State University of New York at Buffalo
1974	Taught at Edinboro College

Lives in New York

KEN JACOBS

Soft Rain, 1968, 12 minutes, color, silent

Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son, 1969, 86 minutes, black and white and color, silent, 16 frames per second



1933 Born, New York City

1950 Began to write screenplays

1957 Made his first completed film with Jack Smith, *Saturday Afternoon Blood Sacrifice: TV Plug: Little Cobra Dance*

1964 Advisory Board of the Film-Makers' Cinémathèque

1965 Began working with Shadow Plays, began N.Y. Apparition Theatre

1966 Director of the Millennium Film Workshop

1970 Began teaching State University of New York at Binghamton

Lives in Binghamton, New York, and New York City

PETER KUBELKA

Mosaik Im Vertrauen, 1954-55, 16.30 minutes, black and white and color, sound

Adebar, 1956-57, 1.50 minutes, black and white, sound

Schwechater, 1957-58, 1 minute, color, sound

Arnulf Rainer, 1958-60, 6.30 minutes, black and white frames, black and white sound

Unsere Afrikareise, 1961-66, 12.30 minutes, color, sound

1934 Born, Vienna, Austria

1964 Co-director, Österreichisches Filmmuseum

1967 Member, Board of Directors, Anthology Film Archives, New York

1972 Taught at New York University

1974 Taught at State University of New York at Binghamton

1974 Taught at New York University

Lives in Vienna

GEORGE LANDOW

Fleming Faloon, 1963-64, 7 minutes, black and white and color, sound

Film In Which There Appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dirt Particles, etc. 1965-66, 4.30 minutes, color, silent, 16 frames per second

Film In Which There Appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dirt Particles, etc., wide screen version, 1966, 20 minutes, color, silent, 16 frames per second

The Film That Rises To The Surface Of Clarified Butter, 1968, 9.30 minutes, black and white, sound

Institutional Quality, 1969, 5 minutes, color, sound

Remedial Reading Comprehension, 1970, 7 minutes, color, sound

What's Wrong With This Picture?, 1972, 10.30 minutes, color, sound

Photo Robert Parent

1944 Born, New Haven, Connecticut

Attended New York University, Art Student's League, Pratt Institute

1970–71 Taught at Film Institute of Chicago

Lives in Chicago

JONAS MEKAS

Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania, 1971, 85 minutes, color, sound

1922 Born in Semeniskiai, Lithuania

1942 Graduated from Gymnasium in Birzai

1943 Assistant Editor of newspaper and literary journal in Birzai and Parievezy

1944 Attempting to flee occupation, is caught en route to Vienna and interned in labor camp, Elmshorn, Germany

1945–49 Lived in D. P. camps, attended universities in Mainz and Tubingen, founded Lithuanian literary magazine, *Zvilgsniai*

1949 Emigrated to New York, began shooting first film

1955 Founded *Film Culture*

1958 Began film column, known as MOVIE JOURNAL in *The Village Voice*

1962 Founded Film-makers' Cooperative

1964 Arrested for screening *Flaming Creatures* by Jack Smith and *Un Chant d'Amour* by Jean Genet. Case dropped after international protest by group of international intellectuals

1964 Opens Film-makers' Cinémathèque in New York

1966 Founded Film-makers' Distribution Center

1968 Director of Anthology Film Archives

1972 Taught at New York University

1974 Taught at Cooper Union

Lives in New York City

YVONNE RAINER

Lives of Performers, 1972, 95 minutes, black and white, sound

Photo Babette Mangolte

1934 Born, San Francisco, California

1956 Came to New York City to study acting

1958 First modern dance study with Edith Stephen

1960 First choreography, *Three Satie Spoons*
Studied with Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Ann Halprin, and Robert Dunn

1962 Appeared in the first Concert of Dance, Judson Memorial Church, New York City
Started the Judson Dance Workshop with Steve Paxton

1967 *Harper's Bazaar* Woman of Accomplishment

1968 Ingram-Merrill Fellowship
Taught at New School for Social Research, New York City
Taught at Goddard College, Plainfield, Vermont

1969 Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship
Taught at Connecticut College, New London

1970 Helped form the Grand Union, a cooperative performing group
Taught at George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

1971 National Endowment for the Arts Grant
Taught at Vancouver Art Gallery
Teaches at the School of Visual Arts, New York City

PAUL SHARITS

N:O:T:H:I:N:G, 1968, 36 minutes, color, sound

T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G, 1968, 12 minutes, color, sound

S:TREAM:S:S:ECTION:S:ECTION:S:SECTIONED, 1968-70, 42 minutes, color, sound

Photo Robert Parent

1943 Born, Denver, Colorado

1964 BFA in Painting, University of Denver

1966 MFA in Visual Design, Indiana University, Bloomington

1967–70 Taught at Maryland Institute of Art, Baltimore

1968 Grant from American Film Institute

1970–73 Taught at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio

1970 Ford Foundation Humanities Grant

1973 Teaches at Media Center, State University of New York at Buffalo

Lives in Buffalo, New York

HARRY SMITH

Heaven and Earth Magic, 1950-60, 66 minutes, black and white, sound

Late Superimpositions, 1964, 31 minutes, color, sound

Early Abstractions, 1941-57, 28 minutes, color, sound

1923 Born, Portland, Oregon

1935 Began learning alchemy from his father

1939–46 Began batiked abstractions made directly on film

1950 Began optically printed non-objective studies

1957–62 Began semi-realistic animated collages made "as part of my alchemical labor"

Lives in New York City

MICHAEL SNOW

Wavelength, 1966-67, 45 minutes, color, sound

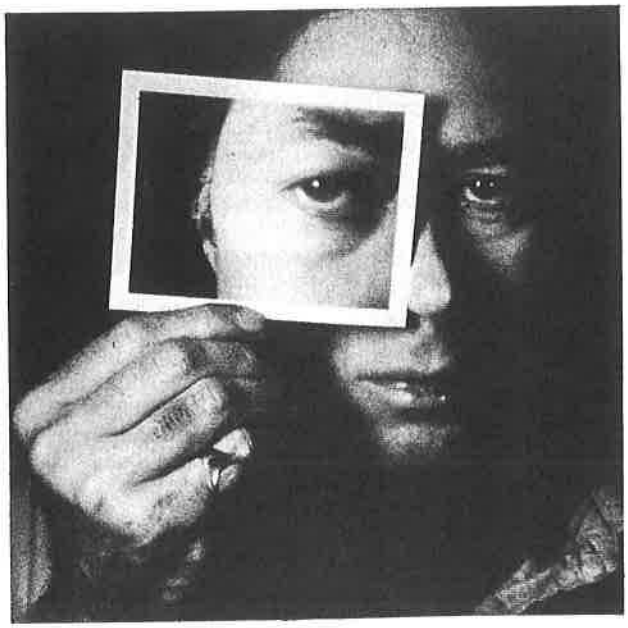
Standard Time, 1967, 8 minutes, color, sound

←——→, 1968-69, 52 minutes, color, sound

One Second in Montreal, 1969, 26 minutes, black and white, silent, 16 frames per second

A Casing Shelved, 1970, 40 minutes, color, sound

La Région Centrale, 1971, 3 hours, color, sound



1929 Born, Toronto
Educated Upper Canada College, Ontario
College of Arts, Toronto

1953–54 Traveled in Europe (painting and working as a musician)

1955 Film animator for Graphic Films

1957 First one-man show, Isaacs Gallery, Toronto

1957 Married Joyce Wieland

1967 Grand Prize, Fourth International Experimental Film Festival, Brussels

1968 Labatt's Breweries Award for non-narrative film

1969 One-man show, Museum of Modern Art, New York City

1970 Cannes Film Festival
XXV Biennale di Venezia

Lives in Toronto

JOYCE WIELAND

Sailboat, 1967-68, 3.30 minutes, black and white, printed on color stock, sound

1933, 1967-68, 4 minutes, color, sound

Catfood, 1967-68, 13 minutes, color, sound

La Raison Avant La Passion, 1968-1969, 80 minutes, color, sound

Pierre Vallières, 1972, 34 minutes, color, sound

Photo Michael Snow

1931	Born, Toronto
1946–49	Studied art at the Central Technical School
1956	Met Michael Snow while working at Graphic Films
1957	Married Michael Snow
1960	First one-man shows at the Here and Now Gallery and the Isaacs Gallery, both in Toronto
1962	Moved to New York City
	Lives in Toronto

CRITICAL ESSAYS AND STATEMENTS BY FILM-MAKERS

BRUCE BAILLIE AND THE LYRICAL FILM

by

P. Adams Sitney

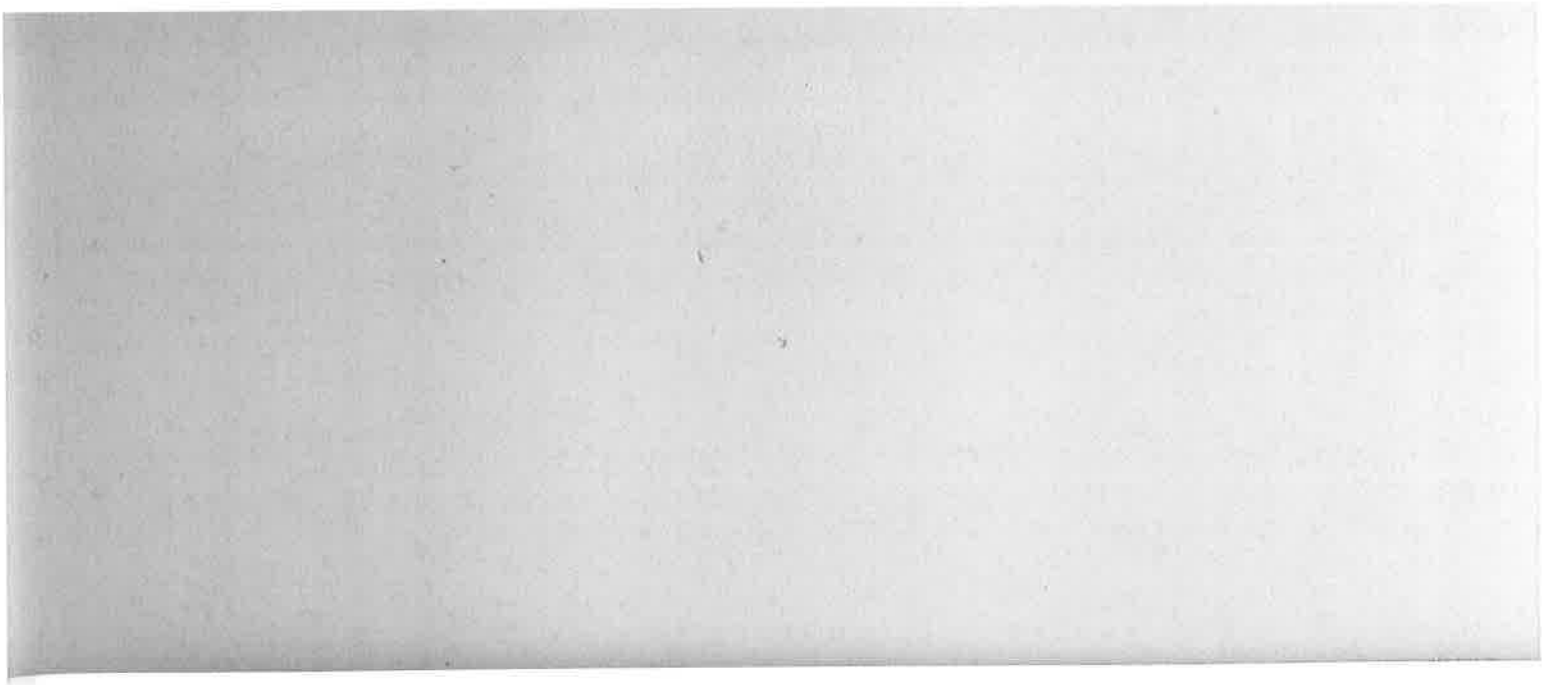
Of the many film-makers of the sixties working in the lyrical mode after Brakhage's initial work, Bruce Baillie has had the surest voice of his own.

In his lyrical films, Baillie turns from the uneasy inwardness of Brakhage's work to a problematic study of the heroic. *Mr. Hayashi* (1961), *Have You Thought of Talking to the Director?* (1962), *A Hurrah for Soldiers* (1962-63), and *To Parsifal* (1963) prepared the ground for his major extended lyrics, *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1964) and *Quixote* (1965, revised 1967). The first of these films was made as a newsreel advertisement to be shown at Baillie's film society, Canyon Cinema, in the second year of its existence. It shows a Japanese gardener, Mr. Hayashi, performing his daily tasks in a few black and white shots. The form is intentionally brief, minor, and occasional; although there is no metaphor or conflict of images, it reminds one of the aspiration first voiced by Maya Deren and later echoed by Brakhage to create a cinematic haiku. The plastic and formal tradition indigenous to San Francisco, the center of Baillie's activity, owes something to oriental, and specifically Japanese, aesthetics. The oriental "saint" in a fusion of Zen, Tao, and Confucian traditions is the first of the heroes proposed by Baillie's cinema. The second, Parsifal, logically prefigures the first; his quest seeks the reconciliation of nature and mind that makes the oriental saint possible.

In *Mass* and *Quixote* he subtly blends glimpses of the heroic *personae* with despairing reflections on violence and ecological disaster. In the earlier films those poles were explored in separate, and much weaker works. *Have You Thought of Talking to the Director?* casually articulates an image of sexual loss and paranoia by combining an interview-like monologue about girlfriends in a moving car and on the streets of a small California town with a frame story derived from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari;* that is, Baillie repeatedly cuts from the speaker to him sitting silently in the corridor of a hospital, and the sinister doctor who whispers near him appears—no longer as a doctor—at significant points in the events outside the hospital. In *A Hurrah for Soldiers* Baillie naively attempted to illuminate an elliptical and rhythmically edited scene of imagined violence—a man attacked by a gang of girls—with photographs of actual violence from a newspaper. He is more successful in the mixing of sounds in this film than in the cutting of images. In his major lyrical films he extended his natural talent for sound fusion to a textured visual surface which uses superimposition and often mixtures of negative and positive black-and-white with color, in a rhetoric of slow transformations. His notes for **Mass** give a clear picture of its structure:

> A film Mass, dedicated to that which is vigorous, intelligent, lovely, the-best-in-Man; that which work suggests is nearly dead.
>
> Brief guide to the structure of the film:
>
> *Introit:* A long, lightly exposed section composed in the camera.
>
> *Kyrie:* A motorcyclist crossing the San Francisco Bay Bridge accompanied by the sound of the Gregorian Chant. The *epistle* is in several sections. In this central part, the film becomes gradually more outrageous, the material being either televi-

Bruce Baillie, CASTRO STREET



sion or the movies, photographed directly from the screen. The sounds of the "mass" rise and fall throughout the *epistle.*

Gloria: The sound of a siren and a short sequence with a '33 Cadillac proceeding over the Bay Bridge and disappearing into a tunnel.

The final section of the *communion* begins with the *offertory* in a procession of lights and figures in the second chant.

The anonymous figure from the introduction is discovered again, dead on the pavement. The touring car arrives, with the celebrants; the body is consecrated and taken away past an indifferent, isolated people accompanied by the final chant.

At the very beginning he shows a man struggling and dying on a city street at night, ignored by passers-by as if he were a drunk collapsed in the street. In the subsequent weaving of moving camera shots, in counterpointed superimpositions of factories, expanses of prefabricated houses, traffic, parades, and markets, all complemented by a soundtrack that blends Gregorian chant with street noises in shifting degrees of priority, the viewer tends to forget the dying man or to see him as the forecast of the section of the film that enjambs bits of war films with advertisements shot directly off a television without kinescopic rectification so that the images continually show bands and jump.

Contrasted to the images of waste and violence, a motorcyclist appears in the traffic and Baillie follows him, shooting from a moving car for a very long time. He is the tentative vehicle of the heroic in this film. But when he too disappears in the welter of superimposition, we do not expect his return. Instead the movement shifts to the grill of a 1933 Cadillac as it cruises the highway. As the second part of the film circles back on itself, the Cadillac turns out to be the ambulance/hearse which brings doctors to the man on the street and which carries away his dead body. Then when it reenters the highway, Baillie again shifts the emphasis to the motorcyclist, whose second disappearance concludes the film.

Two images demonstrate the ironic pessimism with which Baillie views the American landscape at the center of the film. Over the sprawl of identical prefabricated houses he prints the words of Black Elk: "Behold, a good nation malking in a sacred manner in a good land!" Then he pans to an American flag waving on a tall pole in the distance. By changing the focus without cutting from the shot, he brings to view a previously unseen barbed wire fence between the camera and the flag. "The Mass is traditionally a celebration of Life," he wrote in the Film-Makers Cooperative catalogue, "thus the contradiction between the form of the Mass and the theme of Death. The dedication is to the religious people who were destroyed by the civilization which evolved the Mass."

In *To Parsifal* Baillie began to elaborate his equivocal relationship to technology by employing the train both as a symbol of the waste land and the heroic thrust of the Grail quester. The motorcyclist of *Mass* possesses some of that ambivalence. But it is in *Quixote* that Baillie utilizes the tension between the heroics and the blindness of technology as a generative principle for the organization of the whole film. He told Richard Whitehall:

> *Quixote* was my last western-hero form. I summarized a lot of things. I pretty much emphasized the picture of an American as a conquistador. A conquering man. For example, up in Montana there's a bridge being put up, driving straight through the mountains, and it was half made when I got there.
>
> They're chopping their way right through. And, to me, that was the best explanation of what western man was up to.

In many ways *Quixote* restates the structural principles of *Mass* with increased irony and ambiguity. For instance, the tentative protagonist of the earlier film, the motorcyclist who appears near the beginning and the end, becomes a flying man, a movie version of Superman, at both ends of the later film. Despite his sophistication, Baillie remains an innocent; the whole of his cinema exhibits an alteration between two irreconcilable themes: the sheer beauty of the phenomenal world (few films are as graceful to the eye as his, few are as sure of their colors) and the utter despair of forgotten men. It is in *Quixote* alone that these two themes emerge into a dialectical form, an antithesis of grace and disgrace.

The incessant forward movement of *Mass* leads to the meandering journey, of which *Quixote* is the diary, of a film-maker in search of a hero who can be his mediator without irony. But the series of agents he finds cannot sustain that burden: they are tired Indians in a luncheonette, an old farmer, a prizefighter reduced to Bowery life, a naked girl, the artificial Superman, and even animals (a turtle, horses). In their impotence, the lyrical film-maker, himself a Quixotic observer without Anger's confidence that the cinema is a magical weapon, becomes the hero of his own film as he descends through

a nostalgia for the lost Indian civilizations (manifested in the intercutting of contemporary chiefs with turn-of-the-century photographs of the tribes) to a vision of New York streets meshed with a collage of old films and footage of the war in Vietnam.

With Baillie we return to an aspect of the visionary film-maker suspended since our discussion of Maya Deren: his role as a champion of reform for the film-makers' plight. In 1961 he founded Canyon Cinema, the first permanent showcase for the avant-garde film in the San Francisco area since the collapse of Art in Cinema more than a decade earlier. The next year it moved from the town of Canyon, still keeping the name, to Berkeley and initiated a newspaper, *The Canyon Cinema News.* Shortly afterward he founded the Canyon Cinema Co-operative, following the example of Jonas Mekas and the original Film-Makers Cooperative in New York. Although Baillie soon retired as the chief administrator of the Canyon Cinema functions, they continue today much in the spirit in which they were founded. The visionary inspiration which informs the work of the American avant-garde film-maker has in many instances spread to the creation of his institutions.

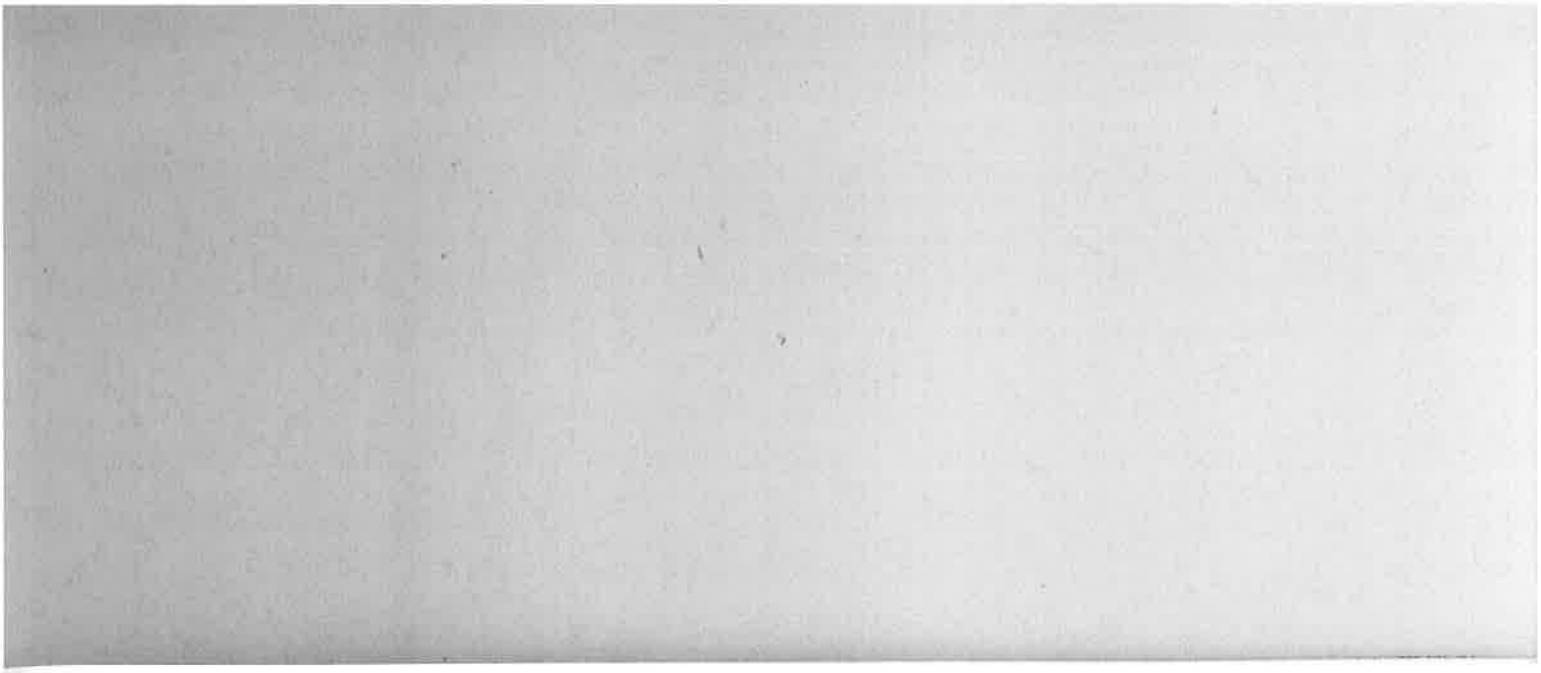
Stan Brakhage, too, has been influential in the formation and promotion of organizations to benefit the film-maker. He was one of the founding members of Mekas' Cooperative, and in its early years he acted as an informal ambassador, uniting factions in different parts of the country whom he encountered in his lecture tours. One of his major concerns has been the encouragement of private libraries of 8 mm and 16 mm films. To promote this idea and promote careful and repeated viewing of films, he has been uncomfortable in his alliances with the community of film-makers and has on several occasions withdrawn his films from cooperatives and attacked them. His motives have been for the most part aesthetic, not economic; and within the politics of aesthetic he has fought, with all the polemical means at his disposal, tendencies he felt were contrary to the making and reception of films as revelation. Repeatedly he has invoked the myth of Faust in his periodic attacks on other film-makers and ideas, reserving for himself a Prometheanism, wherein the commitment to aesthetic perfection and prophetic revelation triumphs over seduction. His repeated reconciliations with film-makers' institutions are usually attended by confessions that his dramatic response was personally essential to the rooting out of drama from his films. Markopoulos, too, and in spite of his enthusiastic appraisal of the inspired work of the cooperatives, has withdrawn, returned, and then withdrawn his films again without the public histrionics of Brakhage.

But Baillie has eschewed the polemical struggle in the ten years he has been making films. His rare interviews reflect his pacific personality, generosity, and disinterest in theory. Since the mid-sixties, he has traveled continually, living out of his Volkswagen bus, in a tent in the California commune of Morting Star, or in a cabin by the ocean in Fort Bragg. A persistent struggle with serious hepatitis since 1967 has circumscribed his activities and generated a meditation on death in his longest film so far, *Quick Billy* (1971).

In the end, the argument between consciousness and nature is as crucial to Baillie's cinema as it is to Brakhage's. But it is problematic because the weight of the dialogue seems to rest outside of the film, especially in the prolific stream of films from the late sixties—*Tung* (1966), *Castro Street* (1966), *All My Life* (1966), *Still Life* (1966), and *Valentin de las Sierras* (1967). In these, the eye of the film-maker quiets his mind with images of reconciliation; the dialectics of cinematic thought become calm in the filming of the privileged moment of reconciliation. In an interview with Richard Corliss, he describes his achievement as a film-maker and the fundamental shortcoming of that achievement:

> Now, I can answer a little bit just for myself, as having been a film artist. I always felt that I brought as much truth out of the environment as I could, but I'm tired of coming *out of*. . . . I want everybody really lost, and I want us all to be at home there. Something like that. Actually I am not interested in that, but I mean that's what you could do. Lots of people would like it. I have to say finally what I *am* interested in, like Socrates: peace . . . rest . . . nothing.

Baillie's two versions of the structural film, coinciding with the general emergence of that form, draw upon his lyrical films and point toward the consecration of the privileged moment. By replacing a form which has internal evolution with a monomorphic shape and by affirming the priority of the mechanics of the tools over the eye of the film-maker, the structural film terminates the dialectics of the lyrical and mythopoeic forms. Baillie comes to it in the apparent hope of subduing the reflective ego and, at least tentatively, exploring deep space and unquestioned natural objects. In *All My Life* (1966) he pans along a fence lined with rose bushes.



Then in the same slow movement of the unstopping camera, he switches from the horizontal to the vertical, rising above the fence into the sky, resting in a composition of two telephone lines trisecting the blue field. The movement lasts as long as it takes Ella Fitzgerald to sing "All My Life" on the soundtrack. Its complement, *Still Life* (1966), fixes an interior view with an unmoving camera. The voices on its soundtrack suggest that the dim figures by the far window are looking at a series of photographs of shrines devoted to Ramakrishna. Baillie refers to this in the Film-Makers Cooperative catalogue as "A film on efforts toward a new American religion."

Castro Street returns to the lyrical form with a renewed lushness of texture and color. His note for it is typically gnomic and tantalizing in its guarded hints about his working process:

> Inspired by a lesson from Erik Satie; a film in the form of a street—Castro Street running by the Standard Oil Refinery in Richmond, California . . . switch engines on one side and refinery tanks, stacks and buildings on the other—the street and film, ending at a red lumber company. All visual and sound elements from the street, progressing from the beginning to the end of the street, one side is black-and-white (secondary), and one side is color—like male and female elements. The emergence of a long switch-engine shot (black-and-white solo) is to the film-maker the essential of *consciousness.*

A different note subtitles it "The Coming of Consciousness".

The film begins slowly and gradually changes pace several times. Its fusion of black-and-white negative with color, often moving in opposite directions, recalls Brakhage's micro-rhythms. The superimposition tends to destroy depth and to reduce foreground and background to two hovering planes, one slightly in front of the other. The opening movement, accompanied by the sound of a train in slow motion, occurs on the back plane. An iris isolates a smokestack, then slowly wanders on the screen, drifting toward the upper right corner. The first dynamic image is of a negative, high-contrast power line moving in the superimposition.

Baillie occasionally uses slightly distorted images of the trains and the railroad yard with prismatic colors around the border of distinct shapes. He also uses images which were recorded by an improperly threaded camera so that they appear to jump or waver up and down on the screen. A ghost image of a man and the numbers from the side of a boxcar jump in this way on the foreground layer early in the film. Soon afterward part of the screen clears to show a red filament inside a tube; for Baillie not only uses superimpositions but soft masking devices so that parts of the screen will be single-layered, while the rest is double, or will contain a third element which appears on neither one of the superimposition layers, as if melted into the picture.

As the trains move faster, the pace of the film changes. The smokestack in the iris returns, now red-filtered and occupying the center of the screen. Another central iris replaces it, looking out on violets in a yellow field; slowly an old Southern Pacific engine pulls into the iris beyond the violets, recalling the later movements of *To Parsifal.* A yellow car crosses almost pure white negative cars.

At this point in the film we hear whistles, muted voices, and the tinkling of a piano. A curtain is drawn open to show the blue of the sky, and then it closes, blending immediately into the superimpositions, which become progressively anamorphic. To the sound of clangs, negative and color trains move in opposite directions across the screen, ending in the dominance of a silhouetted negative engine with a man in it, slowly crossing the field of vision. This is the image Baillie refers to as the "essential of consciousness".

Just before the film ends another negative figure takes over the film. The camera follows the blazing white pants of a walking workman, then shows his polka-dot shirt. His appearance crowns the passing negative of the engine and its conductor. Then a red, dome-like barn appears while a sign, saying "Castro Street", pointing in the direction opposite to that of the camera, marks the film's conclusion.

Both Brakhage and Baillie push in their later lyrical films toward cinematic visions of impersonal or unqualified consciousness. In films such as *Pasht, Fire of Waters,* and *Castro Street* they succeed in momentarily disengaging the self from vision. But that came only after they had invented and pursued a form that could articulate that complex relation for the first time in cinema.

Stan Brakhage, WINDOW WATER BABY MOVING

CAMERA OBSCURA: THE CINEMA OF STAN BRAKHAGE

by

Annette Michelson

Eliot once remarked, in a phrase I can neither quote nor locate exactly, that we know more than the artists of the past and that they are precisely what we know. Eisenstein was part of the past Brakhage came to know as a young film maker beginning his work in the early 1950's. That knowledge was, however, mediated by the use of Eisenstein's work made by Brakhage's lonely predecessors, the American Independents of the postwar period, and most particularly by the work and theory of Maya Deren.

Deren worked and argued for a "lyrical" film, positing its "vertical" structure and ultimately its disjunctiveness, as against the "horizontality" or linearity of narrative development. She thereby claimed for film the stylistic polarities which Jakobson, formulating the basic structural attributes of speech through an analysis of its disorders in aphasia, has proposed in the metonymic and metaphoric modes. Deren's work extends the extraordinary intuition with which Cocteau had seized upon the primary Eisensteinian impulse. Inserting within the literally split (spliced) instant of a tower's crash, a poet's odyssey of self-discovery, he had pushed the strategy of disjunction to that point at which its analytic function dissolved. He had, moreover, in the most nakedly autobiographical of films, inverted the direction of Eisensteinian energy, reinstating the Self as subject, multiplying the modes of its appearance—in mask, signature, voice-over, tableaux, autobiographical incident and allusion—substituting that multiplicity of apparitional modes for the disjunction of the given event. He pays homage, in his opening address to the spectator, to Uccello, Piero della Francesca, Andre del Castagno, as painters of coats of arms and enigmas, implicitly enjoining us to decipher or read the film as a text. He is, of course, paying homage to the development of perspective in Renaissance painting, and one is therefore not surprised to read, in his Postscript to the published script of *Blood of a Poet,* of his reluctance to "deform" space. Fearing, no doubt, the *Caligarisme* which was his film world's name for its form of a more general, French detestation of expressionism, he confines himself to manipulating the time of action while attempting to respect its spatial integrity. The result is an important film, an engaging hybrid, and a work of particular consequence for young Americans in the '40s and '50s to whom the major works in the Surrealist tradition were still largely unfamiliar.

Deren, arguing for her personal, "vertical", "lyric" film, was to work in a direction which reversed Cocteau's. Rather than splice a moment of time into which she could insert the integrality of a film, she attempted to work with the single moment, distending it into a filmic structure of exquisite ambiguity underwritten by the braver spatial strategies that come perhaps more easily to the developed kinetic sense of one who had been trained as a dancer.

It was left for Stan Brakhage to radicalize this revision of filmic temporality in positing the sense of a continuous present, of a filmic time which devours memory and expectation in the presentation of presentness. To do this one had, of course, to destroy the spatiotemporal coordinates in terms of which past and present events define themselves as *taking place in time.* The assault of Brakhage upon the space of representation, then, brings the final dissolution of that spatial integrity which Cocteau, neoclassicist that he was, had been at pains to preserve. And it is, of course, at this point that Brakhage moves into the climate of expressionism, pushing the abstractive process, contracting the depth of the visual field, to the point where he dissolves the spatiality of narrative. In so doing he redefines time as purely that of sight, the time of appearance. He replaces the filmic scene of action by the screen of eidetic imagery, projecting the nature of sight itself as the subject of the cinema. His editing style, at once assertive and fluid, creates that "convergence of a hundred spaces" which Klee had called for and which only a radically redefined temporality could provide. It is in that strict sense Utopian.

Slow motion, the anamorphic lens, the superimposition which contracts space and arrests temporal flow, extreme close-up, change of focus, the out-of-focus shot, the use of leader, the inversion of images, the sensed rhythm of the body in the camera movement, the violent contrast of volumetric and flat areas, the rapid flash-pan, the painting and scratching of the surface, and the affirmation of the grain of film begin to compose an

inventory of personal strategies. *Wonder Ring*, a film of the Third Avenue El shot in 1955 for Joseph Cornell, must have served a crucially educative purpose. For the movement of the train itself, the framing of its windows, the reflective surfaces of both windows and doors, the distortions produced by unevenness in those surfaces, all propose a composite inventory of the resources in the camera itself. Dispersed throughout the structure and the trajectory of the elevated railway, they are reassembled, as it were, and the sequence of formal strategies available is discovered as the course of a journey.

It is, however, in *Anticipation of the Night*—still tied, ever so tenuously, to the narrative theme of suicide contemplated—that Brakhage reaches the threshold of his major innovations. This film is, in a way, his *October*. In it his distinctive editing style will emerge. If Eisenstein's cinema of intellection depends upon the unity of the disjunct, sensed as disjunct, the cinema of sight will be, from this point on, incomparably fluid. It will be, as well, the cinema of the hypnagogic consciousness aspiring to a rendering of a totally unmediated vision, eluding analytic grasp.

It is suggested by Sartre that the hypnagogic consciousness is the consciousness of "fascination".

> This does not mean, in fact, that consciousness is not fully centered on its object; but not in the manner of attention . . . What is lacking is precisely a contemplative power of consciousness, a certain way of keeping oneself at a distance from one's images, from one's own thoughts and so to permit them their own logical development, instead of depositing upon them all of one's own weight, of throwing oneself into the balance, of being judge and accused, of using one's own power to make a synthesis of whatever sort with no matter what. A coach appeared before me which *was* the categorical imperative. Here we see the fascinated consciousness: it produces an image of a carriage in the midst of thinking about Kantian morality. . .

It is, of course, precisely this fascinated state of consciousness, the depositing upon them of all one's own weight, throwing one's self into the balance which Brakhage introduces as the pivotal principle of his cinema. In so doing he develops a theory of Vision and a cinematic style, both irreducibly, intransigently critical of all conventions—and most immediately those of Renaissance spatial logic, and of perspectival codes. The cinema of the hypnagogic consciousness, of the image, inaccessible to analysis, devours in its constant renewal both memory and expectation, projecting that "continuous present" which Brakhage had sensed as Gertrude Stein's great and particular lesson for him. The agents of its sustained instantaneity are camera movement, light, and the editing process itself. In *Anticipation,* then, Brakhage's shadow hovers over light emerging through door and window, the brilliance of car lights streaks through the black night, a garden is seen as light reflected from its green, a rainbow forms in the water of a garden hose. In the dark of night, the complex play of lights animating an amusement park move, spinning, circling, whirling, in a space of infinite depth and total ambiguity. The camera moves with and against light. An image is reversed, and that movement of reversal flattens, transforms the space of the garden in the image. Pans, shot away from the light, from within the park's ride, send light careening across the screen and into the obscurity of its surface. The camera gains from that obscurity the ability to reverse the reality of its own movement into the illusion of the object's motion, so that a moon and a templelike structure are seen in pans to streak across the screen.

In this film we see as well Brakhage's editing style reach maturity. Its fluidity almost belies its total sovereignty. The cuts are many and quick (Brakhage in his mature work also makes great use of the fade), but—and this is Brakhage's point of dialectical intensity—they are fused by a camera movement sustained over cuts. Disparate images (car lights and a boy in a garden, for example) are united by movement or direction either repeated or sustained through the cut. Disparate spaces are unified in a consistent flattening or obscuring of spatial coordinates and that unity is intensified by the synthetic effect of continuous movement produced in editing.

Brakhage has moved, then, through the climate and space of Abstract Expressionism, severing every tie to that space of action which Eisenstein's montage had transformed into the space of dialectical consciousness. Brakhage posits optical space as the "uncorrupted" dwelling of the imagination which constitutes it. Dissolving the distance and resolving the disjunction Eisenstein had adopted as the necessary conditions for cinema's cognitive function, he proposes, as the paradigm of contemporary montage style, an alternative to Intellectual Cinema: the Cinema of Vision.

FROM "RESPOND DANCE"

by

Stan Brakhage

To Gregory Markopoulos, June 8, 1963

After thinking awhile about comments I sent you in my last letter, Jane did finally out with: "But a song, a tune, can and does impose itself on me without being consciously recalled—in fact, does often run on and on in my head, uncommissioned, to the extent of interfering with all other thought." And, of course, I immediately realized that was true for myself also; but then, as I almost immediately pointed out: "It is not the sound of the tune forcing its way into memory-ear but the intervals of the melody . . . indeed, one would have to, and often does to be rid of it, consciously commission instruments to play that tune, voices to sing that song, in the head—or, that failing, whistle it out to exhaust the impulse." This soon led me to the conclusion, with tentative agreement from Jane, that it is the mathematical nature of music than enables the subconscious to impose a melody upon our consciousness in a way similar to superimposition remembrances; and there in my path lay the further, and specifically relevant, consideration that any musical treatment of sounds that concerned itself with intervals (time and pitch) only, and to the expense or even exclusion (where possible) of other aspects of music (such as timbre or, on a larger formal scale, theme and variations, etc.) would naturally evolve a process analogous to visual processes. This reminded me that, when I had recently visited Bell Laboratories in New Jersey (in company of James Tenney, who is currently working in the computing dept. there—creating and composing with sound generated by means of a Digital Computer) and while viewing the purest color I could ever hope to see (in the Maser Dept.) created by, or rather being, light emitted with a uniform wavelength, one of the scientists interfered with, stuck his hand into, the beam and spoke of the resultant, distorted pattern as analogous to the overtones of an impure sound. Well, we do hear much closer to pure, pitched sounds in listening to music than we have ever (except in Maser Depts.) seen pure, orderly light. This thought led me to the revelation that it is primarily *shape* that imposes itself on the conscious mind, uncalled for, and that *colors* are almost invariably commissioned, filled-in after by conscious recall or imaginative whim. This last thought seems to be checking itself out as correct in all my experiences these days. THEREFORE, it is the relationship between space-shape and rhythm-pitch which gets closest to the heart of the matter (that is the blood-pumping to the meat-bulk of the creature) of providing a form for audio-visual experience that is something other than a cheating of sense-ability-and-itivity (and, for me, form must [whether acknowledged—classic—or not—romantic—etc.] find its prime source of inspiration in the physiology and psychology of the creator.) And I do take very seriously Charles Olson's warning in "Theory of Society":

> (we already possess a
> sufficient theory of
> psychology)
> the greatest present danger
> the area of pseudo-sensibility:

And as to "the gods," as referred to in your letter, Gregory—I have found that if I keep the total instrument of myself in shape (form) and sea-worthy (going . . . growing), or ship-shape and sea-worthy (to keep it light . . . afloat, that is) while maintaining capability of depth and complexity (anchors at sails with attendant et sets and et ceteras—what's past, pre-sent, and futurahhhhhhh) then "the gods" seem to keep up their beginning-middle-and-end of it admirably . . . i.e.: do persuage me (breath-wind: inspiration) to raise sail, steer courses unmapped, et cetera, and force me, usually by appearing under sign of Dis; that is, do'ert me, rendering themselves invisible for my searching, hiding for my seeking below the Sirface of them (thoughtstop-windead: spiralization) to drop anchor, Vat and all, et settle, and fin-ally to S'ave me too, 2, for partnership-shape (thought-wind-breathstop and/or key: exspiration and/or invention) to add new rigging, disentangle the nets, and strengthen the links, make weightier anchor, et sets. I do not ever like to take "the gods" as fore-granted, find no likeness there, and am, at least in this sense, natural class-assist.

To P. Adams Sitney, June 19, 1963

OF NECESSITY I BECOME INSTRUMENT FOR THE PASSAGE OF INNER VISION, THRU ALL

MY SENSIBILITIES, INTO ITS EXTERNAL FORM. My most active part in this process is to increase all my sensibilities (so that all films arise out of some total area of being or full life) AND, at the given moment of possible creation to act only out of necessity. In other words, I am principally concerned with revelation. My sensibilities are art-oriented to the extend that revelation takes place, naturally, within the given historical context of specifically Western aesthetics. If my sensibilities were otherwise oriented, revelation would take an other external form—perhaps a purely personal one. As most of what is revealed, thru my given sensibilities clarifies itself in relationship to previous (and future, possible) works of art, I offer the given external form WHEN COMPLETED for public viewing. As you should very well know, even when I lecture at showing of past Brakhage films I emphasize the fact that I am not artist except when involved in the creative process AND that I speak as viewer of my own (NO—DAMN that "my own" which is JUST what I'm trying, DO try in all lectures, letters, self-senses-of, etc. to weed out)—I speak (when speaking, writing, well—that is with respect to deep considerations) as viewer of The Work (NOT of . . . but By-Way-Of Art), and I speak specifically to the point of What has been revealed to me AND, by way of describing the work-process, what I, as artist-viewer, understand of Revelation—that is: how to be revealed and how to be revealed TO (or 2, step 2 and/or —the viewing process).

To Bruce Frier, Late August, 1963

"The twentieth century and all its works" constitute, as a matter of course, the natural tomb of living man, or life itself, which approximately twenty centuries of steadily increasing (not to count previous sporadic instances) monotheistic thinking has created: a gigantic Grave Yard, which, by this time, has no boundaries on this earth and is manifest everywhere, built for the dead at the expense of the living. It seems likely that the first gravestone was, in fact, laid when Pandora's box, which might actually have been a coffin, was opened and the truth, mortality of man, was known. And it seems quite natural that Man, or any man, or woman (from Pandora herself to Bluebeard's wife opening the one forbidden door—the latter myth still sufficient to stand for the whole Western sex complexity of twentieth century realization) having released the potential of all evil (that is: insufficiency and/or the irreconciliable: that which neither he nor she could hope to more than "come to terms" with) the natural tendency would be to climb into the very box wherefrom all evil came and therefore, presumably, was not. (Or if you prefer Eden: once having tasted of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, become then the fruit, even food for serpent, later, rather than be subject to more temptation—or to find opposite of Bluebeard version, take earlier Eden myth where we find Adam disobeys Eve, Earth Mother, in tasting and is, therefore, driven from Eden. Nature.) However it happened and at whatever rate, its works are the monoliths of entomb-meant of life-force in man, the Tree of knowledge a gallows for living sensibility, made manifest by quest-shun-an-swear, rather than a source of nourishment for growing sensibility, a course of man, chorus sing in harmony, each one in inter-relationship to every other, coursing altogether of necessity whenever narrow passage (if ever), dissimilarity the measure of individual core, co only re: Plan, for companionship . . . or, as Olson sez:

> And now let all the ships come in,
> Pity and Love The Return The Flower
> The Gift & The Alligator catches
> and the mind go forth to the end of the world.

Which brings us, if you follow me as graciously as you lent me your support, to "The Twentieth Century *and all its workings*"; I mean that which is really *moving* in this time, each move meant and of a rhythm more ancient than all history, each in time only to the life-force being listened to as it hasn't been in at least 2,000 years, all underground, of necessity—only statues on mon-u-meants above the ground—all messages rapped out secretly along the drain-pipes of civilization, difficult to decipher amidst the roar of shit—only epitaphal mono-thesis disgracing the more muddy than underground air of the surface. But nothing moves up there (it's all in "the works") and down here, where at least *I* am (and I hope you'll join me) there's such a human burrowing as the world hasn't known since Pleistocene man.

To P. Adams Sitney, March 11, 1962

I've been having (after some ten years of work) an immense difficulty making a splice . . . I'm speaking aesthetically, not technically natch—all touched off by John Cage's appearance here, long talks between us, the listening to his music and subsequent readings of his

marvelous book *Silence.* Cage has laid down the greatest aesthetic net of this century. Only those who honestly encounter it (understand it also to the point of being able, while chafing at its bits, to call it "marvelous") and manage to survive (i.e., go beyond it) will be the artists of out contemporary present. All those pre-tend artists who carry little gifts in their clutching, sweaty hands (the "cookie-pushers" as Pound calls them) will no more be able to get thru that net than those monkeys who are caught by gourds with small holes in them filled with fruit (monkey grasps fruit, hole too small to withdraw hand, monkey too dumb to let go of fruit, etc.).

To P. Adams Sitney
End of second week of December, 1962

Then the spiritual trial, as always, is relevant: that is, I have come to the time of life of which Mr. Pound speaks (in the book on Gaudier-Brzeska) thus:

> He (Gaudier-Brzeska) even tried to persuade me that I was not becoming middle-aged, but any man whose youth has been worth anything, any man who has lived his life at all in the sun, knows that he has seen the best of it when he finds thirty approaching; knows that he is entering a quieter realm, a place with a different psychology.

and this re: "spiritual" can only be sensed psychologically with some deficient image ("only", as yet, in mind) such as a spiral being pressed (by all pushing ego past) to be thought of as a circle (all to make ends meet—out of future foreboding—as if to make "security" there) . . . my struggle being thus, TO SPRING! But then I am sharply stop-answered (in Gilbert Sorrentino's article of great worth in *Kulchur 8*) by T. E. Hulme:

> In November, 1829, a tragic date for those who see with regret the establishment of a lasting and devastating stupidity, Goethe—in answer to Eckermann's remark that human thought and action seemed to repeat itself, going around in a circle—said: "No, it is not a circle, it is a spiral." You disguise the wheel by making it run up an inclined plane; it then becomes "Progress" which is a modern substitute for religion. . .

and I am haunted by Webern's piece based on Bach's *Musical Offering,* the intense center of the piece, where, as the ear makes obvious, he struggles most desperately to break dissonantly with the imposed past form—and fails . . . and dies shortly thereafter . . . and I am haunted by Pollock's rages when he found the totems of his earliest work turning up again—and could only think of them as of re-turn . . . and died shortly thereafter. And fear of death (in both physical and spiritual sense) is certainly not new to me, but it does come in a new form . . . with a stupid una'kin, yet mannakin, to "Rage, rage, against the dying of the light."

Well, all the above is, for the moment at least, past tense now—as we have just seen *Dog Star Man: Part I*—and it is of these above struggles and (unlike I feared it might) does not assume old forms but rather transforms image, in a total concept and thru completely filmic magic, with such strength that *Prelude* looks flashy and even superficially imitative of painting beside it. It does not save me from the dilemmas mentioned in the first paragraph, not was I saved in the act of making it (one of the falsest delusions of the young artist is that his art may act therapeutically as if "finger painting" were more than fingers painting); but it is just that the finished work gives me the same sense of both sssss-and-ave which has acted within me for this sal-vation long before the work was started—so that it, the work of art, can act upon the artist as much as Gertrude Stein (in *Picasso*) says that war acts upon civilization . . . i.e., to inform the civilization of what has already taken place in terms of change.

. . . Of all kinds of survival a film artist struggles for, the economic one (as typified by my personal one as expressed in this letter) is the most immediate. Yet film enthusiasts generally hate to have any expression given to a personal economic need. I think this as serious an oversight (if deliberate shielding can be called that) as that devious refusal from film goers, well entrenched eight years ago, to consider the personal statement within the aesthetic structure as anything but a mistake engendered by psychoanalysis . . . well, mis or not, it has taken; and the whole structure of now recognized areas of film where the artist's hyper IN-volvement with his per-son (if un-owned—i.e. given to the process, at weakest, or medium, when medium, of God-force [that thrust, out of necessity, of all the invisible coming thru us] when greatest) proved the way to most of universe—albeit not, CERTAINLY NOT, "Universality" in the old sense . . . the distinction between "Universe" and "Universality" here most be-speaking the confusion which arises when the viewer take "a lity" for a light, thinks "the universe" what-is-already-partitioned rather than enjoying and joining the search for the unknown and accepting the unknown ways to it as more reasonable than all paths.

To Robert Kelly, June 26, 1963

I had as a child always one predominant vision of my future life: I was, with all my friends, backed into caves of a mountain and attacked by an enemy (most often the police, sometimes Germans, later Russians, etc.) I was always the leader, most distinguished by the possession of the only machine gun. We were always hopelessly outnumbered but always confident of eventual success. I had usually worn, in my imagination, a cartridge belt (patterned after those of *For Whom The Bell Tolls,* etc.). Three years ago, Jane fashioned a leather belt, to my specifications, with pockets for carrying film, light meters, inst. books, and bags (including an actual bulls-balls, given us) for carrying lenses, prisms, filters, etc.; and when I saw it completed, hooked over my shoulder as intended, I recognized the whole transference pattern into my contemporary living. My particular love of the machine-gun-like noise of the camera in operation (usually an annoyance to film-makers because of interference with sound-taking), my naming of our projector "Old Thumber" (what an interesting slip—when what I had intended to write was "Old Thunder" . . . particularly as I do take thumb, Graves-way, as Venus, birth, finger, and find deep relevance in over-lap of thumb-eye area of human brain, etc.) and the screen "Lightning"—so perfectly fitting my picture of a film-show where machine-gunlike flashes of vision reflect off the screen to kill "the enemy", which I do find, now, some unenlightened part of every man, woman, and child . . . even myself, in *Dog Star Man* as an old man of the mountain climbing to cut down that dead tree, myself knowing better than any other man (except possibly yourself) that it IS dead, not silver (as was once in legend) nor *ever* going to grow green branches again, that it MUST be cut down . . . The fear of its falling is where, I'm sure, all bomb scares find origin, in the same sense that Gertrude Stein said of wars:

> The spirit of everybody is changed, of a whole people is changed, but mostly nobody knows it and a war forces them to recognize it because during a war the appearance of everything changes very much quicker, but really the entire change has been accomplished and the war is only something which forces everybody to recognize it (*Picasso,* page 30.)

THE FILMS OF ROBERT BREER

by P. Adams Sitney

Two important figures of the American avant-garde cinema began to make their first films in Europe in the early 1950s. They are Robert Breer, an American, whose cinema grew out of the painting he was doing in Paris in the early 1950s, and Peter Kubelka, an Austrian who went directly into cinema but who did not find a significant context for his art until he came to America in 1965. Breer had resettled in Palisades, New York by 1959. Although their films are obviously very different and no influence can be traced from one to the other, both have their roots in the graphic cinema of Eggeling, Richter, Duchamp, and Lye without the mediation of the Abstract Expressionistic and mythopoeic phases that I have described in the previous chapters.

Both Breer and Kubelka were only marginally aware of the early graphic cinema. Nevertheless, they each took up its premises and reduced them to a new essence after a hiatus of more than twenty years. The similarity of their situations, if not of their films, has produced a number of related (sometimes in likeness, sometimes in opposition) theoretical positions and insight.

Breer described the background of his first film in an interview with Guy Coté: "First, I was a painter. In Paris, I was influenced by the geometric abstractions of the neo-plasticians, following Mondrian and Kandinsky. It was big at that time, and I began painting that way. My canvasses were limited to three or four forms, each one hard-edged and having its own definite color. It was a rather severe kind of abstraction, but already in certain ways I had begun to give my work a dynamic element which showed that I was not entirely at home within the strict limits of neo-plasticism. Also, the notion of absolute formal values seemed at odds with the number of variations I could develop around a single theme and I became interested in change itself and finally in cinema as a means of exploring this further. I wanted to see if I could possibly control a range of variations in a single composition. You can see that I sort of backed into cinema since my main concern was with static forms. In fact, I was even a bit annoyed at first when I ran into the problems of movement."

Later in the same interview he unfolds the heart of his first film when he says of all his work, "I'm interested in the domain between motion and still pictures." The cuts of *Form Phases I* take place between still figures, often the mirror images of each other, and the motion variations are bracketed by the static poles of *arche* and *telos*, the beginning from which and the end to which lines move. The realms between stillness and motion remain the object of almost all of Breer's explorations in cinema. He came quickly to a heightened awareness of the operation of the single frame as the locus of the tension between the static and the moving.

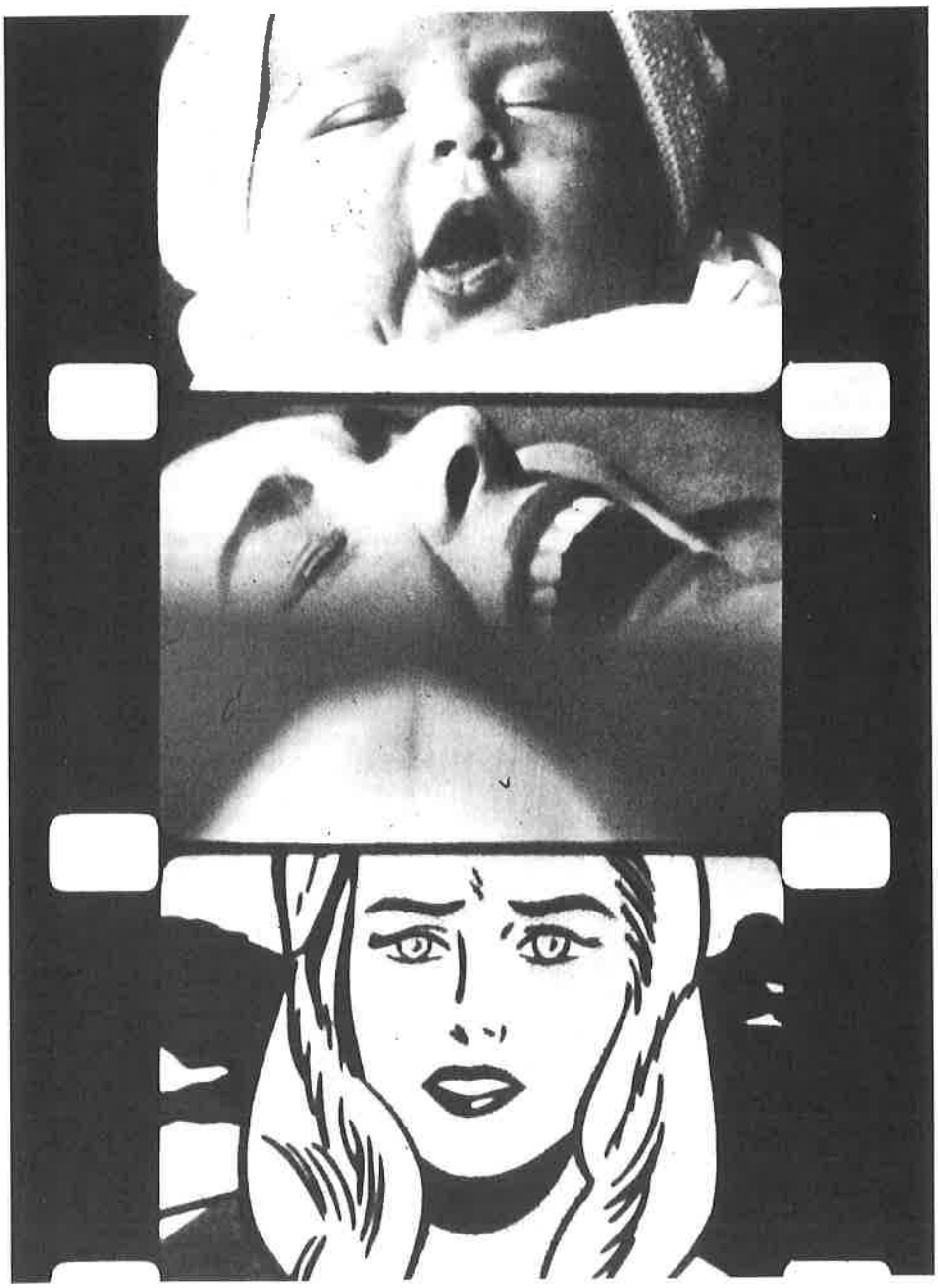
In an article on the cinema, called "A New Realism —The Object", which equates "the realism of the cinema" with "the possibilities of the fragment or element", Fernand Léger calls for a new kind of film-maker:

> New men are needed—men who have acquired a new sensitiveness toward the object and its image. An object for instance if projected for 20 seconds is given its full value—projected 30 seconds it becomes negative.

In *Recreation I* Breer took up the challenge of Léger, but in a direction of heightened speed that the maker of *Le Ballet mécanique* had not quite anticipated. In the same article, Léger said that "All current cinema is romantic, literary, historical-expressionist, etc." He is using the terms "romantic" and "expressionist" in a vague and popular sense, but they apply precisely when used to define his tradition, as Breer manifests it, in contrast to the late Romantic (and Abstract Expressionist) aesthetic.

Although there is a concrete pattern in the development of Breer's work, it is not one that touches upon the trance film, the mythic film, or the structural film (even though—and this makes the matter complex—the structural cinema has been influenced by his achievements). The absence of these forms is not as significant as the absence of the aesthetic which generates them. The Romantic film-maker looks on the cinema as an instrument of self-discovery or mythopoeic discovery; the process of making a film becomes a quest for the film's often problematic content.

In terms of painting, both American and European art was irrigated by Cubism and neo-plasticism after the Second World War. In Europe, Surrealism died as a painterly force. The heirs of Mondrian and Kandinsky



Robert Breer,
FISTFIGHT

accepted their geometry but rejected the Neo-Platonic and theosophic framework in which it had been first expressed. In America, on the other hand, the Surrealist aesthetic merged with Cubism to influence the most Romantic school of twentieth-century painting, the generation of Pollock, Still, Newman, and De Kooning. Robert Breer's aesthetic was formed in Paris just after the war, within the sphere of post-Mondrian abstractionists.

In an interview Breer stated:

> I started in Europe and I feel that my orientation was somewhat European. As a painter I was working out of Bauhaus traditions while Abstract Expressionism was getting going here, you know, coming out of Surrealism. . . . It's true that my films had their roots in European experimentation of the Twenties. . . . Another European aspect of my work might be that it is more conventionalized that that of the Americans. The Abstract Expressionists, and so forth, were working in a sort of anti-conventional way, trying for direct expression, while I was happy working out of conventions. I like this idea of limitations which you break all the time. The limitations have to be there, if they're self-imposed or if they come through some kind of historical inheritance, as mine are. I'd set up conventions on a film and then play with those within them.

The first part of this statement is a lucid appraisal of the difference between his work and that of his American colleagues. His stance in regard to conventions has varied as his work has changed. The earliest films he made, between 1952 and 1957, grew out of the norms of geometrical painting into those of the graphic film, with important modifications of both. But beginning with *A Man and His Dog Out for Air* (1957), he made animated cartoons until 1964. They include *Inner and Outer Space* (1960), *Horse Over Teakettle* (1962), *Breathing* (1963), and the climactic *Fist Fight* (1964), in which cartooning broke up and led back to the fast motion cinema of his earlier works.

In the cartoon films there is a shift in his working process. Instead of creating the film directly in front of the camera as he was shooting it, he began to draw the lines and figures of individual frames on paper and cards. By flipping through the cards he could approximate the experience of the film. The actual shooting became more of an exercise in translation than creation. In an interview with Jonas Mekas, he spoke of *Recreation* as having been made

> in a kind of deliberate feeling of wonderment: "What the hell will this look like?" you know, that kind of thing, and " I don't want to know . . . whether this is cinema or not; it doesn't matter." Then I would go back and try to incorporate some notions of control and construction.

By introducing the middle step of creation on cards, he refined his animation but diminished the dynamics achieved in his first works.

In terms of the whole of Breer's work, the issue of conventions is less important than that of image content. It is there that he differs fundamentally from most of the Romantic film-makers. There is always a distance between him and the subjects of his films: he is an extreme formalist. He will choose the familiar—buttons, knife, string, a wad of paper; the abstract—transforming geometrical shapes; the simple—a tangle of moving lines eventually resolving into the cartoon of a man walking a dog; or conventional cartoon imagery—comic human figures and animals—as the object of his formal manipulations. The distance between his subjects and the cinematic strategies he applies to them is neither ironic nor problematic. The weight of his interests as an artist lies in the creation and breakdown of illusions. This, he seems to believe, becomes clearest when the materials of the illusions are depersonalized (and demythologized), or as he has said, "conventional".

Naturally the notion of the "threshold" is more vital to Breer's aesthetic than that of "conventions". Conventions are, in fact, a means for him to come upon a threshold more immediately. Of the four realms of exploration, the first is the most important; for it extends throughout his work and tends to encompass the other three. In *Jamestown Baloos* (1957) and *Eyewash* (1959), he integrated the techniques of his earliest animations with those of *Recreation I* in a process of questioning and defining the boundaries between still and moving images, and the corollary distinction between "actualities" and flat pictures.

Jamestown Baloos jarringly juxtaposes all of his previous techniques and aesthetic strategies and invents a few more. The film has a triptych form of two black-and-white sections with martial soundtracks bracketing a silent one in color. In changes of tempo from very rapid to moderately slow and back again, he switches from the hand-drawn outline of a figure or an object to a magazine

collage of that figure or the object itself. In all three parts he mixes satiric collages of Napoleon and the instruments of warfare with glimpses of landscapes and abstract textures and geometries, but he keeps the film in an unresolved suspense by subverting the viewer's psychological urge to fix one of these elements as the central theme and reduce the other two to sub-themes.

The transitions between themes within the three sections revolve around thresholds between motion and stillness. A series of watercolors, each on the screen for three or four frames, vibrates before the lens as if they were quickly shaken by hand. Collage gondolas move against static cityscapes of Venice. Then a barrage of single-frame landscapes by old masters rushes across the screen. They are arranged so that a tree or an image in one occupies approximately the same place in the next, giving a sense of continuity amid violent change. Finally Breer incorporates very short shots of actual landscapes, whose spatial expanses are revealed in fragmentation by a few panning frames after or before a brief hold. The mesh of flat work and photography in depth, with the pronounced accent on the former, is so fine and subtle that the film does not lose its carefully balanced tension in these transitions.

Most of *Eyewash* derives from photography of actual entities rather than from collages, drawings, or flat photographs. Reflections of light on water, blurred fast panning motions, passing trucks filmed through a telephoto lens, a rolling ball, single-frame street scenes, and a humorous and exciting shot of a workman just at the point of sawing through a blue plank, are the crucial images here. Breer cuts on motion, shifting depths, speeds, colors, and directions in the shot-to-shot junctures, while he organizes the whole film in terms of repeated images and waves of rhythmic intensity and relaxation. *Eyewash* anticipates many of Stan Brakhage's *Songs,* made a decade later, but it lacks the visionary coherence and passionate commitment that Brakhage with the advantage of ten years of development was able to bring to his materials. More than any other film of Breer's, this one recalls the strategies of *Le Ballet mécanique,* especially when Léger moves out of his studio and organizes his glimpses of Paris into a chain of associations.

With *Eyewash* Breer ended his work in defining the threshold between flat animation and photographed actuality by means of freezes and movements fractions of a second long.

Of the American films he made before *Fist Fight,* only *Blazes* (1961) touches upon his central concern with the border in cinema between motion and stillness. Here he painted one hundred cards with bold, freedrawn shapes and rough calligraphic lines; then he shuffled them and photographed them in irregular alternations of one and two frames each. With each shuffling he varied the rhythm of durations. There are short sections in which two images flicker between each other in single-frame changes; there are also single frames inserted after twenty of blackness, and some are held up to half a second on the screen. In the end he zooms in on a series of cards with three or four frames for each movement. A loud clicking sound gives an auditory equivalent to the rush of similar and recurrent designs before the eyes.

At the same time he translated his principles of animation into sculpture. By hand-cranking his mutoscopes of slightly varied cards, the observer could control the degree of stillness or motion and thus provide himself with the illusion of continuous change or destroy that illusion. The mutoscopes also provided a means of breaking down the theatrical situation of cinema, which Breer has always held in suspicion. In two interviews he said:

> I got disoriented by the theatrical situation of film, by the fact that you have to turn out the lights and there is a fixed audience, and when you turn out the lights you turn on the projection light and you project the piece of magic on the wall. I felt that this very dramatic, theatrical situation in some ways, just by the environment of the movie house, robbed some of the mystery of film from itself. The idea to make mutoscopes was to bring movies again into a gallery situation, where I can have a concrete object, which gave this mysterious result in motion.
>
> All my art ideas have to do with material I was using. . . . I wanted to examine it more closely, and bring it into the open, to expose it.

In the middle of the decade, Breer's sculptural work shifted from making mutoscopes to constructing objects that moved so slowly that they would seem stationary when directly observed, but when ignored for a period of time their shift of location would be obvious. At the same time, the dimensions of the single frame re-emerged in his films with increased vigor and purity.

Fist Fight, unlike any other of Breer's films, is autobiographical. In it he contemplates and manipulates "still" images from his past in what is apparently a moving family album. Black-and-white photographs of his

wife as a girl, of himself at his work table, of children, a wedding party, and many friends and personal scenes are scrambled together with fragments of cartoons (including a quotation from *Horse Over Teakettle*), a handwritten letter passing too fast to be legible, fingers, a bare foot, a mouse in a cartoon trying to turn on a lamp, and a real mouse falling through black space—to isolate a few of the more striking images.

By treating the photographs as he had the geometrical shapes of his earlier animations, Breer seems to be trying to distance himself from these images of his life. The personal material blends into the animations and fragments without assuming a privileged emphasis. At times it seems as if they were not personal pictures at all, but simply the most convenient photographs for a film intensely determined to explore further ambiguities of stillness and motion, painterly surface and illusory depth.

The film articulates itself in bursts separated by sections of blackness. In each burst a technique or series of images may dominate or provide a matrix, but all the elements (photographs, cartoons, abstractions) occur in each cluster. At first the flickering alternation of photographs and later the cartoon elements seem to be the center of concentration, yet the film resists giving a sense of development. In a note for *Pat's Birthday,* Breer had written, "Why things happen after each other in this film is because there isn't room for everything at once. But it's really a still picture and time is not supposed to move in one direction any more than it does in the other." Although he does end that film with a recapitulation in brief shots of the actions already seen, *Pat's Birthday* follows the course of a day's outing, but in *Fist Fight* the tension between the human lives schematically depicted in the photographs and the recurrent bursts of images comes closer to the atemporality he claimed for the earlier film. Since *Fist Fight,* at eleven minutes, is the longest of Breer's films after the leisurely-paced thirteen minutes of *Pay's Birthday,* it takes on a quality of duration foreign to his earlier work; some of the image clusters seem as long and as integral as *Recreation* or *Blazes.*

Had Breer chosen to use the penultimate scene as the last, it would have resolved the tensions he elaborated earlier. In that section, he wrenched the camera off the animation table while it was still running. Then he walked out of his studio with it, filming the walls and his shoes as he went, until he was in the open and could photograph the sun. By returning to the bursts of animation and photographs after this gesture, he further maintained the equilibrium of the phrases and qualified the most expressionistic moment yet to occur in his cinema.

After *Fist Fight* Breer made three remarkably controlled animated films which return to the forms and themes of his earliest work but with more power and confidence than ever before. These three closely-related films, *66* (1966), *69* (1969), and *70* (1970), place Breer for the first time among the major colorists of the avant-garde. Each film sets itself a clearly-defined problem involving color, speed, illusion, and image-shape, and even though they are unquestionably units of a series, they do not overlap or borrow from each other. Each fully satisfies its own postulated conditions of operation; seen together they clarify the subtle problems the film-maker has posed for cinema.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT BREER

by

Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney

JONAS MEKAS: I don't know if it will work, but ideally I'd like to concentrate only on your last three films, *66, 69* and *70.* I think that they differ from all the others. Or no? What do you think? Do they differ, for you?

ROBERT BREER: Yes, they do. But you know, *Form Phases IV* is very much like those films. *Form Phases IV* was made in 1956 or something, and that was my last abstract film until the film *66* which was in 1966 or 1967. In between, I made those collage and animated cartoons and people films. *66* was very much a return to *Form Phases IV.* It's a funny kind of retrogression, I guess. *66* was purely geometric, abstract. *69* was another abstraction; and then, *70.* They have numbers and they group together, developments of each other, I guess.

MEKAS: Most of your films before *66,* I mean the period between 1960 and 1966, deal with certain collage areas—even the films with people. They don't go that deeply into the explorations, in a sort of minimal way, of color, the illusions of the eye, the . . . I don't know how to describe it.

BREER: But that's where I started. My first film, *Form Phases I,* in 1952, as a matter of fact, it's an abstract film. That is an abstract film, and it came right out of my paintings and elements in it were taken from my paintings. In fact, it was meant to be just an elaboration on the painting I was working on at the time. I wasn't really interested in film; I didn't know if I was. So now I am going back to that again. I don't paint anymore. Oh, I fell into a certain dead end in the painting, at that time, and the neo-plastic ideal. Films were very liberating, so I took advantage of it. I wanted to see some things I'd never seen before. Actually, those collage films were in the same spirit as the abstract paintings, trying to distill the essence of the medium. For me, film was another medium that permitted mixing all this other extraneous stuff, ideas and words and configurative elements that I couldn't justify putting in paintings anymore, and I was sort of trying to come to terms with conventional cinema as opposed to film, but still, very basically, abstract, you know, examining the material, what was possible in film. So now, I've come back.

MEKAS: Parallel to your film work, you continued working on your moving sculptures.

BREER: I made paintings and films for about six years and I kept on painting. Gradually, I stopped painting. And then I went through a period when I came back here from Paris, well, for maybe two or three years, when I didn't do anything but films. Then I wanted to bring film back into . . . I got disoriented by the theatrical situation of film, by the fact that you have to turn out the lights and there is a fixed audience, and when you turn out the lights you turn on the projection light and you project the piece of magic on the wall. I felt that this very dramatic, theatrical situation, in some ways, just by the environment of the movie house, robbed some of the mystery of film from itself. My early sculpture was an attempt to make films concrete that could be seen in daylight. Well, the kind of effect that I got out of flipbooks, where you hold something in your hand and you flip three images together and they flow into one image. And that is a very concrete situation. It's something you hold right in your hands, something that you are looking at in normal circumstances, under light, without sitting in a chair, or something, and art is always presented that way. In a gallery, you walk around and look at it on the walls. I couldn't go back to static painting anymore after film—so I started making objects that had some kind of development in time and yet could be looked at as concrete objects. So, I started making these bent wire objects and mutoscopes, flip cards.

MEKAS: You may be interested to know that there is now a screen invented which allows one to project films in bright daylight. As a matter of fact, the brighter the room, the more clear the image will be.

BREER: Well, there is one already, it's called television.

MEKAS: But this new screen is specifically designed for projecting films. I don't know the principle, but it was demonstrated half a year ago.

BREER: Well, I still felt a kind of remoteness between the projector and the screen. The pleasure I get out of making drawings and then looking at those drawings immediately, is something I thought I lost somewhere in cinema. It was made up for by these effects that you couldn't get any other way, these collage effects, but

I still felt a loss there and I wanted to get closer to the direct action of an artist or somebody making art, I guess. Even a screen in daylight, when you can now get a very bright image, still seems to me that the image on the screen has gone through a mysterious process, it's back in the booth some place. So it's trying to be concrete about cinema that got me into making sculpture, and the things that creep around on the floor came five years ago, I guess. There was a period when I was searching around for something that would be the equivalent of what I thought was—I hate to use these words—mystery . . . and wonder . . . Killing words . . . It's a very fragile thing for me and I felt that it had to be distilled somehow and isolated and it had to be really strong; it *had* to be. It seems like a contradiction in terms, but they had to be singled out, with nothing extraneous around, just that phenomenon, and I don't know how to describe that, I don't know what it is, I guess it's what people see when my things are successful, that's what they get. So that these things move around on the floor, just dumb objects, and all they do is just move around very slowly, and I try to keep it as simple as that. There are a lot of ramifications, but I am not talking about film now, of course.

(Interruption)

BREER: I am trying to explain the evolution, you know, back and forth between films. I never quit making films, but I just change emphasis. It's something about the work habits that makes me go from film scale back to concrete objects. It's a kind of nice, stimulating process for me. If I get bogged down in making objects, or somehow I come to a point where there is nothing going on, I can use this change of scale and material to revive my ideas. There are some practical things about that, working in a small scale, the way I do with the films, just sitting in one place, and . . . It has a lot to do with the . . . kind of . . .declaring the limits to the means ahead of time so that then you can work within these self-imposed limitations and you don't have to think about the limitations anymore. In that sense, I guess, it's kind of conceptual. This is the effect that you are going to get . . . Like, I made *Breathing* as a film. A little self-consciously, I had a sign up, and I was working on the . . . I work in strange little rooms and places, I like to do that . . . to get myself a room some place and close to the door and sort of work in there . . . So, I had a sign for making *Breathing,* which involved making thousands of drawings over a period of a couple of months—and I had a sign which was going to be the title of the film, for a while—I'll be damned if I can remember it exactly—I think it was: THIS FILM IS WHAT IT IS WHAT IT IS WHAT IT IS WHAT IT IS—and had the sign around and that was a reminder for me, as a kind of discipline that I didn't refer to anymore after I wrote it, but it was there to remind me that I was making a really concrete film; I wasn't going to digress; I was going to keep on making a *direct* film. So it is a kind of compulsion to define my limits.

MEKAS: A "direct" film?

BREER: Well, in that case, I was drawing on cards and animating lines and the temptation, with my background, when I start drawing, is to let things flower out into other areas and make cartoons and bring in extraneous material, and so forth. In this case, I decided that the limit was going to be . . . I was going to keep very close to direct, concrete imagery. It is my own, private classification . . . I didn't invent it, the term, but that was my meaning of it. I guess, that the movement of that line, and its place on the screen, and its density, the rhythms, and so forth, were going to be the totality of the film, and that I'd concentrate on that.

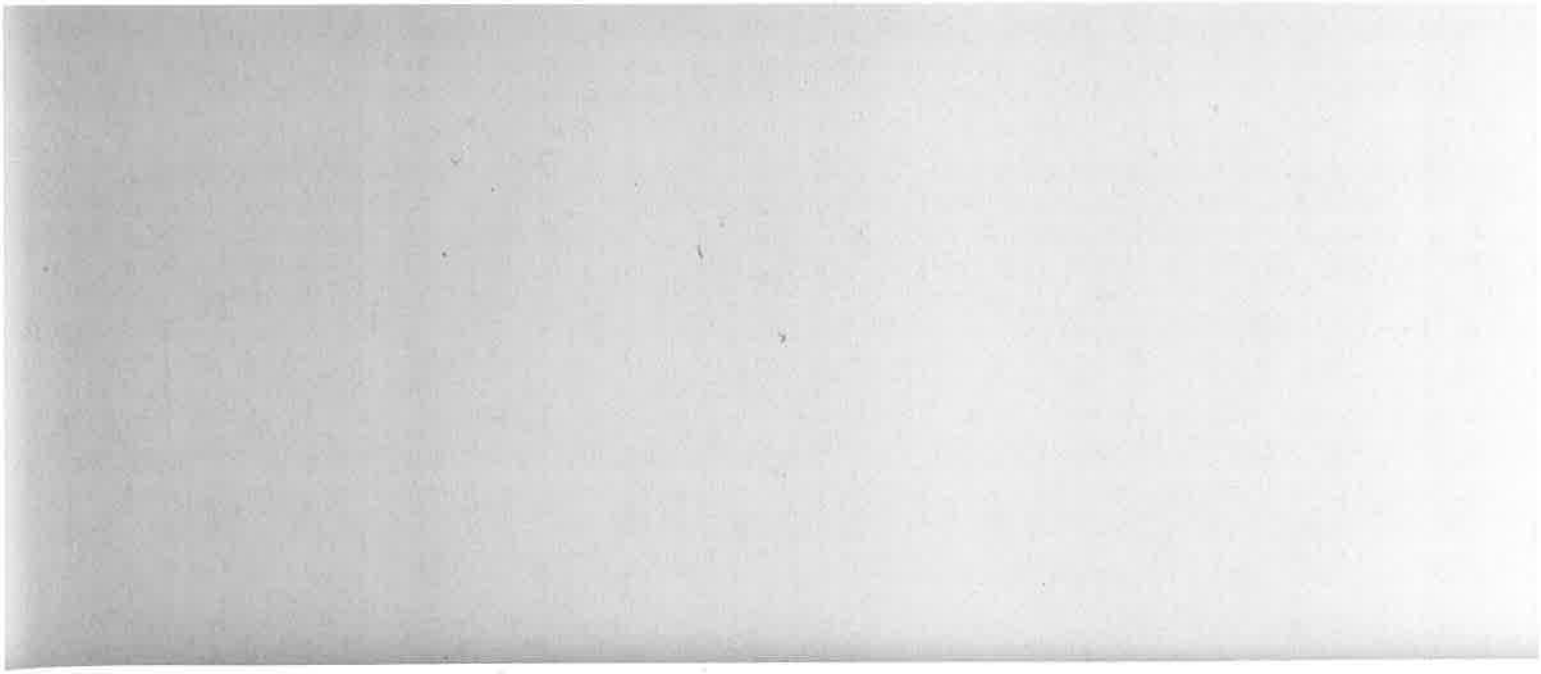
MEKAS: This is a silly question, but could you try to sum up, what, for you, cinema is, as opposed to painting? Are those two directions, areas, clear?

BREER: I use the word "threshold" a lot, when I am thinking about what I am doing. I have a notion about conventions or disciplines, they are inter-changeable words for me. The sum total of the, let's say, cultural history of the . . .

(Interruption)

MEKAS: Yes, we were on the word "threshold".

BREER: Yes. Somewhere, in all my work, I tried to amaze myself with something, and the only way you can amaze yourself is to create a situation in which an accident can happen. The accident is relative to what you're trying to do. It's only an accident because it's unforeseen. And somehow it always gave me that opportunity. It's narrowing down now, in such a way that the accidents are smaller and smaller . . . That's the terrible thing that happens with the kind of control that you have. Still, it's very important. And that's where I consider the threshold of what I know about a given medium and what happens when I violate that threshold at the moment I consider I am doing something worth pursuing. So, every film has to get me interested, while I'm doing it. This has to happen somewhere along the line. It's a notion, like . . . It's probably an old idea about avant-garde, you know, about breaking ground and about defining the limits of something by breaking those limits all the time. I consider limits very important, if only to serve as a basis



for rupturing, you know? This is the only reason for doing this thing, it's a matter of bringing life into something. You break a leg and you know what you are made of; if you get sick, then you know what you are, or, maybe in a more positive way, if you have some great paroxysm of joy. I mean, sexual revelation, all kinds of physical revelations, like that. And in an art form, it takes a more formalistic . . .

MEKAS: Do you see any different steps in your work—can you group your work in some way, in groups? Periods? Technique-wise or subject-wise or threshold-wise . . .?

BREER: Yes, because I have tried a lot of different things, to amaze myself. I guess, there are. The first films were working out painting problems. But my work habits are such that for a long time I used to alternate from one kind of film to the other—the other being an antidote to the one I just did.

MEKAS: From anecdote to antidote . . .

BREER: Yes. The anecdote was one of the things that bothered me, so I used to alternate between them, I guess. If you went back and looked at dates and things, you'd see that I went from collage things, very dense kind of, chopped up imagery, to something that I . . . that would serve least in working as an anecdote, and that's when I got into the line . . . the flowing . . . the kind of float-through things. And so I really alternated those types of films.

P. ADAMS SITNEY: You mean, did one collage, and then one . . .

BREER: Yeah

MEKAS: When I say "groupings", I don't necessarily mean groupings that are separated in time. They could be overlapping.

BREER: That's right. They do. They overlap; they almost alternate one after another.

SITNEY: When did you start the alternation?

BREER: Right at the beginning. I went first from geometric films, in 1952, that first, little one, *Form Phases I.* A lot of bad and successful experiments . . . I had to work through everything I had seen, too, and try everything I had seen. So it started right at the beginning. I went from that fairly rigid constructivist type film to using flowing inks, and so forth.

SITNEY: Which ones?

BREER: They are on *that* reel . . . I don't know if they are on *that* reel. Well, there were more *Form Phases* . . . Some of them are mainly titles . . . very out of frame, you know . . . unhappy lighting, and so forth. But still, the basis was there. Once I did that, O.K., enough of that . . . now it's time to break up everything and do the other thing. It got to be kind of a habit, doing that . . . It doesn't show very well on the films that I show normally, because I suppress a lot of films. What I found was that when I make a film which I really like very much, I try to make a sequel to it. And that was always . . . it was just the energy that I put into that film, the impetus of it carried over into another footage which sometimes would be called, you know, a sequel to the previous film. I mean, I'd have *Recreation 2,* which was a result of making *Recreation 1,* where I really tried to exploit what I discovered in that film. Those were very self-conscious efforts and usually not as interesting as the first ones, and that stands to reason. And so there is always that little film after the one that I considered good. Then I'd throw all that out when I realized what I'd done. Later on, I quit making those sequels, I'd just eliminate that stage. I realized that that was my way of dissipating the energy by making a phony film . . . I'd just spend it out until it was really driven into the ground, then I'd start all over again. It's a strange business of self-hypnosis, you know.

Generally, there is a shift, I guess, from the early geometric things to when I decided that maybe I could break out of these notions of plastic formalism altogether. The cinema really provided an opportunity to forget about continuity, that's one of the things about cinema which was there waiting for me, as a trap. I decided, since I don't know about continuity, I don't have to think about it, and I'll just put it out of my mind, and I'll do it in a very methodical way, which was by fracturing, shattering the image so there wasn't a flaw in it.

So that the collage thing was a kind of deliberate—like the first ones, *Recreation* and the loops I made before that—were done really in a kind of deliberate feeling of wonderment: "What the hell will this look like?" You know, that kind of thing, and "I don't want to know, I can attach no value to it. I don't know whether this is cinema or not, it doesn't matter." It was that kind of thing. Then I go back and try to incorporate some notions of control and construction, and so forth. I think *Jamestown Baloos* was a film where I felt I was riding kind of high on that film and mixed in everything, every discipline I could think of, very conspicuously, and would carry it off just on the level of drive and euphoria, and it would work because I'd will it to work, that's all. Then, after a more sober reflection, I'd go back to another film. Then, there are films that I did out of . . .

MEKAS: *Horse Over the Tea Kettle* seems to me to be one of those films with several satellites . . .

BREER: All of them . . . *A Man With His Dog Out For Air,* I did it to celebrate the birth of a child, and also because Franny was in the hospital, I had a week of being alone. I worked very intensely . . . Those films are done deliberately very quickly, so that I don't think about them. They are done in . . . I don't work in anger or anything like that. I kind of work best when I am well fed and well screwed and everything . . . very peaceful, happy with myself and feeling quite congenial, and that's when I work best. Nothing works out of anger . . .

SITNEY: It seems, there are films, like *Horse Over Tea Kettle* and *Man Out For Air,* they look like they were made first on cards, or something, first on drawings and then film. Other films look like they were made at the projector.

BREER : There are cards, of course . . . This is the scale thing in cinema that intrigues me, and I don't know what it means, but I started working on these small cards. *Man and Dog* was made on regulation size 8 × 12 —or whatever—sheets of paper. The problem there was covering that amount of area in depth through several thousand images, it's a lot of ink. I scratched film too. But it's really against my better judgment. I knew that the results would be limited to looking like every scratch ever made . . . So then I came to these cards, and I don't remember how I discovered *that* as the way of doing things—it seems very simple-minded, but certainly it was the right scale for me, because they allowed me to work very quickly and eliminated a lot of the . . . Oh, there are so many advantages, I don't want to go into it, but working on cards, it was a beautiful thing that happened to me. That, of course, makes the images look very direct, because of the scale—the line is blown up, it's almost like drawing on film. Is that what you mean by having that kind of presence on the screen? It does. But the thing is that working on cards, you can work through five images, relate five images together, you know, the light would shine through five cards. If you work on film, even 75 mm film, at most, even with McLaren's device of seeing, overlaying, you know, with the prisms seeing—two images one on top of other—you can't do that.

SITNEY: It's not what I meant. What I was asking is this: some of your films look like they are cleared out completely in advance. The images were made on cards, or paper. Others, like *Recreation,* obviously were made while the camera was going.

BREER: I see. That's right. That's a good point. That's what I was telling Jonas, before you joined, that I like to work in a room . . . The thing about film is that you can . . . I take a long time working out something, I refine it way down, I am very reductive in my work. I sit and I look at them, at a box I've made, for days at a time, you know, until I'm absolutely at ease with it. I might change something after a week or so. With film, I like the same amount of control. The interesting thing about film is that the act of filming sometimes can be very wild. I permit myself full freedom with film because I know that I can chop it up later, or I won't show it, I can burn it more easily, I can destroy it, or I can reconstrust it. So that puts a kind of curb on this tendency to distill everything all the time, that's what's nice . . .

MEKAS: It's funny—but yesterday I spoke to some writer who said she had just destroyed all her writings, and she said, if this would have been film, probably she wouldn't have destroyed it. She felt the writing was much easier to destroy . . . and film, she wouldn't destroy, she thought. And now, you say, you can destroy it because it is film. Sculpture—you wouldn't destroy that easily . . . So I am interested in these subtle gradations of destruction . . .

BREER: I mean, it's harder to do away with it, you know. More concrete, that's what I was saying; one objection to film was that. It's playing off of this discipline, narrowing down, narrowing down, narrowing down . . . Sometimes it goes beyond the limit of felicity, you know, you get . . . it dies. Well, with the film, you can chop off the dead extension of that kind of energy, or do it all over again.

THE FILMS OF HOLLIS FRAMPTON

by

Bill Simon

Hollis Frampton's films differ from those of Gehr, Gerson, and Snow in major ways. The term structural describes his work even more aptly because he is concerned with the development, arrangement, and juxtaposition of structures. He isolates an idea, a theory, a concept, usually concerning a particular aspect or problem in the cinematic experience and creates a structure that demonstrates and elucidates it. Frampton is less involved with the immediate sensuous experience of an art object. While *Serene Velocity* may be enjoyed for its kinetic quality and *La Région Centrale* for its spatial effects without necessarily engaging the viewer on an intellectual level, the excitement of Frampton's film stems largely from the ideas that are presented. His films have a sensuous intellectuality; they thrill by their engagement in ideas. If Brakhage's great gift is what he does with light and Snow's what he does with space, Frampton's is what he does with conceptual structures.

In three Frampton films shown, two major theoretical concerns are apparent. In *Nostalgia* (1971), he is clearly working with the experience of cinematic temporality. The major structural strategy is a disjunction between sound and image. We see a series of still photographs, most of them taken by Frampton, slowly burning one at a time on a hotplate. On the soundtrack, we hear Frampton's comments and reminiscences about the photographs. As we watch each photograph burn, we hear the reminiscence pertaining to the following photograph. The sound and image are on two different time schedules. At any one moment, we are listening to a commentary about a photograph that we shall be seeing in the future and looking at a photograph that we have just heard about. We are pulled between anticipation and memory. The nature of the commentary reinforces the complexity; it arouses our sense of anticipation by referring to the future; it also reminisces about the past, about the time and conditions under which the photographs were made. The double time sense results in a complex, rich experience.

Two other Frampton films shown, *Critical Mass* (1971) and *Poetic Justice* (1972), also present complex temporal situations. *Critical Mass* shows a young New York couple arguing about their relationship. The film starts on the soundtrack; the screen is blank. Initially the dialogue is cut up in such a way that the couple seems to stutter as they talk. (Frampton adds the "stutter" to such recent perceptual constructs as Warhol's "stares", Kubelka's "flicker", and Mekas' "glimpse".) Lines of dialogue are cut into before they are finished, partially repeated, stopped again, repeated, until the phrase or sentence is finished and a new one begins in the same manner. A line like "I'm going to leave you" comes out: "I'm goin' . . . going to lea' . . . to leave you . . . 'eave you. An' . . . " When the image appears, we see the couple arguing, standing against a white wall. The picture is cut to reflect the stutter, repeating itself and going on, finishing one phrase and starting another. Later the stutter effect disappears and a second structural principle emerges. The sound and image go out of synchronization so that we hear the boy speaking while we see the girl's mouth moving and vice versa. The degree of de-synchronization varies mysteriously, disconcerting us.

There are two kinds of temporal tensions in this film. In the first part, the stutter creates a future-past tension as in *Nostalgia,* only on a more immediate second-to-second basis. The incomplete phrase gives us a sense of what is to come. The repetition brings us backward, then carries us forward, stops, and returns. Time does not evolve in a linear way. We are continually moved from future to past and back again, with no true sense of a present. In the second part of the film, the sound-image disjunction brings about the temporal problem. Because of our retarded awareness of the disjunction we are never quite sure whether we are listening to something that has already been spoken in the image or to something about to be spoken. We are simultaneously either listening in the present and seeing the past or listening to the past and seeing the present.

In *Poetic Justice,* we see a table upon which there is a plant and a cup of coffee. A succession of sheets of paper is placed on the table, each describing the "shot" of a film so that we can reconstruct the film in our mind's eye from the written descriptions. The imagined film is in four tableaux, one of which contains a major temporal problem. In this tableau, every second "shot" is followed by one containing a still photograph of the previous "shot". The second "shot" in each successive pair there-

Hollis Frampton, ZORNS LEMMA

fore refers back to the past; the photograph freezes the action of the first "shot". However, in the description for the second "shot" of each pair, there are instructions that do not appear in the description for the first. In each case, the written instruction decribes an action that occurs after the action of the first "shot" so that the second "shot" in each pair is a rendering of the past state of events and carries the action of the imagined film a step forward. Two directions of temporal experience are mixed in a single image.

The second major theme that Frampton elucidates concerns different kinds of presentational and perceptual modes, especially the modes of language communication and image communication. Frampton deals with the differences between them and mixes the two by treating words as images and images as words. At a seminar at New York University in the spring of 1972, Frampton recalled how he had originally considered himself a poet (before he became a photographer and film maker) and how he was especially interested in that type of poetry concerned with its visual appearance, with its layout on the page, with its sense of being a pictorial image.

In *Nostaglia,* the past-future tension already discussed can also be considered as a tension between words and images. Frampton's commentary discusses the images before we see them. He gives us historical background to the images, interprets them in some cases (for example, in a hilarious iconographic reading of two toilets) and describes their content. When we actually see the photograph for the first time, there is a jolt of surprise, sometimes a little disappointment, often a shock of delight. There is always a gap between what we imagined from the spoken commentary and the actual photograph. Frampton induces an imaginative visualization on our part and then jolts our imagination by showing us the real image. That jolt amply demonstrates the inadequacy of words to deal with images and the privileged status of an image.

In *Critical Mass,* a problem is posed in terms of the tension between what we hear and what we see. In three sections of the film, we see nothing; the screen is blank. Our whole experience is concentrated on listening to words being spoken, a fairly difficult and also very funny task because of the stutter effect. The first time we see the couple, when the image is also "stuttering", the sound and image are more or less synchronized as we expect in a dialogue film. The second time we see the couple, the sound and image go out of synch. Words and images play against each other, seeming almost to discredit each other. The image's tendency to support the sound in a dialogue sequence is subverted and the disparateness in the experience of listening to words and looking at images, which is usually obscured in a dialogue film, is affirmed.

Poetic Justice poses an especially complex problem in the relationship of word to image because the film is rendered completely through written descriptions of each shot. As in *Nostalgia,* we are expected to visualize the film in our mind's eye, but there are no images with which to compare our imaginative construction. The series of images we are to imagine is communicated through a language system, not through an image system. This language system, the descriptive words written on sheets of paper, constitutes the movie we see on the screen; we never see anything more than the sheets and the table. A duality is established. We are dealing with a film about a film. Cinematic images portray words which portray cinematic images.

The high degree of reflexivity in the images described complicates the structure. As mentioned, in one tableau, every second "shot" contains a photograph of the "shot" before it: an image (the photograph) is imagined within an image (cinematic shot). In another tableau, each "shot" describes a couple making love in a room, but in each a different action is described as being visible through the window of the room. This window becomes a kind of screen for the projection of a succession of images—again an image within an image. In the first and last tableaux, some of the "shots" include someone referred to as "you" photographing what we "see" in other "shots". We are to imagine images of people making images which we then "see". At the end of the film, the second person construction, the reference to "you" and "your lover", breaks down and an "I", presumably Frampton, enters the film; according to the written shot descriptions, he is to be seen first photographing the "you" and "your lover" and then photographing the sheets of paper which describe the film we have been imagining. The reflexivity moves from the film we have been visualizing to the film on the screen. At this point, in the very last shot of the film, a rubber glove suddenly appears on top of the sheets of paper; the logic that had been established by "reading" each image is shattered by the appearance of an actual image. The incredible rigor with which Frampton pursues his theme and the almost infinite number of combinations that he creates from his structures indicates the complexity of Frampton's work.

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: AN INTERVIEW

by

Michael Snow

What's your name?

My name is Hollis Frampton. What's your name?

My name is Michael Snow.

SNOW: I'd like to ask you a series of questions: the first one is, where were you living when you made your first film, and what if any are the relationships between this place where you were living and your first film and also, when was the film done?

FRAMPTON: I was living in Wayne County, Ohio when I made what I think of as my first film—that would be in the summer of 1943 when I was 7 years old. I conceived that insane desire to make a movie of some kind . . . which I couldn't do very well by myself, and I didn't know the technology of cameras, films and so forth . . . but I drew this thing and wheedled an understanding grandfather into building it for me. It was in the form of a continuous belt—about 6 feet long which ran over 2 rollers horizontally, driven by an old handcranked phonograph motor which would run for 3 or 4 minutes, unwinding behind a proscenium made out of cardboard—(the proscenium was) just a sheet with a rectangular hole cut in it. The movie was made by pasting *Sears and Roebuck* catalog cutouts and farm equipment catalog cutouts onto cardboard and putting tabs on them and attaching the tabs to the belt, so that they would run along continually . . . of course all the things had different scale, and were either in greasy black and white or in greasy sepia. Very often, a tractor would be smaller than a man. I remember a red mackinaw jacket, one of the few colored things in the catalog, on the cover, which I cut out by itself because the man's face had been obliterated . . . and it passed by, after a while, marginally, as did almost everything else in the movie . . . and I found several pages of prize Zinnias in a seed catalog . . . and I pasted them onto a piece of cardboard as a stationary background. I had ideas about elaborating on this.

As far as having relation to the place, I suppose it was a conglomeration of my grandfather, the implementation of the seed catalogs, and my need to do my thing.

SNOW: Though there are few similarities in your work and that of the man who used the description "sentimental scientist" to describe himself, I think it could be used to describe you. What objections to this do you have?

FRAMPTON: Only two really. I'll take up your words one at a time. First of all, I don't believe myself to be sentimental. We'll drop it at that point because here we enter upon questions concerning personal vanity. I could be impeached for considering myself "sentimental" at some later time.

As for being a scientist, I certainly am not, not even a Christian Scientist. I've been sentimental about scientists at one time or another—and even about sentimental scientists like Duchamp. For me the sciences, as distinct from the technologies, have always been a spectator sport—circuses that seem to have replaced most of the bread.

SNOW: One of your films is called *Maxwell's Demon* . . .

FRAMPTON: Well, I wanted to do something—to put it as sentimentally as possible—for James Clerk-Maxwell who is, or was, either the last qualitative physicist or the first quantitative physicist. Maxwell is known and admired among physicists for his work in thermodynamics, which is something I don't know or understand very much about. I believe we're all steeped in thermodynamics in the physical sense; but I have particularly revered Clerk Maxwell because he became, in a very brief aside in a lecture delivered at the Royal College of Edinburgh or some place like that, the Father of the Analytical Theory of Color, which, in it's applications and ramifications, has given us color photography and color cinematography. He said, that he thought that all colors could be analyzed into 3 components—a red component, a green component and a blue component, and that all colors could be resynthesized from these three colors, so that in this case, all film makers owe Clerk Maxwell a considerable debt. As for his Demon: in one of his works on dynamics of gases or something like that he proposed in a preface or in a paper or in a chapter-heading, a hypothetical Demon who could be stationed at a partition, or at an aperture, or gate or orifice in a partition within a tank divided into 2 equal parts that contained a gas, and that he would be instructed

to pass through the gate any molecule *above* a certain level of energy, and to reject all others. Eventually, if the Demon were efficient, all the molecules of excited gas would be in one half, and all the "lazy" molecules would be in the other half. This, of course, would create, eventually, a strong inequality between the 2 sides. The problem about the Demon is that as he got more and more excited molecules into one side they would come at him more and more frequently, (and) he would have more and more trouble excluding them as they tried to pass through the gate, so that as he got further along on his job, the Demon would have to work harder and harder and faster and faster all the time. While this has complicated thermodynamic consequences, it's only been in the last 10 years that someone has constructed a mathematical model of the Demon and has excorcised him permanently. I liked the concept of a being who worked entirely in forms of pure energy; and since he was Maxwell's also, I decided to include him in the film. Both of those things which I know about Clerk Maxwell are included in the film.

SNOW: Do you think that your close contact with painting and sculpture, while you aren't a painter or sculptor, has affected your films?

FRAMPTON: In the case of painting. I believe that one reason I stayed with still photography as long as I did was an attempt, fairly successful I think, to rid myself of the succubus of painting. Painting has for a long time been sitting on the back of everyone's neck like a Muse "in heat", whispering in our ears and . . . it has crept into territories outside its own proper domain. I have seen, in the last year or so, films which I have come to realize are built largely around what I take to be painterly concerns and I feel that those films are very foreign to my feeling and my purpose. As for sculpture, I think a lot of my early convictions about sculpture, in a concrete sense, have affected my handling of film as a physical material. My experience of sculpture has had a lot to do with my relative willingness to take up film in hand as a physical material and work with it. Without it, I might have been tempted to more literary ways of using film—or more abstract ways of using film.

SNOW: That was going to be another question: are your films, quote "literary" and what could this possibly mean to you?

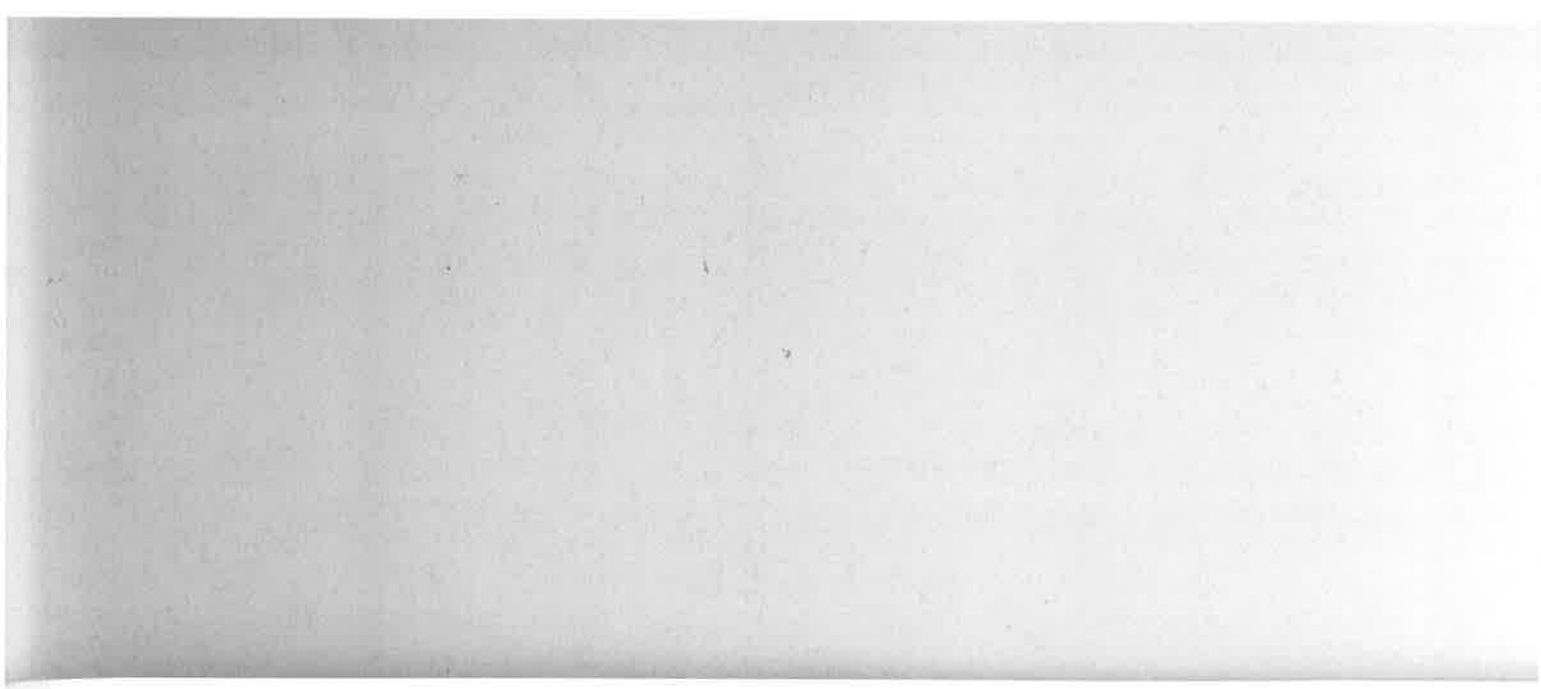
FRAMPTON: I think "literary film" is a pretty cut and dried phrase since most establishment film is literary in the sense that the people who made the films, particularly since the beginning of sound, made them out of stories, books and novels. The commercial view has been that the film is an interesting way of telling an interesting story.

SNOW: In this context then, you would translate the word "literary" as meaning narrative?

FRAMPTON: I would. The only sense in which I think anything about my films is literary to my own satisfaction is that I try to give my films titles that will give a distance from the films' themes . . . the same distance that a short work of literature has from its subject; that is, its pretext.

SNOW: Would you describe the structure and the quote "tensions" of your films *Heterodyne* and *Surface Tension;* and in the case of *Surface Tension,* what are your ideas concerning sound-image relationship?

FRAMPTON: These are several separate questions. Let's start with the structure and intention of *Heterodyne.* I began to make it when I had no money for raw stock and only several rolls of colored leader but nevertheless (had) the need to make or work on a film. As I first conceived the film, I intended it to be a kind of revenge done with the bare hands against—first of all animation—or cell animation in particular and secondly, against abstract films with a capital "A" as they were practiced in the late 40's and 50's as a kind of engine cooler for the art houses where I first saw serious foreign movies. As I thought about the film, I wanted it to have a very open, resilient kind of structure with the maximum possible amount of rhythmic variety, both in terms of "count", "beat" and variety in the rhythmic changes of shapes and the rate of the rhythmic change. I used a debased form of matrix algebra to make up, in advance, the structure of the film, and tried out several arithmetic models for that structure . . . with very short film pieces, before I found one that seemed to suit me. As I came to make the film, it consists entirely of 240 feet of black leader into which are welded about 1,000 separate events. Each consists of one frame, and there are 40 kinds of frame, ranging from a frame that consists entirely of red or green or blue to a frame which may consist of red leader with a triangle of blue leader welded into the middle of it. I say "welded" because the film was put together using three colors of leader and 3 ticket punches—a square, a circle and a triangle—which I felt to be constantly recognizable and also impersonal shapes—and where one color is let into another, or where a color shape is let into black leader, it is literally welded in with acetone. I was doing all of this under a magnifying glass with tweezers and brushes and so forth . . . they're disposed along the continuous line



of film by a scheme roughly the following: in order to avoid a scheme in which certain types of frames would, by rhythmic recurrence, fall at the same spot in the film, or in the same exact frame, I decided to use prime numbers, that is, numbers divisible only by themselves and as a starting-point since they begin to share harmonics extensively only in their very high multiples—I further decided that I could use no prime numbers less than 40, because 40 is the number of frames in a foot and I didn't want any single type of event to occur any more often than once every one and two/thirds seconds, and then I subjected my list of prime numbers over 40 to a series of tests that involved the sums of their digits—casting out those that didn't meet the tests so that as it turned out the commonest event, a frame that is entirely red, occurs every 61 frames in absolutely regular repetition throughout the film; and the least common event, a red triangle on a black ground, occurs every 2,311 frames—all of this necessitated an amount of arithmetic which I did over a period of 6 weeks—reduced it to a large stock of 3×5 cards and collated them, and sat down with my rewinds and splicer and simply put the thing together—altogether on the level of personal logistics, it . . . tied up my time and need to be making a film for about 3 months, at the end of which I found myself with a little more money for raw stock and I could go on and make other kinds of films.

SNOW: So you prefer to use images of photographic material?

FRAMPTON: I certainly do. I think *Heterodyne* came out all right, though. I like it. I think it is, in a way, a model for a photographed film, using 40 different kinds of photographed single-frame images, staggered out in a similar way. I'm not sure that would change the structure of the film in any way, but it could be taken as a model of that kind. I don't ever propose to make a film of that kind again. I believe I'll be using punching and welding . . .

SNOW: I don't believe that that structure stands as something immutable and not altered—

I believe that it would be altered by another use.

FRAMPTON: I think so, too.

SNOW: It's simplistic to think that the structure itself is discernable with any kind of material in the same way, or even in any way that is or has any connection with another use. It's a very interesting thing, I think.

FRAMPTON: Well, I agree, with different material, you have to use a different matrix.

SNOW: That isn't to say that it couldn't be applicable to a scheme—one used with different materials but it could become something so totally different that when you traced to the underpinning you would be discovering nothing.

I had another question. You once maintained that films should be silent—what changed your mind? I think that would be a good preceeding question in talking about *Surface Tension.*

FRAMPTON: Well, I still maintain that the official history of film shows a certain kind of general quality in the available monuments of sound film. Film, from its very birth, from the time of the Lumière brothers, was instantly surrounded on all sides by exploiters, commercializers and charlatans, but I think sound especially contributed to the decline of film by ossifying the early talkies into a standard saleable product. There is no reason why an individual artist could not break out of that and of course there have been films where the sound track, in fact did advance the internal motion or the formal development of the film, the individual film, not the film at large. What I suppose I had in mind when I condemned all sound for movies was a doctrinaire posture to keep myself from being tempted at the time with the spectacle of Eisenstein in *Alexander Nevsky,* who is, I think, with that film, distinctly on the run. He, in later life, disowned his first film, *Strike,* but I think *Strike* was a far better film than *Alexander Nevsky* —for I find Prokofieff's music and Eisenstein's film very often engaged in doing nothing more than grating upon each other. My remarks were addressed more to myself than to other people. I certainly wouldn't prohibit anyone from making sound films. I've been relaxing my own rules, recently.

That's one view. I suppose what magnetizes me is the enormous disaster of Wagner's fusion of the arts. I can only agree with Rémy de Gourmont when he said "God ignores Wagner", possibly because He's the only Being able to get far enough away from the din. I believe that any art thrives by its limitations. I don't think we can gain much by stockpiling one on top of another, where there's more and more sensory overload. Sensory overload turns into mental underwear. One of the things I've always liked about films is the, to our culture at least, the exactitude of limitation and standardization of the conditions under which films are seen and the fact that instead of including many more senses, you are helped as much as possible to limit yourself to a very intense concentration in the use of 1 or 2 senses. Not that I don't think that cracking popcorn—sensory "noise"—is part of the film experience—I really do.

There may be something of interest to be done in the building it in, in a manner of speaking.

SNOW: We've wandered a long way. Let's go back to the sound-image relationship, speaking specifically, of *Surface Tension.*

FRAMPTON: Quite frankly with *Surface Tension,* I didn't propose to attack so grand a fortress as The Sound-Image Relationship. I wanted to make a film out of a relatively small number of simple elements, which would be of a piece, to see how much resonance I could generate among those elements. As you know, the film fundamentally contains 3 shots—a man talking while his digital clock runs; a single dolly shot from the middle of the Brooklyn Bridge to the lake in Central Park; and a goldfish swimming very slowly back and forth in a tank outside the sea. Further, it contains only 2 quite simple sounds: one, the sound of the telephone ringing 37 times; and the other, a prose description which for the average speaker of English comes through as a single prolonged sound because it's in a foreign language—in this case, German. Naturally, I had other and more subtle concerns to work out within the body of each of the 5 or 6 blocks of material that I was using. I did certainly want it to be a sound film and I didn't see how I could do it without sound to build up the internal reverberation I wanted among the various parts of the film . . . but I wanted it to be—a very simple sound film, or a film that used sound in a way more simple and obvious than most sound films have—namely, in part as the most direct kind of sensation and presentation rather than as a directly parallel explication or echo or reminder of something that happens to be going on on the screen. *Maxwell's Demon,* as you remember, is also a sound film, and one reason I chose the sound I did—the sound of film perforations—just plain film perforations—was not only to increase the mass of some of the interspersed shots in the film, but also because I wanted to use the first sound that film ever made which is the sound of film itself. I wanted to use the most fundamental kind of sound in *Surface Tension,* perhaps, simply as the next stage. As a general footnote, I should say that I think of my films in part as an effort to reconstruct the history of films as it "should have been".

SNOW: It is possible for film?

FRAMPTON: Every man will make his own art—on the other hand, I do think some improvements can be made. Let's put it this way—I don't desire immortality for my own work—which I think pretty well saturates the market with 10 or 12 people (who) have seen it half a dozen times apiece. On the other hand that little decision on immortality should be made by "the people" not by us—they are the ones who will have their way.

THE FILMS OF ERNIE GEHR

by

Bill Simon

The structural film makers work in two different manners: one is exemplified by the work of Hollis Frampton. The other is observed in the work of Ernie Gehr, Barry Gerson, and Michael Snow. The latter film makers take a single space and explore it through either a single cinematic strategy or a set of strategies. Their films usually involve an exhaustive analysis of both the space and the strategies, frequently in a mathematical fashion exploring all the permutations and combinations of the possibilities that have been posited. This mathematical approach and tone are reflected in the division of the film into separate units, each another step in the exploration, the relative "flatness" of the rhythm of most of the films, their analytic as opposed to emotional quality.

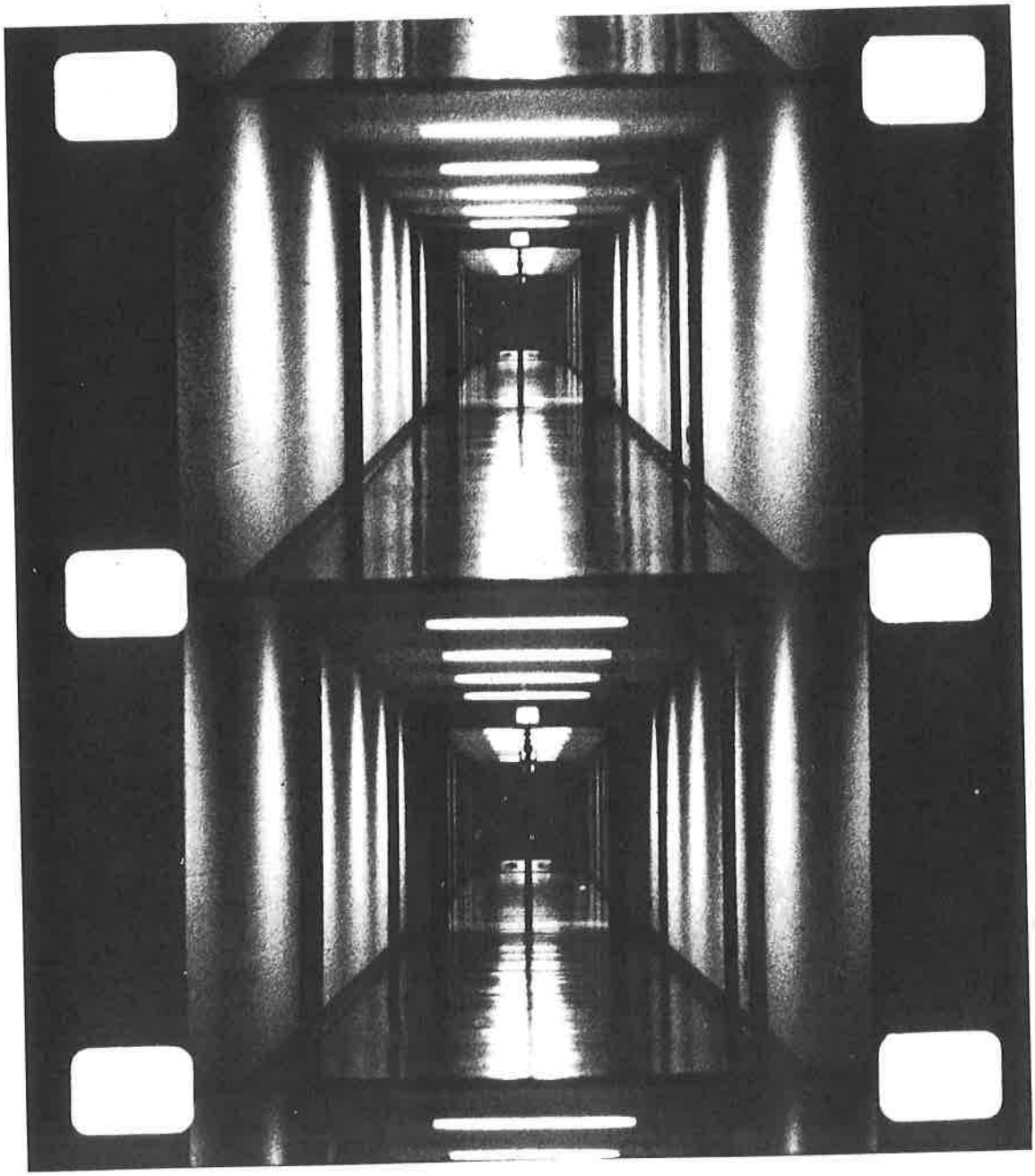
The isolation of a single technique or a fixed set of strategies calls attention to the techniques or strategies themselves. Structural films consciously explore the processes of the medium. They are reflexive, dealing with filming and projecting, the filmstrip, the projection of light, the screen. They raise questions about the effects of the handling of formal elements, for example, the effect of a shooting angle or camera movement on the perception of space. They traffic in the illusions inherent in the film-making and viewing process, exploiting and dispelling the illusions simultaneously and heightening the viewer's awareness of them. The films are both sensuous objects and intellectual constructs, their special ability is to gratify the senses and to induce thought.

Ernie Gehr's *Serene Velocity* (1971) exemplifies this type of structural film. Gehr takes the corridor of a modern university building and explores it through the use of a particular cinematic procedure:

> I used a 16 mm. camera with a zoom lens. Divided the mm. range of the zoom lens in half and starting from the middle I recorded changes in mm. positions. Alternatively increasing and decreasing the depth of field and slowly increasing the difference between positions . . . The camera was not moved at all. The zoom lens was not moved during recording either. Each frame was recorded individually as a still. Four frames to each position. To give an example: I shot the first four frames at 50 mm. The next four frames I shot at 55 mm. And then, for a certain duration, approximately 60 feet, I went back and forth, four frames at 50 mm., four frames et 55 mm. . . Then I went to 45-60 and did the same for about 60 feet. Then to 40-65, and so on.

The result is stunning film visually and kinetically. Because the shot at each position is so brief—one-sixth of a second—the deep corridor is thrown into a state of continuous pulsation; the rectangular deep end of the corridor appears to jump back and forth, from the extreme depth of the space to the foreground. The lines and planes of the corridor expand and contract, leap forwards, zoom backwards. Although the film's geometry frequently evokes comparisons with Stella and Mondrian, it most resembles Albers' *Hommage to the Square* series with the interior space in a continuous state of oscillation from the deep recessive background to the foreground. The color and structure of the corridor add to the effect. The dominant color (walls, floor, ceiling) is a fluorescent-inflected blue-green. Black lines at the junctures of walls, floor, ceiling, and doors divide the space into rectangles. White fluorescent lights and bright red exit lights punctuate the ceiling space.

The overwhelming experience of *Serene Velocity*, aside from its kinetic power, revolves around the ambiguity of what one is seeing. As the space of the corridor becomes elongated, new objects—water fountains, an electric outlet, doors—become visible and raise the question whether they were there before. A door which appeared to one side of a water fountain suddenly appears on both sides due to optical superimposition. One wonders if there is an illusion, tries to understand how it is created, and to dispel the illusion. The film's rhythm, while mechanically exact (four frames per shot), varies in the viewing experience because the eye cannot assimilate the rapidity of the changing shots. One asks if the rhythm is really changing, if there is a pattern to the changes, whether others feel the same changes. Fixation on the doors at the back of the space results in one kind of visual experience; fixation on the red exit lights alters that experience. One wonders what one missed in the foreground by concentrating on the background. *Serene Velocity* is both an art



object and a perceptual puzzle. It involves the viewer in the sensuous experience of movement, form, and color, in the performance of a task (solving the puzzle, resolving the ambiguous conundrum), and in the act of analysis (speculations on how the film was made, realizations concerning the illusory qualities involved).

Gehr's *Still* (1972) evokes similar responses in another way. He takes a single space—a city street with lanes of moving traffic, a parking lane, a line of buildings—and makes multiple exposures. Each section consists of a primary exposure of the street with traffic and people going by and a varying number of other exposures over this. The superimpositions are of varying density so that some of cars and people are partially opaque and others transparent. Different sections of the film use different combinations of superimpositions. Most of the time, for example, a single row of parked cars appears in the parking lane, but in one section there are two superimposed rows of parked cars.

As in *Serene Velocity*, the image is ambiguous: a man crosses the street, through ghostlike cars and buses; upper parts of cars and people appear from a mysterious off-screen space located apparently below the bottom of the frame. The temporal situation is complex, for we are watching several events simultaneously and they tend to blend. Attempts to distinguish which cars or people belong in which exposure result in confusion. The puzzle presented confronts the viewer with technical procedure, with the materiality of the medium, with the illusions upon which the medium is based.

Ernie Gehr, STILL

PROGRAM NOTES BY ERNIE GEHR FOR A FILM SCREENING AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK CITY

A still has to do with a particular intensity of light, an image, a composition frozen in time and space.

A shot has to do with a variable intensity of light, an internal balance of time dependent upon an intermittent movement and a movement within a given space dependent upon persistence of vision.

A shot can be a film, or a film may be composed of a number of shots.

A still as related to film is concerned with using and losing an image of something through time and space. In representational films sometimes the image affirms its own presence as image, graphic entity, but most often it serves as vehicle to a photo-recorded event. Traditional and established avant-garde film teaches film to be an image, a representing. But film is a real thing and as a real thing it is not imitation. It does not reflect on life, it embodies the life of the mind. It is not a vehicle for ideas or portrayals of emotion outside of its own existence as emoted idea. Film is a variable intensity of light, an internal balance of time, a movement within a given space.

When I began to make films I believed pictures of things must go into films if anything was to mean anything. This is what almost everybody who has done anything worthwhile with film has done and is still doing but this again has to do with everything a still is—a representing. And when I actually began filming I found this small difficulty: neither film, filming nor projecting had anything to do with emotions, objects, beings, or ideas. I degan to think about this and what film really is and how we see and feel and experience film.

Morning and *Wait* were the first works in which I tried to break down the essential contradictions of still and shot by enormously emphasizing the still-frame—each frame—as a particular intensity of light, a frozen composition in time and space and its difference and its relation to the shot/film. Out of this came a new balance in the shot and in the frame (now seen, rather than seen through). The film became an arrangement of stills.

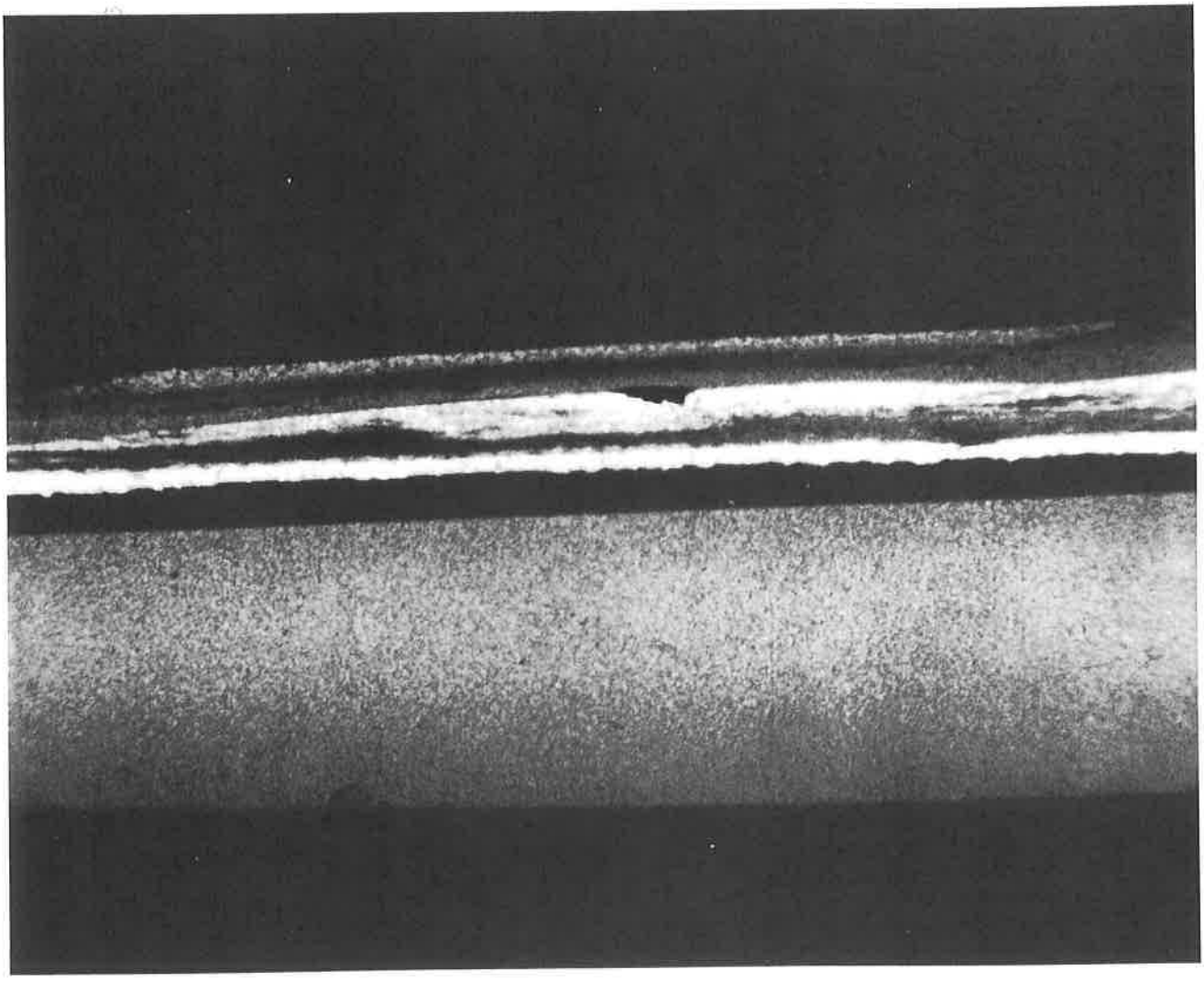
Reverberation began as an attempt at a portrayal, a representing of a concept of a life situation by way of film, and turned in the making of it into a presentation of the physical movement of film itself, stranding the photo-memory of persons/objects/their relationships in a cinematic force-field wherein images are offered up and simultaneously swept away by conflicting energies.

Sound as it comes from a speaker has its own quality. No matter how close it comes in reproducing sound of living beings or objects this quality is always the sound of the projector, the wires, the tubes and the speakers. This is its actuality. And it can be heard and experienced as sound, a form of energy.

History. Motion on a non-perspective plane. In which we infer a struggle for space-form determined by inner necessities. Movement and countermovement. The step the eye-brain takes from a surface to a point of light and to a point of darkness. The whole process of seeing something in seeing. The process of seeing and perceiving film. What happens to film as it is exposed to light. As it is developed. How this becomes a form that is film. History. Film in its primordial state in which patterns of light and darkness—planes—are still undivided. Like the natural order of the universe, an unbroken flow in which movement and distribution of tension is infinitely subtle, in which a finite orientation seems impossible. ("At last, the first film!": Michael Snow.)

In *Serene Velocity* the optical and psychological factors—persistence of vision/reciprocal tension—that allow for the movie illusion of motion and space become the subject of the film itself.

Still. A pictorial orientation of a surface of light populated by opaque, semi-opaque and transparent shadows (light apparitions). Our experience of the film plane filtered (colored and pullod on) by the film image is determined by inner human conditioning and development of perception.



THE FILMS OF BARRY GERSON

by

Bill Simon

Barry Gerson's films are concerned with the ambiguity of the space of the shot. His main preoccupation is the shooting angle, the relationship between the camera and what it photographs, the importance of the frame in structuring our perception of a space. His basic procedure in his brief "studies" is to take a single space and to observe it from differing angles, framing it in various ways, showing the way that the angle and frame change the space. To complicate the questions he poses, Gerson frequently places secondary framing devices within a shot.

The longest of his films shown, *Contemplating* (1969), consists of a series of beach shots. The camera is at a very low angle, just above the sand in some shots, enabling us to see all of the contours and textures of the sand. The ocean in the background appears as a flat dark color band. In other shots the camera is at a higher angle closer to the ocean, contemplating it, transforming the flat anonymous color band into a living organism with its own complex, varied rhythms and textures. At times, he shoots through a rectangular frame within the frame of the shot, altering our perception of the spatial relationships of sky, ocean, and sand. He also masks the bottom part of the image with a board which obscures the foreground space. As he changes the camera angle in relation to the mask, the image wavers between one with four rather flat bands (sky, ocean, sand, board) and one with more realistic deep space.

A variation is worked out in *Beyond* (1969). The foreground discloses the red hair and the shoulders of a girl lying on a beach, the background sand and ocean with the horizon line tipped at about a 45° angle. The camera angle is low, shooting over the top of the girl. Gerson pulls focus several times, highlighting first the girl, then the beach, shifting our attention from one space to the other. At the very end of the film, he raises the camera to a higher angle and the portions of the beach previously obscured by the girl's form become visible and the two spaces—girl and beach, foreground and background—are joined.

In *Beaded Light* (1969), Gerson applies an ambiguous procedure to our perception of color and light. A necklace of beads hangs from the handle of a door. The door is open and slowly swings to and fro. Perhaps the camera moves a little too. The movement of the door allows varying amounts of light to shine on the handle and beads. Our perception of both objects varies with the amount of light shining on them. When more light pours in, the handle seems out of focus and the beads almost disintegrate into rays of reflected light. When less light comes in, the handle and beads take form. The texture and color of the beads become discernible. The uncertainty about the nature of what we are seeing is partly dispelled.

Gerson's films are studies; the six screened films are arranged together as in a volume. Small in scale and modest in ambition, they posit a space and a strategy for exploring it. The exploration usually revolves around an ambiguity which is never completely resolved. Like Gehr, Gerson poses questions about what we are seeing and how it was made. He plays against representationalism or rather capitalizes on one's expectation of it to confuse, obscure, and transform, and in the process, he elucidates a theoretical construct.

A STATEMENT BY BARRY GERSON

If, for example, there existed, say, thirty layers of realities and we perceived only three or ten or twenty nine they would be illusions of reality because we would not be seeing all thirty. One reality relates to another in the sense that they are parallel. Film is a medium which presented the *illusion of images*—for an image is an illusion—images of things seen in *Film Time.*

I see specific shapes as emitting a particular kind of energy—just as the pyramid form concentrates cosmic energy—certain shapes placed on film, through the magic of light, in given specific relationship to other specific shapes, create forms which have a very definite energy field and affect us in very subtle ways. These shapes are created through light, motion, color, time, as relating to the overall shape of the screen—i.e., a rectangle. Therefore, the shapes operating within the rectangle must work with that shape, i.e. a new form is created by the relationship between the screen rectangle in combination with the shapes within the rectangle.

When I look through the camera I am applying an enormous amount of concentration and it is through this concentration that a state of high is reached, not unsimilar to a state of meditation in which alpha waves are predominant. I say, not unsimilar, because a high degree of psychic energy is in operation, brought about by the concentration involved in looking into the camera, with its rectangular framing, and developed, or heightened, compositional awareness.

I feel a strong sense of communication between my being and the objects and elements which I film. These objects and elements are alive—I feel their energy—whether they are created by man or nature, they live by virtue of their chemical and energy relationships which are further determined by their shapes. It is a monumental task to place one object next to another—to place one image next to another. What subtle energy is being generated and could be liberated by such a placement! What fragile beauty is perceived when constantly faced with the unknown. The world is a mysterious place.

My films, as objects, have a life of their own once they leave my hands and it becomes an increasingly strange experience, as time passes, to see these films and kknow that they contain a part of me which I have willingly given up. So I am dying a little bit with the creation of each film, I am dying a joyously slow death filled with the wonder of what I see.

I would like to stress at the outset what not to expert from my films. They do not come out of an aesthetic based in literature nor any other verbal form—therefore there is no intended symbolism or metaphor. Symbols imply a subject—there is no subject in my films. Symbols ultimately give way to word images—they stand out—my images contain forms which are ultimately equal to one another. One part of the image is no more important than another part—the forms operate together —what is occurring on the left edge of the screen lives because of what occurs on the right edge, top edge, middle, etc. I am concerned with the beauty of mystery, magical happenings, chance occurences, relationships between objects and elements and how these qualities are revealed through a concern for the formal aspects of cinema.

Light is the revealer and the projector is the magic lantern that gives life to film forms. The pyramidal shape of the projection light shapes the energy flow and what shapes appear on the rectangular screen either work with or against that energy flow—for the screen is the base of that pyramid and we—sitting under it are affected by its power.

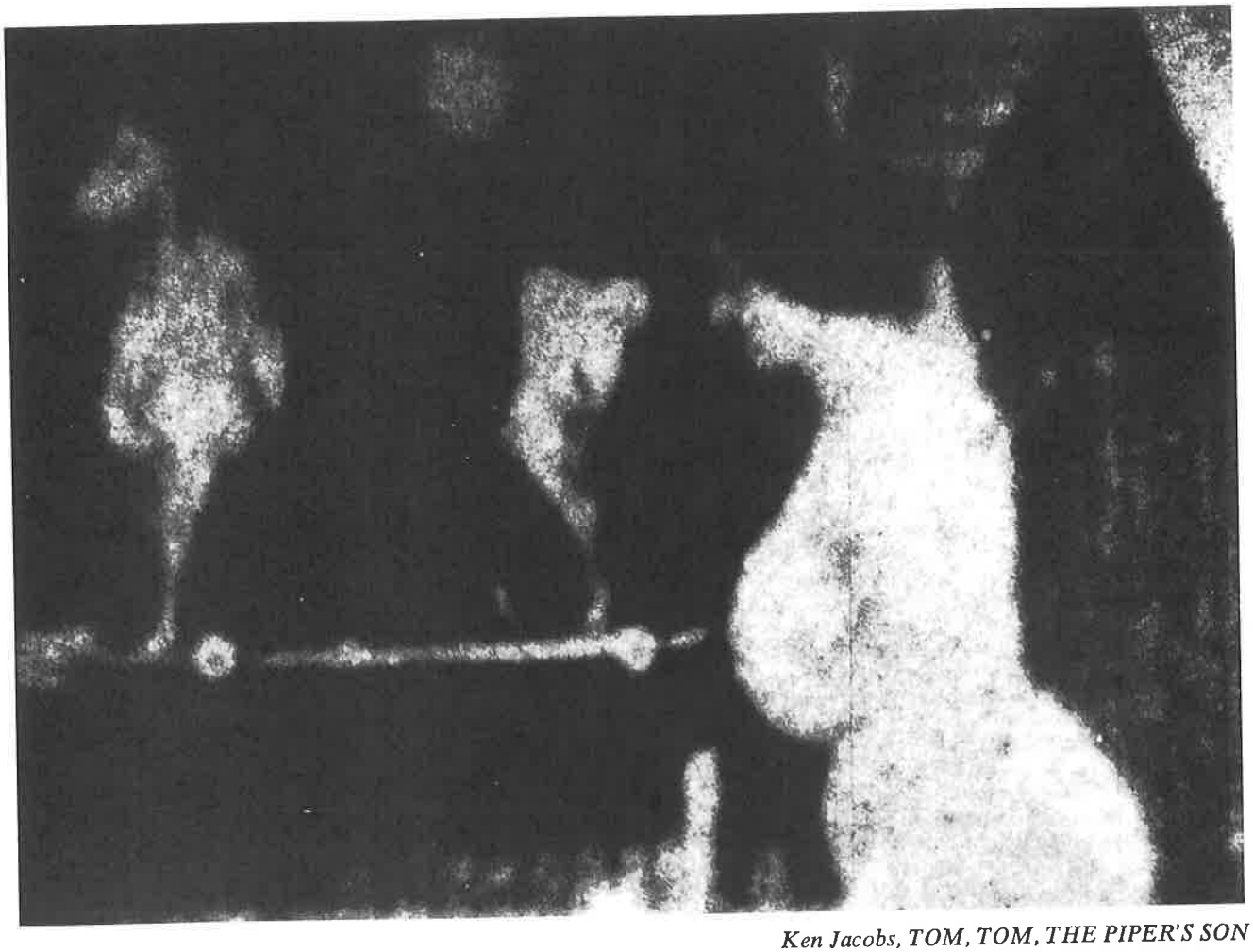
I have briefly touched on several of my many concerns in film and life, for my work is an integral part of my life, and I would like to clarify more fully some of these concerns—but in order to do so, it is necessary first to discuss the concept of symbolism as being in opposition to my general aesthetic. I offer as an example—a rose—the time worn symbol of beauty. It has become accepted as such because of repeated use of the rose in literature, painting, etc. within a given *frame of reference* which allows it to operate as a symbol. So, we are confronted with the rose as a subject. By this I mean that if, for example, a rose is seen in a prominent position in a picture, it is prominent because of the frame of reference, and since there is *agreement* among viewers, derived from their past associations with the rose in literature, etc., it will automatically be construed to stand as a symbol for beauty. But, if a red rose is used in a picture in which there are other objects and elements of the color red, and if it is not placed in a conspicuous position—we then are faced with a very different frame of reference. It is no longer a rose, but has become simply another red form operating with other red forms and it is perceived as a field of red

energy. Now, one could say, well the *color* red is symbolic in itself of anger, excitement, etc.—but if the red is shown in a frame of reference in which it is perceivable that it is a part of a whole, i.e., acting as one color unit in relationship to other color units, its strength as symbol is completely non-existent.

Traditionally, cinema images have quite often dealt with a *subject*, i.e. a person or persons, an object, an element. These are photographed as one shot or scene and act on a level of giving information—examples being a shot of water, of fire, a tree, etc. This then presents one with a defined foreground and background—or possibly just a foreground. Because of this kind of usage—the shot or scene becomes symbolic because of either its placement in relationship to other scenes, such as in montage, or by its repetition, i.e., a series of the same subject, possibly from different perspectives.

Historically speaking, I see my films as an outgrowth of the Surrealist tradition—but from that small wing of surrealism in which symbolism was not a concern.

It is a *natural process* that takes place with regard to my use of familiar objects and elements. I am concerned with *images*, images which present *film realities* in which the objects and elements are *removed* from their *ordinary reality* and are perceived as *living film forms*. These films have evolved through a process of *rigorous seeing*, a process by which I perceive reality as being made up of *layers of realities* taking place in Space and Time. My consciousness perceives beauty in the subtle overlappings of these mysterious realities and film acts as a mirror—giving me back these expressions of realities—further transformed in film time, space, color, etc. What we call ordinary reality is nothing more than a *convenient frame of reference*—it is an illusion—an illusion born out of fear of the unknown. It is an illusion simply because we perceive it as being the only reality.



Ken Jacobs, TOM, TOM, THE PIPER'S SON

KEN JACOB'S, "TOM, TOM, THE PIPER'S SON"

by

Lois Mendelson and Bill Simon

Ken Jacob's film, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son,* is, with Vertrov's *Man with a Movie Camera,* one of the two great works of a reflexive cinema whose primary subject is an esthetic definition of the nature of the medium. Jacobs himself has called it "a didactic film". It deals with several major critical areas: with representation, narrative and abstraction, with the illusions involved in the film-viewing experience, with the possible ways of handling space and time, with structure and with perception. It is, as well, a work of radical transformation; a primitive work from the earliest period of film history is transformed into a highly innovative work, modernist in character, constantly pleasurable to the eye and, at the same time, a sophisticated exercise in film and art criticism.

Jacobs, then, has taken an early American film called *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son,* a rendering of the nursery rhyme, and recreated it. He first presents the original film as it was made in 1905. Then, for 86 minutes, by photographing the original film while it is being projected, Jacobs performs an exhaustive analysis of it. Finally, he shows the original film in its entirety once again, adding a brief coda of his own.

The original film is 10 minutes in length and consists of eight tableaux or shots showing a crowd in pursuit of Tom and a stolen pig. All eight tableaux are photographed in a basically theatrical way—in long shot, with the camera placed front row center. The space in each of the shots is shallow and is articulated in a very simple manner—with some use of groups and with some suggestion of receding space painted on the sets. There is also very little rhythmic articulation. Events either happen all at once and are difficult to distinguish or else are strung out at great length one after another.

The film has great charm, largely because there is a decorative quality to the painted sets and the costumes (supposedly modeled after Hogarth prints) and also because there is so much close attention to detail. In the many revellers, a fight between sailors, as well as the opening tableau, at the fair, there are acrobats, jugglers, stealing of the pig—a tableau crammed with simultaneous activities. The subsequent tableaux follow the chase with each of the ten or twelve chasers individually jumping into haystacks, climbing out of chimneys, climbing over or through fences, all ending in a barnyard filled with ducks, geese, and flying birds.

From this, Jacobs has made a radically different film. Using the basic procedure of photographing the original film from a screen upon which it is being projected, he employs just about every strategy known to film. He photographs varied portions of the original shots, sometimes showing a shot in almost its full size, sometimes blowing up a very minute part of the original. He moves his camera along, up, down, into, and away from the original, in which there is no camera movement at all. He uses the freeze frame technique, stopping the original on any one frame for any period of time, then going back into motion. He uses slow motion, reverse motion, superimpositions, masks, and wipes. He adds black and clear leader, creates a flicker effect, and leaves in the circles and flares that appear at the end of reels of film. He photographs the film strip as such and sets his screen within a larger spatial context, creating a kind of screen-within-a-screen. He does shadow play with fingers against the screen from which he is shooting, visibly moves that screen while the film is being projected, and even photographs the light bulb of the projector. He also adds two color sequences which do not appear in the original film. All of these strategies are employed both individually and in the most extraordinarily complex combinations. Jacobs sets up an extremely rich vocabulary and proceeds to employ it exhaustively, using the basic montage principle (the possibility of combining in any way) to create a completely new work.

In doing all of this, Jacobs is essentially involved in an analysis, a contemplation, of the original work. "I've cut into the film's monumental homogeneity (8 statically photographed sets . . .) with some sense of trespass, cropped and given a Griffith emphasis to parts originally submerged in the whole—but (this is a didactic film) it was necessary to do so in order to begin to show how much was there." Very much attracted to the original film, he decided to show what interesed him in it. His film is a revelation of the original, achieved by analyzing, fragmenting, and abstracting the original and reconstituting it as a new film. In revealing what interested him in the

original, Jacobs has revealed what interests him in film. And in so doing, he has created a discourse on the nature of film. He has created a film that deals with several major esthetic problems and preoccupations.

The 1905 *Tom, Tom* is both a representational and a narrative film. It depicts a world which has reference to people, places, and objects that we can recognize and it tells a story which we are expected to follow. Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom* is quite different. Because Jacobs subjects the images to so many radical alterations, they frequently lose their recognizability and attain varying degrees of abstraction. The point of reference both to the outside world and to the original film disappears. A human body becomes patterns of lines, forms, and light and dark. Thus, Jacobs' film constantly oscillates between two kinds of images—the completely representational and the completely abstract, with all the varying gradations between representational and abstract also included.

In addition, there is a constant oscillation between narrative and abstract images. As long as enough of the original images is shown, the actions of the original film are recognizable. The audience can react to what is being seen in terms of actions, of a narrative. On the other hand, when Jacobs photographs a smaller part of the original film or otherwise distorts the image, the audience can no longer react in terms of actions.

Two points become clear in Jacob's treatment of this problem. The first is the degree to which representation and narrative are inextricable. The reaction in terms of narrative, of following actions, depends on representation, on the recognizability of people and what they are doing, on the existence of a certain kind of space in which actions can happen.

The second point that is very clearly elucidated by Jacobs is that these two modes of art elicit different kinds of experience. As long as the images are representational and narrative, we are following the film in terms of actions, with interest in and attention to these actions. When the images are abstract, a very different response is called forth. We must adapt a much more contemplative attitude and see the film largely in terms of the interaction of form, line, light, movement. Jacobs forcefully demonstrates the differences in these two experiences by constantly oscillating between the two poles of representation and abstraction.

Jacobs is also very much concerned with another element in the film-viewing experience. He is concerned with exposing, through the systematic reduction of images, the two major illusions upon which the filmic image depends.

The first illusion concerns light. Because he photographs a film off a screen and because he photographs it so closely at times, the image is reduced visibly to various intensities of light and shadow. The fact that the filmic image always consists of varying intensities of light projected on a flat surface, the fact that film is really always a kind of shadow play, is revealed by the process of reduction.

The second illusion that is revealed in *Tom, Tom* is the illusion of movement. By using the freeze frame technique (holding any one frame for any period of time) and by constantly alternating frozen frames with moving images, Jacobs reveals that the film image consists of a series of unmoving, still images. (The illusion of movement is achieved by the eye combining the still images into movement through the persistence of vision.) As always in *Tom, Tom,* this demonstration is taken as far as it can go. For instance, Jacobs sometimes moves his camera over a frozen frame, complicating and re-emphasizing the fact of the frozen frame by insisting at once on the lack of movement in the frozen frame and on the presence of movement, albeit illusory movement, because of the moving camera.

In *Tom, Tom,* Jacobs presents a brilliant lesson in perception and perception-training. He shows us what to look for in the 1905 version of *Tom, Tom.* He selects for us those aspects of the film intriguing to him by isolating and magnifying details, by distending important moments. Those elements towards which he directs our concentration—formal elements for the most part—tend to draw our attention away from the narrative. When he projects the original film once again at the end of his reworking of it, he is allowing us the pleasure of viewing it with our newly trained eyes. At the same time, he is heightening our awareness of how much we have just learned about visual perception.

But Jacobs' film is not only about what to look at in the primitive version of *Tom, Tom.* While one watches the unraveling of his visual analysis, one becomes aware of the fact that perception or perception-training is actually one of the subjects of the film. As P. Adams Sitney has pointed out, Jacobs retards the fictive development of the original and, through his process of elongation, induces an awareness of perception itself as a value and an esthetic experience.

It is clear that Jacobs does not expect the viewer to respond passively to his method of perception-training. He presents a rigorous course for the eye and he demands, in return, a great deal of visual work. The level of difficulty of perception demanded of the viewer varies

throughout the film; at times, one can easily grasp what one sees, while at other times, the images and interactions of images are so quick, complex, and elusive that repeated viewings are necessary inorder to comprehend them. With each viewing, one actually sees more. One becomes visually more sophisticated and more attuned to the multi-faceted potentialities of cinema. One emerges with a set of visual tools with which to perceive not only the original *Tom, Tom* and not only Jacobs' intricate reworking of it, but also film in general.

The second point concerns transformation. We have already stated that the entire film involves a major act of transformation, the transformation of the original primitive film into Jacobs' radically modernist one. Further, we have implied that in each of the areas we have discussed, there is an element of transformation—the transformation of representational and narrative into abstract, the transformation of the image to reveal the illusions behind it, the transformation of space, time, and structure.

What is especially important about *Tom, Tom* is that we always perceive the process of transformation. The film itself is an act of visible transformation, demonstrated in the film. We witness the stages between representation and abstraction, we experience the state of forming. Similarly, we see the illusory image in the process of dissolving into light and dark, the moving image become frozen.

The space is visibly changed, and we feel the shifts in kinds of temporal experience. The fact that all film involves some degree of transformation is made manifest in film in which the subject is the act or process of transformation.

Peter Kubelka, MOSAIK IM VERTRAUEN

THE FILMS OF PETER KUBELKA

by

Elena Pinto Simon

Peter Kubelka is a major figure in the contemporary avant-garde film movement—a movement distinguished to a large extent by the casting aside of the traditional narrative form, by the questioning of illusionism in cinema, by a movement towards abstraction, and by a reflexive investigation of the nature of the filmic medium. Kubelka, a Viennese, and the only prominent European in the group, belongs to the especially abstract and Minimalist side of this multifaceted movement.

His experiments in reduction, with an aim towards definition of the medium, are relatable to similar preoccupations of contemporary American painters—with Kubelka most notably sharing an emphasis on the properties of the specific object itself, and with viewer confrontation with that object. His works are more pertinently related to the Viennese School in early 20th-century music (especially Schoenberg and Webern) for both emphasis on serialization and on brief, concentrated forms.

Kubelka's films represent a major rediscovery and investigation of the basic elements of film: sound, silence, light, absence of light. Kubelka himself is the originator of a major genre within the contemporary avant-garde, the "flicker" film (so called because of the effect created by the rapid alternation of light impulses) that includes works by other artists such as Paul Sharits and Tony Conrad. The films of Peter Kubelka are radical, exuberant works that explore the extreme of the montage esthetic and the problems of the non-narrative film. In addition, they represent the most exhaustive attempt to date to deal with the process of reduction in cinema.

Kubelka is a reflexive film maker concerned, above all, with defining the nature of his medium, and the experience of it. The process of reduction, basic to his entire oeuvre, is a process undertaken in order to both delimit the bare essentials of the medium and to create a filmic experience out of these bare essentials—light, sound, rhythm, and structure. The experience of Kubelka's films is both a highly sensuous interaction with these elements, purified and intensified as they have never been before, and an intellectual recognition of the nature of these elements. The films, in their radical simplicity and in their density, pose a challenge to our perception, raising questions that can be gradually resolved only after multiple viewings and, in some cases, by an examination of the filmstrip itself.

Kubelka's first film was *Mosaik im Vertrauen* (1954-55; 16½ min.). An embryonic film in many ways, it nonetheless is a sophisticated work which contains some or most of the basic concerns to recur throughout the works: repetitions, emphasis on light and dark contrasts (most evident in the sumptuous Anthology Film Archives' print) the interchangeability of parts, the importance of the single shot, and the use of a device similar to the freeze frame; that is, a hold, which later erupts into movement. (Shots of a man with a cigar which suddenly "come to life" are one such example.)

The primary process of abstraction in *Mosaic* involves the disintegration of the narrative form. For while *Mosaic* suggests a story film, or a film with several stories, the extreme disjunctiveness of the film negates a narrative response. Sequences are never developed or completed; Kubelka jumps from "story" to "story", eliminating the sequence-to-sequence events normal to the narrative film. He also cuts in various kinds of materials unrelated to the story in any strictly narrative sense (newsreel footage, a pinball game, etc.).

The emphasis in the film, then, is on the shot-to-shot event. Disjunctiveness and discontinuity are keynotes. The relationship of one shot to another and of the shots to the similarly disjunctive and discontinuous sounds is the prime source of excitement of the film. The notion of filmic montage, of the juxtaposition of elements, in this case, based largely on formal (similarities or dissimilarities in movement, rhythm, form, light and dark) relationships, is redefined in this work of striking visual and aural complexities.

Mosaic's soundtrack is highly complex. It is a collage of different textures and tones of sounds—abstracted, nasal, low and high pitch. Sound is used to transform the image, much as it is used in the later work, *Our Trip to Africa*. In *Mosaic* a shot of a train slowly turning a bend forming an arc, is accompanied on the soundtrack by music that reminds the viewer of a music box. Suddenly, the huge industrial icon becomes reduced (figuratively) to a toy train. The soundtrack is at times synchronous, at times disjunctive throughout the film—and here, as in

the later works, the sound/image conflict is at the heart of Kubelka's esthetic.

Adebar (1956-57; 1½ min.), Kubelka's next film, was originally an ad (rejected) for the Café Adebar. It represents a huge departure from the format of *Mosaic* and a major step in the development of Kubelka's work. *Adebar* eliminates any sense of narrative, and virtually becomes an abstract film, due largely to the silhouette images throughout, the repeated use of a fragment of a tune played over and over, and the visual repetitions and serialization. Shot length are shortened radically, forming a kind of transition between the shots of *Mosaic* and the rapid cutting in *Schwechater.*

In some ways, *Adebar* is the most elusive of Kubelka's films for it seems like a film whose process and structure one should be able to grasp as it is viewed, unlike *Schwechater* which at a first viewing seems to work subliminally. In *Adebar,* shots are long enough to determine that there is a process, a pattern, a set of procedures, repetitions of positive and negative images, etc., but not long enough to determine what that process or pattern is.

Adebar is a dance film, an intensely rhythmic dance film complicated by being slightly off metronymic beat. This helps set up some of the sound/image disjunction that preoccupies Kubelka in all of his works.

Adebar's images are shadows, the stress is on white and black alternation and on gray and white movement in silhouette. Images of people become almost abstracted, moving and frozen shapes and forms. These forms and movements are repeated although never exactly in the same way, or in successive moments in time. The image is extremely flat, on the surface of the screen, with little or no illusory depth, especially interesting for a dance film.

With *Schwechater* (1957-58) Kubelka moves more explicitly towards stressing the frame-to-frame event, bringing the Eisensteinian concept of the shot-to-shot collision of elements almost to its fullest point of development. The "shots" in *Schwechater* are only frames long, and sometimes only a single frame long. Originally intended as a beer commercial, rejected by its sponsors, *Schwechater* contains, in mature form, all of the major Kubelka strategies. The film runs 60 seconds.

Schwechater is in black and white with twelve color incidents and moves towards two points of intensification. The twelve color sections are generally much more active (the third red incident, for example, contains fifteen images in two seconds). The blacks (positives) are longer held and less active. This progression moves to the middle of the film (the fifth red incident) where there is a reversal: the red is longer held, and the black that follows is a very active section. The film then returns to its original progression until the extraordinary visual bombardment at the end of the film (the last 128 frames —four seconds before the Schwechater sign appears).

To aid in perceiving the bombardment, Kubelka introduces the color incidents by tinting the black leader that precedes them with red. This forms a kind of visual "set-up" for the extremely rapid, active red sections that follow. As the film progresses, the red-tinted lead-ins are cut back.

Viewing *Schwechater* is an exciting visual experience, an experience that demands a kind of viewer confrontation with the filmic object, and a constant bringing to consciousness of the process of perception—to the point of becoming a kind of tantalizing game for the eye. The images—black, white, and red—are all high contrast, clear colors, and the sensuality of the surface is almost overwhelming.

Through to *Rainer,* Kubelka is concerned with the gradual reduction of narrative, images, and sound. With *Rainer,* Kubelka turns to an ultimate reduction and the source of his esthetic: a beam of light filtered through clear and darkened leader. It is in the *Rainer* film that the collision of the four basic elements of cinema—light, absence of light, sound, and silence are fully explored, bringing the implications of the montage esthetic full circle to its most radical conclusion. In this work, all stress is on the frame-to-frame event. The result is more than collision: it is truly explosive, and *Rainer* remains a historic visual/aural moment: the liberation of sound and image; the dynamic intensive bombardment of the senses.

CINEMATIC ARTICULATION : PETER KUBELKA IN CONVERSATION WITH JONAS MEKAS

JONAS MEKAS: Should we concentrate specifically on your latest film, *Unsere Afrikareise,* or should we also talk about the European avantgarde?

PETER KUBELKA: No, I can not talk about the European film avantgarde at all because there is nothing there that I respect. When you transcribe this interview, you should state, that nothing that I say has anything to do with my films. I have, I feel a very great need to communicate. I work hundreds and hundreds of hours for one particular minute in my films and I could never produce such a minute by talking. I want therefore my talk to be completely irrelevant. Because, otherwise, it might just spoil what I have to say through my films. The real statement that I want to make in the world is my films. Everything else is irrelevant.

JONAS: You mean, there is nothing that we can say about *Unsere Afrikareise* at all?

KUBELKA: Yes, we can talk. There are certain things that could be said. For instance: What I had in mind, with *Unsere Afrikareise,* was to leave a document for the future generations, when all this our life will be over . . . I thought this is a document. Of course, it may seem like a poem. Of course, it has a very lyrical form—but this is document too. My film is a document for future generations. There is nothing that has to be said with it. It just can't be said.

JONAS: It is interesting that Andy Warhol, too, considers his films—even films like *Sleep*—as documents for the future generations. Once he said to me: Wouldn't it be great today to have, films made in the year 1266—a film of a man's shoulder, for instance, or his ass, to see how differently people looked seven hundred years ago.

KUBELKA: Did he say that? Yes. It's true.

Then there is a second thing that I would like to say. I work for this living generation. I want to help in aging mankind, to get it away from the stone age. Make it adult. I feel the mankind is still a very young child—if you can make such a comparison. I feel that the age of mankind now is that of a very young child. For example, it just begins to be articulate. These are the first stages where it's articulate. It's beginning to have a memory. History is very young. What we call history, is not history but very subjective statements of single beings and not right at all, and very mystic and mysterious. Mankind is now just in the process of growing up a little bit, slowly, slowly. My films have a function (this goes for the African film)—I play with the emotions and try to tear the emotions loose from the people, so that they would gain distance to their emotions, to their own feelings. This is one of my main tasks: to get distance to the whole existence, to see . . . I have a lot of distance. I always had it, and I have too much, so I feel very lonely and I want to communicate. You see, you have this whole range of emotions and these mechanisms, how the emotions are created. When you see certain images or hear certain sounds you have certain emotions. So I must always cry when I see moving scenes, when I see the hero getting the first prize for the biggest round and they play the national anthem . . . I have to cry . . . or when they bury somebody, I have to cry. At the same time I am angry at myself because I know that it's just the emotional mechanism. So, with the African film, I do a lot of this, I trigger a lot of those mechanisms at the same time and create a lot of—at the same time—comic feelings, sad feelings . . .

JONAS: Like the lion's death scene, when they are dragging him up on the truck—I think this is one of the saddest scenes I have ever seen. Or death of the giraffe —they are both very sad. They are pulling up this poor dead lion, and it's difficult to pull him up, it is a very sad shot. And the giraffe dies, falling on his side, and we hear this laugh, like sides splitting from laughing, I'm dying . . . these multi-level feelings . . .

KUBELKA: This is achieved through the perfect synchronization of the music, did you notice that?

JONAS: Yes.

KUBELKA: They move all in rhythm. There are many things that are not noticeable on first few viewings at all.

JONAS: Or the eye, when the dying lion lifts his eye and looks directly into the camera accusingly and forgivingly, and then dies. If there is a great moment of cinema, this is one.

KUBELKA: Did you hear the music? When the lion looks at the camera, the music says (he sings): "You look at me, and I watch thee . . ."—this comes together, then. And this brings another thing I want to state, and that is, that I try continuously to be more articulate with film. This brings up the question of economy.

When you have the public sitting there you have a very short time that they are looking at you and you must consider that the senses of the people now are the senses of the stone age: hunters and gatherers. They just have the senses to survive. Human beings are not in position to sit and be interested. All their senses have survival reasons. So you must count on the audience which sits there and will only be attentive to things that they are vitally interested in, or they will give you just a certain amount of time. So, when you really want to communicate, you must be very economical with every part, with every second. For me, film is the projection of still frames. My economy is one single frame, and every part of the screen. So I feel that every frame that is projected too much makes the whole thing less articulate. So I always work in frames. Even the African film, which doesn't seem to be like that, because it's very natural, is worked frame by frame. I have twenty four communication possibilities per second and I don't want to waste one. This is the economy. And the same is with the sound. Because one of the major fields where cinema works is when sound and image meet. So, the meeting of every frame with the sound is very important. That means, you must have the same economy with sound as you have with the image.

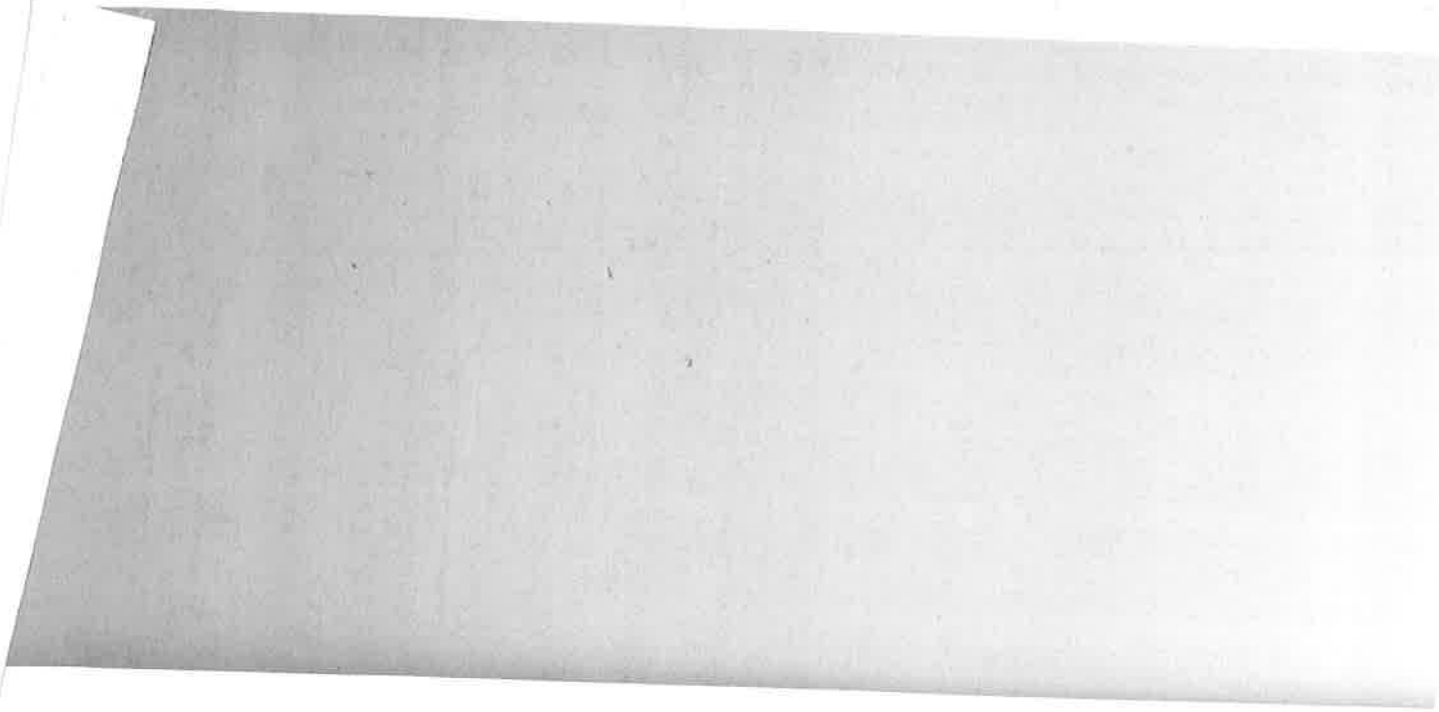
JONAS: Let us suppose, one reasons this way: If we accept the proposition that we are still in the stone age; and if we now say something to these stone age people in a sentence that is so concentrated and distilled, that every sound, every word, every letter in it means something—do you think they will understand it? Isn't it better to divide the message that you want to put across into five sentences? So that they would get it, in the long run? because you say, you want to communicate; and you don't want to waste a single frame?

Some people say: Cinema is Movement; some others say: Cinema is Light. Do you have anything to say on the "essence" of cinema?

KUBELKA: Cinema is not movement. This is the first thing. Cinema is not movement. Cinema is a projection of stills—which means images which do not move—in a very quick rhythm. And you can give the illusion of movement, of course, but this is a special case, and the film was invented originally for this special case. But as it often happens, people invent something, and then they create quite a different thing. They have created something else. Cinema is not movement. It can give the illusion of movement. Cinema is a very quick projection of light impulses. These light impulses can be shaped when you put the film before the lamp—on the screen you can shape it. I am talking now about silent film. You have the possibility to give light a dimension in time. This is the first time since mankind exists that you can really do that. To talk about the essence of cinema, it's a very complex thing. Of course, when you say, what's the essence of music, you can say one thing, and another, and another—there are many things in cinema. One is this great fascination that light has on man. Of course, cinema is still very flimsy, a pale thing, and it passes quickly, and so on—but still, as weak as it is, it is a very strong thing and it has a great fascination just because you can do something with the light. Then: it's in time. It can be conserved, preserved. You can work for years and years and years and produce—as I do—one minute of a concentrate in time and ever since mankind existed you never could do such a thing. And then—sound. The meeting of sound and image. And we come to this problem: where does film become articulate? When does a language become articulate? Language becomes articulation when you put one word and another word. One word alone is one word alone, but when you put two words, it's between the two words, so to speak, that is your articulation. And when you put three words it's between one and two, and between two and three, and then there is also relation between one and three, but two is in between.

JONAS: For Eisenstein it was a collision, to you it's . . .?

KUBELKA: Yes, it can be a collision. Or it could be a very weak succession. There are many many possibilities. It's just that Eisenstein wanted to have collision —that's what he liked. But what I wanted to say is: Where is, then, the articulation of cinema? Eisenstein, for example, said: it's the collision of two shots. But it's very strange that nobody ever said that IT'S NOT BETWEEN SHOTS BUT BETWEEN FRAMES. It's between frames where cinema speaks. And then, when you have a roll of very weak collisions between frames—this is what I would call a shot, when one frame is very similar to the next frame, and the next frame, and the next frame, and the next frame, and the next frame—the result that you get when you have just a natural scene and you film it . . . this would be a shot. But in reality you can work with every frame.



JONAS: In *Afrikareise,* you had this shot, you see a river behind the trees, the trees, and whatever animal there is, in the river, slowly rising, a small action spot behind the trees, and nothing else really happens—it was the longest shot in the film it went for something like ten seconds. Almost a Warhol shot . . .

KUBELKA: Yes, the crocodile shot. But this was on purpose. You see, I broke up this thing with *Schwechater.* The *Schwechater* was the first film which worked with the event of the frame. *Schwechater* film is a very strong, strong, very strong optical event. And what is it? Just people drinking beer.

JONAS: Have you seen Len Lye's 50 second automobile commercial? Nothing happens there either, except that it's filled with some kind of secret action of cinema.

KUBELKA: Yes, I saw it in 1958. *Schwechater* was finished already by then. And then, this feeling, I never lost this frame by frame film-making. Also in the *Rainer,* I did it. And in the *Afrikareise.* But what I wanted in *Afrika* was to create a world that had the greatest fascination on the spectator possible. This world had to be very naturalistic, so that you could really identify it and enter it. It's therefore that I want a big screen for it so you can see the blood and the elephants and the women and the Negro flesh and all the landscapes. This was one thing. And the other thing was that I wanted to have it so controlled as if I had painted it or made up myself and I achieved that through this immense, immense long work of thousands of hours of cataloging the whole material practically frame by frame. So there is this continuous correspondence between sound and image. After you see the film twelve or twenty times, then you notice that practically every optical event corresponds to the acoustic event.

JONAS: Even that ten second shot where we have . . . how many frames do we have? almost five hundred frames . . . after fifth and sixth time I may be noticing the sound, what it does, because as it was now, the first four times, I was watching most of the time the image . . . At least, I have no memory of the sounds in that scene.

KUBELKA: Yes, there is sound. You hear the shot, and it makes puff and misses the crocodile. But a bird flies. And then the man says: "Geh!" He is disappointed and amazed, you see. Then it makes again PUFF—and then he hits, you see the crocodile is hit, and he says "Na also!" which is "Oh, finally!" "Nun also", "Na also", which could mean if translated, "Finally you did it." And he says it in a very . . . it could be meant for a completely different event. Like, for example, the zebra is hit mortally and you hear a woman's voice who says "Auu!" as if a mosquito had just given her a little bite.

JONAS: Yes, I noticed that. I think it was during the third viewing that I really noticed that, and it was very funny, and sad.

KUBELKA: But there are many hundreds of such things. I never want to make a funny scene, or a sad scene—I always have these . . . I want them very complex, never one single feeling but many many feelings always. So of course it's funny and then it's not funny at all, because for the zebra it's a tragedy, and you pity her. Then you have that other scene. Before the zebra appears, you have this mysterious, my miracle shot of the moon where you see first this long fruit, brown, and it has a very phallic form, and then it dissolves (but it's not a dissolve, it's just changing of focus) into the moon, this beautiful white moon, and then you hear this voice, of the everything knowing German professor or something that says "Die Erde," "The Earth." But it's not the Earth—it's the moon! And then both say, in chorus: "Die Erde ist terra," "earth means terra," —they bring in their latin . . . and then, when you hear "terra,"—cut—and you see the terra, you see the dying zebra lying on the terra. You see then the real.

JONAS: I see. That places everything in the proper perspective. Even *Unsere Afrikareise* is a stone age product.

KUBELKA: Yes. I try to get myself and everybody else away from the stone age. But you see, when you say that perhaps I should give more time to people—I do this through repetition. I want my films to be viewed many many times. (A note in the Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue says that, when rented, each of Kubelka's films should be projected twice. On reels, there are two prints of each film spliced side by side—to help the projectionist.—Jonas) As I work a long time on my films, I don't want to lose them, I am not like many other artists who say: Oh, I made this long ago, and I have overcome it, and I don't like it anymore. I can still see all my films, even the very first one. Everything that I do must be so clear and dry.

You see, there is a very essential point for me: I always want to enjoy what I do. I look thousands of times at what I do. I want to give to myself these very very rich seconds and I enjoy these minutes very much. There must be a lot of essential pleasure just in the films when they hit the screen—I heard this expression yesterday, "to hit the screen", that's phantastic, in En-

glish. Hit the screen—this is really what the frames do. The projected frames hit the screen. For example, when you let the projector run empty, you hear the rhythm. There is a basic rhythm in cinema. I think very few film-makers—if there ever was one, I don't know—have departed making films from this feeling of the basic rhythm, these 24 impulses on the screen—brrhumm—it's a very metric rhythm. I thought, the other day, that I am the only one who ever made metric films, with metric elements. These three films *Adebar, Schwechater,* and *Rainer* are metric films. You know what I mean by metric? It's the German expression "Metrisches System." The classic music, for instance, has whole notes, and half notes, and three-quarter notes. Not frames as notes, but the time sections that I have in my films. I mean, I have no seventeenths, and no thirteenths, but I have sixteen frames, and eight frames, and four frames, and six frames—it's a metric rhythm. For example, people always feel that my films are very even and have no edges, and do not break apart, and are equally heavy at the beginning and at the end. This is because the harmony spreads out of the unit of the frame, of the 1/24th of the second, and I depart terra, then. It's black and grey and burned. And then, they shoot the zebra for the sixth time, because zebras don't die, you have to shoot them many times, because they have such a hard life, you see. And then she (zebra) says: "Auu . . ." And the man says: "Aufstehen!"—"get up!"—and this is a reminiscence of the Bible, I often have such references . . .

JONAS: Lazarus?

KUBELKA: Yes. It's exactly that. I have something like that in my first film also. The voice says: "Steh auf und geh!" meaning: "rise and walk". And then he says something about Jesus, he says: . . . "Ich bin auch nur ein Beamter . . ." which means "I am also nothing but an employee". I don't know, it's very difficult to talk about that, but it has to do with my childhood, my Bible reading, and Jesus, what he did, and so on, and I always imagined him as an employee of his Father, and so he says so in this film. Also, in the African film, there are some things that relate to the Bible in image and meaning. One is this "Aufstehen".

JONAS: The brown, clay color of the film—was this the color of the actual footage, or did you do something to it?

KUBELKA: Yes. I wanted a sort of a monochromy through the whole thing. Sometimes I break it up. I make this very yellow grass when you see the Negroes walk, where the Negroes walk . . .

JONAS: Yes, that beautiful yellow. You made it that way?

KUBELKA: Yes. This is like another world, then. In my films there are moments when everything stands still. This is a very important thing for me. This is in all of my films. Some films as a whole are like that. These are moments of escape, from the burden of existence, so to say—moments where you are not human, nor something else—not an angel or something, but just OUT, out of it, and when nothing happens, and nothing leads to this, and this leads to nothing, and there is no tension, and so on. This is the scene in the African film where just the Negroes walk. First, you have the Negroes walk and you have the Austrians laughing, producing this incredible laughter, and the Negroes don't notice them, they just walk and walk in this yellow grass. And then, overpowered, or something by this thing, the laughter ceases and then you hear nothing anymore, just a few birds quacking . . . and the Negroes continue walking, and then it's silent and they walk on and walk, one from the left, one from the right—so this is one of those moments. You remember that?

JONAS: Yes.

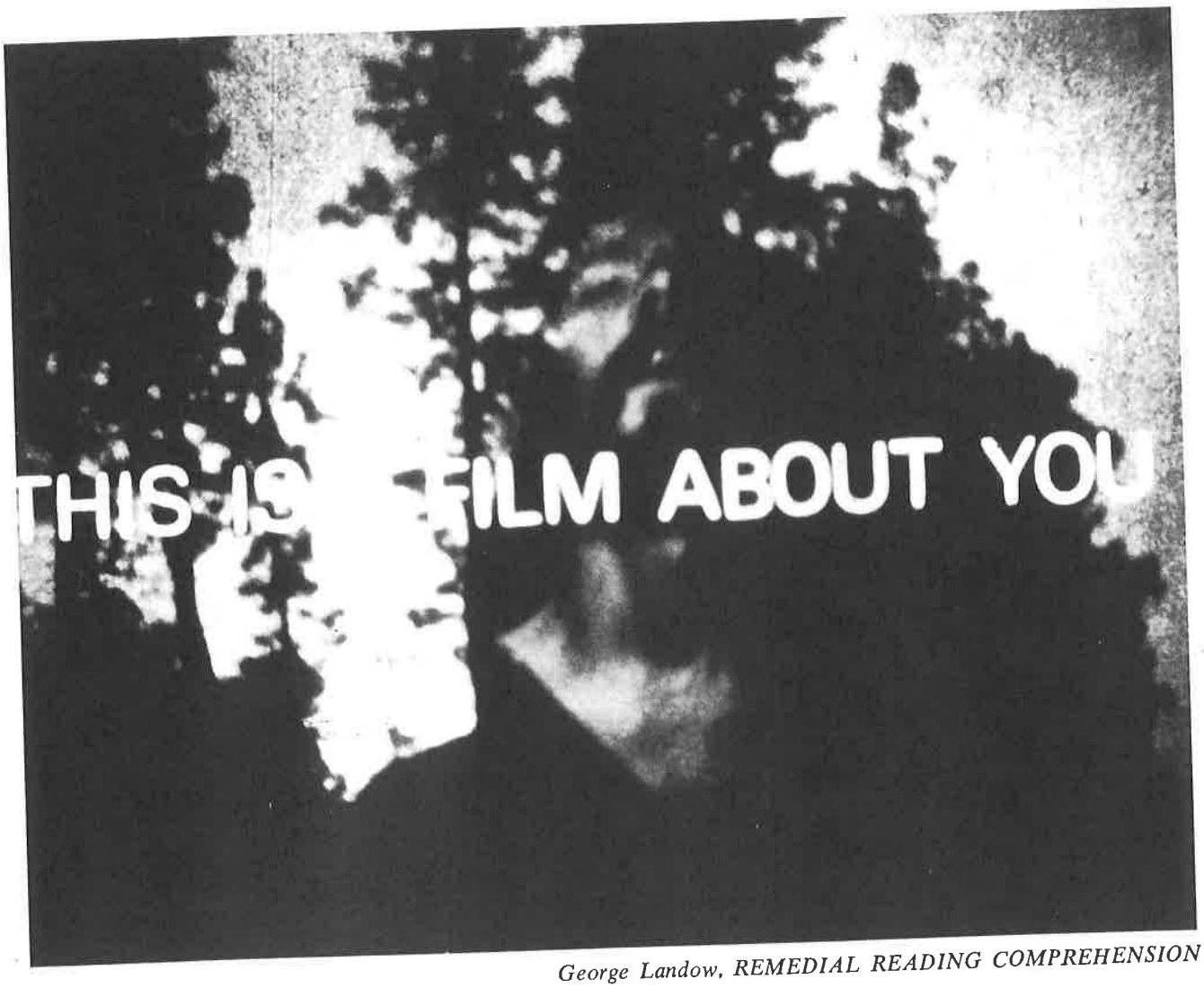
KUBELKA: It has no reason—you understand. It does nothing for the story, it doesn't say anything, I can not say what I really mean with that, but these moments are the biggest achievements for me—these are the moments which fascinate me always when I watch the films. In my first film the moment is a love scene where this rather heavy guy with a cigar, says: "Du wirst mir schon noch verfallen" "you'll fall for me", and the girl watches him. And then, later in the film, you see them again, and the voice says: "Verfallen!" And then there is another shot, and he says again: "Verfallen!" The other such moment is where this mannequin turns around and this fatman comes in and they watch each other. And, for example, on this I can't speak at all, but these moments you can only create when you have this huge thing around them. But, for example, films such as *Schwechater,* are such moments as a whole. When you watch the *Schwechater,* I mean, it has absolutely no classical tension that goes up and down. Then, it doesn't say anything, it says nothing —because what you see are people drinking beer, or something like that—but, really, what is the *Schwechater* film? You don't know. And yet, it fills you very much. Since I work on my films for such a long time, I always make my films sort of . . . how do you say "Geruest"? the thing that holds the house . . . maybe "skeleton" —something on which I can hang onto . . . something

sustaining and life keeping. The *Rainer* is very much like that. Oh, it was fantastic in Los Angeles, you should have seen this, really. Because they had very powerful loudspeakers.

JONAS: Was this at the Cinema Theater?

KUBELKA: Yes. They had a screen as large as a house, and they had these powerful loudspeakers. The sound was like Niagara Falls, so loud—incredible, it was fantastic—and the lights, so strong—this was really the event that I wanted it to be. And with this element . . . Here it comes, this fascination of sound and light . . . And to have this element and then to be able to create a rhythmic construction with sound and image which is so precise, on frames of a second—this gives me an incredible feeling. By the way, for *Schwechater,* my model, so to say, was running water, or a tree with thousands of leaves when the wind goes through—I was very concerned with these forms.

JONAS: When I was watching the *Rainer* film, I closed my eyes, at moments, and I could watch it with my eyes closed, as the light rhythms pulsated on and through the eyelids. One could say, that the *Rainer* film is the only film ever made that can be seen with your eyes closed.



George Landow, REMEDIAL READING COMPREHENSION

THE FILMS OF GEORGE LANDOW

by

P. Adams Sitney

The most devout of the structural film-makers is George Landow. His first film, *Fleming Faloon* (1963), is a precursor of the structural tendency, though not quite achevied. The theme of a direct address is at the center of its construction: Beginning with two boobs reciting "Around the world in eighty minutes," jump-cuts of a TV newscaster, and image upon image of a staring face, sometimes full-screen, sometimes the butt of a dollying camera, superimposed upon itself, sometimes split into four images (unsplit 8mm photography, in which two sets of two consecutive images appear in the 16mm frame) televisions, mirrored televisions, and superimposed movies are interspersed. Although I have seen the film many times, I could never find a structural principle after the opening, which Landow has called the prelude. *Fleming Faloon* is simply a series of related images.

The sensibility that created *Fleming Faloon,* a film-maker more than any other non-aninator devoted to the flat-screen cinema, the moving-rain painting, is the primary force in the structural film. Perhaps he actually invented it when he made *Film in which there appear sprocket holes, edge lettering, dirt particles, etc.* He derived its image from a commercial test film, originally nothing more than a girl staring at the camera, a blink of her eyes is the only motion, with a spectrum of primary colors beside her. Landow had the image reprinted so that the girl and the spectrum occupies only one half of the frame, the other half of which is made up of sprocket holes, frilled with rapidly changing edge letters, and, in the far right screen, half of the girl's head again.

Landow premiered this film as loop at the Film-Makers Cinémathèque, calling it *This Film will be interrupted after ten minutes by a commercial.* True to its title, the film was interrupted with an 8mm interjection of Rembrandt's "Town Council" as reproduced by Dutch Master Cigars. A luscious green scratch stood across the splice in the loop, which gave it a particular tonality during that single performance, since only that identified the cycling of the loop, and contrasted with the red overtone of the image.

When the loop, minus the commercial, was printed to become *Film in which,* etc., Landow instructed the laboratory not to clean the dirt from the film but to make a clean splice that would hide the repetitions. The resultant film, a found object extended to a simple structure, is the essence of a minimal cinema. The girl's face is static; perhaps a blink is glimpsed; the sprocket holes do not move but waver slightly as the system of edge lettering flashes around them. Deep into the film, the dirt begins to form time patterns, and the film ends.

There is a two-screen version of this film, projected with no line separating the two panels and with the right images reversed so that a synthetic girl, with two left hand sides of her face, is evoked between the two girl panels.

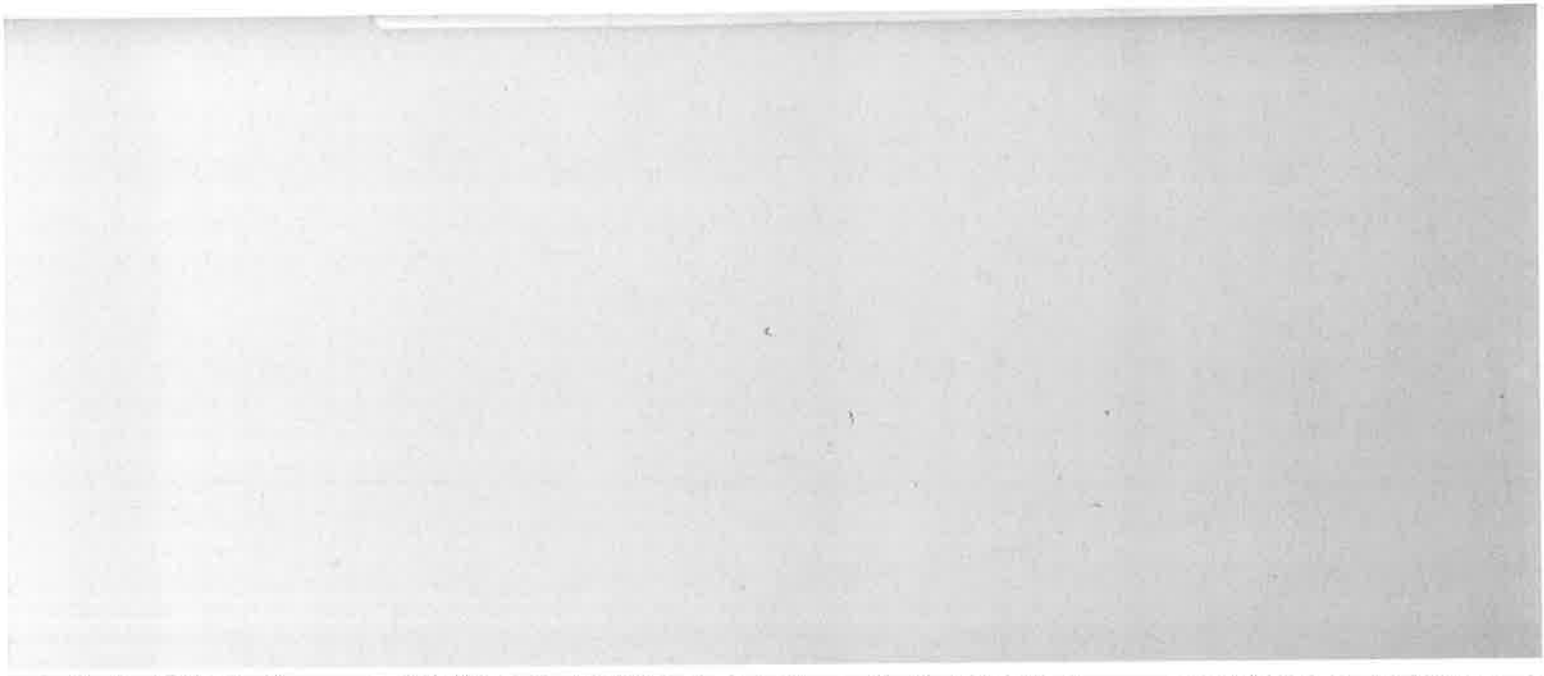
Bardo Follies (1966), Landow's most sophisticated film, describes a kind of meditation analogous to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead.* The film begins with a loop-printed image of a water flotilla carrying a woman who waves to us at every turn of the loop. After about ten minutes (there is a shorter version, too), the same loop appears doubled into a set of circles against the black screen. Then there are three circles for an instant. The film image in the circles begins to burn, creating a moldy, wavering, orange-dominated mass. Eventually, the entire screen fills with one burning frame, which disintegrates in slow motion in an extremely grainy soft focus. Another frame burns; the whole screen throbs with melting celluloid. Probably, this was created by several generations of photography off the screen—its effect is to make the screen itself seem to throb and smolder. The tension of the silly loop is maintained thoughout this section, in which the film stock itself seems to die. Afetr a long while, it becomes a split screen of air bubbles in water filmed though a microscope with colored filters, a different color on each side of the screen. Through changes of focus the bubbles lose shape and dissolve into one another and the four filters switch. Finally, some forty minutes after the first loop, the screen goes white. The film ends.

Structurally, we have the gradual abstraction of an image (originally emphasized though loop printing) through burning and slow-motion rephotography off the screen. The final images of air bubbles are metaphorical

extensions of the process of abstraction. The entire opus is open to the interpretation suggested by the title, of the pursuit of the pure light from the "follies" of daily life. The viewer comes to see not the images of the earth, the girl on her flotilla, but the colors and tones of the light itself in a chain of purification .

In his latest work, *The Film that Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter* (1968), Landow extends the structural principle of the loop into a cycle of visions. Here, we see, in black and white, the head of a working animator; he draws a line, makes a body; then he animates a grotesque humanoid shape. In negative, a girl points to the drawing and taps on it with a pencil. This sequence of shots—the back of the animator, the animation, the negative girl looking at it—occurs three times, but not with exactitude, since there is sometimes more negative material in one cycle than in another. Next, we see (another ?) animator, this time from the front; he is creating a similar monster; he animates it. Again we see him from the front; again he animates it. Such is the action of the film. A wailing sound out of Tibet accompanies the whole film. The title as well is Eastern: Landow read about "the film that rises to the surface of clarified butter" in the *Upanishads.*

The explicit ontology of the film, based on the distinction between graphic (the monsters), two-dimensional modality and photographic naturalism (the animators, even the pen resting beside the monsters as they move in movie illusion), as a metaphor for the relation of film itself (a two-dimensional field of illusion) and actuality, is a classic perception implicit since the beginning of animation and explicit countless times before. Yet what film has been built solely about this metaphor? No other that I can recall. Landow's genius is not his intellectual approach (even though he would be among the most intelligent film-makers in the country), which is simplistic, that is, the variations on announcing and looking (*Fleming Faloon*), the extrinsic visual interest in a film frame (*Film in which there appear sprocket holes, edge lettering, dirt particles, etc.),* a meditation on the pure light trapped in a ridiculous image *(Bardo Follies),* and the echo of an illusion (*Film that Rises to the Surface of Clarified Butter).* His remarkable faculty is as maker of images; for the simple found objects *(Film in which;* beginning of *Bardo Follies)* he uses and the images he photographs are among the most radical, superreal, and haunting images the cinema has ever given us.



NOTES ON "REMEDIAL READING COMPREHENSION" AND "WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?"

by

George Landow

Remedial Reading Compréhension: The important thing to see is that the film contains visual metaphors. The first image is a female head, horizontal and more or less suggestive of three-dimensional space. The next to last image is the same head which becomes a white silhouette in a shallow white (not black) space. Compare the two grains of rice—whole grain (brown) and processed (white). The white rice grain has lost its "essence" (the germ), just as the silhouette has lost its three dimensionality. One thing this suggests is the process of removing substance, which is done to food, art, environment, religion, etc. An art that becomes personal removes some of the substance to get a "purer" product. The film-maker himself appears in the film, yet he tells us it is about us and "not about its maker." Certain images—the rice, "Madge's" friend—are impersonal. They might be images from TV Commercials or industrial promotional films. There is a relationship between the personal and non-personal images which is roughly the same as the relationship between the first image and the next-to-last image. Before the female becomes a silhouette there is a transition period in which a struggle seems to take place between the three dimensional form and the flat one. The rhythm of the sound track is the rhythm of his alteration. When the struggle is over, the three dimensional form disappears and a new rhythm is heard—the rhythm of the abstract symbols—words—which have been moving across the field of struggle.

What's Wrong With This Picture? at present consists of: Part 1: An exercise in combining a documented segment of a real occurrence with structural elements. The film becomes a study of speech patterns. There is, on several levels, a play on the difference between film mechanics and video electronics. Part 2: An exercise in 1) making a facsimile of a 1930's Coronet instructional film entlited Are You A Good Citizen? and 2) combining it with structural elements. It was made as close to the original as possible, using the original soundtrack dialogue which was re-synched and slightly edited. Stills from the original film were used to determine the composition of each shot. The printing techniques used produce the illusion of reverse figure-ground relationships—i.e. the background appears to be closer than the figures.

Jonas Mekas, REMINISCENCES OF A JOURNEY TO LITHUANIA

THE "REMINISCENCES" OF JONAS MEKAS: THE FILM-MAKER AS POET

by

Rimydas Silbajoris

There are words which tend to lose their sharp outlines of meaning over the years, because the flow of time and events rubs them smooth and easy on the tongue, makes them abstract and synonymous with others, like so many pebbles in a riverbed. Such a word for us Balts is "exile." We left our homes a long time ago; but now, as we sit in our pleasant houses and look at the green grass, what is an exile, a refugee, an immigrant, an émigré? Are we now like the East Asians driven from Uganda, or like the children of Bangla Desh, or perhaps like the Vietnamese, straggling across moonscapes made by man? With us, the word "exile" has become a habit of speech, a distant cousin to the reality of experience which was imposed on us once and a pale memory of which we still possess. What remains real is a sense of loss and a yearning to fill a vague emptiness in the heart. To the extent that the present moment fails to appease this gnawing anguish, we tend to turn back to our past, searching for a remembrance to call our own. Surprinsingly, at times the feeling of having truly been at home comes to us with the memory of places which were then already on the trek of exile, already foreign when we lived in them. Indeed, it seems at times that memory itself is our only home.

Our exiled poets, however, generally disdain all halfway houses and insist on singing of the native land alone, as if forgetting that Jerusalem is but a city of the mind. Only occasionally do we have someone like Jonas Mekas who, in his recent book called "Reminiscences," speaks of the early postwar years in Germany with a warmth of feeling and a loyalty to past emotions which we do not find in any other Lithuanian poet who cares to remember Germany at all in his works.

But, then, Mekas himself has always been a rather special individual combining in his mind, as parts of a necessary poetic harmony, things that most people saw as either opposites or irrelevancies. When he did live in Germany, in DP (Displaced Person) camps, after the war, he belonged to a small group of young rebels who refused to fit the prescribed pattern of traditional romantic patriotism and preferred instead to look around them with an intellectual curiosity free of anger and sorrow, open to new, experimental, sometimes downright irreverent ideas in the arts. And yet, no one has paid homage to the native land, now lost, with such humble devotion as Mekas did in his cycle of poems entitled "The Idyls of Semeniškiai," published in 1947. The book was particulary successful in conveying a sense of place, of vivid material detail, as if Mekas had taken each piece of his native village, native soil into his hands, made it live by the force of his love and then put it back into the landscape, now iridescent with poetic beauty. It seemed as if this book, concentrating on one moment in time past, provided the necessary counterpoint to Mekas' adventures among new intellectual horizons.

Having arrived in this country, Mekas soon became very different indeed from everyone else among his fellow exile-refugees, particularly the bourgeois and the intellectuals. When we were saving money to go to college to become doctors and professors, he bought himself a film camera and aimed it, like a weapon, against the whole Hollywood movie industry. His war cry was a magazine called *Film Culture,* his soldiers—artists, pseudoartists, movie critics, and Greenwich Village types (some of whom, like Andy Warhol, have since acquired fame in their own right). Having produced a number of iconoclastic films, he became a concept and received a name that had nothing at all to do with the little world of Lithuanian exiles—they called him "the granddaddy of the underground cinema." As all this was going on, Mekas, according to his own testimony, still enjoyed dancing barefoot on his hotel room floor, as if he were a peasant boy, splashing in the rain, in this native village of Semeniškiai.

These activities had their own counterpoint—a private place inside the heart from which emerged his books of poems in Lithuanian: "The Talk of Flowers" in 1961, "Word Apart" in 1967, and, in 1972, "Reminiscences." This last book, our topic, consists of images recalled from the past, depicting a marginal existence outside the march of history. Leftovers from the war, the DP's, walk across the ruined German countryside, watch the children play, or sit in burned-out railroad stations late into the night. Their lives alternate between movement and stillness, alienation and intimacy, peaceful hours

in the sun, and a troubled, vague yearning, the call of the distance, as if there were a home somewhere beyond each new horizon. There are meetings and separations, a spark of love, a touch of death. The basic things in life remain the same as always, and it seems normal, somehow, to be a Displaced Person. Indeed, after memory has cleared the ashes of time, the lives we see there sugggest a kind of home.

This is the surface texture of the book. Its simplicity deceives the eye and even, to some extent, the heart, because all these vignettes of a vagabond life in Germany, written down in plain blank verse, hardly seem able to pass from mere reminiscence into the realm of poetry. The true outline of the book as a work of art emerges gradually, as we begin to perceive subtle balances and symmetries of its poetic form. These add up to a kind of harmony of opposing entities, consisting of the dynamic principle of movement on the one hand and a meditative, inward-looking principle of stillness on the other. We tend to recall that such opposites characterize Mekas' own life and personality and see that the book is not so much a remembrance of things and places that once surrounded the poet, but rather a self-portrait of his own soul, perhaps more harmonious and perfect than Mekas feels himself to be. The harmony of his art conceals and transforms his human tensions, the pain of exile, so well that sometimes it takes close reading to perceive the hidden sorrow underneath.

Mekas' approach to form is unconventional in that old and faded photographs from DP life in Germany are included as integral parts of the text. It is not a matter of illustration but rather of correspondences. As we leaf through the pages, for insistance, we may read a passage about streetcars and cobblestone streets, and somewhere nearby there will also be a picture of a German street with cobblestones and a streetcar. Or again, Mekas in one place describes how he used to pull carts with firewood; soon after we actually see him pulling such a cart, dressed in baggy pants and the typical DP jacket, kindly provided for us at that time by the Canadian forestry service. These pictures echo the next not always immediately, like an illustration might, but often across a few pages, with other word-images and pictures intervening, so that the effect produced is more like that of a refrain, repeated at the end of each stanza in a conventional poem. The repetition is incomplete because the preceding passage has left a trace in our mind which modifies the meaning of the refrain. Mekas, however, has gone one step further and provides the partial recurrence of image in another medium. The distance in medium and thought then gives depth, additional implications, to the repeated poetic statement. The pages of the book are not numbered, and therefore there is no strict formal measurement available, as there would be in regular stanzas of a poem. This allows for a softness of outline, an indefiniteness of mental impression which translates itself emotionally into a certain vague dreaminess of mood. This, in turn, is echoed in the faded, somewhat blurred quality of the photographs themselves.

The pictures complement the text also in its balance between dynamic and static moments. The narration alternates between journey and rest, and the pictures repeat this alternation: in some of them we see people in trains, on trucks, or walking along a field of flowers, and in others—little groups temporarily settled in some corner, or resting against a landscape. Again, these alternations are not exact—they produce the feeling of a rhythmic pattern only in their totality, in an overview from a certain mental distance, where they have already partially blended into one another, simultaneously asserting and obscuring the identity of each separate image. One may say that the rhythm we feel is not mechanical, but organic, growing, developing and fading, just like memories do within the mind.

This subtle coordination between written text and photographs recalls the fact that in the United States Mekas has been working with film. The experiences and values of the film technique seem to have retroactively entered into his past, or, more exactly, his memory of it, so that the book, as portrait of the artist's soul, includes the present, dynamic moment as much as it does the finished, static past.

Even though the pictures and text must be taken together in order to perceive the artistic integrity of the book, one's attention gradually centers upon the verse itself as the medium which ultimately carries the impact of the whole work. The verse section seems at first glance rather diffuse and almost prosaic, because it lacks the basic formal devices still dominant in Lituhanian poetry, namely rhyme, syllabo-tonic stress alternations, and strict stanzaic structures. Moreover, the language itself is not elevated in style, nor is it richly metaphorical or symbolic in the conventional sense. A close reading, however, reveals the same balanced pattern of the dynamic and static principles as can be seen in the relationship between the verse and the photographs. There is an underlying verbal stream which

describes constant movement of people from one place to another and in which words signifying motion, or those expressing yearning for further distances, are constantly repeated until they seem to dismantle syntactic structures, making it difficult for a sentence to reach the semantic value of a complete statement. This verbal stream seems to carry the travelers along, past extended lists of place names and landscapes, until no particular place on earth seems able to maintain any longer its own significant identity. The general impression of this steady onward movement of people, objects, and emotions may be conveyed by the following quotation:

> With weary eyes closing, and not feeling
> life in any limb—on heavy, rumbling roads, and in exhaustion
> we pushed ahead that summer, on toward the south;
> from every town, from each horizon,
> from every railroad station
> still rose the smell of death, of acrid smoke—
> and lonely, pitiful remainders, witnesses,
> burned out, dismembered tanks, fortifications,
> and blasted highways,
> bomb craters in the fields, the deep
> and black eyes of death—
> the lonely, pitiful remainders, witnesses,
> were lying underneath the early blossoms of the Spring.
> We pushed so on and on
> across dismembered cities, pitiful horizons,
> of burned-out villages, fields of guns and trucks,
> the cemeteries of steel,
> and crowds of occupation armies,
> striped sentry boxes, stood around in city squares.
> We pushed ahead,
> watching how from under piles of bricks,
> from underneath the ruins, hungry crowds were gathering,
> how from the dust, and clothed in motley prison garb,
> with hands so thin, emaciated, just like death itself,
> arose the women and the children.

This particular passage, early in the book, depicts the postwar devastation, but there are later passages, full of peace and sun, where the same onward movement constitutes the main driving force of the poem. It is the force of exile, of dispossession, alienation, though not necessarily always of sorrow, and almost never of anger.

A NOTE ON "REMINISCENCES OF A JOURNEY TO LITHUANIA"

by

Jonas Mekas

The film consists of three parts. The first part is made up of footage I shot with my first Bolex during my first years in America, mostly from 1950-1953. It shows me and my brother Adolfas, how we looked in those days; miscellaneous footage of immigrants in Brooklin, picnicking, dancing, singing; the streets of Willamsburg.

The second part was shot in August 1971, in Lithuania. Almost all of the footage comes from Semeniškiai, the village I was born in. You see the old house, my mother (born 1887), all the brothers, goofing, celebrating our home-coming; you see some of the places we used to know; you see some of the field work, and other insignificant details and memories. You don't really see how Lituanian is today: you see it only through the memories of a Displaced Person back home for the first time in twenty-five years.

The third part begins with a parenthesis in Elmshorn, a suburb of Hamburg, where we spent a year in a forced labor camp during the war. After the parenthesis closes, we are in Vienna where we see some of my best friends — Peter Kubelka, Hermann Nitsch, Annette Michelson, Ken Jacobs. You also see the Monastery of Kremsmuenster, the Stammdorf case of Nitsch, the house of Wittgenstein, etc. The film ends with the burning of the Vienna fruit market, August 1971.

The sound: I talk during much of the film, reminiscing about this and that. Mostly it's about myself, as a Displaced Person, my relation to Home, Memory, Culture, Up-rootedness, Childhood. There are a few Lithuanian songs sung by all of the Mekas brothers (my brother Adolfas and his wife, Pola, were with me on the same trip, and eventually you'll see Adolfas' view of the same Journey, shot with his 16mm Bolex, and Pola's view shot with her 8mm Minolta). I use two songs sung by the Lithuanian Folk Ensemble conducted by P. Tamosaitis. The Preludes for piano, by K. M. Ciurlionis, played by Vytautas Lanasbergis, are also used. In the third part I use Anton Bruckner (Mass N. 3 in F Minor) and a madrigal by Gesualdo (Deller Consort).

The film is in Ektachrome color, 16mm. It is 82 minutes long. I am very grateful to Hans Brecht of Norddeutscher Rundfunk (Hamburg), and Jimmy Vaughan Films Ltd (London) for the financial assistance in making this film. The first screening of the film took place on February 12th, 1972, on Norddeutscher Rundfunk.

YVONNE RAINER: "LIVES OF PERFORMERS"

by

Annette Michelson

Lives of Performers is Rainer's first film, completed in the early summer of 1972. Its feature-length or running time is 120 minutes. It constitutes, of course, the decisive move back and away from the abandonment of directorial and compositional modes of work which had animated her two years of association with The Grand Union. Work on *Lives*, however, presented Rainer with a new modality of collaborative effort, and a gratification intensified by the production of a work which, though temporal, is permanent. Her principal, non-performing collaborator for *Lives* was Babette Mangolte, whose exceptional skill as camerawoman is inseparable from the interest and success of this work on film. *Lives* departs from a rather long and complex "scenario" composed of material Rainer had been collecting for about a year. The tact of Mangolte's camera movement, her editing, evoke another subtly articulated presence, steady and graceful. Her lighting, moreover, endows the bare loft space, its paper screens, the props, the nakedness of things with a singular, reserved elegance.

The film is composed of parts, sequences or pieces which give it the total, compositional aspect of a "recital". And it cannot with any justice be described as an integral whole; its parts, while not wholly disjunct from one another, function as variations upon a number of given themes and strategies. Rainer's first use of disjunction is for the creation of a semblance of fictional continuity out of situations which are nevertheless experienced as largely discrete with respect to the notion of an enveloping fictional whole. The film then begins to project a series of variations upon its themes and strategies. The text, partly projected in titles, partly read off-screen, chronicles the complex interrelationships developing among performers during a period of rehearsal. One must remember that fragments of this scenario had been performed "live" together with commentary at the Whitney Museum, and that evidence of or reference to these presentations is present in the film—largely through the recorded laughter of a knowing and appreciative audience, recorded at performance time. The result is a very complex temporality. One has the retelling, by off-screen voices of past events, fictive in nature involving fictive versions, as it were, of the real performers who in recalling, under their own names, the events of that fictive past, make reference, from time to time, to real performances (that of *Grand Union Dreams*, or of *Inner Appearances*). The temporal complexity of this sort of superimposition will on occasion be intensified by the sharing or shifting of roles. A dialogue begins between Yvonne and two performers, Fernando and Shirley, later joined by Valda and John. Yvonne, the director, provides certain information, while Fernando and his fellow-performers discuss the nuances in shifts of feeling and of commitment which animate their complex interrelationship. These, while constantly being explicated, in that idiom of somewhat manic autoanalysis which characterizes life and love in a therapeutically oriented culture, are not always clear. John's role is particularly shadowy, and Yvonne announces at one point that she is going to assume his role. Although literary texts and cultural heroes are from time to time quoted and evoked, there is really one single mode of intellectual discourse which informs the "action" of this film and its "characters": that of psychoanalysis, in its latter-day, revisionist modes. Much of the material presented, then, in *Lives* is the stuff of bourgeois drama—and comedy—the succession of tiny crises and realignments, the small agonies and apperceptions of a milieu existing wholly within the area of performance and rehearsal, its cross-analysis of motives and intentions expanding to fill its entire psychic space.

I have, in the first part of this study (published elsewhere), referred to the reflexive character of the New Dance; and the manner in which its consumingly autoanalytical character is to some extent contingent upon the intense restrictedness of the social space in which it flourishes. Rainer, in this first film—as in the performances which preceded it—plays on psychological ambiguity as if, venturing for the first time to create characters, she wishes to preserve their concrete point of origin in a nonfictional esthetic context. Performers, then, preserve their names in the tangle of purely invented interrelationships. *Lives of Performers* is, among other things, the construction of a series of rather joyless *marivaudages*, in which protocols and autoanalytic exchanges are invested with the high-minded austerity of Sohoesque life. These ambiguities obviously spoke to a small though

growing circle of enthusiasts with the trivial seduction of a *roman à clef*. Filled with allusions to private and not-so-private problems and agonies—some of these articulated, one suspects, through quotations from private journals and/or psychotherapeutic revelations, and apperceptions —the film's structure proposes, far more interestingly, the *uses* of such material, how they can be distanced, the extraction of the formal potential of these constraints and ambiguities. *Lives* begins, then, with a quotation from the writings of Leo Bersani on the nature and value of cliché, as a principle of intelligibility. One will not feel, as the film progresses, the full and clear deployment of this principle, but one will feel its intermittent presence, as the formalizing agent which replaces that of myth.

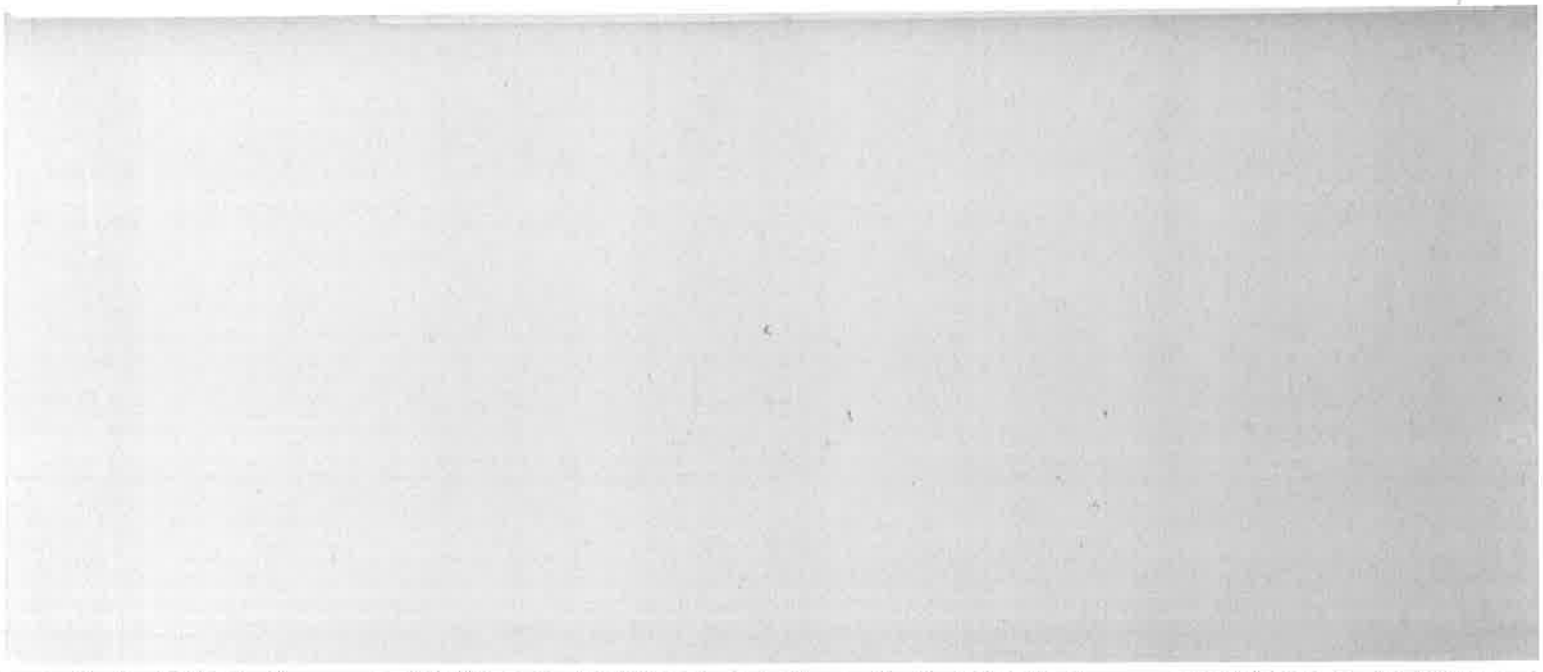
The first sequence of *Lives of Performers* is, however, not a performance, but a rehearsal by Rainer and her colleagues-characters for a future performance at the Whitney Museum. The repetitive character, a formal constituent, of the particular movement being rehearsed is echoed or confirmed by the camera's movement, perhaps the most active and sustained of the entire film. This movement describes, in a steady series of pans and tilts, a repeated quadrilateral form, discrete, but steady and relentless. The sound track is not audible until part of the way into this sequence, and it is slowly evident that the dialogue is extracted from another, quite different moment of rehearsal. It is as though Rainer is giving instructions (1, 2, 3, 4 . . . the beginning), setting the pattern for camera movement.

In this opening sequence, Rainer and Mangolte establish a series of variations upon a factor that is, of course, particularly interesting—central, in fact,—to dance film: the synechdocal mode of movement articulation through the ratio obtaining between close, medium and long shots. Rainer and Mangolte are, on the whole, quite free and varied in their handling of group dance movement. One can isolate shots, for example, in which the total screen space is framed by a close-up of head and torso with extended arms, or by feet, at the bottom right or left of frame. The range of shot sizes from this end of the spectrum to that of long shot is full and complete. And there would seem to be a sense in which this variety is particularly appropriate to New Dance. One knows that Nureyev, in supervising the recent film and television versions of major works by Petipa, insisted upon the steady maintenance of the long shot. And there is a way in which the qualities of poise, of presence, *ballon*, fullness of gesture which characterize that balletic style in general and Nureyev's in particular, require the use of the long shot and the long take. That dance demands the spatio-temporal continuity of *mise-en-scène* to manifest itself in its completeness. For it is quite evidently not the fictions of *The Sleeping Beauty* or of *Don Quixote* which solicit, indeed impose, an integrity of cinematic illusionism. It is rather the representation of the balletic reality of the dancer moving in theatrical space which insists upon it. Yvonne Rainer, in an early notebook had proposed the following sequence of movements: "Turn head from side to side while hands flap ears like semaphores. Speak softly—mention a part of the body, move that part. Mention another part, etc. Make it continuous." It is in the filmic synechdoche that she now performs that analytic and ostensive work upon the body in movement; the assertive cut provides for the *cinematic* intensification of its continuity.

The rehearsal ends ("dissolves") in laughter. A title, "all at once our attention vanished", provides the transition to the next sequence. Titles will be extensively, variously used. They have been signaled in previous performance by use of extensive program notes, by presentation of lists, nomenclature, and also by the growingly extensive use of slides, the occasional use of blackboard inscriptions. Titles will comment upon the film's actions, upon characters' motives. They will speak for characters' motives. They will speak for characters, directly, or enclosed by quotation marks. They will present literary quotations, the rhetoric of cliché. They will permit a personal utterance which is not weighted with mimetic expressiveness. It is as if Rainer is rediscovering the multiple function of titles in silent American and Soviet film. (One thinks of De Mille's *Male and Female* [1918], a film in which the narrative is reinforced by the titles' constant introduction of verbal metaphors.)

This title is followed by the second major sequence of *Grand Union Dreams,* in which a number of the film's major strategies are established as originating in *Grand Union Dreams.* We see a succession of eight still photographs from that performance. They are seen, however, upon a background of typescript, the script, in fact, of *Lives of Performers.* The off-screen dialogue, spoken by Yvonne, Shirley, and Fernando, initiates the reading of those photographs addressed, presumably, to the spectator. A descriptive analysis of the nature of the performance is offered. Thus:

> In this first photo Epp and James are engaged in a duet. David and Yvonne have just finished dragging them on the fake grass in a small arc. When they stand they undulate their upper bodies in unison while passing the red ball back and forth. They



> are about to pick up the grass and involve it in their undulations. Valda waits. My question is "What does it mean?" Are they celebrating something? Yes, that sounds good: Epp and James are doing a dance of pleasure at the advent of spring.

And now begins the dialogue between Shirley and Fernando (whose Spanish accent, extremely heavy, is somewhat at variance with the easy idiom of his text): "It actually *was* spring when we began working on this piece—and I first met you, Fernando. I think some people went over to your house after that first rehearsal." The exchange of reminiscences of two characters presumed now to be lovers is occasionally interrupted by Yvonne, who will say, before examining still number four, "This one is out of proper order." They are joined on the sound track by Valda, and the dialogue shades into a discussion of the iconographic and textual sources of *Grand Union Dreams.* As that shift slowly occurs, Yvonne's discourse, addressing Shirley, shades into both an explanation of her strategy and the inflections of direct speech, or its mimesis. A disagreement about the qualities of a given Jung text, used in *Dreams,* elicits from Yvonne the avowal of her present rejection of a

> weakness for the sweeping revelations of great men and her intention of pursuing the coming concert (Whitney, 1972) so different, of simply doing another form of story-telling, more intimate, less epic, and in further explaining, elicits from Valda the query "Were you saying that or reading it?"

In this section, then, still pictures are presented as the documents of a past performance. A superimposed fictional past is presented as generating a future performance, is the recorded performance of the first sequence. And the sequence ends with Rainer's specific warning to us that she is moving from the temptation of the mythic (the sweeping revelations of great men), from temptations of the epic into some other more intimate form.

Yvonne, when asked whether she is reading or telling her account of things, has replied, "I'm remembering it from Hofstra." This is a reference to a past performance at Hofstra University, in which the photographic documentation of *Dreams* was first used, and the laughter which greets the answer informs us that we are listening to a sound track which records the use, during a performance at the Whitney Museum, of that same material and the amused reaction of the rather knowing Whitney audience. The recitals and fictions which have now accompanied the images on the screen encapsulate, then, three distinct past temporal points. This somewhat disjunct and multiple present filmic moment will erupt again from recorded audience laughter at another exchange between Shirley and Fernando which spells out the terms of Shirley's ambivalence and vulnerability. The rather intensively introspective mood of Shirley is interrupted by Valda's entrance, in her evening dress, announcing she's seen a film. The response is, "I remember that movie. Its about all those small betrayals, isn't it?" (in a title), and we now witness the formalized enactment of another fictional (cliché) situation.

Valda, replying, "You might describe it that way," begins to extract the full archetypal force from this particular fictional convention and recounts, in an off-screen recital, the three subjectively conditioned, possible versions of a domestic triangle which is "also about a man who loves a woman and can't leave her when he falls in love with another woman. I mean he can't seem to make up his mind." This small drama of ambivalence and guilt is played as we see Valda, Fernando, and Shirley head-on in long shot, aligned before us, pivoting about to and from each other in an elementary choreography which objectifies the terms of the triangle, in extreme formalization of a dramatic situation. And it is this formalization which introduces a further extension and complication of the relationships which have until this point been established as the film's fictional core. It is now that John is introduced, and it is now that John and Valda begin to be involved in the drama developing between Shirley and Fernando.

The camera has been presenting that drama in a very intimate sort of way, through close-ups which examine the floor, the bed of the bare chamber. Yvonne and Shirley comment: "He's tired of indecisiveness. She doesn't know what to do." And there follows the revelation that "she has always worked in a form which disappears as soon as it reveals itself." This reflection, loader with implications as to the dynamics of Shirley's emotional ambivalence, is accompanied by an embrace during which the camera travels slowly up the joined bodies of Fernando and Shirley, descending, once again, down those bodies now separated.

The chamber in which these dramas are being played out is, of course, not really a room, but rather is a playing space. The intrusion of objects (Fernando's suitcase, for example) is therefore momentous, and the spareness of décor endows them with a particular weight and intensity of presence: those of a prop.

In this playing space, characters do make entrances and exists in a somewhat theatrical way. So that Valda, discussing the complexities of her relationship with John and Shirley, proposes an analysis through an inventory of possible versions of another "classical" situation: the reaction upon entering that chamber to the presence of the two other members of a triangle. These are boldly, unequivocally "enacted" in a series of takes which are separated by intrusive jump cuts: Valda entering and noticing or not noticing their presence, Valda affectionate, indifferent, brooding.

This playing space is then easily transformed into the space of dream, and as Shirley tells that dream, we see, in slow motion, a child bouncing a ball, while in the background a cat watches. It is rather like a cinematic transposition of Goya's portrait of a princely child. Shirley is dreaming about a wall ("neither concrete nor metal, but rather of steel mesh"—which is to say, transparent), the surmounting of which produces an experience of release and well-being as she accedes to the playground which can be glimpsed beyond it. And as she describes that wall we sense, rather than see, a limit which separates us from the playing child; it is the limit of the visual field of the camera, so that the bouncing ball in experienced as rebouding away from us, its direction inflected by the invisible, impalpable limit of the cinematic illusion.

The final major mode of fictional presentation in the film is constituted by a long series of shots which engage Valda, John, Shirley, and Fernando in *tableaux vivants.* They are seen against a black background in fixed attitudes of a sort which suggest dramatic action in arrest, very much like movie-production photos. A drama is being enacted in complete silence, all titles, commentary having ceased. The Performers have abandoned the rehearsal of their private dramas. They are part of another fiction, and we sense from the trajectory of glances, the tension of bodies, the sudden changes of costume accessories, the extremely artificial studio lighting, that, in fact, they constitute another fictional world in which the impulses of cruelty, guilt, violence are played out in an entirely different register of intensity. They are, in fact, enacting moments drawn from another film, *Pandora's Box,* made by G. W. Pabst in 1928, after Wedekind's drama. They have moved, then, from the formalization of an archetypal domestic triangle seen as choreography, to the projection of a filmic work, seen through photography. For the *tableaux* are drawn, not directly from the film, but rather from the stills accompanying the edition of the film's script published in 1971 by Simon and Schuster. The notion of cliché as organizing principle, as replacement for archetype, as mode of a possible fiction, has been radicalized and *literalized* in this final sequence: the psychological drama is wholly objectified in attitudes which succeed each other in silence, drawn from the photographic reduction of a moving picture. Music follows, and *Lives of Performers* is at an end.

FILM AND PERFORMANCE

by

Yvonne Rainer

I used continuous verbal material as early as 1962 *(Ordinary Dance),* film and slides in 1966. How is my use of these things different now? As for texts: The text now functions to construct a fictional continuity and cohesiveness. In the past it was an independent element that was meant to enrich a sequence of events and very often replaced music. It provided an emotional or dramatic fabric that I had not necessarily been concerned with in the making of the dance, a filling of the crevices with a content that the dance itself did not supply. Sometimes the text contained a thorough exploration of a given content, a cataloging of a body of information in as complete a way as I could (the William Bentley diary used in *Parts of Some Sextets).* This was not the way I went at dancing at all, at making movement. The physical aspect of my work had always been more erratic and electic; I didn't always feel the same obligation to make the dances hang together in a contextual way. But the texts fulfilled what obviously was some kind of need.

Film and slides now too project the imagery and content of an elusive story. Slide projections of text are a recent development. My process requires that I make certain distinctions for myself: What do I want the audience to do: *read* or *hear* textual material? When should such material be heard as a *recording* and when should it be heard *live,* i.e., from the lips of the performers themselves? In film should the spoken words be *in synch* or *out of synch,* or should there be *voice-over narration?* (This last decision is often based on economics). Should the performer *read* the words, *recite* them, or *paraphrase* them? These decisions are usually contingent on the nature of the material itself (such as length) and/or the context within which it is to be presented. The particular construction of a given sentence may be more important to me than a quality of "ad libbing", or vice versa.

In my live shows I look for a certain amount of diversity. I wouldn't like the audience to have to read all night; better they stay home with a good book. We do have the metaphor, however, "in one ear and out the other", which doesn't exist in relation to the eyes. When I want to be certain of the strongest impact from a given text, when I want to avoid the possibility that the words merely "wash over" the audience, I present the material in printed form. Four-letter words, erotic, and more emotionally "loaded" materials are dealt with in this manner. The complicity of the audience in being "face-to-face" with such materials is an important factor in the quality of the impact.

One outcome of these considerations in making a film is that any one choice automatically puts that part of the film into some kind of convention, such as the *acting* of the narrative film, the *inter-titles* of the silent movie, the *sub-titles* and *dubbing* of the foreign language film, the *voice-over* of the documentary and the flashback, and the *face-front-to-camera delivery* of Godard.

Paul Sharits, T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G

PAUL SHARITS: STOP TIME

by

Rosalind Krauss

> Cries and Whispers *is an instance, more interesting as a pure movie, as piece of Hitchcock gone gothic, than it is as proposition about the pain and solitude of human life. Except of course that there is no such thing as a pure movie.*
>
> Michael Wood, "Seeing Bergman," *The New York Review of Books,* March 8, 1973.

If the notion of purity is used as part of the grammar of essences, how would one go about isolating the pure film, the film as such? Where would one look to discover film itself? Would one turn to the physical supports of the image: to the celluloid strip with its fragile emulsion, or to the plane onto which the image is projected? Or would one argue that the images on the strip are still only film *in potentia*—that film itself is tied to the phenomenology of projection: to the beam of light which is the agent of the image's visibility as film, to the revolving action of the shutter which pits the reality of intermittent projection, as the gate opens, closes, and opens again on each separate frame, against the illusion of continuous motion? We tend to think of purity as a function of simples, as part of a process of reduction. Whereas, it may be only a relatively complex object that can reveal the totally synthetic nature of the expe ience of film.

Filmstrip, Soundstrip, a film which Paul Sharits exhibited last December at the Bykert Gallery, is an object of great complexity whose goal is to make available, at any one moment of one's experience of it, the parameters of that synthesis.

Filmstrip is a composite of four loops of film, projected so that their edges abut one another, forming a continuous horizontal band. Each loop projects the image of a strip of film running sideways (from right to left) through the projector, bearing on its surface parallel stripes of color and at its top edge a black band punctuated by the appearance and disappearance of sprocket holes. Seen together, the four contiguous images create the illusion of a single strip of film, four frames of which are visible to the viewer at any one time. The whole thing has about it the look of tremendous obviousness; one looks at it and thinks of it as simple: a strip of film projected as such.

In fact, each of the four loops is the result of two generations of recording and projection. For each was made by taking a strip of film, scratching on the emulsion, back-projecting the film onto a screen, rephotographing the image off the screen, taking the resultant film and scratching on it anew. In the final image, the difference between the two generations of scratched lines is that the ones on the original film are now blurred bands of light: the image of scratches; whereas the ones on the surface of the film one is now seeing are sharply delineated with ragged edges of emulsion: the projection of real scratches. Sometimes these "real" scratches pass over the sprocket holes at the top of the strip, making clear that the sprocket hole is a recorded image, a documentation of the past, rather than the registration of the physical fact of the actual film one is seeing in the present. As Sharits describes them: "the sprocket holes that were really empty spaces now are images. Even though they're passing white light. they're acting as images, as things."

Held synthetically in each single "frame" of *Filmstrip,* then, are the image of something recorded and the image of something actual—the evidence of the recording function of the camera stationed in past time relative to the present tense of the projection, conflated with the evidence of the actual strip of celluloid running scratched and mutable through the projector in a manifestation of its own physicality. Two separate levels of illusion nudge at each other within this conflation of the image of recording and the image of projection. There are at work, as well, two levels of illusion in one's impression of the strip as a whole. For the "strip" that one is seeing passing before one, four frames at a time, is the image of a continuous band of film—the image of what film is like when one holds it one's hands, visible as a sequence of frames only because it is immobile and inert, because it is not yet filmic. Projected into motion, the separate frames of film are exactly what cannot be seen. The visibility of the motion depends upon the extinction of their separate existence, the obliteration of the objecthood of the frame. But in *Filmstrip* one sees

both the illusion of the "frame" as such—the projection of each individual loop—and the illusion of a continuous slipping sideways into motion of the whole. The soundtrack of *Filmstrip, Soundstrip* emphasizes this continuity and direction of the image as a whole. For the audible sense of the soundtrack is dependent on one's hearing the sounds coming from the four projectors sequentially, from right to left, as each track enunciates separately four sections of the word "miscellaneous."

Seen over time, nothing "happens" in *Filmstrip.* The word "miscellaneous" repeats over and over, the scratches glide by, and the color of the base film changes according to exposure time from deep scarlet to pale pink and back again, asynchronously in the four loops. It is possibly because of this lack of development, this sense of motion as not progressing through time toward something, that *Filmstrip* has been seen as pictorial, as a moving luminous color field approximating itself to the static image of depth and surface that one finds in abstract painting. As Sharits point out, this approximation has nothing to do with his intention in *Filmstrip:*

> One of the problems is that I don't think people respond to this enough as film, partially because of the context (in an art gallery), and partially because they don't really know what film looks like. They don't realize that in one sense they're seeing a real scratch playing against or referring to by being parallel to a picture of a scratch going by at different speeds. They see these as just lines, and then they start relating it color field painting.

Instead, what is relevant to *Filmstrip* is the demonstration of that kind of temporality which is at the very heart of film. For film indeed is the recorded passage of time, an approximation of experience as it unrolls away from the past and toward the future. One can of course stop time within one's own experience: one can remove oneself from experience by reflection, by an act of consciousness that tries to stand outside itself and look back analytically on its own process of cognition. Yet that act of standing outside interrupts experience, changes it. And one is left with a sense of the tension between analytical reflection and a consciousness fully embedded in the flow of experience. Deep within the very grain of films is the same tension: between the sinuous flow of movement through time and the single frame whose potential for analysis is realized only by interrupting that flow.

Sharits' work within the medium of the flicker film was involved with creating a visceral feeling of that tension. His use of the flicker made it seem that one could catch the single frame as it came by projected, that one could actually see that moment which makes the film image possible. This feeling was pitched against the extraordinary forward momentum of films like *Ray Gun Virus* and *Razor Blades,* so that one felt the tension as a real thing, as the hypostatized effort of trying to arrest time, to stop it, so that one could "see" it. *Filmstrip* obviously no longer uses the medium of the flicker. But what happens within one's experience of it is a deepening of that same sense of the pain of analysis, that same effort to prize apart experience, to catch the illusion against the grain of time.

NOTES ON FILMS / 1966 - 1968

by

Paul Sharits

(OVERTURE: "All writing is pigshit. People who leave the obscure and try to define whatever it is that goes on in their heads, are pigs."—Antonin Artaud.)

GENERAL STATEMENT FOR 4th INTERNATIONAL EXPERIMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL, KNOKKE-LE ZOUTE:

I am tempted to use this occasion to say nothing at all and simply let my films function as the carriers of themselves—except that this would be perhaps too arrogant, and more important, a good deal of my art does not, in fact, "contain itself". It is difficult for me to verbalize about "my intentions" not only because the films are largely non-verbal experiences but because they are structured so as to demand more of viewers than attention and apreciation; that is, these works require a certain fusion of "my intentions" with the "films' intentions" and with the "viewers' intentions".

This has nothing to do with "pleasing an audience" —I mean to say that in my cinema flashes of projected light initiate neural transmission as much as they are analogues of such transmission systems and that the human retina is as much a "movie screen" as is the screen proper. At the risk of sounding immodest, by re-examining the basic mechanisms of motion pictures and by making these fundamentals explicitly concrete, I feel as though I am working toward a completely new conception of cinema. Traditionally, "abstract films", because they are extensions of the aesthetics and pictorial principles of painting or are simply demonstrations of optics, are no more cinematic than narrative-dramatic films which squeeze literature and theatre onto a two-dimensional screen. I wish to abandon imitation and illusion and enter directly into the higher drama of: celluloid, two-dimensional strips; individual rectangular frames; the nature of sprockets and emulsion; projector operations; the three-dimensional light beam; environmental illumination; the two-dimensional reflective screen surface; the retinal screen; optic nerve and individual psycho-physical subjectivities of consciousness. In this cinematic drama, light is energy rather than a tool for the representation of non-filmic objects; light, as energy, is released to *create* its own objects, shapes and textures. Given the fact of retinal inertia and the flickering shutter mechanism of film projection, one may generate virtual forms, create actual motion (rather than illustrate it), build actual color-space (rather than picture it), and be involved in actual time (immediate presence).

While my films have thematic structures (such as the sense of striving, leading to mental suicide and death, and then rhythms or rebirth in *Ray Gun Virus* and the viability of sexual dynamics as an alternative to destructive violence in *Piece Mandala End War),* they are not at all stories. I think of my present work as being occasions for meditational-visionary experience.

N:O:T:H:I:N:G / FROM AN APPLICATION FOR A GRANT:

The film will strip away anything (all present definitions of "something") standing in the way of the film being its own reality, anything which would prevent the viewer from entering totally new levels of awareness. The theme of the work, if it can be called a theme, is to deal with the non-understandable, the impossible, in a tightly and precisely structured way. The film will not "mean" *some*thing—it will "mean", in a very concrete way, *no*-thing.

The film focuses and concentrates on two images and their highly linear but illogical and/or inverted development. The major image is that of a lightbulb which first retracts its light rays; upon retracting its light, the bulb becomes black and, impossibly, lights up the space around it. The bulb emits one burst of black light and begins melting; at the end of the film the bulb is a black puddle at the bottom of the screen. The other image (notice that the film is composed, on all levels, of dualities) is that of a chair, seen against a graph-like background, falling backwards onto the floor (actually, it falls against and affirms the edge of the picture frame); this image sequence occurs in the center, "thig le" section of N:O:T:H:I:N:G. The mass of the film is highly vibratory color-energy rhythms; the color development is partially based on the Tibetan Mandala of the Five Dhyani Buddhas which is used in meditation to reach the highest level of inner consciousness—infinite, transcendental wisdom (symbolized by Vairocana being embraced by the Divine Mother of Infinite Blue Space). This formal-psychological composition moves progressively into

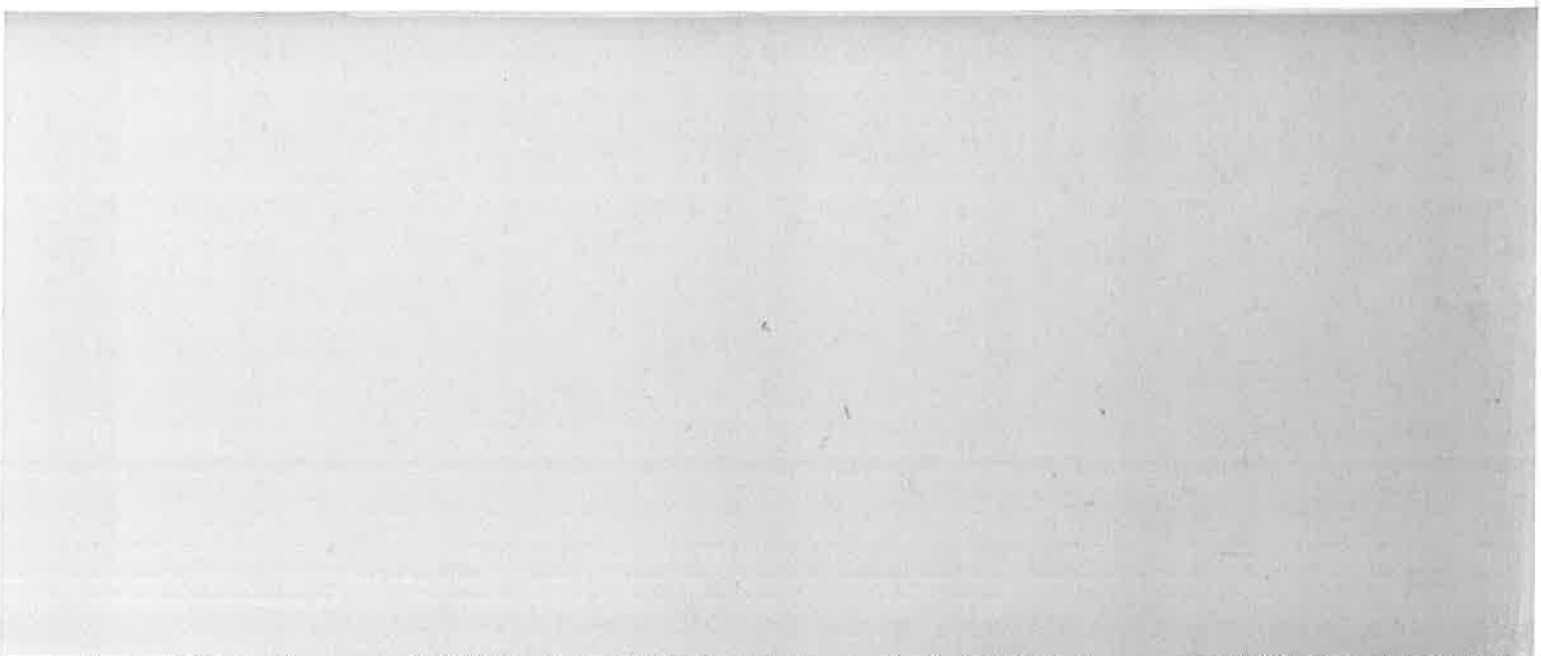
more intense vibration (through the symbolic colors white, yellow, red and green) until the center of the mandala is reached (the center being the "thig le" or void point, containing all forms, both the beginning and end of consciousness). The second half of the film is, in a sense, the inverse of the first; that is, after one has passed through the center of the void, he may return to a normative state retaining te richness of the revelatory "thig le" experience. The virtual shapes I have been working with (created by rapid alternations and patterns of blank color frames) are quite relevant in this work as is indicated by this passage from the Svetasvatara Upanishad: "As you practice meditation, you may see in vision forms resembling snow, crystals, smoke, fire, lightening, fireflies, the sun, the moon. These are signs that you are on your way to the revelation of Brahman."

I am not at all interested in the mystical symbolism of Buddhism, only in its strong, intuitively developed imagistic power. In a sense, I am more interested in the mantra because unlike the mandala and yantra forms which are full of such symbols, the mantra is often nearly pure nonsense—yet it has intense potency psychologically, aesthetically and physiologically. The mantra used upon reaching the "thig le" of the Mandala of the Five Dhyani Buddhas is the simple "Om"—a steady vibrational hum. I've tried to compose the center of N:O:T:H:I:N:G, on one level, to visualize this auditory effect.

From a letter to Stan Brakhage, late spring 1968: "The film is 'about' (it *is*) gradation-progression on many different levels; for years I had been thinking that if a fade is directional in that it is a hierarchical progression, and that that exists in and implies forward moving 'time', then why couldn't one construct inverse time patterns, why couldn't one structure a felt awareness of really going thru negative time? During the final shooting sessions these past few months I've had Vermeer's 'Lady Standing at the Virginals' hanging above my animation stand and have had the most peculiar experience with that work in relation to N:O:T:H:I:N:G (the colons 'meant' to create somewhat the sense of the real yet paradoxical concreteness of 'nothing' . . . as Wittgenstein so beautifully reveals). As I began to recognize the complex interweaving of levels of 'gradation' (conceptually, sensually, rhythmically, proportionately . . . even the metaphoric level of subject making music, etc.) in the Vermeer I began to see what I was doing in the film in a more conscious way. I allowed the feelings I was getting from this silent dialogue between process of seeing and process of structuring to further clarify the footage I was shooting. I can't get over the intense mental-emotional journeys I got into with this work and hope that the film is powerful enough to allow others to travel along those networks.

"Light comes thru the window on the left and not only illuminates the 'Lady at the Virginals' but illuminates the subjects in the two paintings (which are staggered in a forward-reverse simultaneous progression-creating a sense of forward and backward time) hanging on the wall and the one painting on the inside lid of the virginal! The whole composition is circular, folds in on itself but implies that part of that circle exists out in front of the surface. What really moved me was the realization that the light falling across the woman's face compounded the light-gradation-time theme by forcing one back on the awareness of (the paradox of) awareness. I.e., one eye, itself dark, is half covered with light while the other eye is in shadow; both eyes are gazing directly at the viewer as if the woman is projecting music at the viewer thru her gaze (as if reversing the 'normal' role of 'perception') . . . I mean, the whole point is that the instrument by which light-perception is made possible is itself in the dark."

POSTSCRIPT: Interrelated proportions welded into a formula consisting "of terms, some known and some unknown, some of which were equal to the rest; or rather all of which taken together are equal to nothing; for this is often the best form to consider."—Descartes



HARRY SMITH: AN INTERVIEW

by

P. Adams Sitney

SMITH: The dating of my films is difficult because I had made the first one, or part of that, in 1939. It was about twenty-five years ago, although it says forty years in the *Film-Makers Cooperative Catalogue*, because, at different times, I have posed as different ages.

SITNEY: *When were you born?*

I never give that information out. I would like to say that I'm the Czar of Russia. My mother always claimed to be Anastasia. That's how I got Mr. R. interested in these things. This interview has to be severely cut down. Like no names, Mr. R., you know, or something.

I had drawn on film for quite a while, but exactly which one is # *1* I don't know. It was made something between 1939 and, I would say, 1942 at the latest. Later, I was very disappointed to find out that Len Lye had done it. Naturally, I was horrified when either Dick Foster or Frank Stauffacher showed up with a book one day and told me that not only had Len made hand-painted films, but he had done 16mm ones. Then later somebody in San Francisco, whose name I forget (he was the Harley-Davidson agent), got like stimulated by me and made 8mm hand-painted films.

I was made by taking impressions of various things, like cutting up erasers or the lid of a Higgins Ink bottle. That's where I derived all the circular shapes. There's a kind of cork on the top of it. I dipped it in the ink and squashed it down on the film; then, later, I went over the thing with a crow-quill pen. However, the colors aren't too good in that film. I can't remember how long it took to make it, because I'd made a number of others. I had a considerable number of films that have not been printed at all. Undoubtedly less than half of my stuff is in my possession now.

When I was a child, there were a great number of books on occultism and alchemy always in the basement.

Like I say, my father gave me a blacksmith shop when I was maybe twelve; he told me I should convert lead into gold. He had me build all these things like models of the first Bell telephone, the original electric light bulb, and perform all sorts of historical experiments. I once discovered in the attic of our house all those illuminated documents with hands with eyes in them, all kinds of Masonic deals that belonged to my grandfather. My father said I shouldn't have seen them, and he burned them up immediately. That was the background for my interest in metaphysics, and so forth.

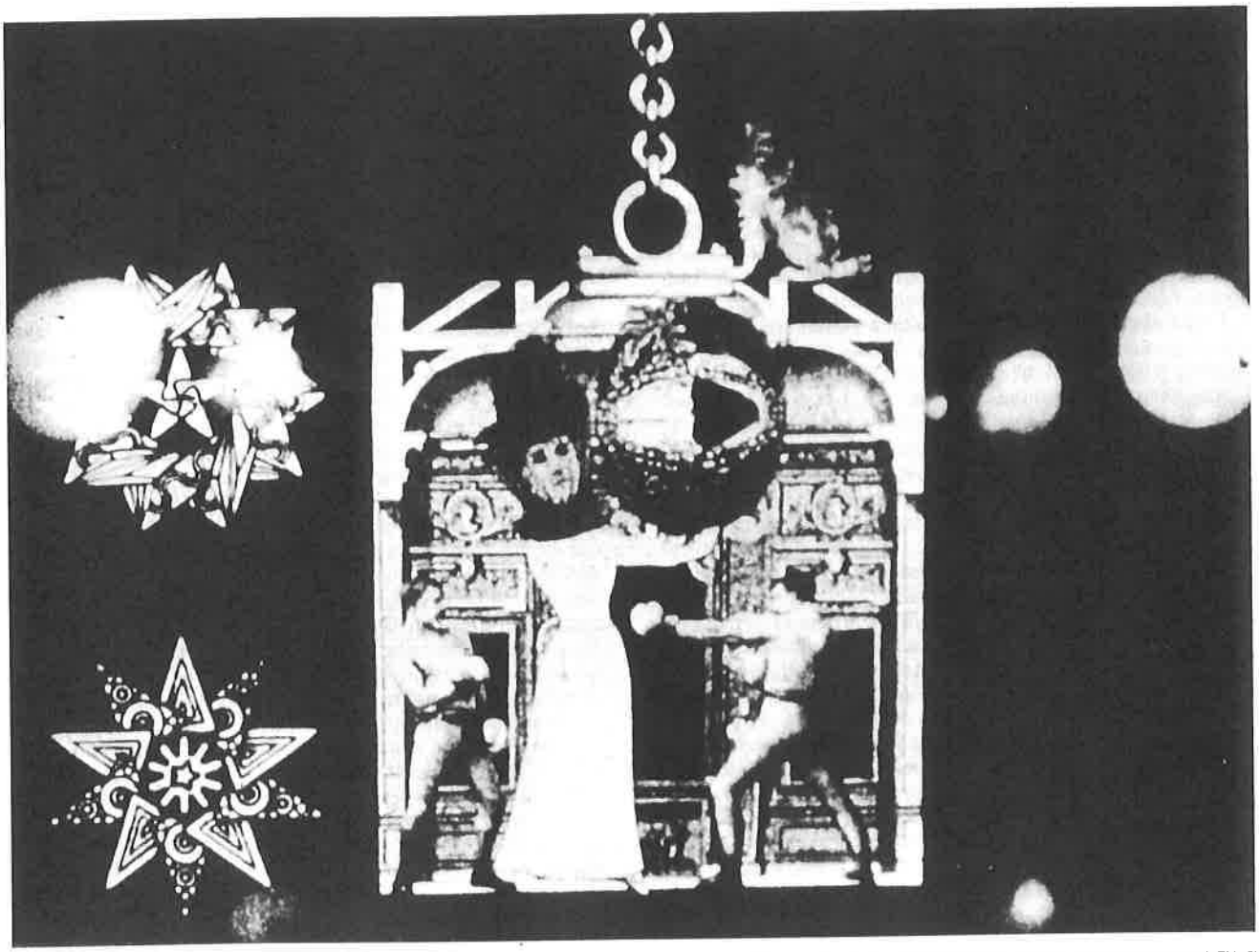
Very early, my parents got me interested in projecting things. The first projections that I made were from the lamps of a flashlight. In those days, flashlights had lenses on the front of them; that couldn't have been much later than in 1928.

My parents lived in separate houses from the time I was about ten until I left home at the age of eighteen. They had communication between their houses by ringing bells. They'd meet for dinner. My father wanted to play the piano and the guitar. He was interested also in drawing and things; he was the one who showed me how to make that "Tree of Life" geometrically.

So anyhow, the first projections that I made were negatives that my mother and father had taken in Alaska. I had thousands of those, enormous masses of this stuff. I can remember the amazement that I felt when I took the lens of the flashlight and was able to see one of the snow scenes on the walls of the hall.

My mother evidently had a number of boyfriends as my father was never there. He was always in Alaska doing something. She would park me in movies, most of which I can't remember. They were all silent movies. That's what got me interested in them. Sure. She was off doing something else; maybe not with boyfriends. I did meet a few of them; that's how I met Aleister Crowley. Probably he's my father, although I don't want to say that. There's a question as to whether he is or Robert James Smith is. She had fallen in love with Crowley when he was in this country in about 1918, while he was living on some islands in Puget Sound north of Seattle. Then he showed up a few more times, probably —I don't know when they were—in 1927 or sometime —that can be determined from books on his travels. I can remember meeting him at least once; he showed me a clam neck hanging out of a cliff; he had a black turtle-neck sweater on. He was not any kind of sissified character like they say. He was a really handsome, muscular person. My mother would sneak off to see him. He was there twice as far as I can remember; she met him when he was running naked down the beach in 1918.

She would leave me in a theater. I saw some good



Harry Smitch, HEAVEN AND EARTH MAGIC

films there, which I wish it were possible to locate again. I saw one, for example, which was pretty good in which bad children put caps into the spaghetti at a fancy Italian dinner. (That was one of the first sound films that I ever saw). When the people chewed their spaghetti there was a BAAAKH; that was about all that was on the soundtrack. The mouth would fly open, and false teeth would go across the dinner table, and so forth. They consistently took me to see Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. I can remember being horrified when Keaton (in *The General)* gets caught in the bear trap, though my parents thought that was so funny. I was never able to understand why it was funny, but they kept taking me back to it day after day after day. Mainly, I liked serials. I didn't particularly like Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton. Of course, I appreciate them now.

I saw all those Fu Manchu movies; they were some of my favorites. There was also some serial that had a great big spider about the size of this room, which would be chasing Pearl White down through tunnels. That thing scared the shit out of me, but I probably had erections during it, it was so terrifying. I was very interested in spiders at about the age of five.

I was mainly a painter. The films are minor accessories to my paintings; it just happened that I had the films with me when everything else was destroyed. My paintings were infinitely better than my films because much more time was spent on them. I can show you slides of them. I don't have any slides that were made since about 1950. That's a painting that was made of the score for one of the films that were shown. That's like the scenario for the last movement of one of those color films.

On that Oz film, that expensive one, of course, I had quite a few people working; so that all kinds of special cut-outs were made that were never photographed. I mean really wonderful ones were made! One cut-out might take someone two months to make. They were very elaborate stencils and so forth. All of my later films were never quite completed. Most of the material was never shot, because the film dragged on too long.

I tried as much as possible to make the whole thing automatic, the production automatic rather than any kind of logical process. Though, at this point, Allen Ginsberg denies having said it, about the time I started making those films, he told me that William Burroughs made a change in the Surrealistic process—because, you know, all that stuff comes from the Surrealists—that business of folding a piece of paper: One person draws the head and then folds it over, and somebody else draws the body. What do they call it? The Exquisite Corpse. Somebody later, perhaps Burroughs, realized that something was directing it, that it wasn't arbitrary, and that there was some kind of what you might call God. It wasn't just chance. Some kind of universal process was directing these so-called arbitrary processes; and so I proceeded on that basis: Try to remove things as much as possible from the consciousness or whatever you want to call it so that the manual processes could be employed entirely in moving things around. As much as I was able, I made it automatic.

I must say that I'm amazed, after having seen the black-and-white film (# *12*) last night, at the labor that went into it. It is incredible that I had enough energy to do it. Most of my mind was pushed aside into some sort of theoretical sorting of the pieces, mainly on the basis that I have described: First, I collected the pieces out of old catalogues and books and whatever; they made up file cards of all possible combinations of them; then, I spent maybe a few months trying to sort the cards into logical order. A script was made for that. All the script and the pieces were made for a film at least four times as long. There were wonderful masks and things cut out. Like when the dog pushes the scene away at the end of the film, instead of the title "end" what is really there is a transparent screen that has a candle burning behind it on which a cat fight begins—shadow forms of cats begin fighting. Then, all sorts of complicated effects; I had held these off. The radiations were to begin at this point. Then Noah's Ark appears. There were beautiful scratch-board drawings, probably the finest drawings I ever made—really pretty. Maybe 200 were made for that one scene. Then there's a graveyard scene, when the dead are all raised again. What actually happens at the end of the film is everybody's put in a teacup, because all kinds of horrible monsters came out of the graveyard, like animals that folded into one another. Then everyone gets thrown in a teacup, which is made out of a head, and stirred up. This is the Trip to Heaven and the Return, then the Noah's Ark, then The Raising of the Dead, and finally the Stirring of Everyone in a Teacup. It was to be in four parts. The script was made up for the whole works on the basis of sorting pieces. It was exhaustingly long in its original form. When I say that it was cut, mainly what was cut out was, say, instead of the little man bowing and then standing up, he would stay bowed down much longer in the original. The cutting that was done was really a correction of timing. It's better in its original form.

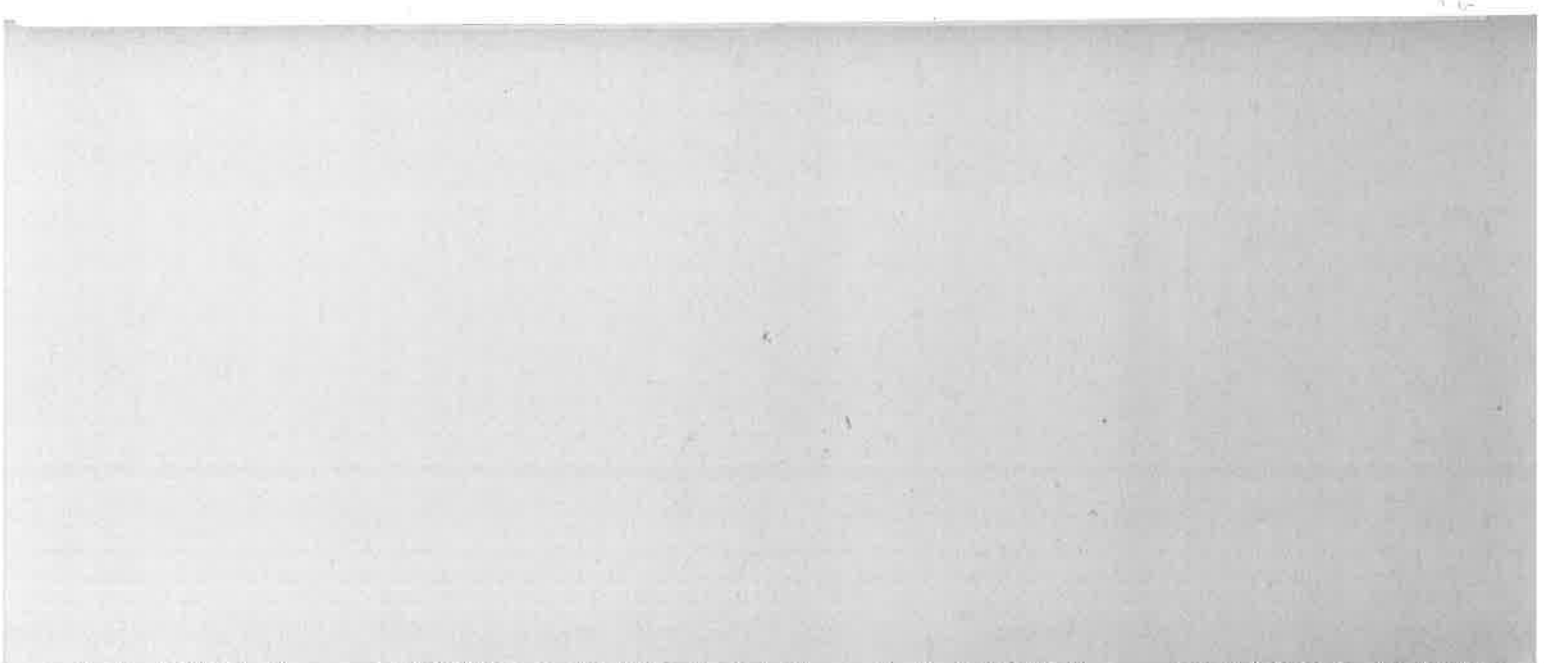
13 had all the characters out of Oz in it. That was

assembled in the same way: I naturally divided Oz up into four lands because Oz consists of the Munchkins, the Quadlings, the Gillikins, and the Winkies; and then the Emerald City is in the middle; that is where the wizard's balloon had landed. I had built that thing many times as a child. I had fairly severe hallucinations, and I had built something called my Fairy Garden for many years. I actually used to see little gnomes and fairies and stuff until I was seven or eight. It's a typical psychic phenomenon; I mean, I wasn't nutty or anything; all children see that stuff. Up until I was eighteen or so, I worked hard on my Fairy Garden and then started building Oz. It was a fairly large place, because we had blocks and blocks of property in Anacortes. I built Oz a number of times; the final form, though, was for this film. It was to be a commercial film. Very elaborate equipment was built; the animation stand was about the size of a floor and exactly fourteen feet high. Oz was laid out on it, then seven levels, built up. It was like the multiplane camera of Disney, except that I was using a Mitchell camera that moved around. That's how I got into so many difficulties. Van Wolf had not paid rent on the camera, which was a thousand dollars a week. He was the producer, but he was taking far too many pills to do much but try to wiggle out of situations that developed. He got various people to pay for it Huntington Hartford, Harry Phipps, Peggy Hitchcock, Elizabeth Taylor, and so forth invested in the film.

It was divided into different things. I ditched the Munchkins, Quadlings, Gillikins, and Winkies in their original form. What I was really trying to do was to convert Oz into a Buddhistic image like a mandala. I can't even remember what those lands were. One of them was Hieronymus Bosch Land: All of Bosch's paintings were carefully dissected. Another one was Microscopia taken from the books of Haeckel, who was the Viennese biological artist and very wonderful. The things he made are just marvelous; he picked out every possible grotesque object that there was. There was another land that was entirely made out of flesh. Enormous vistas for miles were made out of naked people from dirty mags. That would have been a nice film! Most of my material was prepared for it, and over six hours of tests were shot to get the apparatus to operate correctly. Only the little piece in the drawer there was ever synchronized to the music. In this particular section, the Ballet Music from *Faust,* the Tin Woodman performs magic before leaving for the Emerald City. The sound track was made up for the whole film.

I don't think I'll make any more animated films. They're too laborious and bad for the health. Sitting under those lights for hours is terrible. I've made enough of those; just like I've made enough hand-drawn films. I would like to make an "underground" movie that could be shown everywhere in little towns, because it was seeing art films, or whatever they used to call them, that first got me interested in these things. Now there must be lots of kids all over the world that would make films if they saw some of the things that are being made now.

There was another very good series of films I saw during the late 1920's. It always started with coming up to a door that had a little grille work in it, a mysterious little thing; the going in there, through it. Isadora Duncan was in one of those. You'd go through this door, and then there would be some Turkish or Chinese exotic operations. Those and the Fu Manchu movies were the ones that influenced me most. Naturally, I would like to make some kind of artistic film that would be helpful to the progress of humanity. And that's the best one I can think of. There's no doubt in my mind that eventually someone is going to make a so-called inderground movie that will revive Hollywood as Kenneth Anger writes of it.



THE FILMS OF MICHAEL SNOW

by

P. Adams Sitney

Michael Snow utilizes the tension of the fixed frame and some of the flexibility of the fixed tripod in *Wavelength.* Actually, it is a forward zoom for forty-five minutes, halting occasionally, and fixed during several different times so that day changes to night within the motion.

A persistent polarity shapes the film. Throughout, there is an exploration of the room, a long studio, as a field of space, subject to the arbitrary events of the outside world so long as the zoom is recessive enough to see the windows and thereby the street. The room, during the day, at night, on different film stock for color tone, with filters, and even occasionally in negative is gradually closing up its space as the zoom nears the back wall and the final image of a photograph upon it—a photograph of waves. This is the story of the diminishing area of pure potentiality. The insight of space, and, implicitly, cinema as potential, is an axiom of the structural film.

So we have always the room as the realm of possibility. Polar to this is a series of events whose actuallity is emphasized by an interruption of the sine-wave blasting soundtrack with simple synchronized sound. The order of the events is progressive and interrelated: A bookcase is moved into the room, two girls are listening to the radio; so far, we are early in the film, the cine-morning, the action appears random; midway through, a man climbs the stairs (so we hear) and staggers onto the floor, but the lens has already crossed half the room and he is only glimpsed, the image passes over him. Late in the film, its evening, one of the radio girls returns, goes to the telephone, which, being at the back wall is in full view, and in a dramatic moment of acting unusual in the avant-garde cinema calls a man, Richard, to tell him there is a dead body in the room. She insists he does not look drunk but dead and says she will meet him downstairs. She leaves. The call makes a story of the previously random events. Had the film ended here, actuality in the potent image of death would have satisfied all the potential energy built up before; but Snow prefers a deeper vision. What we see a visual echo, a ghost in negative superimposition of the girl making the phone call, and the zoom continues, as the sound grows shriller, into the final image of the static sea pinned to the wall, a cumulative metaphor for the whole experience of the dimensional illusion of open space. The crucial difference between the form of Brakhage's *Song 6* and this film is that the *Song,* true to song form, is purely the invocation of a metaphor, while *Wavelength* uses a metaphor as the end of an elaborate, yet simple structure whose coordinates are one room and one zoom.

[One can see in an earlier Snow film, *New York Eye and Ear Control* (1964), the conceptual origins of *Wavelength* (1967) and ←→ (1969), his latest long work. Numerous dualities make the film cohere: The cut-out figure of The Walking Woman (an obsessive image from his paintings and sculpture), at times white, sometimes black, recurs throughout the film, which has two different parts. In the first half, the flat cut-outs contradict the deep spaces of the landscapes, rockscapes, and seascapes in which they are placed. The second half occurs indoors, within a small unoriented space, where black and white pose in relationship to the cutouts and their negative moulds.

New York Eye and Ear Control suggests a declension of ideas, of black and white, flat and round, stasis and ebullience, silence and sound; but (despite the film-maker's articulate description of the over-all construction, in our conversations) it is architectonically naïve. What is Snow's primary weakness here becomes the central strength of his later work: the vision of a simple situation permeated by a field or rich philosophical implication, which *duration* elaborates.] Like Brakhage's *Song 6,* it is an epistemological metaphor. What is particularly interesting is that, like Landow's *Fleming Faloon* (1963) it is a first attempt to make a structural film by the film-maker who later achieved that form, before the form had emerged.

[Snow considers the primary historical contribution of *New York Eye and Ear Control* to be its direct confrontation with aesthetic *endurance.* If this was his intention, he has been more successful in a later film, *One Second in Montreal* (1969), where more than thirty still photographs of snow covered parks are held on the screen for very long periods. The shape of the film is a crescendo-diminuendo of endurance—although the first shot

Michael Snow, WAVELENGTH

is held very long, the second stays even longer, and so on into the middle of the film, when the measures begin to shorten.

The central fact of ←→ (1969) is velocity. The perpetually moving camera, left-right, right-left, passes a number of "events" which become metaphors in the flesh for the back-and-forth inflection of the camera (passing a ball, the eye movement of reading, window washing, and so on). These events suggests the elements of contemporary dance (Yvonne Rainer, and others). Each activity is a rhythmic unit, self-enclosed, and joined to the subsequent activity only by the fact that they occur in the same space. They provide a living scale for the speeds of camera movement and solid forms in the field of energy that the panning makes out of space.

The continual panning of the camera creates an apparent time in conflict with the time of any given operation. In the film's coda, a recapitulation of all the events, out of their original order and in multiple superimposition, the illusions of time dissolve in an image of atemporal continuity.

The overt rhythm of ←→ depends upon the speed at which the camera moves from side to side, or up and down. Likewise, the overt drama of *Wavelength* derives from the closing-in of space, the action of the zoom lens. The specific content of both films is empty space, rooms. It is the nature and structure of the events within the rooms that differentiate the modes of the films.

CONVERGING ON "LA REGION CENTRALE" MICHAEL SNOW IN CONVERSATION WITH CHARLOTTE TOWNSEND

More than five years ago I started speculating on how you could make a real landscape film, a movie of a completely open space. *Wavelength,* 1966-67, *Standard Time,* 1967, and ←→, 1969, used closed, rectangular spaces, each for different purposes. *New York Eye and Ear Control,* 1964, had both city and country spaces, but they were part of a completely different composition from what one might call "landscape." I wanted to make a film in which what the camera-eye did in the space would be completely appropriate to what it saw, but at the same time, equal to it. Certain landscape paintings have achieved a unity of method and subject. Cézanne for instance produced an, to say the least, incredibly balanced relationship between what he did and what he (apparently) saw.

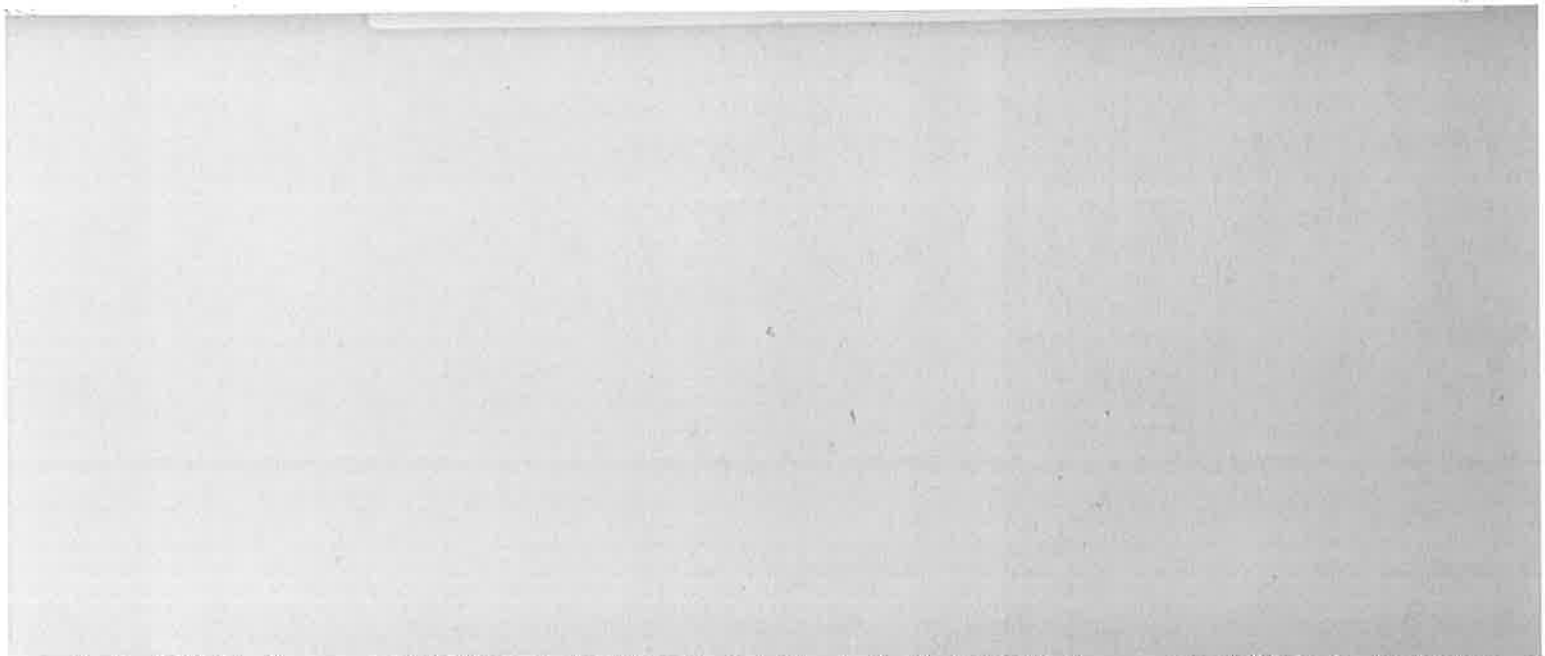
Standard Time had the germ of the idea. When I saw what happened with the continuous circular, horizontal pans I realized there was a lot to be done with it. If properly orchestrated it can do some powerful physical-psychic things. It can really move you around, as I think you felt in the ten minute excerpt I showed you. If you become completely involved in the reality of these circular movements it's *you* who are spinning surrounded by everything, or, conversely, you are a stationary centre and it's all revolving around. you. But on the screen it's the centre which is never seen, which is mysterious. One if the titles I considered using was *!?432101234?!* (an adaptation of a sculpture title) by which I meant that as you move down in dimensions you approach zero and in this film, *La Région Centrale* that zero point is the absolute centre, Nirvanic zero, being the ecstatic centre of a complete sphere. You see, the camera moves around an invisible point completely in 360 degrees, not only horizontally but in *every* direction and on every plane of a sphere. Not only does it move in predirected orbits and spirals but it itself also turns, rolls and spins. So that there are circles within circles and cycles within cycles. Eventually there's no gravity. The film is a cosmic strip.

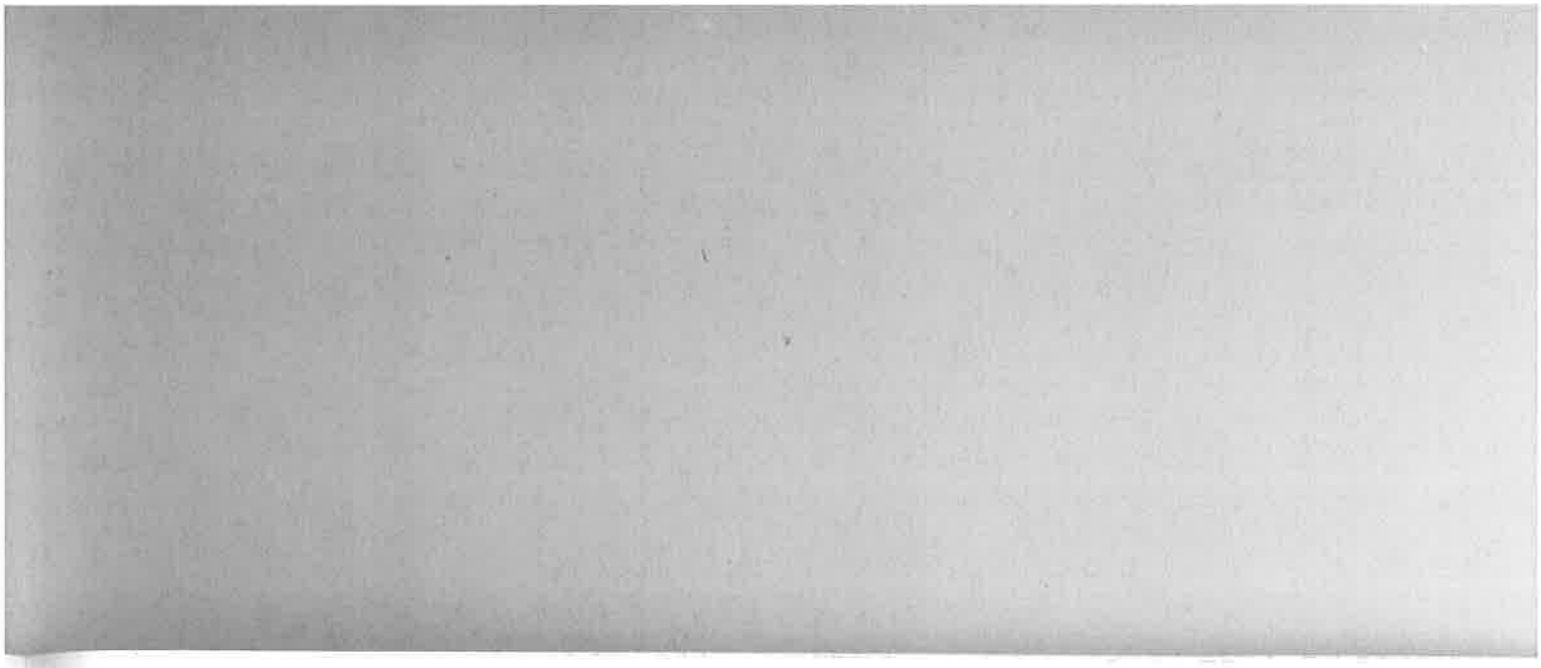
I'd wanted to use another non-verbal title like ←→ but hadn't settled on one when Joyce saw the words *La Région Centrale* in a book on physics in a bookstore in Quebec City and suggested it. I think it's fine, very appropriate.

As a move from ←→ I decided to extend the machine aspect of film so that there might be a more objective feeling, you wouldn't be thinking of someone's expressive handling of the thing but perhaps how and why the whole thing got set in motion, what's behind it. In both ←→ and *La Région Centrale* once it is set up it keeps on going. The camera itself is a machine so attaching it to another, personally designed machine, seemed a way of augmenting its possibilities. In this case I was composing for a very special instrument. The piano is a machine too.

When I'm talking about my films it sometimes worries me that I give the impression that they're just a kind of documentation of a thesis. They're not. They're experiences: real experiences even if they are representational. The structure is obviously important and one describes it because it's more easily describable than other aspects; but the shape, with all other elements, adds up to something which can't be said verbally and that's why the work *is,* why it exists. There are a lot of quite complex things going on, some of which develop from setting the idea in motion. The idea is one thing, the result is another. In ←→, for example, there were some qualities that I could'nt possibiy have foreseen but which were organically appropriate and which I tried to strengthen in the editing. *Wavelength* was like a song, like singing, but with ←→ I wanted to do something that emphasized rhythm. One of its qualities is a kind of percussive rawness, but is goes through various stages of effects and qualities at the different speeds. When it's very slow one is more interested in identifying everything; as it gets to a medium speed there's the rickety quality, a kind of futurist staggering. Faster, and the image begins to smear, to blur. The continuous side to side motion is so ongoing that it sets up its own (real) time and the things and people that are caught up in the scanning process become consumed by it. The film has a time of its own which overrides the time of the things photographed. The people photographed seem victimized by it, but the film wins out and so does the real live spectator. *La Région Centrale* grew from this.

In seeing *One Second in Montreal* you have to be





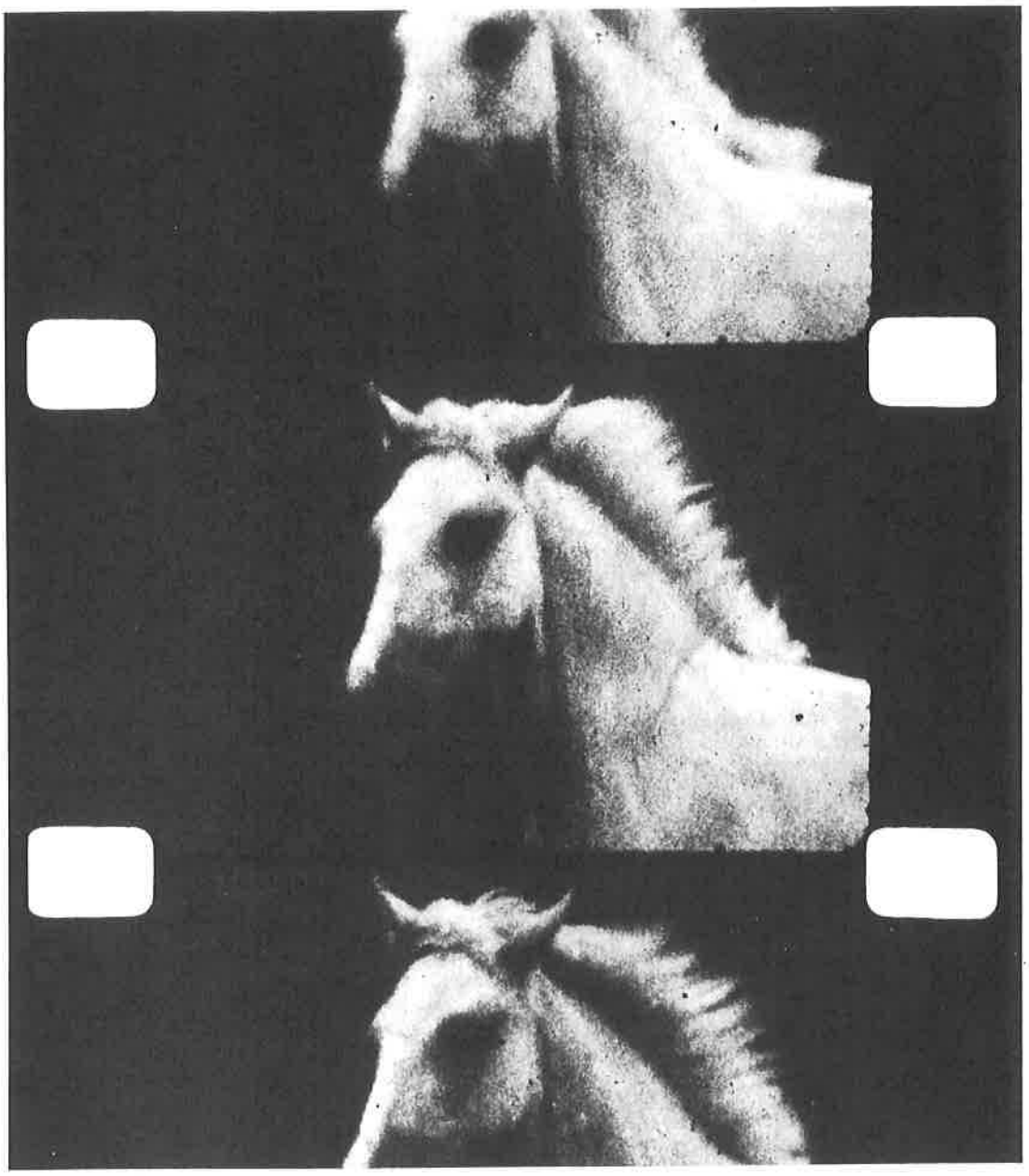
able to live with what is happening for a certain length of time in order to begin to understand it, to start to speculate with it. It is literally made with lengths of time. In a completely different way this applies to *La Region* too. It is a big space and it needed a big time. It's manageable however. Three hours isn't *that* long. You can see three hours. It's embarrassing to say it but within the terms of *my* work I had in the back of my mind great religious works like the *St Matthew Passion, B Minor Mass, The St John Passion, The Ascension Oratorio.* What an artist! I wish he could hear and see *La Région Centrale.*

Also it should present the clearest dialogue between what one identifies as "sky" for example, and the actual, physical effect on the eye-mind of the project moving light image. *La Région* isn't only a documentary photographing of a particular place at various times of day but is equally and more importantly a source of sensations, an ordering, an arranging of eye movements and of inner ear movements. It starts out *here,* respecting the gravity of our situation but it more and more sees as a planet does. Up down up, down up down, up up up. The first 30 minutes shows us the four people who have set the camera and machine in motion doing various things, talking, looking, but after that we are gone and the remaining two and a half hours is entirely made by the machinery (you?). There are no other people but you (the machinery?) and the extraordinary wilderness. Alone. Like a lot of other humans I feel horror at the thought of the humanizing of the entire planet. In this film I recorded the visit of some of our minds and bodies and machinery to a wild place but I didn't colonize it, enslave it. I hardly even borrowed it. Seeing really is believing.

I composed the camera movements, made an overall score for the film. Pierre worked out a system of supplying the orders to the machine to move in various patterns by means of sound tapes. Each direction has a different frequency of an electronic sine wave assigned to it. It makes up a layer of tones divided into five sections starting very high, about 10,000 cycles per second, down to about 70 cycles. The speed information is in terms of beats or pulses going from slow to fast. So the sound space is divided up horizontally which makes it equivalent, and synchronous to the eye space in some ways, but in others it's a foil to it. Anyway, this layered but simple sound space is the sound track. The machine can be operated remotely with a set of dials and switches. The sound-image relation in films is a whole world of conservation in itself.

I only looked in the camera once. The film was made by the planning and by the machinery itself. So you can imagine I was eagerly awaiting the results when the film (about six hours) finally went to the lab in Montreal.

Most of my films accept the traditional theatre situation. Audience here, screen there. It makes concentration and contemplation possible. We're two sided and we fold. Truly three dimensional pieces can only be done with sound and I did a sound piece at Expo '67 called *Sense Solo* that completely wrapped that up as far as I'm concerned. Multiscreen things usually involve such vague optical direction that they're often a kind of therapeutical Impressionism. My work is classical in the sense that it involves a definite directing of one's concentration. The single rectangle can contain a lot. In *La Région* the frame is very important as the image is continually flowing though it. The frame is eyelids. It can seem sad that in order to exist a form must have bounds, limits, set and setting. The rectangle's content can be precisely that. In *La Région* the frame emphasizes the cosmic continuity which is beautiful, but tragic: it just goes on without us.



Joyce Wieland, LA RAISON AVANT LA PASSION

"THERE IS ONLY ONE JOYCE"

by

P. Adams Sitney

The future course of Joyce Wieland's films is unpredictable. Looking at her achievements to date, which are substantial, one sees a nexus of aspects that have not yet crystallized into a single form. She seems to foster and encourage the contradictions within her works, to let them run their course; for she has a filmic *style* that is her signature, quite apart from the differing genres of filmmaking she employs. In this note, I would like to approach a definition of her style through its historical context.

Joyce Wieland moved to New York in 1962, when the exhibition of avant-garde films was at its apogee of excitement. For many filmmakers it was a period of intense turmoil as a major shift was occurring in radical film aesthetics. The history of the independent film in America up to that time had been one of progressive plasticization of a psychological premise: the identity of film and dream. The early psychodramas of Brakhage, Anger, and Markopoulos, in which the filmmaker acted out his own nightmares, had evolved into apocalyptic myth films (*Dog Star Man, Scorpio Rising*) and involuted abstract psychological narratives (*Twice A Man*). From the similarly premised comedies of Sidney Peterson and James Broughton—they used surrealism as a confessional weapon in the more "objective" mode of comedy —came the best picaresques of Ron Rice and the barely conscious parodies of the Kuchar Brothers. Wieland arrived in New York at a time when the latest of these films were being completed and premiered and when retrospective exhibitions of the past achievements within the avant-garde were most intense.

As a viewer with experience in filmmaking, at Graphic Films an outpost for early refugees from the monolithic tedium of the National Film Board, she confronted the past and present of the radical film simultaneously. Her moral commitment to the independent film had already been made; inspired by reflected energy from the activities in New York and San Francisco (without having yet seen the films) she had made some subversive parodies of her commercial animation work. Soon she and Mike Snow, her husband, were bringing the first programs of the New York filmmakers (and the Canadian expatriate Bob Cowan) to the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto.

I noted above that she came to know the avant-garde film at the very end of the psycholanalytical tendency. The transition did not become apparent until it had taken place. A number of successful painters began to make films at that time, the most spectacular example being Andy Warhol. The older generation of filmmakers were themselves changing, as the entire axis of American art shifted at then end of the 1950s. The formal concerns of Joyce Wieland's cinema have their origin at this precise moment on the pivot. The cinema that emerged from this transition is more plastic and more intellectual than what preceded it; it rejects the spectacular complexities made possible by montage in favour of an exploration of the spatial field natural to the cinematic image; and when exaggerated extremes of stasis are required to explore that space, the new filmmakers do not shrink from extending their films over a long stretch of time. To make the outline clear, simple, and evident from the very start of the film has become a virtue.

Obviously the great influence on Joyce Wieland's formal aspirations has been her husband, Mike Snow, who made two of the masterpieces which define the tendency I have been describing. I mention this not to diminish Wieland's individuality and originality—which is great—but to clarify a persistent confusion (which her films tend to perpetuate). Snow has vigorously oriented himself and dicovered his strength within the concerns of the Structural film. Wieland has not. Formally her films owe allegiance to the Structuralists, yet what is happening on the screen, moment by moment, is quite different.

There are aspects of Wieland's art that relate to the work of other filmmakers. I am not concerned at this time with the tired question of influences, but with the definition of a creative personality in the context of her contemporaries and immediate antecedents. In plastic conception Wieland follows the achievements of Marie Menken (whose work she hardly knows directly), and in her use of sound she has learned much from the Kuchar Brothers. Menken has been making short film poems for twenty-five years: *Lights, Glimpse of A Garden, Notebook, Here and There with My Octoscope,*

Go! Go! Go!, Wrestling. The titles are self-evident, an index to her style. She has also irreverently, but lovingly, passed her moving camera over other people's art to make a film, *Visual Variations on Noguchi, Mood Mondrian.*

The most Menken-like of Joyce Wieland's films, *Water Sark,* evolves through images created by moving a camera around and through glasses filled with different colours of water. *1933* repeats a street scene, shot from an upper loft window as the camera speed changes from fast to normal motion, about a dozen times with the title superimposed over every other repetition. In *Sailboat* a boat sails from screen left and our right, then another, and another, etc., with slight changes of scale at each occurrence.

In descriptive prose these films seem slight. To the eye they have a sensuality that deepens with reseeing. A curiosity of Wieland's evolution is that although the quality and intensity of her work has improved yearly for the past five years, each new film provides visual information and clues that make reviewing the earlier works a progressively richer experience. Only after *Reason Over Passion* (1969) am I coming to appreciate the rewards of *Water Sark* (1965).

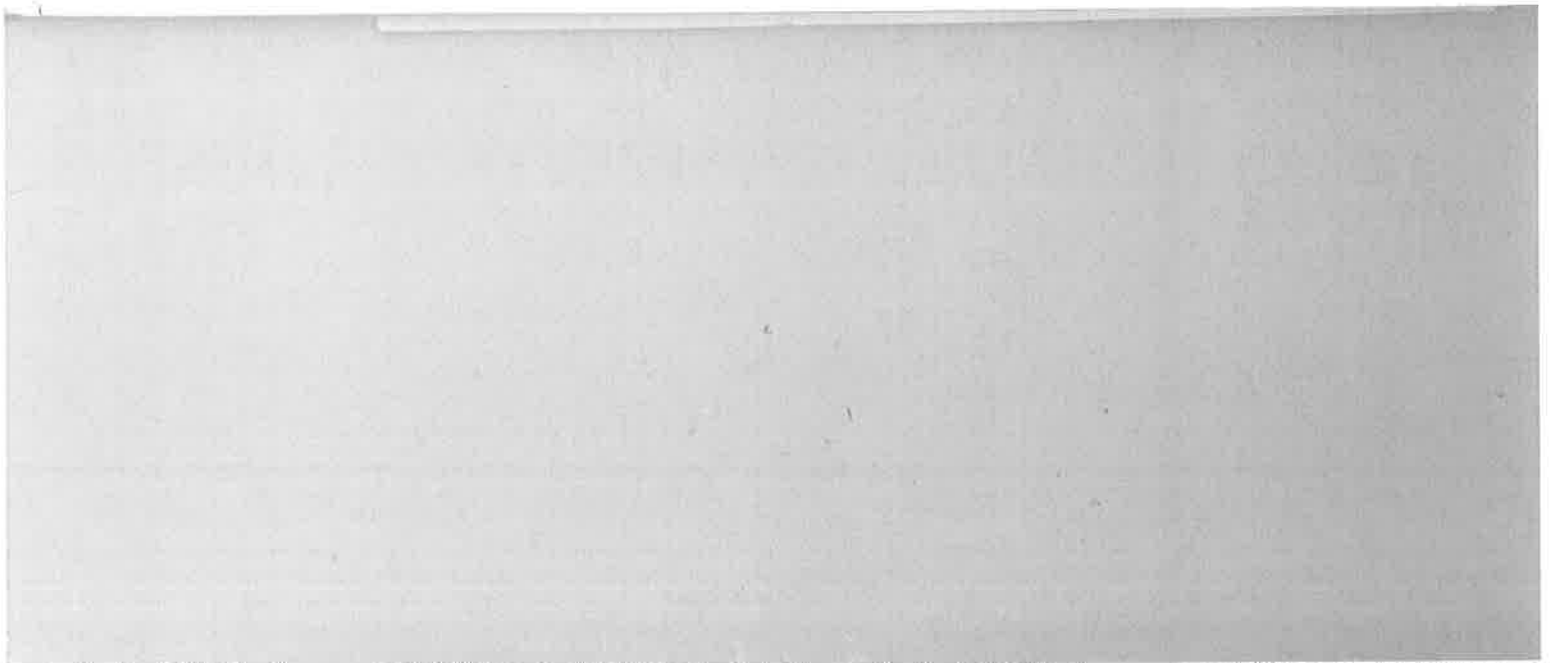
Rat Life and Diet in North America comes the closest to parody of all her films. In *Catfood,* a long long look at a voracious cat devouring whole sardine after sardine, with only the slightest cinematic variation in the shots, she confronted the tension between the thrust of her formal preoccupation—the intensification of perception through the temporal elongation and visual minimalization of the image—and her sensual commitment to her visual material. But in *Rat Life* she discovered a new approach by bringing the film to the edge of parody without providing the simplistic clues about how the film is to be seen (even if it is parody, the viewer cannot be sure if she is mocking a political situation or films about such political situations) she achieved the same alienation of the audience she had required for earlier films.

Again she uses the tension between the images of the rats, eating, scrambling around, and the titles which purport to make a political allegory of their captivity in the United States and their escape into Canada.

Reason Over Passion brings all these themes and forms together. The film is extended to the breaking point over 90 minutes. In this film more than any other she works with the viewer's power of endurance and his expectation of repetition. The title of the film in hundreds of computer scrambled anagrams, flashes metronomically across the bottom of the image (a formal device improved upon from *1933*), giving an impression that the film is even longer than its clock time.

The sound track combines beeps synchronized with the flashes of the subtile, songs including the Canadian National Anthem, and a very funny French lesson. The magnificence of the film lies in its imaginery: a moving excursion across Canada from west to east. Shots of the setting sun running along the horizon, a train emerging from a tunnel into a snowscape burned out on the film-stock, a harbour seen through the titled camera. These images incarnate the epic spirit of the film which with all its contradictions (of form and image, sound and picture) is extravagantly ambitious and elevated. Yet one feels more sadness than grandeur at the passing landscapes, the flashing animations of the Canadian flag, and the grainy slowed down images of Trudeau. At the end, we have seen an ecological dirge, not a poem of becoming so much as of what might have been.

Reason Over Passion, then, is Joyce Wieland's major film so far. With its many eccentricities, it is a glyph of her artistic personality: a lyric vision tempered by an aggressive form, and a visionary patriotism mixed with ironic self-parody. It is a film to be seen many times.



"PIERRE VALLIÈRES?": NOTES FROM THE FILM-MAKER

by

Joyce Wieland

Near the end of February, 1972, Judy Steed, the film-maker, and myself decided to go to Mont Laurier, Quebec, where Pierre Vallières was working. Judy wanted to do a straight interview on him, and Vallières and I wanted to do a film on his lips in extreme close-up. For about a year I have been working on studies of birds in extreme close-up . . . and now felt like using the lense for a political report.

Judy had tried to interest CBC and CFTO in doing a film on Vallières. They said they thought it to be an interesting idea but it was French. We were aware of the general indifference to Quebec which exists here how extreme radicals considered him a decadent cop-out to Parti québecois etc. We were interested in his writings and struggles to find himself. Here was a man who tried to do something about his society and spent three years in jail without trial . . . and who had been born into the extreme position of French Canadian poverty.

At Mont Laurier we waited for Vallières in his apartment. When he arrived we found he wouldn't speak English with us, so the problems of translation fell to Dannièle Corbeil of the National Gallery who had agreed to come and help and who wanted to meet Vallières. The morning after we arrived, we set the camera and equipment up in the living room and waited for him to finish breakfast. When he was ready he walked in, sat in front of the camera and, after a little problem or two (technical) he delivered three essays without stopping, except for reel change and camera breakdown:

1) Mont Laurier
2) Quebec history and race
3) Women's liberation

Everything which happened is recorded on the film. It was a one shot affair. I either got him on film or I missed. Dannièle held his head in position while I looked through the lense. I had to signal her with my hand to bring him into focus and she had to hold him there as best she could because once the camera rolled the shutter action would nearly all but obliterate what I could see of focus (depth of field).

What we see on film is the mouth of a revolutionary, extremely close, his lips, his teeth (and calculous), his spittle streams, his tongue which rools so beautifully through his French, and finally the reflections in his teeth of the window behind me. This film mouthscape shows all the process of making the film, camera breakdown, Vallières pulling away after shots, and the final emptying of the camera . . . I had over fifty feet in the magazine so I turned the camera around on the tripod and had it look out the window at the snow while it emptied itself.

I chose to do Vallières lips as a film because I am interested in lips as subject matter. In my art works I have used lip animation (O Canada Lithograph Animation and Lip Embroidery) as well as in many drawings a few years ago. My film and art works have influenced one another. I like the idea of concentrating on one small section of his anatomy, because it simplifies things, here is a close-up hold of his mouth on and through which you can meditate. Meditate on the qualities of voice, the French language, revolution. French revolution, Gericault's colour, etc., these are some of the things I think about when I see my film.