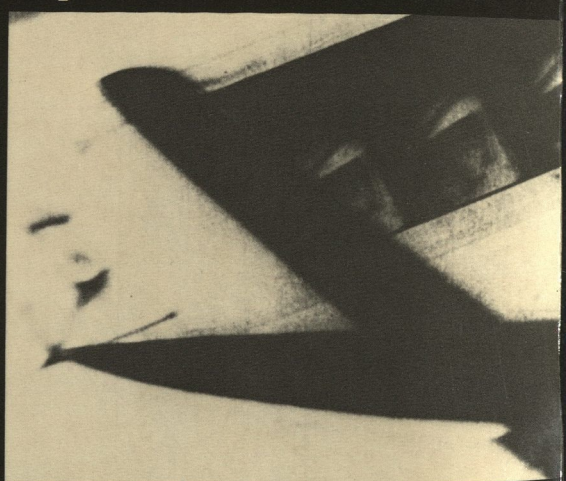


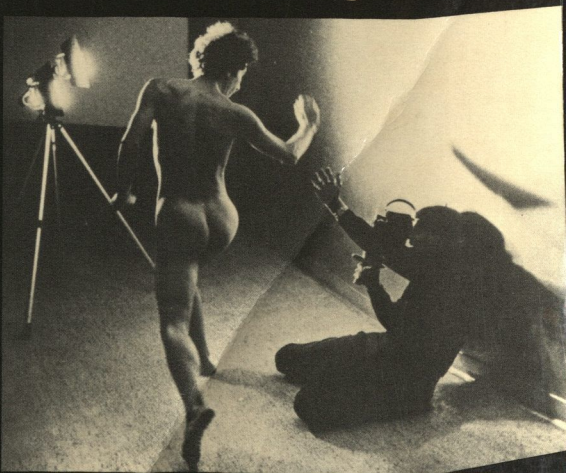
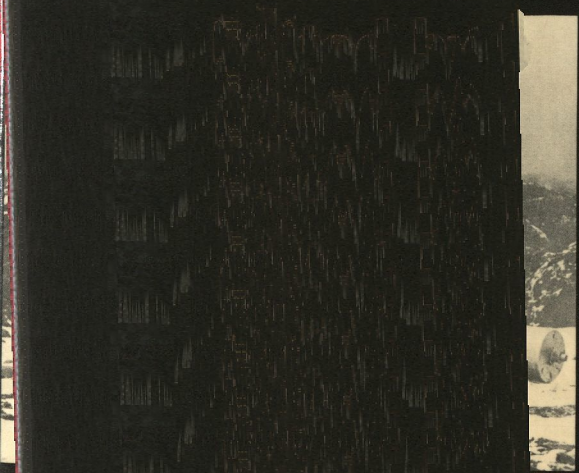


# **THE AVANT-GARDE FILM**

## **A Reader of Theory and Criticism**



**Edited by P. Adams Sitney**





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**PREFACE**

This anthology offers for the first time an extensive survey of the theoretical contributions of avant-garde film-makers and essays about their cinematic achievements. Several texts appear in print, or in English, for the first time here. Because of the diversity of the materials—manifestoes, letters, a scenario, program notes, lectures, interviews—and because of the stylistic peculiarities of some of the authors, no attempt has been made to standardize spellings, punctuation, or footnoting throughout the book. Each contribution conforms to its original manuscript or printed form.

I would like to thank the authors for their permission to reprint texts. *Film Culture*, *Daedalus*, Marie Epstein, Georges Borchardt, Mike Weaver, Mrs. John Benton, and The Vancouver Art Gallery generously assisted in securing permissions. The Museum of Modern Art Stills Archive, *Millenium Film Journal*, Fred Camper, The Ryerson Library of the Art Institute of Chicago, and above all Francene Keery provided illustrative material not already in Anthology Film Archives. Graduate and undergraduate students of Cinema Studies at New York University transcribed Peter Kubelka's lectures; Sue Ann Estevez and Steven Weisberg helped to edit and type them. Jonas Mekas and Marjorie Keller shared the proofreading. Steven Weisberg worked arduously on the early stages of this book and Susan Greene contributed to every phase of its production.

P.A.S.



language with vision. One strategy he has used to control this problem has been to mediate his text with profuse allusions and quotation of poetry (as the place where language is most self-aware). In the letter to Yves Kovacs, he reinterprets the influence of Surrealism by bringing it into alignment with recent American poetics. The complementary question of the relationship of film to music dominates the letter to Ronna Page.

Bruce Baillie's major films occupy a region between the early lyrical films of Brakhage and the mythopoeic cinema that followed. *To Parsifal*, *Mass*, *Quixote*, even *Castro Street* and *Valentin de las Sierras*, are heroic poems without heroes. The characteristic strategy of Baillie is to find an image of exaltation or liberation—in the movement of a train, a flying spaceman, a motorcyclist, or a particularly sympathetic and usually aged face—which is at first valorized and emphasized by carefully selected music or an intricate mixture of natural and musical sounds. Yet the more sinister implications of these metaphoric vehicles are seldom far removed. In *Mass* and *Quixote* this tension within the imagery is polarized by an explicitly political structure and the ironic use of filmic quotations (from advertisements and commercial films) which specifically attribute a negative value to cinematic representation. *Castro Street* and *Valentin de las Sierras* lack the social context of the earlier films and rely more heavily on the ability of sensuous imagery to convey the antithetical structures of meaning. In fact, it is as they veer toward the apogee of this sensuousness that the contradictory movement is initiated: in *Castro Street* it is the slow movement of the train through a field of flowers that raises the polarity of natural and mechanical consciousness which is deceptively couched in the center of the film; while in *Valentin de las Sierras* the close loving attention to the wrinkled flesh of the ancient guitarist, whose song gives the film its title, reveals that he is blind. His blindness intensifies the pathos of his song and underlines the optical scrutiny of the wandering film-maker, who in this film presents himself as entering on horseback, but unseen, the village he records in a rich texture of close-up synecdoches. In his very attention to detail the film-maker seems to be avoiding any direct glance that would acknowledge his presence; in place of a self-image, he offers us the moving shadow of the horse which brings him to and away from his subject.

While Deren, Broughton, Peterson, Markopoulos, and Brakhage were mining their Surrealist, Dadaist, and Constructivist sources for a cinematic vocabulary with which to formulate crises of the self, another group of young American artists turned back to the geometrical abstraction of the Germans in the 1920s to revive the graphic cinema. Oskar Fischinger's presence in Hollywood during these years was a mediating influence. So was that of Len Lye in

New York. Along with Ruttmann, Richter, and Eggeling, Fischinger had been one of the originators of the geometrical style in film-making. Unlike all the others, he continued that work until the 1950s. The coming of sound helped him to realize his theories of synchronization between music and image. Lye, a New Zealander, may have been the first film-maker to paint images directly on film (others had certainly tinted shaped outlines before him). His work in England throughout the 1930s marks the highpoint of the fusion of kinetic montage with abstract color dynamics in the cinema.

The young Californian graphic film-makers Harry Smith, John and James Whitney, and Jordan Belson variously drew inspiration from Fischinger's mesh of geometry and melody and Lye's erratic vibrant colors and pulsing rhythms. Smith's early cinema was an attempt to translate music into color and shape. In 1950 he experimented in reversing this proposition by showing four films with a live jazz band. They responded to the images in a jam session as if to a leading instrument. The Whitneys developed a synthesizer which could simultaneously generate picture and sound. In their theoretical formulation of this synthesis, they saw their work as a reconciliation of the positions of Mondrian and Duchamp, the Neo-Platonic purist and the anti-aesthetic ironist. Belson eventually pushed his abstraction to the boundaries of representation where geometrical shapes mediate between suggestions of macro-cosmic and micro-cosmic imagery, for instance between an eye and galaxy or between a cluster of stars and swarm of bees.

Another powerfully influential figure was the collagist and box maker Joseph Cornell. His films were rarely seen until the late 1960s, but they were very important to those who did manage to see them. His collage films of the late Thirties, *Rose Hobart* and the "Children's Party" series, which he made by reediting other commercial films, are the masterpieces of their kind. Only Bruce Conner, who had not seen them, made collages of comparable intensity (*A Movie*, *Cosmic Ray*, *Report*) more than twenty years later. Larry Jordan assembled the "Children's Party" series according to Cornell's instructions in the late 1960s. His own graphic films testify to Cornell's influence as a cutout collagist. Jordan brilliantly animated cutout figures against both fixed and shifting backdrops. Unlike the Polish film-makers Lenica and Borowczyk who practiced a similar technique, Jordan eschewed literalism. His collage films *Hamfat Asar*, *Gymnopedies*, *Duo Concertantes*, *Our Lady of the Sphere*, and *Orb* are allusive evocations of visionary ecstasies and terrors, organized through delicate rhythmic patterns of transformation.

Robert Breer's animation evolved from flat work (*Form Phases*, 1953) through a mixture of flat and shallow movements (cutouts alternating with crumpled papers, a mechanical mouse, bits of hand painting) in *Recreation* (1957) to a complex fusion of cartoon, collage, single frame changes, and live photography in *Fist Fight*



tage here similar to that deliberately sought after by both Mondrian and Duchamp however opposed their respective points of view; Duchamp, an anti-artist, and Mondrian, seeking a purity of plastic means.

But the machine is yet a poorly integrated, clumsily handled invention else man would not be face to face with his destiny by it today. Personal contact with new creative fields by way of the machine would hardly be worth struggling after were it not for the tremendous variety of new clay to be found there, its universality and its close kinship with modern experience.

Our animating and sound producing devices do not respond to our touch as a musical instrument responds to the virtuoso. Aside from our own admitted inexperience there are clear-cut historical reasons for this. The devices of art and music which have made Western Art forms possible, originated in antiquity and have evolved slowly paralleling the life of that culture. The introduction of the machine in such proportions as has taken place only in this century constitutes a quantitative change effecting a distinct qualitative revolution. The motion picture camera is no more an improved paint brush than our sound track device is an improved musical instrument.

It is our opinion that the work and ideas of Marcel Duchamp with his underlying principles, against hand painting, and, a studied exploitation of the mechanisms of chance, make a significant esthetic contribution to the advancement of this "qualitative revolution." Perhaps his concept of irony provides a clue to the whole future of machine realized art. He defines his meaning of irony as "... a playful way of accepting something. Mine is the irony of indifference. It is a meta-irony."\* Our own experience has been that this corresponds very closely to the correct philosophical disposition by which the resources of the machine may be accepted and employed.

(*Art in Cinema*, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1947)

\* See *View Magazine*. Duchamp Number, Series V No. 1.

P. ADAMS SITNEY:

## Harry Smith Interview

*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.

#1 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.

*Were the early films made on 16mm?*

No, on 35mm. After I made #1, I met the Whitney Brothers through Frank Stauffacher and Dick Foster. Foster was the one



who had really started the Art in Cinema Society because he had been in New York and had met film-makers there. But, later, he and Stauffacher fell out; so I took over Foster's position. They sent me down to Los Angeles to look for films. That's when I met Kenneth Anger, who sort of remembered me when he was up here last month. It must have been 1944, maybe, when I made that trip.

*He made Fireworks in 1947.*

1947? He definitely remembered me when I brought up the situation during which our meeting occurred. How old was he at the time?

*About seventeen.*

Everybody was very embarrassed at his films at that point. It was a horrible thing! He was embarrassed; I was embarrassed. I went to his house, and he was afraid his mother was going to find out that I was there; she was upstairs. He looks today almost identical to the way he looked then; that's the amazing thing! It was a small bungalow type place . . . I didn't realize the artistic quality of *Fireworks* until seeing it this year; then it seemed like some kind of homosexual exercise. When Kenneth sat down in something like a golden chair from Versailles of his mother's, the chair's leg fell off. He was very embarrassed. "My mother might hear me." Then, in order to get the leg back on the chair, he raised the venetian blind, and the cord broke, and the thing fell all over the floor. However, I did manage to get the film for the Art in Cinema Society, which I think was its first large showing. The auditorium of the San Francisco Museum of Art seated at least, I suppose, 300 people. He came up to the showing and embarrassed everyone. After the clapping at the end of the film, I thought he was putting his hands up like a prize fighter. But, when he was here a month or so ago, he explained that that was a sign having something to do with the Aleister Crowley cult—I forget what—perhaps Shu holding up the sky.

I had been going to the University of Washington studying anthropology. I was a teaching assistant there occasionally. (I still love Drs. Gunther and Jacobs.) I was never a good student, at all. I led a very isolated youth. My father had run away from home at an early age to become a cowboy. I think that at that time his grandfather was the Governor of Illinois. They were a wealthy family. My great-grandfather, General John Corson Smith, was aide-de-camp to General Grant during the later Civil War. My mother came from Sioux City, Iowa; but my grandmother had had a school that was supported by the Czarina of Russia in Sitka, Alaska, although she moved around. The Czarina still supported those operations for years, and that's what led to my mother's being Anastasia. My father destroyed every single shred of information on her when she died. I never saw him again. The last time that I saw my father, I was like a heroin addict. I might have been sixteen or seventeen. I left on the bus for San Francisco after

the funeral. I had to get back to get a hold of the connection. My father was crying. . . . What I started to say was that they lived in separate houses. My grandfather came to Washington and founded the Pacific American Fisheries with his brother, which is the largest salmon canning combine in the world. They killed off all the salmon in Washington. They still have twenty some canneries in Alaska. They fished everything else out of British Columbia and Washington years ago. This doesn't have much to do with my films. It's all true. My father may still be alive. I haven't contacted him in years, although he tried to find me by various means. He found out that my films were being shown at the Art in Cinema Society and tried to discover where I was. He finally did find out where I was and I sent him one of those "Tree of Life" drawings. I never did hear from him again. He was evidently very smart; he had taught me about alchemy. He was interested in that sort of thing. On about my twelfth birthday he gave me a whole blacksmith's shop. (They were stuck with various canneries that had been built up during the First World War. The whole thing over-expanded.) Most of my childhood was spent in a fairly elaborate place in Anacortes, Washington. There was nobody there at that time except my father who was something of a ne'er-do-well. My great-grandfather must have been pretty interesting. At one point, he said, "I am leaving for a five-year tour of Tibet." After the Civil War, the Masons split into two groups—one of them was led by Albert Pike, who wrote *Morals and Dogma of the Scottish Rite*; the other one, the Knights Templar, were refounded by my great-grandfather. Any time that the Masons have a parade on Fifth Avenue, they always have a float that shows my great-grandfather founding this thing. He traveled all over the world and initiated people like the King of Hawaii and King Edward the Seventh into that business. 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. My mother described mainly events from when she was working in the school in Alaska my grandmother had run. For example, one day she hadn't been able to get into the place where she was living: It was so cold, her hands started to freeze and she was unable to unlock the door. She went out into the woods where she saw all the animals performing ceremonies. She told me many times about that because it must have been a wonderful thing.



That was somewhere on the Yukon River. Hundreds had gathered together and were leaping over each other by moonlight. They were running around in little circles in different places. Of course it all could be explained in terms of bio-mass, or what is that thing called? There is some way that the animals have certain ranges and interrelate with one another. It was evidently some special thing. The authority on these things, Tinbergen, points out that animals do absolutely every single thing that humans do except make fire.

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.

What I really started to say was that, due to the vast amount of buildings and things that had no use after there were no more salmon in the Fraser or the Columbia, 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 drawings and things; he was the one who showed me how to make that "Tree of Life" geometrically. I mostly lived with my mother. I performed what might be considered sexual acts with her until I was eighteen or nineteen maybe. No actual insertion or anything, but I would always get up in the morning and get in bed with her because she had a long story she would tell me about someone named Eaky-Peaky. She was a really good story teller. My posture is derived from trying to be exactly her height; for she was shorter. I think that the first time she went to Alaska must have been kind of strange because it was right after or during the Gold Rush. Both my parents were there at that time. There were various people on this boat going to the Gold Rush. One of them, for example, was suffering from withdrawal from morphine and thought she had worms under her flesh. She was lying there saying, "The worms! the worms!" The other was some kind of whore who was hanging her tits out the porthole and saying, "Come on, boys, milkshake, five cents a shake." I don't know how my father got there. They somehow met there. They met somehow.

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 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 was still going to school, which was an interesting school; what was that called? The Western Washington School of Education. The head of it later got busted for Communism. I liked it because they had a glass beehive in the middle of the classroom that had a chute running out through the window so we could study the bees at work. It was an unpleasant place because they kept accusing me of stealing things like money. On the day that Admiral Byrd was visiting, somebody said Miss Rich, who was my principal, was going to take us to see Admiral Byrd; and I said, "Oh, kick Miss Rich in the pants." It was horrible, because I said this to the person next to me, and the person next to me said it to the person next to him, "Harry said, 'kick Miss Rich in the pants.'" And he said it to the next one. I saw this thing go around, back and forth across the room. It finally got to the teacher, so, naturally, I was kept home when everybody else went to see Admiral Byrd; although, strangely enough, I met him in a Mannings later that day.

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 discovered a lot of them in the Columbine vines. Also I remember meeting my grandfather (my mother's father) who was also pretty interesting because he had followed a particular friend of his—he had been born in Kentucky, I don't know where, some place like that and followed the Union troops north after the Civil War. I remember he and his friend had long white beards with yellow streaks down the front of them. I had thought that egg had run down them. They had been eating eggs, see, and the egg had run down the middle of their beards.

This is the college education that I got . . . I was never able to pass the entrance examination in English. Despite the fact that I should have a Ph.D. at this point on all other bases but that. I just could not diagram sentences. I was sort of an instructor at one point at the University of California. I went to the University of Washington first. I was never too well liked there. The war had ended, and there was all this anti-Communism; what they call witch hunting was going on, and my favorite teacher was . . . you see, I got connected with the World Friends Service Committee at that point. I began working with the Japanese that were being kicked off the West Coast. The day after Pearl Harbor, all the Japanese were arrested and sent to camps in some horrible desert, I forget where that was. They sure came back in condition! We finally got one Japanese back to Seattle who was a midget and wore a monocle—a girl, who was going to deliver a lecture in some church; I forget what that thing was called—the Fellowship of Reconciliation, that was it. I barely escaped the Communist plots, I think. It was pretty funny: We rented this church for her to give the lecture in, and nobody came, not one person. There, I'm stuck with this girl that is completely confused. I was also involved with a lot of Jewish refugees that were going to the University of Washington then, ranting about people being thrown into incinerators and so forth in concentration camps. It was an interesting period: I wish they'd have another war; I liked it.

There's confusion in the notes for the *Catalogue* because I tend to glamorize, saying that I did such and such at a much earlier age than I did it. The reason I moved to Berkeley from . . . how did that happen? Anyway, I went to Berkeley on some little trip from Seattle with someone named Kenneth, I forget what his last name was. I'd met him in a bookstore. He said, "I'm leaving for Berkeley, do you want to go?" So I went to Berkeley. This was supposed to be for over the weekend. However while I was there I ran into someone named Griff B. He turned me on to marijuana. So naturally when I got back to the University of Washington, where I was about to become a teaching assistant, it was impossible to stay there after having smoked pot. The stuff that is given in the *Cata-*

*logue* that was used on different films is slightly inaccurate. I've never experienced the real heroin-addiction thing. In the place where I lived, the Fillmore district of San Francisco called Jackson's Nook, two people died; I mean, there was a number of people staggering out into the back yard and dropping dead. When my mother died, there were a lot of guns around the house, because they'd always had them while they were in Alaska, both my mother and father. I took all that stuff back with me. It led to a rather exciting life in San Francisco at that point. My mother was dying in the hospital of what Ronald J. once called terminal diarrhea. She died the day after I left. I was like a heroin addict at that point. The symptoms were not very serious though; I was not lying on the floor frothing at the mouth; I had a stomach ache and a runny nose and that sort of thing.

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.

My first film was made by imprinting of the cork off an ink bottle and all that sort of thing, as I said before. The second one was made with Come-Clean gum dots, automatic adhesive dots that Dick Foster got for me. It's like a paper dot with gum on the back. The film was painted over with a brush to make it wet, then with a mouth-type spray gun, dye was sprayed onto the film. When that dried the whole film was greased with vaseline. Of course this was in short sections—maybe six foot long sections. Anyway they would be tacked down. With a pair of tweezers, the dots were pulled off. That's where those colored balls drop and that sort of stuff. Being as it was pulled off, it was naturally dry where the dot had been and that part which had been colored was protected by the vaseline coating at this point. Then color was sprayed into where the dot had been. After that dried, the whole film was cleaned with carbon tetrachloride.

The next one was made by putting masking tape onto the film and slitting the tape lightly with a razor blade and a ruler, and then picking off all those little squares that are revolving around. I worked off and on on that film for about five years pretty consistently; I worked on it every day at least. I may have abandoned it at one point for three months or six months at the most.

Mrs. S. who owned the house in Berkeley gave me a room in exchange for mowing the lawn and trimming the ivy. I had developed a theory that the ideal diet was a mixture of butter and sugar—a pound of sugar and a pound of butter mixed together. I became so weak, though, that I was unable to get out of bed for a long time.



Except some girl, Panthia L., would come up some mornings and scramble an egg and give it to me; or I'd go down to the super-market and steal avocados, butter and sugar.

*Were the early abstract films at all influenced by your childhood interest in the occult?*

Sort of. But mainly by looking in the water. I lived a kind of isolated childhood. I said my parents were living in different houses and would only meet at dinner time. They'd set up this fancy five-storey art school, at which there were really only two students—sometimes there were four students. With Mrs. Williams, I studied at least from maybe 1932 to 1942; I must have studied with her for ten years. She gave lessons two or three times a week during that period, which consisted of drawing things. She'd lay out a cylinder or a ball or an egg-shaped thing which we were supposed to draw on a piece of paper and then lay a piece of glass over that and trace the drawing with a grease pencil, then hold it up and see if it looked exactly the same.

#1 took a very long time. Either a day or a week. Then #2—which was much longer than the form it is in now: It was actually at least half an hour long—it was cut down to match a recording by Dizzy Gillespie, which I believe is called "Guacha Guero." It took maybe a year to make. Then on the next one I worked on about five years, then I gave up that particular style. There were maybe eight years of it. I developed certain really complicated hand-painting techniques of which I made only short versions. For example, painting the whole film a certain color and then smearing vaseline on it; and then taking a stylus and scraping designs off. It is possible to get a lot of spirals and curvilinear designs which I was never able to get by cutting off the masking tape; then spraying bleach into the place where the groove was. I made short samples of that sort of material. As I say, less than half of all that stuff is in my possession at this point. I also made alternate versions of a great number of scenes. Sometimes, in order to demonstrate how it was done, I made up special reels that partially had the masking tape still left on, and partially the first . . . Anyway, there are thousands of feet that were never printed, and several entire very long films. Many of those films are missing totally. I never edited at all, except to cut them down—except that second one, which shows the balls falling. Like I say, it was at least 1,200 feet long originally. It was then cut down to a hundred feet to make it match "Guacha Guero." What Jonas Mekas calls "The Magic Feature" (#12) was originally about six hours long, and then it was edited down, first to a two-hour version, and then down to a one-hour version. There was also an enormous amount of material made for that picture. None of the really good material that was constructed for that film was ever photographed. There was a Noah's ark scene with really fantastic animals. I started out with the poorer stuff. The really good things were supposed to be toward the

end of the film, but, being as the end of the film was never made . . .

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.

Those two optically printed films were made for the Guggenheim Foundation. The three-dimensional one was made from the same batch of stencils as the color one. First, I got a camera from Frank Stauffacher, which is when those two films were made: The first is called *Circular Tensions* (#5); I forget what the other one is called. The black and white one (#4) precedes that.

*The black and white film (#4) begins with a shot of—*

—a painting. It is a painting of a tune by Dizzy Gillespie called "Manteca." Each stroke in that painting represents a certain note on the recording. If I had the record, I could project the painting as a slide and point to a certain thing. This is the main theme in there, which is a-doot-doot-dootdoot-doot-dootdootdoot; those curved lines up there. See, ta-doot-doot-doot-doot-dootaloot-dootaloot, and so forth. Each note is on there. The most complex one of these is this one, one of Charlie Parker's records, I don't remember the name of it. That's a really complex painting. That took five years. Just like I gave up making films after that last hand-drawn one took a number of years, I gave up painting after that took a number of years to make; it was just too exhausting. There's a dot for each note and the phrases that the notes consist of are colored in a certain way or made in a certain path. The last paintings that I made were realistic things connected with the Tower of Babel. There was an extraordinary one of the control room of the Tower of Babel, which was built into a railway car leaving it. That painting was derived from a scene in Buster Keaton's film *The General*, where he chops out the end of the box car. A special film was projected onto the painting so that all the machinery operates.

In a number of cases I've made special screens to project films on. All those so-called early abstract films had special painted screens for them. They were made of dots and lines. All those things disappeared.

When I went to Oklahoma last year, I decided to devote my attention to the Indians. I really was honored to be able to record those things from the Indians. I decided to devote the rest of my life to that one thing. It was an unusual opportunity, because the Kiowa Indians are extremely conservative. They hadn't really been studied very much. Through various reasons, I got involved with them so that they told me all their myths and everything. It seemed better to devote the conclusion to that. That's why I'm living in this hotel room. Despite the fact that I can't afford the hotel room—it's fifty



dollars a week—I am more or less able to spend my time doing that one thing. It is a very elaborate series of records, you know. We're devoting far too much time to accessory subjects. Naturally, I sort of goof on everything I'm doing.

*I'm very puzzled about your fascination to visualize music.*

That is an interesting question, isn't it? I don't know. When I was a child, somebody came to school one day and said they'd been to an Indian dance and they saw somebody swinging a skull on the end of a string; so that I thought, Hmmm, I have to see this. I went to that. Then I fell in with the Salish around Puget Sound for a long time. I sometimes spent three or four months with them during summer vacation or sometimes in the winter, while I was going to high school or junior high school. It all started in grade school. In an effort to write down dances, I developed certain techniques of transcription. Then I got interested in the designs in relation to the music. That's where it started from. Of course! It was an attempt to write down the unknown Indian life. I made a large number of recordings of that, which are also unfortunately lost. I took portable equipment all over that place long before anyone else did and recorded whole long ceremonies sometimes lasting several days. Diagramming the pictures was so interesting that I then started to be interested in music in relation to existence. After that I met Griff B. and went to Berkeley and started smoking marijuana, naturally little colored balls appeared whenever we played Bessie Smith and so forth; whatever it was I was listening to at that time. I had a really great illumination the first time I heard Dizzy Gillespie play. I had gone there very high, and I literally saw all kinds of colored flashes. It was at that point that I realized music could be put to my films. My films had been made before then, but I had always shown them silently. I had been interested in Jungian psychiatry when I was in junior high school. I found some books by Jung in the Bellingham Library. The business about mandalas and so forth got me involved. I would like to say I'm not very interested in Jung anymore: It seems very crude now.

Incidentally, this whole thing can probably be printed, if you want to print it for me, like some kind of poem. In that way, this constant shifting back and forth can be eliminated.

Later I borrowed a camera from Hy Hirsh. He had a pretty good camera, a Bell and Howell model 70-something, and had seen my films. The San Francisco Museum showed that one of the grille works (#4) that precedes *Circular Tensions*, and he came up and spoke. That's when I asked for a camera. I've never owned a camera; I've usually just borrowed one, then pawned it. That's always an embarrassing scene; trying to explain to the person where his or her camera is. I can remember Frank Stauffacher saying to me, "Now you haven't pawned the camera, have you?" He said this jokingly, but it was pawned. Usually, people get their cameras back, eventually. My later films were made with one that belonged to Sheba

Ziprin. The *Mysterioso* film (#11) and the long black and white film (#12) were shot with her camera, which is now in a pawn shop in Oklahoma City. The main parts of my film in Oklahoma last year were shot on a camera that belonged to Stuart Reed. That camera is in a barber shop in Anadarko, Oklahoma, where Mr. A.'s Wollensak also is, unfortunately.

After I first stopped making films, I made those paintings that you point at. Unless you've seen those, it's hard to describe what they really are. They are at least as good as the films. I'd been able to hear Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk, both of whom had come to San Francisco, but wanted to make one final thing, another painting of Thelonious. When I came to N.Y.C., I realized that it would be impossible to make it in the form of a painting, because his music was so complex, and it would be better to make a film. I hadn't made films for at least five years by then. #10 was a study for the *Mysterioso* film. Generally speaking, those films were made by trying to collect interesting pictures, cutting them out, and then filing them. I had enormous files possibly only 2 or 3 per cent of which was shot. I had worked on this one thing for twenty years, having collected a lot of that stuff before; but then, when I left San Francisco, I gave it to Broughton, because I felt that he might do something with it; but he obviously never did.

After I came here I started filming again. Toward the end, I had everything filed in glassine envelopes: any kind of vegetable, any kind of animal, any kind of this that and the other thing, in all different sizes. Then file cards were made up. For example, everything that was congruent to that black and white film (#12) was picked out. All the permutations possible were built up: say, there's a hammer in it, and there's a vase, and there's a woman, and there's a dog. Various things could then be done—hammer hits dog; woman hits dog; dog jumps into vase; so forth. It was possible to build up an enormous number of cross references.

This was all written on little slips of paper, the file cards—the possible combinations between this, that, and the other thing. The file cards were then rearranged, in an effort to make a logical story out of it. Certain things would have to happen before others: Dog-runs-with-watermelon has to occur after dog-steals-watermelon.

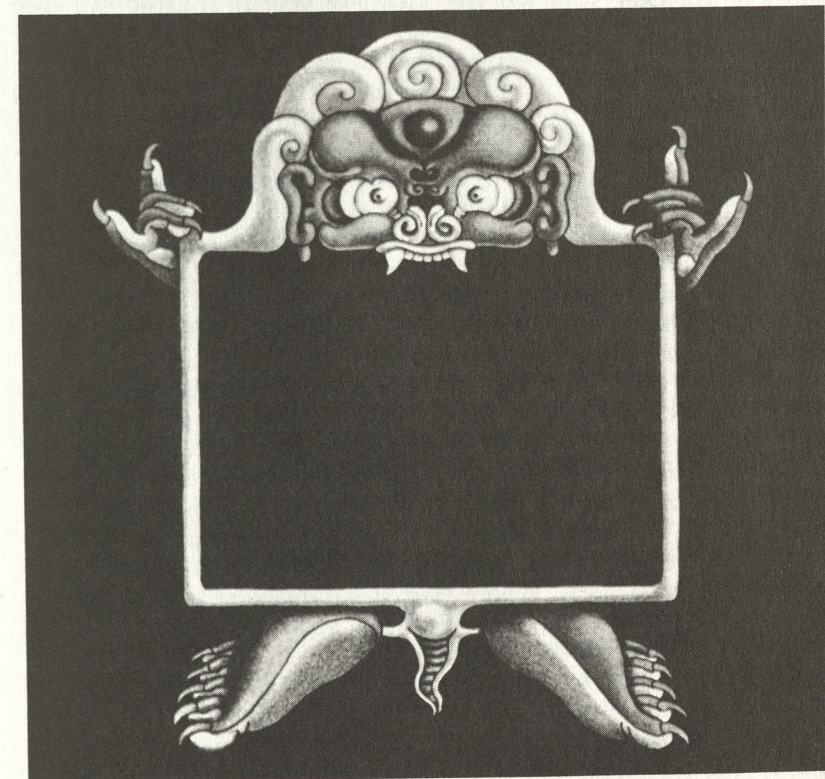
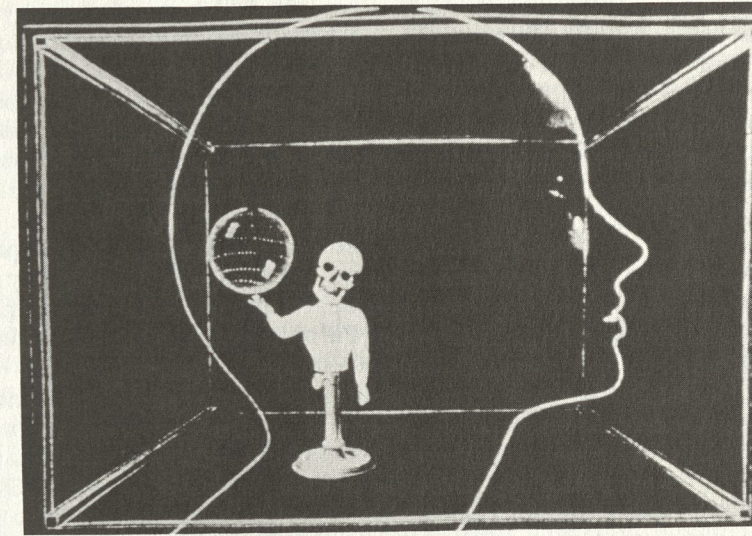
I tried as much as possible to make the whole thing automatic, the production automatic rather than any kind of logical process. Though, at this point, Allen Ginsberg denies having said it, about the time I started making those films, he told me that William Burroughs made a change in the Surrealistic 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; then 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



No. 12 (Heaven and Earth Magic): an image from the film (above) and one of the framing masks through which it was to be projected.



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 Buddhist 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.

Dr. Leary had me interested in that black-and-white film (#12), although, you realize, that *Heaven and Earth Magic*, whatever it's called, was a color film at that point. It ran through a special machine that projected slides. This is the first one that occurs: As the first head is on the screen, the slide of the same image is projected around it. There was a fader that obscured the screen out at the edges. You don't realize that it's an oblong image; it's just that there's another head the same as this—that's the telephone operator who made the greatest number of phone calls in the United States in some particular year. Where everything dissolves into the bridge, you see it's taking place on the moon; when the machinery is all operating, it's inside a watermelon. The slides themselves run through another color apparatus, and the seats in the theater were to be on some kind of electrical contact or rubber pads so that, as the audience looked at the film, if a certain number of them would lean in one direction, that would activate little lights in the projection booth which indicated that the audience who were in dentist chairs, watermelons, and so forth, were thinking about a watermelon

or about a dentist chair, and so forth. Then I would slip that slide in, since any one of the slides could go with any portion of the film. They are now in an order that was convenient. It was an attempt to employ feed-back phenomena. It was executed to a degree in Steinway Hall. Mr. Phipps set up a sort of presentation there. The whole thing was set up, and I arbitrarily guessed what the audience was thinking of from their responses. We didn't have any special chairs for them to sit in though.

I never did finish that sentence about the relation of Surrealism to my things: I assumed that something was controlling the course of action and that it was not simply arbitrary, so that by *sortilège* (as you know, there is a system of divination called "sortilege") everything would come out all right. #14 was made on this basis. Although I kept a record that such and such was shot in such and such an area of the screen, it was completely arbitrary.

*Was it your decision to leave the Kodak leader between rolls of film?*

I stole that idea from Andy Warhol. Everything that was shot was put in. A great number of images are missing. The stuff to which the most effort was devoted doesn't even show at all. A very large amount of material for some reason just isn't on the film. Peter Fleischman, who made that last film with me, and I spent weeks shooting objects that must have been all underexposed. I assumed, when Ansco said that the film had a rating of 300, that it did have a rating of 300. It doesn't; it has a rating of, perhaps, 100. Most of what was shot at the beginning and the end of the film disappeared because of that. The central portion was not developed for a long time; it was left lying around in the hot weather for about six months, so that it faded out and became white. I like the effect of the thing: It's all black at the beginning and the end, white in the middle; it looks good. Mr. Casper at Filmtronics made extremely good prints of the middle part. They are better than the original, but, nonetheless, it didn't come out anything like I'd expected it to.

I started to get people for a film some months ago . . . how did that start? I think I asked Andy if he wanted to make a film, and he said, "Yeah!" So I said, "Look, can I have \$300?" He said, "Yeah." Who was it I asked next? I think Jack Smith. Then Robert Frank. At that point, it seemed ridiculous to make an underground movie, but to make a really elaborate superunderground movie for showing in neighborhood theaters. That would be the only one I would make. The project keeps bogging down, basically because I haven't been able to find anybody that knows enough about films in regular theaters. Arthur and Hugh Young have the money for it. I called them in a drunken condition and asked them for two million dollars, and Arthur said they perhaps would do it if they thought there were any possibility of producing an actual thing. In fact, I called them last Wednesday or Tuesday again, and they have been waiting all this time to look at films. They are interested in astrology. It is nec-



essary to get some handsome producer to produce the film; not to produce money but to decide whether it's to be a short feature, or a short, like a Bugs Bunny length, so it can be distributed in first-run theaters.

It would be like a trip around the world. Various people would come in. It would be marvelous; for instance, if Andy were able to supervise maybe a twenty-minute color picture of Mount Fuji, but with a really good cameraman and technicians and everything so it would be really his beauty. Stan Vanderbeek was going to work on it. What he would do would be to go to northern Australia and animate aboriginal bark paintings. It would be produced eventually. Mr. Young once sent me a lavish check because he didn't like *Taras Bulba*. I'd called him the night before asking for money to go to Hollywood to try to salvage the Oz film. He said, "No, no, no, no, we're going to the movies, we're going to the movies, we don't have any time to talk with you now, Harry. And we're not interested in films. And anyhow you're drunk. You're calling me a fart." However, the next morning, a check did come in the mail, and he wrote, "We didn't like *Taras Bulba* at all, and we decided to see if you could do better." However, I took the money and went to Miami Beach to see Peter's mother, instead of going to Hollywood. I've been afraid to phone them for a long time.

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 underground movie that will revive Hollywood as Kenneth Anger writes of it.

(*Film Culture* No. 37, Summer, 1965)

HARRY SMITH:

## On Mahagonny

[On June 3, 1977 P. Adams Sitney interviewed Harry Smith on his monthly Arts Forum program on WNYC-FM. It was to have been the first of three interviews. However the station terminated the plan because of negative public response to the initial program. This is an edited and annotated version of that program. The voice is that of Harry Smith, except where questions from P.A.S. are indicated.]

Visionary cinema is confused with film. The only preliminary thing I would like to say is that I assume that the radio audience is familiar with the works of Claude Levi-Strauss regarding the Stop sign and the Go sign, the raw and the cooked (animals being cooked and eaten by men). I would particularly suggest page 96, and then you can throw away *The Raw and the Cooked*. A knowledge of Noam Chomsky is also necessary. Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* should be looked at, at least. It is his doctoral thesis, and probably the most brilliant one Harvard has had since Sixteen something. Then, of course, the listener should know a little about Wittgenstein. In that case it's not necessary to take the cellophane off the book before you throw it away.

You should ask some questions, but please explain first that the answers have no connection with the questions unless the up and down is binom . . . binomially . . . (mispronunciations being the raw/cooked part). As a matter of fact, as you leave your home tonight examine the fire hydrants to see if they are still painted red and green the same way they were.

PAS: I find the bibliography puzzling, but perhaps some will find it illuminating. I would like you to tell us about the work you have been doing on your film, *Mahagonny*, the principles upon which you have been making it, and the way in which you plan to exhibit it.

Jung's theories regarding synchronicity have recently turned out to be true. For a long time it was thought that Jung was merely some kind of shill that had been placed there just to see exactly how



far the public would go in belief. But now empirical proofs have arrived from the University of California. I can't go into that. Get the latest issue of *The Journal of the American Society of Psychical Research* (April 1976) and you will find out that what you believed was going to happen, happened. For example, this evening Prof. Sitney thought we were going to be late, and he arranged it perfectly.

PAS: Yes, we were a little late getting to the studio. I see we are having a very easy time getting off the subject.

*Mahagonny*? We just did it. The theory of *Mahagonny* is the Three interacting with the Four: as we all know, three times four is twelve, and three plus four is seven; so consequently there are twenty-two songs. The first lines being: "Wanted: fugitives from Justice, the widow Begbick, Fatty the bookkeeper (or is the word translated "procurer"?), and Trinity Moses." If my listeners have been following the Mideastern situation lately, they will understand why Trinity Moses later impersonates God, when they realize how there was a war between the Mohammedans and the Jews which turned into *them* uniting against the Christians; that's the raw/cooked thing carried to the second binomial juncture.

The first lines being: "Wanted", the last lines, after it goes through things like

You can sponge his face with vinegar,  
But you cannot help a dead man;  
You can cut out his tongue,  
But you cannot help a dead man.

the final lines are: "There is no hope for you, or ourselves, or anyone." Careful examination of the film, *The Harder They Come*, would be necessary. The only person in that film who is not Jamaican is the recording engineer, who is oriental.

PAS: The connection between your film, *Mahagonny*, and *The Harder They Come* escapes me.

Well, we're hoping to open the film in Zurich. I think that will explain the connection, it being more important to live *Mahagonny* than to see *Mahagonny*. It is constructed on all sides: The first thing that happens is, of course, the personification of the widow Begbick as the Three, as opposed to the Four. The Three being money, sex, and, as it says, whiskey ("Show me the way to the next whiskey bar.") But in the original it is: "Show me the way to the next pretty boy." The widow Begbick is running brothels from the place where they are in Florida at that point, "with the desert ahead and the sheriff behind." Trinity Moses represents money ("the next little dollar"). This is then compounded with four things, which I will tell you later.

PAS: What will be the imagery?

Imagery never exists as such. It is determined by what people are told the image is going to be. There is a very interesting study of how people look at a picture. In this case Hokusai's wave is taken; and the first forty-six scans more or less follow the picture of the wave as it breaks over Fuji. The last forty-six scannings are of a random nature, regarding what the individual desires. Now, these studies will demonstrate what is printed on the screen. The book, *Eye Movements and Psychological Processes* (ed. Richard A. Monty, John W. Senders, 1976), goes into the fact that if there is a picture of some people going into a door while others are sitting at a table, and now if the words, "How much money do they have?" are said or printed, the eyes move over the clothing or the furniture. But, naturally, if the question is "How old are they?", people look at the faces; "What do they work at?" they maybe look at the hands. The fact is that the fovea cuts out most of what we see and that the brain constructs an image out of almost nothing (which is, of course, why Hapatia was dragged onto an altar and her flesh scraped off with seashells). Because when one of the people I mentioned earlier was proved to be real, naturally the whole world became real. Otherwise we would be afraid of falling through the floor, and going to China. People don't like that; it's an eight thousand mile jump.

In *Mahagonny* four different images are being projected at once, more or less as a commentary on Duchamp's Large Glass. In the showing of *Mahagonny* people's passions are played upon. I have made a close examination of the tables in the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, where the questions are classified according to, let us say, verbal root, or nominal roots . . . although this time . . . Oh never mind. Gladys Reichart pointed out long ago that in languages as divergent as Navaho and Indo-European (of course, Edward Sapir cut her throat for that) the word "Sun", referring to the thing in the sky, has a different connotation (in one case it being connected with redness and blood, *a la* the Pampas of Argentina) . . . I think you are not very far from a fool, Prof. Sitney. There is just this microphone between us. That is connected with a joke regarding going to Little Rock: "Well, I don't know how to get there, but there's a hell of a big one down in the field of Aunt Martha's."

PAS: Will there be words projected on the screen in your film?

Yes. There are a number of words. They were made by a number of people. Although basically the ones I'm using were done by Mason Hoffenberg. Word frequency counts have been made of things like Mayan, the Enochian words in *The Calls of the Thirty Aethers* that Dr. Dee wrote down in the window seat while Sir Edward Kelley looked into the Olmec mirror. There are a number



of other cases where words that were automatically compounded by automatic machinery are being projected. Of course, anything that happens to have twenty-two forms in it is being projected on other screens. There are basically five movie projectors and about twelve slide projectors. That is why we are moving to Switzerland; it has more electricity than anywhere else.

The major screen is a boxing ring from the original set of *Mahagonny*, that is from "The Little Mahagonny" that was given along with some things by Schoenberg, Hindemith, etc., I believe, at Baden-Baden, perhaps in 1923. The twenty-two statements by the announcer will, of course, be translated into some language or other. Then the twenty-one forms of Death that are in the *Codex Lauds*, which along with the *Liverpool Codex* was brought back from Poland by Dr. Dee and Sir Edward Kelley (it contains things like a man shot in the eye), and then, of course, the Tarot cards will be included. I have recently been fortunate enough to see Robert Wang's paintings that have taken him so many years to make for Israel Regardie of the cards for the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. They are being made public for the first time on one of the screens.

The original set of *Mahagonny* had a boxing ring with a pool table in the middle of it and some chairs. In our case it was more expedient to put the boxing ring against the wall, and put the four pool tables under the boxing ring so that they could all be lit independently. The boxing ring itself should be lit from behind. As much as possible the general Expressionist mode of constructing features has been followed. But due to the fact that everyone in my listening audience merely considers Expressionism to be second-rate drawing, we had had to add a *little* of Claes Oldenburg, Jim Rosenquist, and so forth.

PAS: Some years ago, you projected for me excerpts from *Mahagonny* on a single projector, masked by a series of gels. The imagery seemed to alternate between pictures of people, animation, outdoor scenes, and interiors. What relation would that version have to your present plans?

Of course, over the past decade a large number of projections of *Mahagonny* have been made under various circumstances. That particular one was experimenting with shape in relation to response. The best response to a film, as Prof. Sitney knows, is if the audience goes to sleep; it's *really* been successful; they have entered into the film fully. That particular projection apparatus still exists, with the gels and things. However, it is being done differently at this point. With the four screens being used, naturally, instead of having to block off the lower left hand corner when the words "Look Out" are printed in Urdu or something, we merely black one screen out. However a certain amount of masking is being used to get horizontal or diagonal groups of things.

Any one reel is made up of twenty-four units in palindrome form: P.A.S.A.N.A.S.A.P. and so on. Every other scene is animation [A]. Every first scene on a reel is people [P], then animation, and then something like a generalized image [S] as opposed to a portrait, which is really what P stands for, and then an animation, and then a nature scene of some sort [N], such as photographing the Morgan Bank to get the pockmarks made when the milkwagon blew up loaded with dynamite. (They still get nervous despite the fact that there are no anarchists around. They get nervous on Wall Street. They began closing bronze doors at the mere sight of a camera.) There are twenty-four shots in each of twelve reels, adding up to two gross or two hundred and eighty shots.

I hope your listeners realize at this point why I wanted to edit this tape. I was dragged out of bed. Some idiot that I hope The Mighty Sparrow writes a song about had taken my reds and wouldn't give them back until six o'clock. I took so much speed at noon that I just hope the program is over soon.

The main object of those mask shots was to get light behind individual images that you looked at. Long, long ago in Nineteen Fifty—something I gave an elaborate light show. It was 1956 or something, I don't know when, in Steinway Hall. I originally projected slides around what some idiot, not realizing that the number 12 is somehow equivalent to heaven and earth, called *Heaven and Earth Magic*; they're always unable to accept numbers. That's only natural because once you begin to study numerology every number has a meaning; so it breaks down entirely, except for the number 18, for which I can't figure anything except film #118, which is a postcard size film, which disappeared about 1830. Oh where was I? Yes, it will be the first time the Matterhorn has had an active eruption for years.

PAS: Are you saying that your film will make the Matterhorn erupt?

Now *you're* doing it. So that the experiments that were done earlier with colored light in relation to motion are really very close to some very interesting drawings I've seen recently that were made by Schiller and Goethe examining a color wheel and getting differential impressions. It's funny how that once the behaviorists—and Gardner Murphy if you're listening to your radio forgive me, but you were *nasty* to me when I was a conscientious objector, and I won't forgive you—got off that, it has now come back to, like, red *does* mean a more violent activity than green . . . You know, it is different to get "red in the face" than it is to have the "blues".

*Mahagonny* has required all of my energy, many hundred thousand dollars; at this point it is running about two thousand a month just to keep going, with no food or clothing allowed out of these two thousand dollars I'd like to add, and the rent is always behind. It is funny what it gets spent on.

A peculiar little book on Goethe has recently come out, listing



all the translations of *Faust*. His main things revolve around the problem: Is it I that is looking at the thing? or is it the thing which is projecting itself to me? This, of course, is again why Hapatia was scraped to death as she was riding her chariot on her way to her father's, Plotinus', school. The point is that Plato's notion that the eye projected a beam that went, in this case, through the electric light beam and to a variety of other places, while we believe that it is something else that lights the room; this is again the problem that Goethe had. (The only reason I mention *Faust* is that the United Nations publishes an odd little book at this point, for something like \$23.00, that lists, I think, eighteen hundred versions of *Faust*, translated from e.g. Armenian into Welsh.) Goethe goes over that same business in his argument with Newton, or later with his business about the plant: Is it I that is looking at the colors? or are the colors shining on me? Is it I that differentiates the signature of one plant from another? or is it the plant that determines the signature? The relationship between the *is*, *was*, and *will be* comes in here; the *is* being so infinitely small, and both the *was* and *will* being constructed out of projections of the other one, the future being a construction of the past, and the past being an attempt to correlate what is sometimes perceived as the *now* with a way of operating in the future. I don't know! What P. Adams wants me to do is to ask for money. Well, I won't. So I don't have much to say about *Mahagonny* except that I'm making it in my autumn years. I've been cooked enough; the leaves are falling off!

Four screens are to be used and rhythmic patterns will occur between the length of the scenes. The general form of twenty-four interlocked shots is the same, backwards and forwards. Individuals in the audience will have their attention directed to one particular part of the counterpoint at each minute. Peter Kubelka wanted to open it in Vienna: "You can use my castle and my Steenbeck!" But I was afraid they'd understand German there. The whole point of *Mahagonny* is to translate not the story which is trivial (it is handled much better in *Happy End*) but to translate Brecht's indecision. For you must understand that although a lot of people think that Brecht was a Communist, it wasn't exactly that way. He was caught in the middle where he either had to jump along with the Nazis or he had to jump along with the Communists. There wasn't any dream king like Ludwig II drowning himself. One of the best examples of cooking something is the column that runs up the main stairwell in the ridiculous castle that Lufthansa Airways now makes just a tiny airshot. God, what a fantastic piece of marble carved like a papyrus or something tied together, going up to blue things among stars and I don't know . . . All these questions can be looked up in a book called *Theatrum Vitae Humanae* by J. J. Boissard (Metz, 1596). The original decision was to translate an opera into an occult experience. And I hope Prof. Sitney now understands the relation of occlusion to sleep. Or why one should sleep

through movies. In this case, *you can't do it* if you come to *Mahagonny*! What was that play Ludwig did in which he flooded the theatre? Of course, D'Annunzio did it in one of his plays; but that was mere chance. There was a war scene, and bombs were being set off; the theatre filled with smoke; the audience rioted, but fortunately at that moment, he writes in his diary, a cannon blew a hole in the wall and they escaped from the stage. It is just the same old stunt; it is just like the Globe Theater, only we're electrifying it this time.

I have to talk to Andy Berler of CAPS, because I was supposed to finish *Mahagonny* by April Fools Day. The public service contract has not been fulfilled. Well, the point is, Mary and Andy if you hear this, the greatest public service that I could have pulled at the time was to disappear, and I did it! After twelve years I moved out of the Chelsea Hotel to a secret location on the Lower East Side or some side. My public service is to leave people alone and have them leave me alone, and to work on the most elaborate mathematical tables regarding *Mahagonny*. I would like to say, Andy, that somebody gave me considerably more money than the CAPS grant to show *Mahagonny* free. It is going to be in a black room with a boxing ring, and millions of volts of electricity brought in, and there won't even be any chairs! Nobody's going to want to look at a thing that long: it is two hours and twenty minutes without an intermission. I would like to say that anyone I know, or have ever seen, or am likely to meet, is going to be excluded. They are *not*, after the way they treated me, are treating me, or they're going to treat me, going to be allowed to see anything that will give them happiness. No! I'm saving it for things like playboy, no-good, tin kings of Bolivia, that have been having special tablecloths woven for thirty years. They are the ones that can see it. If Barbara Hutton is alive, she can see it, and that's it!



As he rocks sympathetically by the shore Broughton is able to ventriloquize the ocean. But their "dialogue" gently touches upon the disharmony between the mortal self and the endlessly repeating sea. The initial appearance of the empty chair suggests that indeed the "me" of the film has entered the sea forever. But after the autobiographer returns, backwards, to his seat, the sea in the final passage wants to open up the theme of death:

Let's talk of my dead,  
the Sea said.  
Let's not, said I  
I'm dry on my dune . . .  
Then, said the Sea,  
When I wash up the dead  
will you wade in?  
I'll swim, I said.

Broughton rocking by the sea recalls a commonplace in American poetry initiated by the great poems of poetic incarnation of Walt Whitman: "A Word out of the Sea" (first titled "A Child's Reminiscence" and from which the image of the ocean as "Out of the rocked cradle" comes), and "As I ebbbed with an ebb of the ocean of life." The Pacific is gentler to Broughton than the Atlantic was to the suffering Whitman in delivering the same deadly message. "I'll swim," is an heroic taunt at the limitation of this metaphoric ocean, and it touches us precisely because it evokes the temporal advantage of the sea over the swimmer.

Just before the processional scene there is a superimposition of the film-maker reading his Tarot at a stump in the woods under the image of the dancing angel, a cinematic representation of the simultaneity of the moment of reflection and of incarnation. At this moment the poet reads the conclusion of his exquisite "True and False Unicorn." Here the poem of 1957 is called up to comment on the authority of autobiographical cinema in the film of 1976. It articulates the ambiguity inherent in the relationship of the authorial self to his own representation, as accurate for cinema as it is for words:

This is my only, this is my fate.  
This is my godhead grown from doubt.  
I am my unicorn, and he is I.  
  
I am myself my own true and false.  
I am myself my real unreal.  
He is my unicorn, and I am he.  
  
This is my I, my one, my me.  
This is my own, my two, my we.  
I am my unicorn, and so is he.

#### CODA

This essay should not end without a note on the diary film, a vastly important genre today, and one so close to my topic that some might

think it indistinguishable. The film diary differs from the autobiography in this: it does not choose a fictive vantage point to reflect upon the past; in fact, it has next to no reference to the past. It would offer, instead, a series of discontinuous presents. The most important cinematic diarist, Jonas Mekas, does not set for himself the most extreme self-limitations in filming his diary. He is often very close indeed to an autobiographer; for he allows himself the second, or doubling, movement of verbal commentary, which very often smuggled the ironic perspective back into a genre that is sealed against irony.

Howard Guttenplan, perhaps the most rigorous inventor of self-imposed constraints for his diary films, tells us that he will not film anything out of his normal path. He does not go out of his way to get a particular shot. He films from where he is at the very moment of inspiration, and he does not edit aside from eliminating weak, or false elements.

Harry Smith did not edit his New York and Oklahoma diary, *Late Superimpositions*, but he did allow himself the freedom of organizing the completed rolls of film, leader and all, so that they move from maximal density and saturation of images to the thinnest point in the middle of the film, and then back to deeper colors and more complex layering. The curve also describes the shift from short and animated bits to longer and longer takes of live photography, and then back.

Editing is by no means banned from all the diaries. Andrew Noren has released many versions of his closely edited *Kodak Ghost Poems*, but he has not indicated the movement of his changing attitudes to the film within it. Each version appears as the definitive totality and each remains rigidly achronological.

Most of the diarists show an ambiguous attitude, a hesitation toward their fundamental metaphors. They offer them as if they were the most casual encounters with the phenomenal world. So in the center of *Late Superimpositions* an Indian boy reacts to the manipulations of the cameraman by trying to twist his head around to keep his image straight in the turning camera. This sequence is the most touching of several demonstrations of the formative power of the camera and the film-maker in the film which pretends to be purely passive in relation to its imagery. Mekas, too, saves an image of conflagration (the burning of the Vienna fruit market) for the climax of *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, in which it is an apocalyptic metaphor for his distance from his origins. However he makes every effort to emphasize, on the soundtrack, his random stumbling upon this fire scene. Also in *Lost, Lost, Lost*, the diaries of his early years in America, he keeps saying, "I was there, recording it all with my camera." Yet one cannot but be struck by the elliptical, personal, fragmented recording of this supposed totality. If that claim refers to the life of the Lithuanian exiles in his film, as it seems to, it must be ironic, for he records next to nothing of it. We see above all his own nostalgia and isolation.