AMERICAN MAGIC:
THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEING SHAPES

by

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Abstract.

AMERICAN MAGIC:
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by

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American Magic: The Importance of Seeing Shapes opens the field of American's defining philosophy of pragmatism (in a lineage that stretches from Jonathan Edwards to Emerson to William James and, most recently, to Stanley Cavell) by using the work of American avant-garde filmmaker Robert Beavers as the catalyst for realization. The project is an extended exercise in practical aesthetics, an amplifying series of essays that considers "seeing shapes" from a variety of positions – philosophical, linguistic, poetic and visual. As I investigate the crossroads of Beavers' films and philosophical texts across both time and disciplinary bounds, I trace the slow movement from belief in *divinity-in-God* to *divinity-in-imagination*, a "progress" that evolves in American over the course of three centuries. I identify in both the American philosophical tradition and Beavers' films a microscopic focus on the practices of reading and writing as means of crystallizing consciousness of the mind-at-work. This approach foregrounds an interest in the divine potential of such embodied awareness for the film spectator or reader/writer of philosophy.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: American Magic, or,
'The Rest of the Text Does not Fit the Introduction' 1

I. Writing in the Present Tense

1. Small Books about God 33
2. Inscription 58
3. *From the Notebook of*…Robert Beavers 84

II. Two Heads

4. Cubes and Clouds 123
5. The Incubators 150
6. A Conversation with Robert Beavers 176

Conclusion: Revelation of Roots 201

Works Cited 207

INTRODUCTION

American Magic, or, 'The Rest of the Text Does not Fit the Introduction'[1]

> [N]o anthropologist ever reported more objectively on the fertility rites of a jungle tribe [than Jonathan Edwards in his *Personal Narrative*].[2]
> Perry Miller

Stanley Cavell's decades-long incisions into the heart of American philosophy consistently lead to two visions. The first is that of the present-tense: the ongoing beat of "I am writing" and "I am reading" that threads through philosophical prose, and the invitation to readers to acclimate to this beat. "Emerson's and Thoreau's relationship to poetry is inherently their interest in their own writing…their interest in the fact that what they are building is writing."[3] Cavell cites Thoreau's own narration of reading, from the "Sounds" section of *Walden*, as an example of such foregrounding of the piecing-together of language:

> The writer describes himself as 'look[ing] up from my book' upon hearing a train pass, and it takes a moment to realize that what he calls 'my book' is the one he is now writing. And when he looks up at the train here is what happens. 'This carload of torn sails is more legible and interesting now than if they should be wrought into paper and printed books. Who can write so graphically the history of the storms they have

[1] Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 2001) 124.
[2] Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2005) 138.
[3] Stanley Cavell, *Senses of Walden* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)134.

> weathered as these rents have done?' What happened when he looked up from his book is that he went on reading (and writing)…his reading and writing were not interrupted after all.[4]

Cavell imports this orientation, where reading and writing both bleed together and expand to welcome the straying mind, into his own investigations of film, which became a steady object of his scholarship starting in the early 1970s. In his 1979 foreword to the expanded version of *The World Viewed: Notes on the Ontology of Film* (1971), he announces that in some cases he has written about films he has seen once—often decades ago, using his memory and the notes he took in the theater and just after viewing as his only guides. Unconcerned about the risks of error and inaccuracy, he relies comfortably on the un-even residue of past impressions in his subsequent writing, "wanting neither to disguise the liabilities of the spirit in which the work was composed nor to disguise the need for a study of what may be remembered in any art" (but in particular film, which resists straightforward "quoting" due to the layered quality of both the medium and one's memory of it).[5] In refusing to write about more than he remembers, Cavell stays in touch with the particular present-tense conditions of spectatorship that fascinate him just as much as his chosen films: the real-time communion with others in a dark space, one's own invisibility in the face of the actors' towering presence, and the opportunity to witness this whole state of affairs at once.

The second vision to which Cavell's American philosophy regularly attends is the relationship between minds. He sees American philosophical language laboring to underline and affirmatively answer the question of "whether we can know that there are

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[4] Stanley Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 49.

[5] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) ix.

other minds, creatures who share our capacities of consciousness, who are aware of us as we are of them."[6] He celebrates an essential identification that can occur between reader and text or across disparate philosophies that suddenly admit affinity, when "a moment of what you might have felt as ineffable innerness turns out to be shareable as bread, or a particular pond."[7] He values, in the work of Emerson and Thoreau, the paradoxical "bringing back" of both words and selves to a home heretofore unknown – something that could be called "America" and serve as a site for contact with like creatures. His own writing, willing to tread irregularly according to the changing locations of quandary or mystery as he thinks and composes, extends this historical effort: to forge communal intimacy scaled to abstraction and oriented to the phenomenon of "possessing a self," to press forward confidently into a zone of "intelligibility" amongst strangers, to overcome William James' "biggest rule" - the "absolute distance between minds" - by finding plain and spacious language with which to speak about reading, writing and the experience of being alive.[8] "This possessing is not possessive…in being an act of creation…it is the exercise not of power but of reception."[9] What I will come in this project to call in shorthand the dilemma of "two heads" refers to dialogue both within oneself (where watching the mind at work requires inhabiting a body with two heads) and with another.

What I called Cavell's two consistent visions of American philosophy just above, then, form a figure-eight of relatedness: by "writing in the present tense" one shares a form of intimacy with the irregularity of one's own existence and perceptions, but also

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[6] Cavell, *Etudes* 21.
[7] Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989) 87.
[8] William James, "Stream of Thought," *Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) 221.
[9] Cavell, *Etudes* 17.

faces the creative and rhetorical challenge of *pitching* this unique self-knowledge to strangers in a way that will generate real recognition. Communing in the realm of shapes, both linguistic and pictorial, is one mode of meeting on shared ground.

For help in clarifying what I mean by "communing in the realm of shapes," I turn to Emerson's "The Poet": "[Imagination] is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees*, by sharing the path, or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucid to others*. The path of things is silent. Will they suffer a speaker to go with them? A spy they will not suffer; a lover, a poet, is the transcendency of their own nature, -- him they will suffer. The condition of true naming, on the poet's part, is his resigning himself to the divine aura which breathes through forms, and accompanying that" (italics added).[10] "[S]haring the path, or circuit of things through forms" (writing in the present tense) is an activity rendered possible by a posture of "resigning" (self-possession as reception), and the very consciousness of tracing, or *unfolding-with* line, "makes [forms] translucid to others" (two heads). As Emerson says, his concern lies in the growth of divinity and poetry along this path. While, in contrast, Wittgenstein's interest in following the path of grammar and "language games" is not motivated by divinity, the resulting "forms of life" that he asks us to attend to also usher us into the "realm of shapes." As Cavell tells us, Wittgenstein and Emerson are also bound by their commitment to the common; American philosophy "underwrites" Cavell's understanding of Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy. "American magic," as I'm proposing it in this project, brings us shape-shifting not in the

[10] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," *Essays: The First and Second Series* (New York: Library of America, 2010).

morphing of a human into a totem animal, but in the changing forms rendered by following the paths of the ordinary.

**

My study of Cavell coincided with my introduction to the work of the American filmmaker Robert Beavers; in 2007, I saw the U.S. premiere of *Pitcher of Colored Light,* a portrait of Beavers' mother at home in Cape Cod, at the New York Film Festival. His films exist at what curator Susan Oxtoby has called the "intersection of structural and lyrical filmmaking traditions," and are shot in locations across Europe and Greece, in dialogue with the natural world and the work of artists both known and unknown. Clarified and delicate, they are condensed odes to the pulsing vitality of both spectator and medium, many driven by his enduring investigations of colored light and the construction of space within the frame. Beavers has created his own colored gelatin filters to place *between* the lens and aperture, producing subtle varieties of chroma and saturation quite different from those generated by filters placed in a frontal compendium. And his films are quite literally exemplars of "the importance of seeing shapes": he has invented shaped mattes that obscure and contain aspects of the image. Static and dynamic squares, rectangles, circles and ovals interrupt and re-compose his own footage.

The decision to set Cavell's America and Beavers's films side-by-side evolved over a period of years, but in hindsight the reasons for the pairing are clear. I had turned to Cavell for the first time for his thoughts on Wittgenstein, whose *Philosophical Investigations*, like *Walden*, is profoundly committed to belying the myth of the seamlessness of reading and thinking. In following his shuttles between the Austrian and the Americans (especially Thoreau and Emerson), I came for the first time to want to use

the “American” category that had never before congealed for me into anything intelligible. Cavell’s trans-Atlantic sweep, his deepening of the philosophy of the ordinary by opening the spot of unlikely co-mingling between Wittgenstein and Emerson, gave me courage to assemble my own American constellation of elements amongst which I saw affinity and secret dialogue—Cavell himself a kind of bonding material with which to attach the various textual and cinematic stars.

The importance of seeing shapes: Beavers uses shaped mattes to block aspects of the film image (above, *Diminished Frame*), but he also regularly invokes “shape” in his writing to convey his work with invisible forms. “Filming is a search for correct contours.”[11]

“Attention to experience leads to authentic experimentation,” the American poet and essayist Ann Lauterbach says, a reminder that the dilemma of interruption (as in Thoreau’s looking-up from his book) dissolves when experience is granted authority and naturally augments the fields of reading, writing and thinking.[12] Beavers’ filmmaking is inseparable from the deep writing and reading that have accompanied it

[11] Robert Beavers, “La Terra Nuova,” *The Searching Measure* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive) 1.

since his first 16mm experiments in 1965. He relies on a running practice of writing (discussed in Chapter Three) to steady and contain a craft marked by both extreme length (a single short film can be years in the making) and a commitment to a poetics of receptive "letting" (where his reliance on inspiration and insight rests in delicate balance with a refusal to grasp after form).

Beavers builds associations among elements in his footage.

[12] Ann Lauterbach, *The Night Sky: Writings on the Poetics of Experience* (New York: Viking, 2005) 11.

And his connections to America are both tenuous and profound. Born in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1949, Beavers dropped out of Deerfield Academy in 1965 and moved to New York City to pursue filmmaking; there he met the older and more established Gregory Markopoulos (1928-1992), a central figure in the American avant-garde. He has lived in Europe since age eighteen, when he and Markopoulos went into self-imposed exile. But he is quick to identify his "New England mind." As I spent more time with his films, they appeared as twentieth and twenty-first century extensions—and transformations—of preoccupations that have consistently marked the American philosophical tradition. His embrace of reading and writing as wellsprings for his creative practice and objects of on-screen study struck me as widening Cavell's vision of Emerson and Thoreau "building language" -- newly contextualized in Beavers's more primary interest, borrowing Cavell's language, "in the fact that what he is building is [a film]". For instance, his first explorations, *Early Monthly Segments* (1968-70/2002), are remarkable not only for their announcement of a unique poetics, but for their maker's willingness to articulate his own acts of composition and method, to make the dialects and heartbeat of the camera audible rather than simply showcasing, wizard-like, its effects. In one *Segments* sequence featuring a central square matte that interrupts the representation of deep space, Beavers sits at an outdoor table in Locarno and slides a glass-mounted matte into the camera compendium, so that we witness the joint, real-time work of fingers and camera in the arrangement of an image.

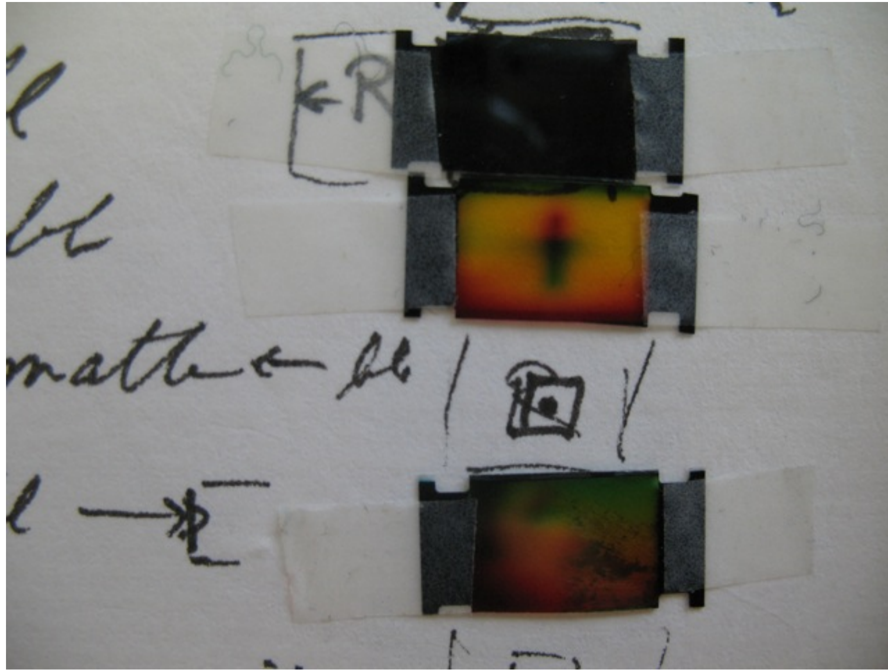
In his loyalty to the poetics of speculation (in his own words: "to move within the unknown and place the making there"), his creation of an undeniably original film language, and his commitment to divinity without recourse to gods (his notebooks speak

of the “spiritual life of the filmmaker”), his tendencies are Emersonian. Beavers’s matrix of imagination and reality is one of startling integration, recalling Wallace Stevens; his is a cinema of transcendence but not one of disorientation or trance. Steadily grounded in the materiality of celluloid and camera, and objects both exalted and mundane, it offers an invitation to direct seeing without demanding exit from the recognizable and the real. And, like Jonathan Edwards, Beavers is both reliant on continuous, notebook-based writing and casts his intentions beyond language limits, working most essentially in the realm of sensation: “All the filmmakers of my kind of filmmaking are using our elements to express what we either cannot or do not want to express in words; we want to give you another experience.”[13] He also shares with Edwards an aesthetic vision marked by “underlying unity”; starting in the 1990s, he re-edited his films over the course of a decade, producing My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure, an eighteen-film cycle of completed works made since 1967.[14] In their investigation of the capacity of cinema to provide contact with a quiet beat of aliveness, the creation of opportunities for “direct seeing” and the restoration of unused human capacities, Beavers’s films call out for at least momentary viewing in the context of American philosophy.

When Perry Miller articulates the unlikely affinity between Jonathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson in *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956), finding them bound by a

[13] “Winged Distance / Sightless Measure: A Conversation With Robert Beavers, Part One,” Interview with Michael Guillen, October 25, 2009, http://theeveningclass.blogspot.com/2009/10/winged-distance-sightless-measure_5054.html.
[14] Robert Beavers *Untitled (Vienna Aphorisms)* 3.

common core of pantheistic and mystical fervor, he is searching for a shape—an American shape—and a way to trace its evolution below the radar and against the logic of institutionalized history, according to which Edwards' Calvinism and Emerson's Over-



Beavers edits his films on paper, using ink and single frames.

Soul spring from sparring ancestries: the former focused on original sin and the inherent depravity of human beings, the latter proposing a universal being linking man and nature.[15] It is in that same spirit, of searching for an under-shape, that I propose to place Beavers in the American philosophical tradition for mutual light-shedding.

William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience* presents religious conversion in the larger field of perception, as a projection of mind state onto the world, and he invokes a form of proto-cinema, where the particular "gifts of spectator's mind" can determine what she sees and experiences. "[S]tage setting receives whatever alternating

[15] Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1956) 184-195.

colored lights may be shed on it from the optical apparatus of the gallery."[16] Beavers's filmmaking contains the fact of James's figural use of "colored lights"; filmmaking literally *converts* what and how he sees. Returning to his mother's house, the location of *Pitcher of Colored Light* (2007), after shooting the film, Beavers said, "I am amazed; I can't see how I made a film there—now I see nothing."[17] And lest we begin to fear that the "American" designation I'm putting forth cannot hold (couldn't we trace such a lineage in another nation?), it might be useful to note that the variety of poetic restoration that I'm interested in drawing out is to a kind of full-bodied-ness (of human being, language, cinema) that has not yet existed. It's the continuity among poetic efforts to un-repress this potential, and the way that potential is imagined, that we can think of as "American."

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I had wanted to call this project "American Magic" but couldn't find my own rationale. Every definition of magic I encountered ran counter to the spirit of American philosophy, always centering on transformation based on elision, rather than the ongoing stream: "Magic supplies primitive man with…ready-made rituals, acts and beliefs…which serves to bridge over the dangerous gaps in every important pursuit or critical situation," writes the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowki.[18] In the course of my research, I turned to the Hungarian psychoanalyst and anthropologist Geza Roheim's *Magic and Schizophrenia* (1955), and came across an account of an unnamed

[16] William James, "Varieties of Religious Experience," *William James Writings 1902-1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1987) 142.
[17] Rutkoff interview (Oct 10, 2009).
[18] Bronislaw Malinowki, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (The Free Press, 1948) 70.

woman I felt certain was my great aunt Sylvia, an abstract American painter born in 1919 (I later confirmed that it was in fact her).[19] Roheim's book traces the connection between the imagined omnipotence of the infant and the circulation of magic in primitive societies: both are strategies for eluding the frustrations of reality. His

An original relation to the universe:[20] Beavers has created a unique film language through his uses of colored filters and shaped mattes. Above: *Still Light* (1970/2001)

narration of my aunt's analysis turned on a war between "sublimation and superego," where Sylvia resisted the pleasures of painting in favor of taking cover in the enticing and familiar shadow of her mother's depression. He named both anality and a lesbian threat in the aura of meanings around Sylvia's art: "I should not paint. I don't want to be a Lesbian," she had once declared, according to his report.[21]

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[19] Sylvia's abstract painting "Two Heads" led to my use of that phrase in this project.
[20] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays & Lectures,* Ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library Classics of the United States, Inc., 1983) 50.
[21] Geza Roheim, *Magic and Schizophrenia* (New York: International Universities Press, 1995) 73.

But Sylvia had always narrated a different tale of her afternoons with Roheim. She had entered analysis when she learned that she could not bear children in the 1940s and felt conflicted about whether to adopt. By the end of her treatment, Roheim announced the dilemma solved: Sylvia did not want a child. The turning point was a dream—Sylvia was carrying a heavy vessel and dropped it. "What color was it?" Roheim asked. "Terra cotta," she answered. "Terra cotta" was not in his vocabulary, so he asked for a translation. "Flesh-colored," Sylvia tried again. "Flesh-colored!?" Sylvia had re-enacted this exchange a dozen times over the years, Roheim's voice always thick with the excitement of a breakthrough. The burdensome vessel was a baby—and dropping it, in Roheim's view, indicated the release of Sylvia's potential baby-wish. But when I interviewed her at her home in Maplewood, NJ, at 92, and brought Roheim's book to share, Sylvia remained decidedly unresolved, the question of baby/no baby as fraught as it had been seventy years ago, now also overlain with regret and loneliness. "Did it help?" Sylvia kept asking herself about the analysis. She invoked the broken terra cotta container not as a private image recalled but rather as a memory of the force of Roheim's analytic logic and her own susceptibility to his authoritative pronouncements of her inner state. She stopped short of criticizing him, though, focusing her bitterness on his appearance ("was he ugly!") and his hopelessly inappropriate, out-of-date boots. She was also incensed by the claims in his case study (which she had not known existed and was encountering for the first time) and stopped reading it mid-way.

Magic's domain is loaded and vast. But regardless of whether we're ensconced in Roheim's infantile imaginary, traveling the colloquial range of expressing mystery about art, nature, or love ("what a magical night!"), or among Melanesian witches with Marcel

Mauss,[22] the territory of magic is consistently one whose central qualities are a) change and b) missing material: transformations marked by words, times, objects, and explanations out-of-sight. In Mauss's anthropological terrain, for example, no explanation narrates the interval between a Murring sorcerer's departure for the spirit world and the removal of quartz from the his mouth (an indication of a journey complete). In the infantile psyche, what's missing is the experience of boundary between self and other and hence there is great confidence in its capacity to act decisively and definitively upon the world: wish, word and action are one. Regarding nature: we are moved by the mystery of a flower in part because we don't have an explanatory language for what we see. The 'how' is beyond our frame – all the stranger since we (the flower and I) belong to the same world. Plants are rife with skips and hence lean toward magic—growth is too slow for us to witness the conspiring forces of emergence, chance and change—and because the present-tense manifestation itself is so seductive and compelling, it's easy to be satisfied by the leaf or blossom itself. But this very perfection of form hints that something is out of perceptual reach.

Tremendous power and pleasure, then, are generated from such a magical skip. We see x and z but only the magician (the authoritative other who knows all the words and can fulfill wishes) guards the intervening y. In the appealing x-y-z rhythm of magic, x and z are marked by great legibility– especially gratifying given the ellipsis of the middle part. Sometimes we can identify the motivations for not knowing y—it's never simply a matter of resignation to the reality of cognitive limitations. (Imagine, for

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[22] The French anthropologist and nephew of Emile Durkheim whose cross-cultural, ground-breaking *A General Theory of Magic*, first published in 1902, identified magic as distinct from religion and a social phenomenon dependent on collective belief.

instance, how pleasant or nerve-wracking it is to perceive a medical doctor as a white-coated magician—the trust required to let him make decisions about the middle portion (the inside of one's own body) and the relinquishing of one's own instincts of bodily knowing that it can inspire.) God, of course, always has a missing y.

Roheim's compelling language of missing material—magic as a life-long re-enactment of infantile efforts at controlling reality via libidinal means—hadn't reached, sadly, the authenticity and specificity of Sylvia's middle portion, her un-seen.[23] But he was famous and creative, the doctor-scholar entrusted with divining Sylvia's unconscious life, and their relationship was determined by power. This was an era of psychoanalysis fully at one with a polarized paradigm of seeing and blindness between doctor and patient, and Roheim and Sylvia accepted his inclination to tell her what her desires were.

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Malinowki (1884-1942), considered the father of structural functionalism, kept a diary, never intended for consumption—published posthumously, in 1967, as *Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. His work in the Pacific Islands is renowned for its insights into participant observation in the field (*Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922)), sexuality (*Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927)), and magic (*Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays* (1948)). His diary offers a second stream of thought, an unwitting accompaniment to his ethnography; it is marked by great angst and stands in a kind of quivering, potentially threatening relation to the urgency of his intellectual strivings and the clarity of his insights.

[23] A different outcome would have been unlikely until the waves of feminist revisions of psychoanalysis in the U.S., France, and England in the 1970s and 80s—with theoretical reformulations by analysts such as Joyce MacDougal, Jessica Benjamin and Julia Kristeva.

Against his argument for the unity of tribal culture as an organic whole whose pieces fit together, his personal struggle revolves around the horror of interior fragmentation and conflict. The well-functioning motions of repression by which he characterizes the Trobriand sexual psyche, where parent-child love is distinct from the romantic sort and marriage serves as a final step in a fluid process of bond-deepening, contrast starkly with his own difficulty in remaining exclusively loyal to his fiancé, the Australian nurse Elsie R. Masson (called "E.R.M." in his journal) and in extracting his mother from his erotic imagination.

Sex and Repression in Savage Society	**Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term**
Between husband and wife sexual desire is indispensable…the passionate feelings of first possession must be incorporated into the calmer affection, allowing husband and wife to enjoy each other's company throughout the best part of their days. In sexual relations the aim of bodily attraction and clinging is that union that leads to impregnation. Each of these two innate tendencies—the mother-to-child behaviour and the process of mating—cover a big range of preparatory and consummatory actions…the line of division, however, is clear, because one set of acts, tendencies, and feelings serves to complete the infant's unripe organism, to nourish and protect and warm it; the other set of acts subserves the union of sexual organs and the production of a new individual. [24]	Although only a few moments before I had 'genuine' and 'deep' feelings for E.R.M., I couldn't keep my paws off the girls. Resolution: Stop chasing skirts. Lecherous thoughts. I tried to chase them away. [I] resolve ...to write...every day, to E.R.M [Elsie]; to attain absolute mental faithfulness to her. Main interests in life: Kipling, occasionally strong yearning for Mother. Thought of E.R.M….I am longing for her…; I felt I wanted her the way a child wants his mother. I thought of Mother, I'd like to see them both together…[25]

[24] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (London: Routledge, 2001)15, 44.
[25] Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (Stanford: Standford UP, 1989) 132, 22, 282, 41, 241.

It is useful in this context to return to Cavell's formulation of self-possession as reception. How are scientific knowledge, self-knowledge, and intimacy dispersed across the waters of these two distinct streams of representation (the diary and the ethnography) and what is gained and lost by insisting on such stark separations? Desire plays primary roles in both, but the anthropologist's own experience of its troubling flux and his insights about the structures that contain it in Trobriand life are not allowed to touch (the cogency of his theoretical propositions necessarily excluding the "y" of the diary's psychic material). No writing is immune from such elisions, and anthropology is surely not alone in the insistence on separate tracks, nor can the dilemma be seen simply as that of the fragmented author. But in its authoritative reports, from the field of the other, on the structures and logics of consciousness, anthropology often provides an acute example of the neat paradox inherent in writing lucidly about the secrets of universe. Perhaps the theorist of magic identifies with his muse, taken by the power that's generated by skipping over missing material, as articulated by Malinowski's previously-cited words: "Magic supplies primitive man with a number of ready-made rituals, acts and beliefs, with a definite mental and practical technique which serves to bridge over the dangerous gaps in every important pursuit or critical situation."[26]

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Anthropology is a not-so-quiet undercurrent in *Walden*. Thoreau repeatedly proposes that there is something curative to be found in the replacement of one sort of travel (across the world, in relation to an obvious Other) with the local sort that occurs between neighbors or even within the bounds of a single self. "In most books, the *I*, or

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[26] Malinowski *Magic, Science* 70.

first person is omitted; in this it will be retained. I require of every writer…a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me," he proclaims on the very first page.[27] The thrill of difference, in Thoreau's American imagination, can be gotten via intimate, first-person reports of the close-at-hand. I can't argue that *Walden* constitutes a full-blown critique of the assumptions of 19th century European ethnological discourse; Thoreau's critique ends where he no longer needs a foil to his vision of the near-by, and "savages" are kept in their place as much as deconstructed in this text. But there is an undeniable association between his direct address to Americans, who are not living up to his ideal of who they might be, and his effort to articulate a new form of ethnography (literally, *writing culture*) whose subject is the self at home. "I would fain say something, not so much concerning the Chinese and Sandwich Islanders as you who read these pages, who are said to live in New England; something about your condition…"[28]

Emerson in *Nature* had something similar in mind. When, in communion with nature, he inhabits a space of such dilated vision that his famous "transparent eyeball" usurps his identity, he issues a reminder that we grossly limit our imaginations if we insist that the identities and proximities of friend and stranger remain fixed:

> Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and

[27] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Mineoloa: Dover, 1995) 1.
[28] *Walden* 2.

> accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, -- master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance.[29]

Looking outside the domain of philosophy, the American anthropology of self-at-home is visible in the discipline of anthropology itself. Zora Neale Hurston deepened Thoreau's tracks by pursuing an original approach to American anthropology, identifying with both anthropologist and primitive in her fieldwork and fiction on the African-American south, and refusing a contradiction between the abstract strokes of modernism and the vernacular specifics of the regional. Disciplinary and institutional affirmation of the theoretical claims of self-reflexive ethnographic practices surfaced in the 1970s and 80s, when American anthropologists Paul Rabinow and Vincent Crapanzano studied themselves as much as their subjects in *Reflections in Fieldwork in Morocco* and *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan Tilemaker*, respectively—works that foreground the nuanced dilemmas of intersubjective encounters informed by the peculiar power dynamics of the field. Perhaps, much like unlikely continuity Miller found between Edwards and Emerson, there is another heritage to be found in a lineage of American ethnographers who have insistently inserted the local and the first-person into the genre.

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I am neither an anthropologist nor an expert in magic, but I will briefly dwell in their territories before I leave them behind. As I continued to question what I wanted from magic (why was I inclined to put "American" and "magic" side by side?), I came to see that what most captivated my attention were formal qualities and structural operations that acutely matched some of the persistent tendencies in American philosophy that interested me, all having to do with representations of language—what I'll call

[29] Emerson "Nature" 45.

"crossing," "condensation" and "the chain," below. The motions of magic are marked by ongoing place-trading among language, pictures, actions and things, between the abstract and concrete, as well as by a current – we could call it 'magic' itself - that travels along an associative chain composed of these mutating elements.

CROSSING

Magic is at its most basic the art of change, but its special status derives from a kind of crossing, a category-mixing, at the spot where transformation takes place. As David Pocock discusses in his introduction to his foreword to Mauss' book, "Rituals *do* what words cannot *say*: in *act* black and white can be mixed; the young man is made an adult; spirit and man can be separated or combined at will. Indeed, actions speak louder than words."[30] Pocock gives the example of the magical function of the non-Hindu Muslim in the caste structure in Gujarat, India. Outside the Hindu caste system, he serves a neutralizing function in the case of an accidental encounter with a polluted Untouchable; he is both outside of the system of purity and impurity and has a central role to play within it, while the outsider according to lived experience, the shunned and excluded Untouchable, is an insider in the system.[31] Pocock is drawing on Claude Levi-Strauss' observation about *mana* (the Pacific Island concept of impersonal force that's directly tied to what we think of as "magic") that "its unique function is to make good a discrepancy between signifier and signified." Levi-Strauss himself had concluded that "conceptions of the *mana* type are so frequent and so widespread that we should ask ourselves if we are not confronted with a permanent and universal form of thought which…being a function of a certain situation of the mind in the face of things, must

[30] Mauss 5.
[31] Mauss 6.

appear each time this situation is given."[32] Though magic is essentially an activity, this explanation pushes to identify it within a larger tendency of mind: "[the use of] symbolic actions which overcome the discrepancies of thought."[33]

A second example of what I'm calling the "crossing" that occurs at the joint of magical activity pertains to causality. While the arts and crafts, Mauss points out, can look strikingly like magic—both involving the hand-work, materials and tools of jewelry, embroidery and metal work—only in the case of craft does effect follow logically from cause of the same register. "Everyone knows that the results are achieved directly through the coordination of action, tool and physical agent": food is cooked by fire and a necklace is produced by metalwork.[34] In magic, by contrast, the effect is of a different order; it is not really believed that a given gesture produces its result—for instance that stirring spring water brings rain.[35]

CONDENSATION & THE CONCRETE

At the core of magic is a chiastic back-and- forth between the concrete and the abstract, a never-ending figure eight of materiality and language. An economy driven by a reduction of excess whittles down complex ideas and images until they can be manifest in a single thing, nameable and often place-able in the palm of a hand. Ideas are represented as material objects subject to action and force—for instance in the case of a charm that a magician might burn or drown in an effort to drive out illness.[36] The tendency toward reduction applies to magical language as well, where not only are tracts

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[32] Mauss 4.
[33] Mauss 5.
[34] Mauss 25.
[35] Mauss 25.
[36] Mauss 77.

of text and speech consolidated into single words, but words take the place of actions and things. The simple mention of a rite's name, for instance, can produce the effects of that rite; prayers are reduced to the name of a god or single word; even a lone letter can take the place of a spell.[37] Reduction proceeds onward toward the removal of language from representation in inscription or speech: interior language can have magical impact; the act of thinking sufficient to establish a link, for instance, between a person to whom harm is to be done and the object or animal ritually used to represent him.[38]

Mauss' analysis, though, departs from a denigrating understanding of the magical favoring of the concrete, where primitive society is akin to the pre-individuated, dependent baby who imagines that she has the power to produce the mind's objects as concrete ones in the world. He summarizes that conception, embodied by the Scottish social anthropologist James Frazer, as follows:

> Magic is…the first stage in the evolution of the human mind…[r]eligion grew up out of the failures…of magic. Originally man unhesitatingly expressed his ideas and their associations in concrete form. He thought he would create those things suggested to him by his mind—he imagined he was master of the external world…But he finally realized that the world was resisting his attempts…[and so] he endowed the universe with mysterious powers…Once upon a time man himself was a god, now he peopled the world with gods…he attached himself to them in worship, through sacrifice and prayer.[39]

Mauss questions Frazer's attachment to the evolutionary notions that man's magical mind disintegrated with the coming of religion and then science and that magical causality was replaced by rational logic. For Mauss, as for Levi-Strauss, magic poses an epistemological question greater than one limited to primitive society. The huge sweep of

[37] Mauss 68, 70.
[38] Mauss 84-85.
[39] Mauss 17.

A General Theory—which regularly crosses continents and centuries—is motivated by the desire to sift something "general" and illuminating, beyond the sphere of action and particularities in geography and time, from a diverse field.

THE CHAIN

"When the cream jug is thrown out of the room in order to bring good weather, the jug is endowed with properties of a certain kind. However, there is no attempt to trace back the chain of associated ideas by which the originators of these rites arrived at their notions."[40] If we return to the notion of the magical skip and the swath of missing material, what is "out of sight" in theoretical terms is the logic of the sympathetic chain that links the various elements in a magical constellation. Reason, for both the observer and the magician, remains largely unconscious.

Mauss presents endless examples of ritual and method to reveal the theme of a magical "cuisine" or "pharmacy" making amorphous material usable — ingredients are pounded, chopped, broken down and reformulated, turned into drinks, cakes, scents; paste, clay, wax, honey, plaster, parchment, and sand are formed into shapes and images. But in so doing, he also unwittingly unveils another theme: the importance of material representations of linearity. Chains, ropes, hair, jets of water and thread are wound, bound, knotted, and untied. It's as if the invisible associative chain of magic rears its head singly in this form—not to announce the details of its logic but simply to acknowledge the linking work of language behind-the-scenes: taking the place of knowing. Doesn't a line, after all, especially a flexible one, warmed and malleable, made of hair or rope or water, anticipate the forming of letters and language? Since magic is the art of change,

[40] Mauss 93.

and its minimum display is that of its effect, might we also say that magic provides a way to watch language move, the thrill of the discrepancy cross as one register of meaning gives way to another? If, as Roheim suggests, we need psychoanalysis to understand magic, might we say that magic provides access to the primal scene of language-making?

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Our fantasy of magic often involves a book with a thick table of contents and long index—a dictionary of meanings, associations, combinations, and recipes that might allow plant or gemstone or rancid milk to cure, punish, bring rain or make the sun shine. But, as Mauss explains in his discussion of sympathetic magic[41]:

> [T]here [is] a whole complex system of symbols through which they order their operations—signs which are astrological, cosmological, sacrificial, verbal, etc…All this paraphernalia acts as a kind of fancy dress…At the beginning of their books, prefacing each chapter of their manuals, we find an exposition of their doctrines. The rest of the text, however, does not fit the introduction.[42]

He goes on to conclude that

> the formulas of sympathetic magic…are not the laws of magical rites…They are but the abstract expression of very general notions which we have found to be diffused throughout magic. They are nothing more. Sympathy is the route along which magical powers pass; it does not provide magical power itself.

When analyses of magic turn on an attempt to understand the causal connections among elements involved, they conflate a "subjective association of ideas" with "an objective association of facts," confuse the "fortuitous" connection with the "causal."[43]

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[41] First enunciated by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* and consisting of two principles: The Law of Similarity (like produces like, or effect resembles cause) and the Law of Contact (things once in contact will continue to act on each other from a distance).
[42] Mauss 124-5.
[43] Mauss 79.

If, for example, a particular magical constellation features two objects of the same color, as in the case of the use of yellow root to cure jaundice among the Cherokee Indians, it is not because yellow has an inherent significance but because color is being used to establish a relationship between the two elements.[44] Ultimately Mauss is making a profoundly pragmatic argument; he is understanding belief by observing it functions: “The interest lies not in the plan or composition of the rite, but in the nature of magic’s working methods…in the beliefs involved…the feelings it provokes.”[45] In the image of the large magical tome, the skip from word to definition is accepted, the rationale safe and sound in the hands of the dictionary-maker; the chain has turned from rope to steel. In this way an authority figure is one you can trust to be the keeper of a viable chain—you inherit the starting and end points but leave the logic of the interior to him.

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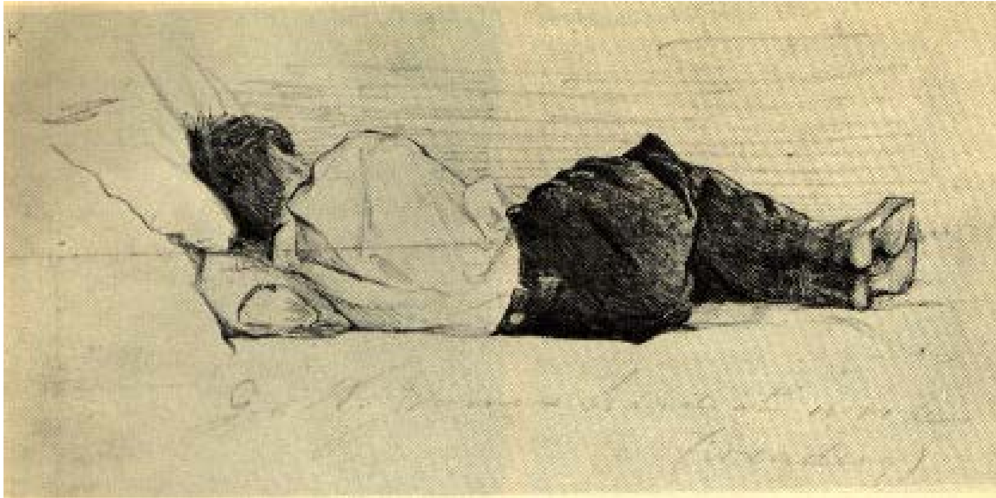

Where does drawing intersect with the stream of thought?
(Image: William James, *hard at work (reading)*, ca. 1863)

[44] Mauss 95.
[45] Mauss 13.

"A subtle chain of countless rings/The next unto the farthest brings;/ The eye reads omens where it goes,/And speaks all languages the rose;/And, striving to be man, the worm/Mounts through all the spires of form."[46] In the first words of *Nature*, Emerson subverts the Great Chain of Being—that medieval philosophy of interconnectedness and frozen hierarchy of forms whose nadir is dirt and whose pinnacle God—and allows for internal mobility: even the lowly worm can make contact with its higher portions. But of course Emerson's version of interbeing ultimately leaves verticality far behind; in *Circles*, for instance, fluidity and impermanence bond all forms of matter, nature and mind.[47] In Cavell's ruminations on this essay, he wonders about jumping from one circle to the next—pressing not for a bird's eye view of the blooming of new concentric circles around the fading, interior ones but for an articulation of traversal:

> [Emerson] invites us to think about the fact…that every action admits of being outdone, that around every circle another circle can take its place. I should like to extend the invitation to think about how he pictures us as moving from one circle to another…there is an ambiguity in his thoughts here as between what he calls the generating and…the drawing of the new circle, an ambiguity between the picturing of new circles as forming continuously or discontinuously.[48]

Cavell, I think, is asking for several things here: can we speak about traveling across the divide—"crossing"—can we occupy that morphological space where an idea, or linguistic register, or way of seeing gives way to another one that takes its place? Can we picture some unit smaller than the whole circle—and can we get a close-up view of the "drawing of the new circle"—as if this circle is made, or known, by one's own pen?

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[46] Emerson "Nature" 5.
[47] "Interbeing" is a term coined by the Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh to express the interconnected nature of all living beings.
[48] Cavell *Senses* 135.

Emerson in *Nature* says: "Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous. The dawn is my Assyria; the sunset and moonrise my Paphos, and unimaginable realms of faerie; broad noon shall be my England of the senses and the understanding; the night shall be my Germany of mystic philosophy."[49] He pulls access to the richness of worlds far-off in time and space away from association with privilege and power (and newly associates this kind of access with the superficial) and refuses the seduction of the literally tropical, announcing plainly that they're already his. These variations of climate and history are available simply via attunement to the chapters of a single day. His siding with the daily is simultaneously his siding with the imagination, and, as in Thoreau's enlargement of textual engagement to include moments of distraction, an interest in the notion of writing/reading/being *through,* of a prose and a philosophy that keeps track of the line, of, as Cavell said, the *drawing* of the circle.

This form of composition not only incorporates all that goes on during the skipped middle portion but lets its shape be determined by it, because value is placed on acknowledgement of the full chain. Could we call this, then, American magic—the ongoing line, the attention to the mark as it is being made across the page or ground even as chance determines it as much as its maker, the address to an imagined reader or viewer who might come to identify with the desire to know her own associations and consent to her own creative choices? "The gladness we experience when we are moved by an artwork [is] that the artist has made these choices and that we can as well," Lauterbach says.[50]

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[49] Emerson "Nature" 15.
[50] Lauterbach 7.

In *Souls of the Labadie Tract*, Susan Howe writes of the walking poetics of Jonathan Edwards and Wallace Stevens. "As an idea occurred to [Edwards], he pinned a small piece of paper on his clothing, fixing in his mind an association between the location of the paper and the particular insight. On his return home, he unpinned each slip and wrote down its associated thought according to location," she says of Edwards.[51] Stevens also made notes in transit, writing ideas down during his daily walk from home to work. His stenographers transcribed these jottings, the raw material for later poems.[52] These tales of fragment and motion bring Blaise Pascal to mind: he carried a small piece of paper in his pocket from the revelatory moment of its scrawled composition (November 23, 1654) to his death, when it was discovered by his servant. Pascal ensured that this revelation would travel with him—a complement, it seems, to the movement of his own thoughts in the radical cutting and ordering of his of fragmentary *Pensées*. Wary of the troubles gotten into by mixing the orders of knowledge (body, mind and heart), Pascal embraced an abstract "middle" that allows, as the *Pensées* do, for dwelling in a space of awareness of the never-ending pendulum swings and inversions of thought and for tracking the distinctions among reason, intuition and feeling.

So too do Edwards' and Stevens' poetics of moving language work attempt communion with a middle or interior of travel. This impulse to watch language move, and to track the motions of mind with pen and paper, open to the accidental spread of ink as writing proceeds, is a way to follow an imaginative God, or an American form of magic. So many of the objects in the traditional magical toolbox appear persistently in

[51] Susan Howe, *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (New York: New Directions, 2007) 9.
[52] Howe 73.

American philosophy—book, rainbow, gemstone, leaf, colored light—in the form of printed text. They provide places to focus the imagination before the next circle forms.

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> I place the pieces of film that are of no further use in one corner of the table. When these have accumulated, I must clear them from the table; their presence alone is an obstacle. They must be out of view to make a space for the next choice in the editing.
>
> I memorize the image and movement while holding the film original in hand; the memorizing gains a weight and becomes a source for the editing. To view the film on an editing table would only distract me from this process and create the illusion that editing is done in the viewing.[53]

Beavers's description of his editing process contains the very break-down of reliable difference between inner and outer, real and imagined, and concrete and abstract that Mauss documented in his study of magic. Returning to Pocock's introductory words: In magic, "[r]ituals *do* what words cannot *say*: in *act* black and white can be mixed; the young man is made an adult; spirit and man can be separated or combined at will." So too do the films of Robert Beavers operate on the energies of such shape change, (where "the eye [can] read the sound in an object" and "the rectangle of the book has become a circle by shooting").[54] As Levi Strauss concluded, the characteristics of magic in far-off lands are ultimately facts of the nature of mind itself. And they are facts of our entire bodies as well (images, after all, are inverted in our eyes). Beavers's films both live inside these facts and remind us that there are ways to feel things we cannot see.

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[53] Robert Beavers, "Editing and the Unseen," *The Searching Measure* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive) 7-8.
[54] Beavers *Untitled (Vienna Aphorisms)* 4.

Theorization of the crossroads between avant-garde cinema and magic has consolidated primarily in three arenas: kinship with early cinema (Tom Gunning's elucidation of a stance of "exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption" that binds both pre-narrative early cinema and avant-garde forms), self-conscious engagement with magic by avant-garde filmmakers (the work of Harry Smith and Maya Deren, for instance), and cinema as modern magic (Rachel Moore's work on cinematic stances of animistic and ritualistic opposition to the alienations of modernist progress).[55] In contrast, this investigation of what I'm calling "American magic" and the cinema of Robert Beavers will come in the form of an exercise in practical aesthetics. I will engage with the ongoing place-trading that characterizes magic (among language, pictures, actions and things, between the abstract and concrete) both as my content and in form, treating "the importance of seeing shapes" from a different angle in each chapter. This project is broken into two parts whose titles ("Writing in the Present Tense" and "Two Heads") come from what I identified earlier as Cavell's persistent frameworks for American philosophy. Part I consists of three chapters about writing itself, each centered around a formal motif: book, inscription, and notebook. This chain of mutating forms crosses over into Part II with a chapter on cubes and clouds, followed by a first-person account of an encounter with the films of Beavers's longtime partner, Gregory Markopoulos, and an interview with Beavers himself. Part II centers explicitly on the relations between minds, on dialogues and societies of two: Wittgenstein/Cavell, Beavers/Markopoulos, Markopoulos/H.D., me/Beavers.

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[55] Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Film and Theory: An Anthology*. Eds. Robert Stam & Toby Miller. (Malden: Blackwell, 2000) 232.

But Beavers hates the word ‘magic’ and we will now dispense with it.

Part I
Writing in the Present Tense

CHAPTER ONE

Small Books About God

The rectangle of the book has become a circle by shooting.[56]
-Robert Beavers

How large is that thing in the Mind which they call Thought?
Is Love square, or round?[57]
-Jonathan Edwards

The common cartoon of Jonathan Edwards – summed up simply by the words "fire and brimstone" – rapidly loses its bold outline under Perry Miller's biographical lens. In exchange for a picture of the supreme Puritan spokesman of theological authoritarianism and biblical literalism, Miller paints an Edwards who is "one of America's five or six major artists, who happened to work with ideas instead of with poems or novels," "one of those pure artists through whom the deepest urgencies…of their country become articulate," and, emboldening his claims even further, "the prefigurement of the artist in America."[58] Edwards' creative and philosophical powers are under-recognized but no less potent because "theology was his medium"; Miller calls him a "speculative psychologist posing as theologian." "Primitive," "aboriginal" and ahead of his time, he "met the forces [of this country] in their infancy, [foresaw] their tendencies."[59] For Miller, then, Edwards represents a great arc of continuity, cultivated in original soil and prescient of persistent speculative strains in the culture.

There is little superficial encouragement for bringing Robert Beavers and Edwards into common view. After all, Beavers's *Ruskin* (1975/1997), the film that catalyzed my desire to look at the two artists together, is thoroughly steeped in Europe.

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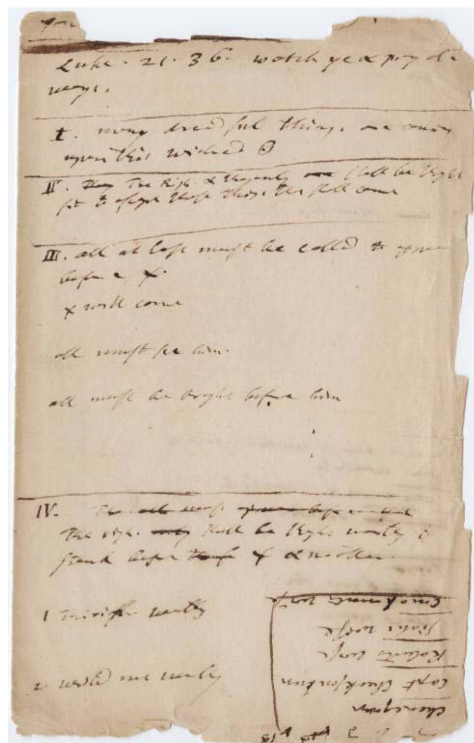
[56] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks 5433.
[57] *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* Volume 1 (London: Ball, Arnold & Co., 1840) cclxiii.
[58] Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2005) 138, xvi, xv, xvii.
[59] Miller xvii.

The last of a series of four films made in Italy and Switzerland (after *From the Notebook Of…*, *The Painting,* and *Work Done*), *Ruskin* was inspired by its namesake's *The Stones of Venice*, and was shot in the sites of the English critic's writings in Venice, the Alps and London. *Ruskin* opens amidst the swamps and cathedral of Torcello, the island just north of Venice that was a trading and economic center until 12th century, and comes to dwell in the city itself, among the architectural details (windows, arches, gargoyles, carvings) and building exteriors that Ruskin drew and wrote about in *Stones*. These images are joined by scenes of the Alps and London, and the sounds of turning pages, flapping birds's wings, and lapping waves, but constitute only one part of a complex compositional world created in conjunction with Beavers's use of shaped mattes that block aspects of the image, shrinking and expanding according to changes in light.

Images of a single, small book recur in the fugal *Ruskin*; it is seen from various vantage points, repeatedly lifted and lowered against the edge of a table under the containment of Beavers's palm, and accompanied by a single organ strain that conjures a churchly connection. Edwards, famous for never-ending writing penned on whatever spare material he could find (scraps from fans, booklets, calendars), created tiny preaching booklets, roughly 3x4 inches, as guides for the delivery of his sermons. They were designed to fit in the palm of his hand. And if we add to this Miller's proposal that Edwards's central philosophical revelation is one regarding temporality, we can see Beavers and Edwards as two American artists working with time, two men whose palms hold spiritual books.

Beavers: "[Like the eyes t]he hands also move: there are similarities between the two eyes and the two hands – a perspective in each pair."[60] Above, *Ruskin.*



Luke. 21. 36. watch ye & pray always.

Edwards's palm-sized sermon notations

[60] Robert Beavers, *Untitled (Vienna Aphorisms),*Temenos Archive, 5.

1. THE BROKEN SEAL

In the conservative Congregationalist tradition that Edwards was to break away from, the monolithic fact of God's power to choose who could be redeemed was accompanied by the apparently contradictory notion of a covenant between man and God. According to "Federal Theology," "[a]t the moment of conversion...the saint is received into a compact with the divine, and thereafter depends for his security upon the fact that the transaction is on record. The sacraments are then given him as 'seals of the covenant,' testifying to what had been nominated in the bond."[61] As Miller explains, this allowed for an appealing combination: the upholding of "absolute predestination" while "offer[ing] to rational men certain inducements for their attempting to open negotiations."[62] In this "adroit and highly legalistic formulation," the seal acts as a kind of reminder; once the covenant is notarized, as it were, the saint is guaranteed of his status, and the authority of the figure of the seal takes over as proof ("[t]hey could work henceforth in the conviction of memory, though their sense of the event might grow dim").[63] While it might appear that this contract carves a pathway for individual will, and that Edwards's emphasis on absolute sovereignty and rejection of the covenant indicates a regressive authoritarianism, Miller points to his repeated modification of conversion with "sensible" as a key to the newness of what he had in mind.

While conversion via the covenant was highly reasonable, an act of seventeenth century intellect, a transformation based on feeling (considered, in Puritan ranking, a lesser faculty) demands a different measure of commitment: one that's ongoing or at least

[61] Miller 30.
[62] Miller 31.
[63] Miller 77.

returning, and might require activity on the congregant's part in order to maintain the authenticity of the connection, in contrast to a paradigm in which "man could do his part and then relax, waiting upon God to do His."[64] The formality and materiality of the imagined seal help the lone experience of conversion "stick"— hardened wax now taking over for a solitary and single climax of conversion-inspiring sensations. In great contrast to the binding seal—official, a transaction of the external world of reason and business—the standard becomes interior in Edwards's model. *Language moves inside*, toward an internal script of tracking and feeling; the institutional seal gives way to an active field of language. What is at stake, in simplest terms, are two paradigms of relatedness to God. How to negotiate the dilemma of knowing of God's total power, his absolute difference from man, while satisfying the longing to imagine a site of real and repeated contact with him?

In refusing the escape valve of the covenant, the suggestion that God might grant mercy to those who sign and seal, Edwards rejected the notion that the announcement of intention, willful stepping up to the plate of vows to God, could provide viable binding. Instead, his version of human-divine relations, while no less certain of God's supreme power, imagines both God and human as diffuse and mingled elements in a shared natural world. "As grace is at first from God, so it is continually from him...as much as light in the atmosphere is all day long from the sun, as well as at first dawning, or at sun-rising," Edwards preached.[65] In "the equating of a continuous influence of God on the saints with such a natural phenomenon as light in the atmosphere," he also imagined a

[64] Miller 134.

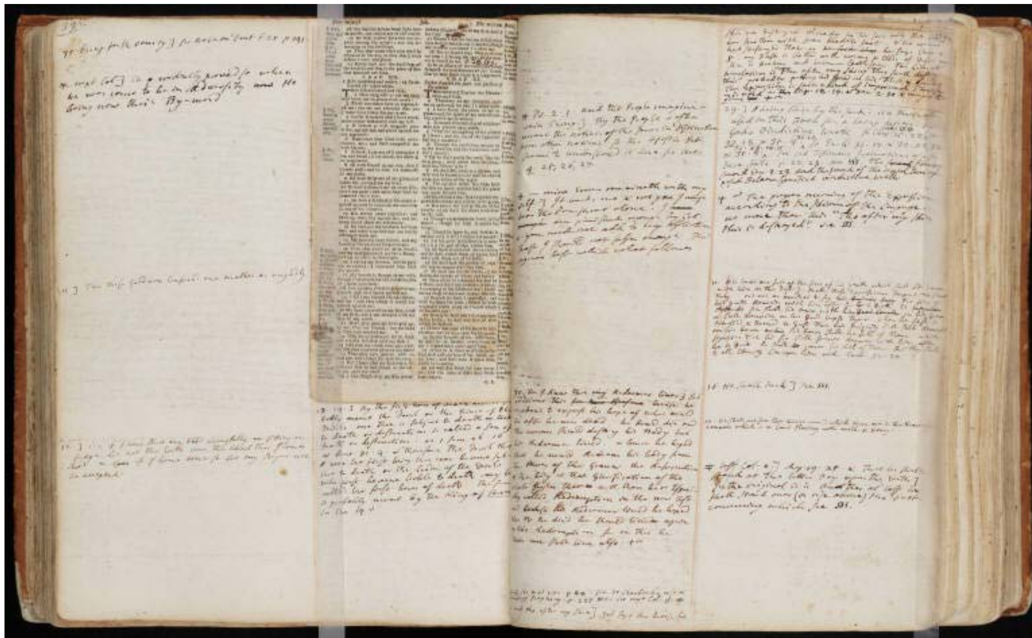
[65] Jonathan Edwards, 'God Glorified in Man's Dependence,' *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 17,* Ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 201.

form of contact between man and God that's ongoing and miraculous in an ordinary way.[66]

Miller considers Edwards and Pascal kindred spirits of speculative theology. Both were passionately persuasive about registers beyond reason in the development of sustainable grace: Pascal argued for careful distinctions among the orders of knowledge (body, mind and heart); Edwards pointed toward the 'sensible' and the felt to find oneness with God. But their affinity can also be understood through the function of ongoingness in their respective writing practices and the prominence of *rhetorics of reminder* within it. Much as Edwards did with respect to Congregationalism, Pascal rejected Catholic dogma and relied on his own experience for ongoing attunement to God. He embraced a scrap-based form of composition, producing raw material that he literally tore into pieces and later re-associated. For both men, writing functions as an alternative to the sign-and-forget model of willful conversion; it negotiates the inevitable inconsistencies of faith and belief that will ebb and flow over time. So in carrying in his pocket the inscription of a moment of acute, ecstatic clarity ("God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars. Certainty, certainty, heartfelt, joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ...joy, joy, joy, tears of joy"), Pascal anticipates the dissolution of this sentiment over time.[67] He is reminding himself not of the existence of God but of his own capacity for experience in this tattered transcription, dialogue with God implicitly turned into dialogue with a part of himself. The hand-scribbled note admits and mediates a purely human problem - the inevitable fact of forgetting, the temporal trouble with grace - in a way that the official notarizing stamp of the covenant

[66] Miller 31.
[67] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995) 150.

cannot. We see this internalized God also in Edwards' admiration of his own wife's grace – "[s]he loves to be alone, and wander in the fields…and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her."[68] There is a quiet identification with and taking in of God as something to be known, lost and re-found within the self.



Ongoing writing: Edwards interleaved a King James Bible with blank folio pages for annotations, radically adding to the Book of God.
Above: *Miscellaneous Observations on the Holy Scriptures*

Edwards distinguishes between his early awakenings and his later, more substantial conversion by linking the dilemma of forgetting to engagement with text. His young love of God, which he mistook for full-bodied grace but was marked by "self-righteous pleasure," easily slipped away: "my convictions…wore off…I…returned like a

[68] Jonathan Edwards, "Apostrophe to Sarah Pierpont," *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, Ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, Yale University Press: 1995) 281.

dog to his vomit, and went on in ways of sin."[69] In his narrative of conversion, Edwards searches for the origin of the better grace he later discovered and locates it in a recollected experience of reading. "The first that I remember…was on reading those words, I Tim 1:17, 'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen.'" ("Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as those words did.")[70] Edwards repeated the words over and over, singing them, and discovered in his praying interior a new affective state ("the appearance of everything was altered"), one he intuitively nourished further by "spend[ing] my time reading and meditating on Christ."[71]

As Edwards recalls these encounters with words, first those on the printed page and then, as he assumes responsibility for their endurance by inscribing them more deeply with this voice, he produces and integrates new fantasies of submission: "to be wrapped up to God in heaven," "swallowed up in God," with "a sweet burning in my heart" and "an ardor of my soul, that I know not how to express." "My heart…panted after this, to lie low before God…that I might be nothing, and that God might be all; that I might become as a little child."[72] While God's overwhelming power rules these images, a great chasm separates the image of a dog in vomit and a swaddled, dependent infant. Even within the discourse of original sin, a dose of identification between God and the self goes a long way toward replacing the irreparably abject with a creature of potential

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[69] Jonathan Edwards, "A Personal Narrative," *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, Ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, Yale University Press: 1995) 282.
[70] Edwards "Personal" 284.
[71] Edwards "Personal" 286.
[72] Edwards "Personal" 284.

grace. In the picture of mother and baby there is intersubjective porousness; dependence is tempered by real recognition.

2. RAYS OF COLORED LIGHT

The first question then shall be what is that reflection which we call a rainbow from. I answer from the falling drops of rain, for we never see any rainbow, except it be so that the sun can shine full upon the drops of rain, except the heavens be so clear on one side as to let the uninterrupted rays of the sun come directly upon the rain that falls on the other side. [73]

Jonathan Edwards

Beavers investigates the nature of colored light.
Above: *Early Monthly Segments*

Two summers ago, I had just spent several days repeatedly screening two of Beavers's films in Paris – *The Ground* and *The Hedge Theater* – when I arrived for the last ten minutes of a crowded morning mass at a small Catholic church. I stood against the back wall, and gazed up, above all the heads in front of me, but I continued to see Beavers's films. Books, leaves, wings, hands, shadows, colored light, and auras: all figure prominently on the surfaces of a church interior and across the landscape of

[73] Jonathan Edwards, "Of the Rainbow," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1896) 239.

Beavers's films. It struck me, suddenly, that Beavers's work refigures both the very elements of iconography and the narrative of transmitting divinity.

Christian iconography invites its beholder into a highly legible, bold-face state of reading God. The viewer can point to imagery and immediately produce a sentence of explanatory translation; indeed, pointing *itself* is a hallmark of iconography, composed as it is of an endless dialect of arm and hand gestures: offering and receiving grace, articulating submission, clarifying hierarchies. Even the churchgoers, at the end of mass, held up their hands to absorb the priest's blessings. Accompanying and supporting this visual rhetoric of directionality and aim is the grammar of extension and aura: rays, halos, and streams of light surround bodies and spring from hands, and lines of color emanate from starbursts, all navigating distances between the human and the divine. These dotted lines tell the story not only of the Divine Mercy and other miracles but narrate the gap between the seen and unseen. Indeed, all gaps in space and time are closed down by this captivating and assuring form of pictorial assembly.

In such imagery the figure of the book itself serves a primary role of orientation; hand-held tablets, scrolls, and bound volumes become ultimate objects of pictorial aim, the discursive vanishing points of iconography. That the hand delivers the biblical word shows up in language as well as in pictures: "there is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment: it is ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night," Edwards preached in the aptly named "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."[74] In my experience, the title of this 1741 Enfield sermon is the phrase most-oft invoked when Edwards's name comes up, but it confines him to a state of dogmatic

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[74] Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2010) ix.

emblemism and fails to capture the real experimentation of his artistry. By what morphology can we get from God's hand over the fiery pit to Edwards's own hand, holding a book he has penned himself, and to Beavers's hand, holding the book of another artist (Ruskin), articulating a register of sensory experience that concerns spirituality but not a punishing God? How do we get from the book as the final Word to the book as text-in-time, as un-bound first-person writing that is generated by experience and observation, spread out across a lifetime?

Straying from a vision of a thoroughly-mapped out cosmology of power, grace, and sin, all gathered in a single book, Edwards wrote that "spiritual things…are not things that can be pointed forth with the finger."[75] Reality is mysterious; "we may not be able more than just to touch it, and have a few obscure glances." A straightforward announcement of his own vision of truth and grace was impossible; to do so would be to go "so far beyond those things for which language was chiefly contrived that…we cannot speak…without literally contradicting ourselves."[76] Miller links such thinking to Edwards's deeply impressing encounter, at age fourteen, with the writing of Locke, who "[made clear that] Gods way…is indirection."[77]

If in an icon the book is single, and final, a simultaneous starting and stopping place, closed even when painted as an open volume, in Edwards's universe writing is more primary than book; his life-long notebooks are as ongoing as is his mind; his

[75] Jonathan Edwards, "Religious Affections," *The Works of President Edwards* Vol. IV (Worcester: Isiah Thomas, 1808) 142.
[76] Jonathan Edwards "The Mind," *The Life of President Edwards* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830) 679.
[77] Miller 189.

"published works are fragments" of this extensive, dispersed and primary body.[78] Even the notebooks themselves are components of the wider field of his mind; for Miller, "[t]he real life of…Edwards at Northampton and Stockbridge was the continuous interior monologue…of which these…journals are the partial record."[79]

So too in *Ruskin* are reading and writing ongoing through-ways (as they are in Beavers's own life and creative practice, as detailed in Chapter Three). The returning presence of the book, both as image and via the sound of thumbed pages (and its figural sibling, the sound of birds's wings), works to bind the disparate elements drawn together in *Ruskin*. In the film's coda, the filmmaker's hand flips through Ruskin's *Unto This Last*; pages rapidly fall one on top of another, and although the text is legible, the velocity invites a form of reading that occurs across the pages, as the eyes can only gather a word or two per page. It's a process that's subject to chance but just as strongly feels prepared for by the first four-fifths of the film, as if immersion in the film's rhythms has prepared the mind and eyes to find the words one needs, and to accept this form of reading without tension. But the open book of Beavers's oeuvre is much larger than this view of *Unto This Last*; divisions in his full *Hand Outstretched* cycle of films are marked not with titles or text but by the sound of birds' wings.

Even in a spiritual imagination in which one cannot point directly at the path to grace, the lines of colored light connecting the angel's nimbus to fallen man don't fully fade away. In the visions of both Edwards and Beavers, a cosmos of connectedness that is not about hierarchy and covenant continues to tie the soul to the radiations and motions of color and light. In 1980, Beavers wonders in his notebook about "the transfer of the

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[78] Miller 49.
[79] Miller 115.

color of object or background to the rest of frame when the color is of a certain intensity...have been fascinated by this since 1965…it is most beautiful when radiated part of color is not conscious seen but barely perceptible—like red in [Markopoulos's] *The Iliac Passion*."[80] As in iconography, color has a reach of its own, beyond the outlines of its originating object: "an object placed near flesh turns pink, appears more red than flesh itself…but only when the object is white?"[81] Indeed, Beavers's entire filmmaking career has been an extended investigation of colored light; his discovery of an unconventional site for colored gelatin filters—between the lens and aperture—allows color to "breathe" in a new way.[82] A diffuse field of hazy jewel-tones in one frame contracts, in focus, to a neat grid of primary-colored squares in another.

3. LINES OF INK

"Without mingling of heart passion with hand power, no art is possible"[83]
John Ruskin

In both Ruskin's and Beavers's biographies, the childhood gift of a book is central to the evolution of creativity. At thirteen, Ruskin received Samuel Rogers' *Italy* with illustrations by Turner. A year later he saw the Swiss mountains Turner had painted with his own eyes, and then began to collect the artist's watercolors and to write a defense of the painter's work that would later become *Modern Painters*.[84] Beavers's neighbor, Berniece Hodges, showed him a book of late nineteenth-century lithographs of ancient art when he was a young boy, and introduced him to the very idea of being an artist and its

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[80] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks 5200.
[81] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks 5306, 5475.
[82] Robert Beavers, Pacific Film Archives presentation, October 2009.
[83] John Ruskin, "The Stones of Venice," *Unto this Last and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1985) 90.
[84] Clive Wilmer, "Introduction," *Unto This Last and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1985) 10.

potential multiplicity: one could simultaneously love and make music, poetry, painting, and architecture. She also gave Beavers *The Stones of Venice* when he was about sixteen.

Beavers's own associations bring Hodges and the notions of gift, hand and America into one constellation. "Her entire perspective and her ethic was deeply New England and so it's really that ethic and belief in a different set of measures than the predominant contemporary measures in America."[85] When asked in an interview with Michael Guillén whether this vision of America has an Emersonian foundation, Beavers instead invokes Lewis Hyde's classic *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1983) and adds, "I think this idea of 'the gift' is somehow very American."[86] Corresponding with the film scholar P. Adams Sitney, he writes, "In re-reading my notes…recently, I found that the literal meaning of *doron*, the Greek word for gift, is 'hollow of the hand.' …I am filming myself, and the gesture is equivalent to 'opening the heart.''[87]

Ruskin bemoans the mercantile turn toward separation between "gentleman" and "operative" and the "mistaken supposition…that one man's thoughts can…be executed by another man's hands."[88] He calls for a return to "the spirit of touch of the man who is inventing."[89] A painter, for instance, should grind his own colors. "It is very important to develop acquaintance with all elements of filmmaking," Beavers writes in a filming notebook, distinguishing the bond strength among different kinds of splicing tape and

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[85] "Winged Distance / Sightless Measure: A Conversation With Robert Beavers, Part One," Interview with Michael Guillen, October 25, 2009, http://theeveningclass.blogspot.com/2009/10/winged-distance-sightless-measure_5054.html.
[86] "Winged Distance."
[87] "Winged Distance."
[88] Ruskin "Stones" 90.
[89] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks: 5545.

noting the difference in sprocket size in film made in Rochester versus France.[90] The vision of soul and mind gathered by one's own working hands ties Beavers and Ruskin; the latter calls for handwork that "brings out the whole mind" (a vase versus a glass bead, for instance).[91] In a 1979 notebook, Beavers integrates time into the mind-hand continuum, articulating the necessity of filming and editing occurring under the guidance of "the same hand": "The act of filming moves within the act of editing—two inseparable elements of a single gesture—in time and outside time. The same hand must complete the entire gesture…the handling of film, winding and rewinding, brings an awareness, the movement leads to a thought."[92]

The variation and singularity of the Gothic forms that Ruskin celebrates (in contrast to their idealized neoclassical foils) come from the freedom of the individual workman, encouraged to bring his full mind into the creation of form. And variety also characterizes Ruskin's own identities - as geologist, literary critic, and museum founder, and writer on crystallography, botany, political economy, Greek mythology, and travel. But drawing is a preoccupation cutting through his work in multiple disciplines: "The art of drawing which is of more real importance to the human race than that of writing...should be taught to every child just as writing is."[93] Himself a talented draughtsman and a devoted teacher of the art, he also imports the stroke into his prose. Ever interested in "how things bind and blend," his project in *The Stones of Venice* is the "tracing out of Gothic spirit," allowing his preoccupation with mark-making to guide the drive of his infinite intellectual curiosities, such as the chemical distinctions between

[90] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks: 5333.
[91] Ruskin "Stones" 46/
[92] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks 5340.
[93] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters Part III* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2005) 286.

charcoal and chalk.[94] The drawn line, real and harnessed in its figural sense, has the power of repair, reconnecting hand, heart and mind in a modern economy where men are "divided into crumbs."[95]

"Drawing is the first instrument of every science," Beavers copies Leonardo into a 1976 notebook.[96] "Perhaps the lagoon and canals create a particular atmosphere in which light rests on outlines of figures more noticeably than other places," he wonders during the shooting of *Ruskin* in Venice, implicitly invoking Ruskin's own drawings of Gothic forms.[97] And while mark-making undeniably runs throughout Beavers's films (in his investigations of painting, writing, and the extensions of lines of light), his draughtsmanship, like Ruskin's, also occurs invisibly: the lines connecting bodies of maker and spectator with camera, screen, projector and world conjure a very particular expanded cinematic field.

Beavers uses mattes to obscure parts of the image, this one bleeding over the edge of buidling tops in *Ruskin*

[94] Ruskin "Stones" 53.
[95] Ruskin "Stones" 56.
[96] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks 6163.
[97] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks 5300.

While the term “expanded cinema” has been codified in film studies to refer to material interventions that subvert the expectations of spectatorship, Beavers’s expansion is not determined by a experimental form of presentation or projection but is encoded in his own making, in his imagination of the lines connecting the elements of his craft in space and time. “Projection is not only thorough the frame to the screen, [it is also] from one image into the next on the screen.”[98] And moving beyond the physical elements themselves, he extends “projection” further: “The soul projects movements in the body, and other movements are projected from the body into the soul.”[99]

In *Ruskin*, the blocking mattes suggest a subtly desiring hand holding or drawing on the image, choosing intuitively what lines in the photographic image to mimic and what aspects to blacken, when to make the edges fuzzy or sharp, and when to bloom and recede as if by breath. But beyond this, Beavers provides glimpses of the camera apparatus by shooting through the compendium without a matte in place, or by shooting with the lens turret turned, so that the top of the image is curved. In this way we are brought into the interior of the camera body and through a telescoped set of alternating circles and squares: lens, viewfinder, iris, eye, screen. “The rectangle of the book has become a circle by shooting,” Beavers writes in his *Ruskin* notes, extending the circle-square morphology even further. In his essay *La Terra Nuova*, Beavers speaks of using the lens turret turning to “bring…[film] closer to the subjective sense of how we see”: “I [turned the full lens] in front of the aperture to create a movement like the eye turned

[98] Beavers *Untitled (Vienna Aphorisms)* 3.
[99] Beavers *Untitled (Vienna Aphorisms)* 5.

upward or cast downwards. I allowed the lens to suggest a rounded field of vision."[100] In Beavers's hands, camera and film feel as if essential, living parts of the human fact, extending the filmmaker's body so that the spectator might glimpse the workings of her own vision.

4. EXPANDED FIELDS

Like Ruskin, William James's objects of deep study were many: anatomy, psychology, philosophy – and drawing. Variety characterizes his philosophy just as much: *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) offers an enlarged vision of religion not as an institutional or theological entity but as a form of inner experience – and hence subject to infinite manifestations. He forcefully pulls open the frame of religion both epistemologically and temporally, first by opening up the mind itself. "Until quite lately, the unit of mental life which figured most was the single "idea," supposed to be a definitely outlined thing. [Psychologists now tend to admit] that the actual unit is the total mental state, the entire wave of consciousness or field of objects present to thought at any time…it is impossible to outline this wave, this field, with any definiteness."[101]

> As our mental fields succeed one another, each has its centre of interest, around which the objects of which we are less and less attentively conscious fade to a margin so faint that its limits are unassignable. Some fields are narrow fields and some are wide fields. Usually when we have a wide field we rejoice, for we then see masses of truth together, and often get glimpses of relations which we divine rather than see, for they shoot beyond the field into still remoter regions of objectivity, regions which we seem rather to be about to perceive than to perceive actually. At other times, of drowsiness, illness, or fatigue, our fields may narrow almost to a point, and we find ourselves correspondingly oppressed and contracted… Your great organizing geniuses are men with habitually vast

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[100] Robert Beavers "La Terra Nuova," *The Searching Measure: Writings by Robert Beavers* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2004) 1-2.
[101] William James, "Varieties of Religious Experience," *William James Writings 1902-1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1987) 226.

> fields of mental vision, in which a whole programme of future operations will appear dotted out at once, the rays shooting far ahead into definite directions of advance. In common people there is never this magnificent inclusive view of a topic.[102]

In his celebration of the widest fields, James imagines lines as the primary way to negotiate the ever-changing fact of thought: they allow us to see relations in time.

In his commitment to variety, which serves to both contract our understanding of religion by focusing on intimate experience over institutional coda, and extend our sense of what religion might be ("our Music, our Science…form the more genuine religions of our time"), James manages another double explication: he both clearly narrates the break between the givens of an authoritarian God and the waning God of the empirical age, and paints pictures of profounder continuities that supplant even this seismic change.[103] And along the way, the rhetoric of his own first-person voice is as various as the religious experiences of which he writes. He claims only "second-hand knowledge" of the tales of conversion he tells; "I can't explain it--to understand you must have been a religious man of extremer type" and "of a certain mental mould."[104] "[S]ome [simply] can['t] become possessed by it."[105] And yet the very means by which he evaluates the "fruits" of religion, and his confidence that his audience will share his terms of judgment, indicate a form of familiarity. After all, the "sanest of us are of one clay with lunatics and inmates."[106] Beavers's work undeniably belongs in James's wide field, where to be religious is simply

[102] James "Varieties" 226.
[103] James "Varieties" 76.
[104] James "Varieties" 119.
[105] James "Varieties" 48.
[106] James's strategy here is much like Freud's in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*: he relies on "extreme" examples (in Freud's case, homosexuality and perversion) only to ultimately argue for the reality of a connected series of subjective and psychic experiences that links all human beings.

"[t]o adjust oneself to the unseen." Beavers's filmmaking concerns itself with his own observation that "sight contains the unseen within it."[107]

5. FLASH AND SEQUENCE

> [Edwards] is pointing out anew where God and man can converse—
> in man the instantaneous act of god is broken down into temporal sequence.[108]
> -Perry Miller

Miller's biography builds in many ways to a climax of Edwards' central revelation as one of time. "For a mind imbued with Newtonianism to break away from the reigning conception of space toward an appreciation of time…this was such a metaphysical excursion as his contemporaries could not begin to comprehend."[109] Edwards understands that "the divine spirit… has a tempo, a rise and a fall."[110] He recognizes language and mind as temporal phenomena—and his transformative hopes and designs for his congregants rely directly on this fact; he sees transfers of force happening via sensation, with his own words impressing themselves on the minds of those who listen, leading to idea formation and then potential action. He believes that "by freeing language from stale associations, by forcing words so to function in the chain of natural causes, that out of the shock upon the senses would come apprehension of the idea."[111]

But he doesn't envision one-to-one correspondence in terms of what he might preach and what his congregants might come to feel and do. Edwards rejects the magical thinking of Puritanism that "suppos[ed] an event in one realm can cause effects in a

[107] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks 5258.
[108] Miller 303.
[109] Miller 311.
[110] Miller 140.
[111] Miller 158.

totally other realm, that a man's act of belief can oblige the will of God."[112] His vision of cause and effect is born of a different scale: they cannot be bracketed and identified but rather constitute a detail within a much larger frame of force transmission.[113] In Edwards's cosmos, says Miller, "All things are in sequences, and there must be a nexus of one with another…[t]he conduct of the universe is 'train of events,' a 'course' of dispensations, and no amount of human prejudice can alter the path of a single atom."[114]

The American interest in writing through and mind-attending, then, at once observes the micro-motions of transmission and impact (of word, thought) while finding a certain freedom in knowing that one's own portion of the stream is just that—a tiny tributary in a global river of change. In this particular and almost paradoxical dialectic between consciousness of the all-connectedness of nature and detailed attention to one's own interior, the poles of selflessness and narcissism fail to capture the potential ecstacy that can come from contact with the nuances of mind-flux when such contact is coupled with a sense of participatory smallness. In contrast with the notion that man can cause the effects he wants, or can jump up out of the ongoing chain of causation with special status and import, is Edwards's vision that man is not first and original within the chain.

Time is man's primary burden: after Eden the clock began to tick, and the dilemma of grace is at its heart a temporal one. James's tales of conversions in *Varieties* are in many ways documents of durations: the undeniable fluctuations within a single self with respect to divinity, the problem of permanence and relapse, and the crucial question of integrating such inconsistencies into a view of what is human. But as God himself is

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[112] Miller 70.
[113] Miller 78.
[114] Miller 151-2.

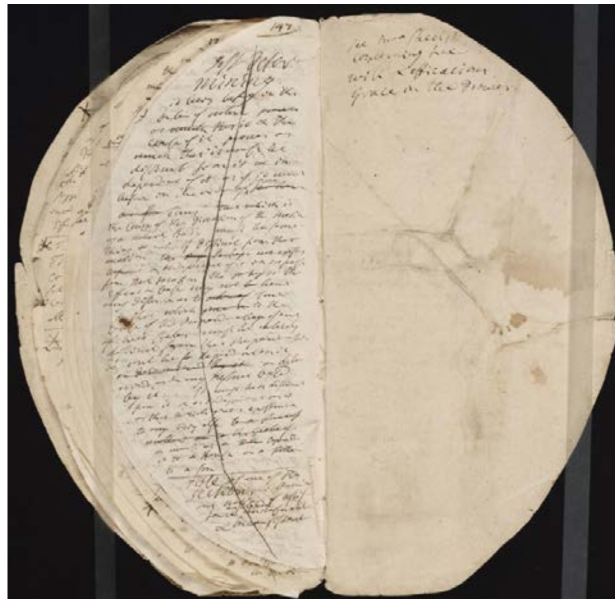
beyond time, it is fitting that the flash is part of man's experience as well – in certain moments apparently out of time, man comes to know God-as-himself. "His whole insight was given him at once…and he did not change: he only deepened," Miller describes Edwards's gift for seeing what James would call "the widest field."[115] So too does Beavers recall discovering the containing name for his cycle of films, *My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure*: it appeared "in a flash" on a train with Markopoulos on their way to Greece.

6. PICTURES OF CREATION

> True virtue…is an elevation of consciousness above the web of relations to the idea of relationship itself. [116]
>
> Perry Miller

The seal of the covenant made the instant of consent official; in the wake of its break, consent finds new form in the associative choices of the mind-in-time. As Miller says of Edward's radical understanding of life-as-chain, "there must come a time when the redeemed self realizes that a sensation cannot be clutched to his bosom as a private luxury, but belongs to a system of impressions that has a logic deeper and more beautiful than any incidental advantages that accrue to him."[117] To counter the threat of total loss—of integrity of self, of "private luxuries"—what is left is the possibility of creativity: the ability to observe and make connections. While Edwards's *Images of Divine Things* is ostensibly a catalogue of biblical typology and correspondence, it also quietly encourages its readers to make their own connections between nature and God. As his examples

[115] Miller 40.
[116] Miller 286-7.
[117] Miller 191.



The rounded edges of Edwards's *Efficacious Grace*

move from the conventional (marriage between man and woman is compared to the union between church and Christ, for instance) to the less familiar and almost arbitrary (high towers show that pride excites God's wrath), Edwards extends an unwitting invitation to follow his associative lead in making sense of the world. The creation of

beauty is not exclusively God's domain; the human capacity for selecting and choosing, and sharing those choices --"the power of intelligible sequences" -- is one of the primary ways we move each other.[118]

By the time she arrives at the turning pages of *Unto This Last* in the coda of *Ruskin*, the spectator has acclimated to rhythms of its filmmaker's choices. Impressed by these repetitions, she is confident to inhabit her own desiring eyes and mind, so that even

Edwards's *Efficacious Grace*

amidst the chaos of the quickly falling pages, she finds the words she needs, as if both exerting will and under the spell of magic at once. In my case, I found "God," "wish," and "pilgrim's progress," and then, in a final image of the unfolding train of American divinity, "God lets down the ladder."

[118] Miller 242.

CHAPTER TWO

Inscription

1. **Filmmaker/Stonemason**

> What lives in the space between the stones, in the space cupped between my hand and my chest? Filmmaker/stonemason. A tower or ruin of remembrance. With each swing of the hammer I cut into the image and the sound rises from the chisel. A rhythm, marked by repetition, and animated by variation; strokes of hammer and fist, resounding in dialogue. In this space which the film creates, emptiness gains a contour strong enough for the spectator to see more than the image – a space permitting vision in addition to sight. [119]
>
> Robert Beavers

Overlapping rhythms gather and disperse on the Greek island of Hydra in Beavers's *The Ground* (2001). Centered around the hilltop ruins of a cylindrical tower, the film moves between the surrounding landscape, including the sea and a stonemason at work with chisel and hammer, and shots of the filmmaker's own bare torso, his hands alternately cupping and striking his chest, and is constructed in complex relation to the sounds of water, animals, birds, and the contact between fist and chest and hammer and stone.

Indeed, the collection of visual elements and spaces from which Beavers's creates *The Ground* is spare: mason, ruins and landscape, isolated chest and arms (which appear in a different spatial context, darkly shadowed and almost theatrical, with no surrounding environmental cues) in a variety of gestures of contact. But it's in the confines of this shrunken down representational universe that we can observe Beavers's own poetic masonry – his construction of a work of art.

[119] Robert Beavers, "Robert Beavers Filmmography/Catalogue of Films," http://www.the-temenos.org/rb_filmography.htm.

> When I think of the central question of pattern, repetition, and so forth, I think of Scarlatti and Handel or Mozart and how diametrically opposite results can be created. This is also true of film. It's such a subtle thing but *film can very suddenly slide into its opposite*. That answers the greater question I tried to answer of how to know the length of a film—this point of how much and when to stop?—in relation to these questions. In *The Ground*, for instance, the elements are limited. *How do you express difference with the same elements*? I'm thinking more in poetic terms than musical terms. Quite frankly, I'm thinking in cinematic terms, which have their own ways of developing because it has so much to do with light.[120] (italics added)

The question of sameness/difference lies on the top-most layer of an encounter with *The Ground*, as an approach to identifying representational forms. Areas of unbroken stone cover the ground of Hydra, for instance, while the tower ruins are composed of stone that's been separated into rectangular forms and arranged into a round construction, and the pieces of stone under the mason's tools exist in various states of intermediate change and emergence. Stone, then, is already both horizontal and vertical, continuous and discrete, square and round. There are also two shirtless male bodies—the mason and the figure whose chest is struck—whose identities are not clear but feel distinct. And there are the apparently distinct regions of sea, ground and sky.

But such initial cognitive musings on similarity and distinction are joined and fractured by the associative relationships that Beavers simultaneously builds via the intricacies of his craft. The first minute of the film introduces its primary visual elements via adjacent, non-dissolving shots: wide shot of the hilltop ruins, male torso in shadow, details of the variously colored island ground and thorny vegetation; but it is in between

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[120] "Winged Distance / Sightless Measure: A Conversation With Robert Beavers, Part Two," Interview with Michael Guillen, October 25, 2009, http://theeveningclass.blogspot.com/2009/10/winged-distance-sightless-measure_3062.html.

the next two shots—where the torso, hand cupped against chest, gives way to a pan down the ruins—that difference breaks down. The black shadows that conclude the torso shot transition, without visual break, to the lens-turret turning that inaugurates the emergence of the tower shot. Beavers discovered that by turning the lens turret while shooting (either to close the lens or to switch to another lens), he could create dramatic and highly kinetic entrances into and exits from images via the aperture-blocking motion of the lens-in-motion. With this signature move, Beavers creates beginnings and ends of shots as he shoots; they then structure his work in the editing process. He ushers two images (either uncut, as they've been filmed next to each other with the interruption in place, or as they've been cut along with the rhythm of a flying lens move) into a new register together.

The Ground

In the above example from the early moments of *The Ground*, the separate spaces and distinct representational tenors of the island environs and the isolated male figure are brought into an open but analogically suggestive kinship – one that enables the viewer to

submit intuitively to their belonging-together, and invites her to begin to follow chains of similarity and difference beyond those available at the level of naming the film's images. Beavers's turret-changing transition is not the overlapping action of superimposition, but a flying emergence or departure, both hazy and abrupt, of image from an amorphous field of blackness, and a subversion of the identifiable horizontal and temporal seams between film frames.

The Ground

As in many of his film, sound in *The Ground* also plays an essential role in Beavers's binding of elements. As we transition from torso to ruins via a darkness that's shared between the two, we also encounter, for the first time, the sharp repetitive sound of instrument striking stone, a sound that becomes diegetic in the next shot, now in sync with a close-up image of the mason at work, his sharply pointed, pencil-shaped tool incising white lines into a mass of grey stone. The strokes of scratched surface, the etched lines on stone that look like a primitive form of writing—themselves generated by the striking of the stonemason's arm—find kinship with the strokes of arm against chest. The dovetailing of the sound-picture sync with the image of mark-making itself powerfully

seals the associations in formation, and serves as a resting point before the next set of poetic mutations begin.

In the next shot of hand and chest, the fist has become a cup – a curved and condensed hand slowly and repeatedly rising, hinge-like, into closed contact with the torso, a motion in sync with the sound of lapping water. The continuing sound of water then binds the sunlit chest to the similarly-colored tawny rocks and isolated cloud that follow it, before we return to the motions of the cupping hand and chest, now slightly out of sync with the lapping sounds, extending the gesture of release evoked by the downward-moving hand. Containment and release are here not opposites but entwined versions of each other; the cupped hand that moves away from the chest remains a vessel even as it represents a letting go. It is curved enough to hold the shot of the cloud that follows; tightly framed, the cloud is as if jointly held by hand and rectangular screen.

As the sound of water persists in the film, it retains its power as a binding force even when not offered in rhythmic relation to the images' internal motions; it can become a quieter force of continuity that supports the spectator's associative work. The very notion of holding is now free to circulate more freely both in the viewer's mind/body. For me these associative trails lead from the cupping gesture to the invocation of a kind of shared body among filmmaker, camera, and spectator. One becomes sensitive to the specter of the containing human hand, even when not literally represented: it shows up in a wide shot of the ruins, the shape of the hill mimicked by the rounded top edge of the frame, created by a lens askew on its camera turret (the image appears as if partially obscured by a matte). The filmmaker's hand has turned the turret to find this rounded container for the image, but even more significantly, the image is as if itself cupped by its

maker's hand. It represents film's capacity to reflect and satisfy primal creative wishes: I want to intervene in this picture, to enter into the composition of a single frame. Beavers's complex use of mattes in many of his films articulate this clearly: I need to obscure, sharpen, squeeze and frame aspects of the image; I want to cut not just temporally, according to the vertical lines of film frames, but also within the frame, as if with my own hand. "With each swing of the hammer I cut into the image," Beavers says of *The Ground*.

The Ground

About half way though the twenty-one minute film, a shot of a loaf of fresh bread appears. This golden orb is out of place, welcome nourishment in the context of metal and rock. A new element and color, the bread is also a figure of integration. Though we don't see its constituent elements, its soft form has emerged from their combining and transformation, as the tower was sculpted from elements of the ground on which it now stands in partial disintegration. Like the book that repeatedly appears in *Ruskin*, the bread

is held in a single hand and placed down. The hand can explore and contain the world a moment at a time, according to the body's scale.

"In this space which the film creates, emptiness gains a contour strong enough for the spectator to see more than the image – a space permitting vision in addition to sight," Beavers says of the film. The nature of this vision, the shapes of those forms that emerge in the viewer's mind's eye, will, of course, vary from body to body and viewing to viewing; for me, acclimation to the analogical universe of the film gives way to a felt sense of an extended, shared, phenomenological body, made jointly from the gestures and capacities of camera, maker, celluloid, and spectator. It's no coincidence that reviewers invoke their own bodies when searching for language with which to talk about Beavers's films. Amy Taubin describes the bodily effect of the film's images and relates it to the repetitive containment and release of breath: "Despite their restraint, they have an immediate kinetic impact—they go right to your solar plexus and change the rate of your breathing—but they also engage your mind with their subtle deployment of metaphor."[121] Regarding the repeated beating of the chest in *The Ground*, Bob Nickas says, "This is a painful gesture, almost a sign of bereavement; Beavers's is a form of medium specificity that leaves you weak-kneed."[122]

Indeed, over the course of the film, the hand strikes the chest with great force, and the aura of feeling around it is both delicate and steep. The striking leaves no damage or mark; the sound is primal, guttural, spoken with the body rather than the voice. But as much as the beating is incisive and fully intentional, after striking the chest the released

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[121] Amy Taubin, "Survival Tactics," Oct. 9, 2001, http://www.villagevoice.com/2001-10-09/film/survival-tactics.
[122] Bob Nickas, "Mild about Larry - Whitney Museum of Modern Art Biennial Exhibition," *ArtForum (*May 2002).

hand uncurls irregularly, with a mind of its own, as a ball of crumpled paper might expand and open after being crushed. In this way the hand is both a rock and a flower, and both synced to the wishes of the mind and motivated by a non-conscious intelligence of its own. Beavers invokes this combined cosmos of hard and soft in his recollection of the development of his ideas and images for *The Ground*:

> I began with a relation to death and asceticism. There were a number of sources for *The Ground*. When I am making a film, I take some notes. Sometimes I see something that interests me. For instance, there was an exhibition in Switzerland about asceticism and there was something about St. Jerome. I had always been fascinated by Da Vinci's one painting he did in the Vatican that's unfinished—it's a drawing—of St. Jerome. I must have seen that at a very early age. But in this exhibition there was also an unusual lithograph or drawing by the artist Redon of a centaur. The centaur is lying against some rocks looking at a cloud. It was so extraordinary to see this very large horse-man looking at a cloud. That's why I included the close-up of the cloud in my film and, perhaps also, the hooves.[123]

It's significant that Beavers identifies a drawing as central to the creation of this film. Mark-making plays an ongoing role in the film, and it carries a flurry of associations. The stone mason wielding his pencil shaped instrument inscribes his medium, the stone, with the white lines of contact and surface breakage. But this is not an image of draughtsmanship as line flowing seamlessly from mind to hand to page. Here the instrument is wielded more grossly; there is no direct control of the flow of ink, and a gap exists between the instruction of mark and the line that is ultimately inscribed. For it is the mason's other hand, the one with the hammer that strikes the pointed utensil,

[123] "Winged Distance / Sightless Measure: A Conversation With Robert Beavers, Part Two."

that sets in motion the chain that will lead to incision. It seems miraculous that unyielding stone will allow intervention and impression at all.

Centaur Aiming at the Clouds, Odilon Redon (1883)

2 . Philosopher/Engraver

The mind, in short, works on its block of stone.[124]
William James

My attraction to the work of Stanley Cavell has much to do with the number of words he skips. He manages to speak in shapes, and to convey sense without a clear trail of its construction. He seems to value *tendency*—that force Emerson speaks of so often, particularly in the *Method of Nature*—the aim and the orientation that take precedence over goal, object and effect. Cavell's force comes from the spirit of 'letting' that infuses his writing, rather than from the acute efforts of explication, argument, and consolidation of authorial identity that so often accompany philosophical work. And I find in his skipping an effort to keep moving: it's only in onward motion that sense emerges, and then it generally collects not around a celebration of what's remarkable about its writer's mind but in proximity to the work to be done on the reader's part.

Cavell's shapes remain mostly unannounced, neutral: he does not step aside to announce his attempts to sculpt into a physical form, or to imagine his own work engraved in an artist's non-alphabetic marks and strokes. But I see his labor as connected to a varied tradition in American philosophy, where shape-making discourses are linked to concerns and conversations about *direction*—regarding, on the one hand, orientation (to God, and, later, to the imagination as savior) and, on the other, the identity of an imprinted mind as either the source or result of sensory experience. There's a spirit of

[124] William James, "Stream of Thought," *Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1981) 211.

unavoidability around the presence of picture-language in theories about the location and acquisition of grace and the usefulness of language to enact a turn toward it. Often the very production of language is imagined as a kind of pictorial act, one of physical transubstantiation: the writer offers himself up as an artist, particularly in moments of necessary reunion with his reader after a voyage into the vague; or relief from the confines of a theoretical position requires a shuttling over to a pictorial schema; or invocation of physical forms and colors serves to cut against an accumulating sense of the cloudy nature of language. Indeed, turning and pictures become unlikely partners: the latter not the object antithetical to, or representative of denial about, the elusive and vague work of language but an antidote to the hopelessness of time (hopeless with respect to the challenges of speaking to each other, comparing minds for sanity and for grace, along the streaming way). Pictures keep American philosophy moving, if we can agree that the motions of primary concern are ones of writing, reading, and nature: "If anything could stand still, it would be crushed and dissipated by the torrent it resisted, and if it were a mind would be crazed; as insane persons are those who hold fast to one thought, and do not flow with the course of nature."[125]

In the American preoccupation with turning, new eyes are not only the content of discourse, but also the promised effect of reading, or at the very least of contending with and incorporating language. That turning is a motion of sorts, but always an incomplete one: sadly, we can't read our way entirely through and across the turn, one of the reasons we must adjust ourselves to the partial and summarizing gestures associated with

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[125] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Method of Nature," *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays & Lectures,* Ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library Classics of the United States, Inc.,1983) 119.

tendency. We're motivated by the drive to compare and to verify--do our minds have anything in common?—but we don't have time to transcribe or to read the whole stream of thought; evolution has not aligned such a project with health, and hence we must jump, coming to awareness of and sharing only selections from our respective streams. But in spite of the impossibility of accessing the full record, we're still left wanting to talk to each other about turning: whether change can be predicted, or planned for, and if there are ways we can produce language to capture authentically those turns we've made. We are fascinated by x becoming y, and American philosophy approaches this question with an open-eyedness that reminds me of that of the ethnographer looking for magic in other lands.

In *The Stream of Thought,* the chapter in The Principles of Psychology (1890) devoted to presenting consciousness as ongoing, always changing, "a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations," William James discusses the difficulty of truly encountering each other by announcing "the greatest breach in nature," the one between minds:

> The only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousnesses, minds, selves, concrete particular I's and you's. Each of these minds keeps its own thoughts to itself. There is no giving or bartering between them. No thought even comes into direct sight of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own. Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law.[126]

The implicit charge is that this breach is so profound that we misperceive it in every place but the one in which it actually exists—we treat it as occurring between and among sensations and thoughts rather than between minds, and we value associated gestures of articulation, enunciation and logic that seem to conjure, treat and manage it. (There is

[126] "Stream" 221.

much less starting and stopping than we wish there were.) In response, James offers up direction, rather than the discrete, but with a warning about the desire to fashion it into the new object: "The truth is that large tracts of human speech are nothing but signs of direction in thought...If we try to hold fast the feeling of direction, the full presence comes and the feeling of direction is lost."[127]

It is very much in the spirit of James' "reinstatement of the vague to its proper place in our mental life"[128] that he describes his own writing as "a painter's first charcoal sketch upon his canvas, in which no niceties appear."[129] The gesture of identification with the artist holds particular value for writers toiling to dilate spaces of the vague and to soften the relationship between signs and their referents with a view toward use as a central meaning-maker. I think of Wittgenstein, who at the start of his *Philosophical Investigations* announces, with some apparent stance of humility, that we are about to encounter a series of sketches: "The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes…Very many of these were badly drawn…marked by all the defects of a weak draughtsman. And when they were rejected a number of tolerable ones were left…Thus this book is really only an album."[130] And of Gertrude Stein, who is proud, not apologetic: *Lucy Church Amiably* is subtitled "a Novel of Romantic beauty and nature which Looks Like an Engraving."[131] In each case there's a connection between a project that seeks to maintain cloudiness, and the invocation of a pictorial output. The picture-language becomes a way of creating a boundary for the

[127] "Stream" 246-47.
[128] "Stream" 230.
[129] "Stream" 220.
[130] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001) ix.
[131] Gertrude Stein, *Lucy Church Amiably* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 2000).

vagueness: it's an offering to the reader, and a request that we not misconstrue their respective clouds nor attempt to disperse them with the demands of something certain.

From James I receive the instruction not to attempt to banish the recognition of objects and discrete moments of thought but rather to place them in the context of *holding* a view of the "breach."[132] In other words, objects become valuable, and productive, when it's a given that there's also a stream. Emerson knows this well. "The gardener aims to produce a fine peach or pear, but my aim is the health of the whole tree,--root, stem, leaf, flower and seed," he says, guessing nature's voice.[133] And again: "nature knows neither palm nor oak, but only vegetable life which…festoons the globe with a garland of grasses and vines."[134] While his point is forceful (as always, pulling out to the rule, the name, the motion that cradles a world of variety in form or words), we can't ignore that the set-aside entities--the peach and the pear, the palm and the oak--are simultaneously necessary words in the sentences he creates. We need to hear and think of them as we are ushered away from them--first, for primal reasons of satisfaction and rhetorical seduction: in writing like Emerson's, supremely effortful to keep itself and its readers in a place of confirming, noticing, prioritizing tendency, rarely slowing to dilate a space of distraction, a "peach" is indeed juicy; and second, to nurture a simultaneity of stream and object. [135]

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[132] Since we can't travel exclusively by way of the turn, then, we need objects to summarize parts of the stream. Sometimes they memorialize a change: they remind us of a path that worked and delivered; they mark the acts that constitute the turn.
[133] "Method" 121.
[134] "Method" 120.
[135] Gertrude Stein introduced me to this function of the object. I came to terms with *Lucy Church Amiably* largely by way of nouns: In a work which slides and skids along over sentences that will neither lie still nor move according to the usual wishes of subjects and verbs, nouns provide rare traction: words like *cake, butter, porcelain, ivory, poplar, plum,*

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James is not the only artist in *The Stream of Thought*; in addition to offering up his work-as-sketch, he conceives of the mind itself as both maker and object: "The mind, in short, works on his block of stone. In a sense the statue stood there from eternity. But there were also a thousand different ones beside it, and the sculptor alone is to thank for having extracted this one from the rest."[136] This picture of shape change, of emergent form, reiterates his offering of "thought goes on" as the only assumption from which he's willing to work: activity and the passage of time are givens; a hazy arc of process is all that can be comfortably asserted. However, the use of a picture of material that's hard, and the presence, though unnamed, of instruments sharp enough to chisel and whittle it, also works as an energizing foil to the soft-edged "thought goes on." And it formalizes some of his most central notions about the coexistence of brain and thought flux and conversion: "The moment one tries to define what habit is, one is led to the fundamental properties of matter."[137] For James, the invocation of artist's material is not quite a

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milk, clover and *feather* collect themselves at the work's center-- recognizable, thankfully, and emblematic of the "pleasant" that Stein returns to again and again. In a novel in which there are so few places to stop and take account of the work's progress and so few offerings of the kind of acute narrative pleasures we expect of the form, these nouns of *mild pleasures* become little hills--places of consolidation, substance, of consistently irresolvable relation to conventional and figurative poles. They're words of round-sound and smoothness, of gratifications not convulsive but plain, of quick reference to the cool and pale objects to which they refer. I found myself engaged in a game of prediction with these nouns as a way of measuring my orientation to the work, as a way of testing whether I was indeed reading: "I predict and hope that the word 'pearl' will occur soon. I know better than to ask for 'lipstick.'" In order to stay in the flow of Stein's book-length turn, I needed the anchors of noun-objects—not as givens of meaning but as entities whose energy I could only ascertain by submitting to the work's unfamiliar mobility.

[136] "Stream" 277.

[137] William James, "Habit," *Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1981) 10.

simple analogy; it confirms the presence of a palpability that's inherently tied to the workings of thought.

It's also a participant in the tradition of envisioning mind-impressions that's so prevalent in this strain of American philosophy-making and its inspirers and predecessors—one that extends from Locke through Edwards, Emerson, and James. Pictures of stamping, burning, sealing, embossing, engraving, carving, and groove-making activities often appear at the heart of conversations about the direction of sensory flow: do forms and language exist impressed on the mind prior to their perceptibility in the outside world? Or does the flow travel in the opposite direction? Divinity, too, functions as a core of this conversation about direction: is God already present in the mind, waiting for acknowledgment, transformation into usable grace, or must He be somehow inserted, introduced into the brain matter? Is reason an element in the clay from which human forms were molded? "I know it is a received Doctrine, That men have native *Ideas*, and original Characters stamped upon their Minds, in their very first Being…Let us…suppose the Mind to be, as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*; How comes it to be furnished?" asks Locke.[138] Perry Miller, zeroing in on a creative will at the heart of Jonathan Edwards' metaphysics, says: "When an idea comes to a living organism charged with the threat of evil or the promise of good, it is apprehended on a level of anxiety. It is then not merely absorbed, like ink into the blotting paper; it is feared or loved. Even though the mind originally receives the idea as an impression from the outside, it is not supine and languid; it has a concern, a stake in

[138] John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Volume 1* (Toronto: Dover, 1959) 104.

the game." [139] James also pushes against the picture of the mind as modest receiver of the stamp: "By the ancients, and by unreflecting people perhaps to-day, knowledge is explained as the passage of something from without into the mind—the latter…being passive and receptive." And then quoting Borden Parker Bowne: "'By describing the mind as a waxen tablet, and things as impressing themselves upon it, we seem to get great insight until we think to ask where this extended tablet is, and how things stamp themselves upon it, and how the perceptive act would be explained even it they did…'"[140]

While in these instances impression-language is used for persuasive means—seeking to reorder an understanding of the elements that constitute perceptive processes, and the chronology of their occurrence—there's a co-existent body of language that harnesses the impression for more abstract and expressive uses, suggesting something irresistible about the seal and its kin. For Emerson, impressions negotiate the border between natural objects and the profile of the human body; for Charles Sanders Pierce, "[a] figment is a product of someone's imagination; it has such characters as his thought impresses upon it."[141] Impressions are a central component of expressing curiosity about the way vision gets moved, the transporting mechanisms that deliver divinity from a source, or simply an inspired, to the needy, the searcher, or to the one who's almost there. Speaking of the desire on the part of seer to "impart…knowledge and love," Emerson says, "Somehow his dream is told…sometimes with pencil on canvas; sometimes with

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[139] Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart," *Harvard Theological Review 41* (April 1948), 128.
[140] William James, "The Relations of Minds to Other Things," *Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1981) 19.
[141] Charles Sanders Pierce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," *The Essential Writings: Charles S. Pierce* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1998) 136.

chisel on stone…but clearest and most permanent, in words."[142] Despite the apparent hierarchy of expressive forms, Emerson creates an analogy, once again, between writing and acts of material impact. Naming the pencil, chisel, canvas and stone is an important gesture of incorporating them into acts of writing and reading, of setting them side by side.

In all of these images of impressing, there is the suggestion of contact between two discrete planes, or objects, that's forceful enough to have left a mark, an indentation. Language has been delivered into a physical form; new objects have been created. And *effort* has been made: how else has pressing to have occurred? We don't quite know the duration of this mark--how long will it last?--but suggestions are that it is lengthy. An impression, however, is also its own opposite, something vague: it's an indistinct or imprecise notion or remembrance. So whether in definition or in the temporal schema it evokes, an impression is always two things; it yokes. Either shape has changed, or there's a hazy cloud of recollection. An impression conjures time and motion: something has moved, both in transfer and in will, and the result is something fixed--perhaps.

Widening the scope of planes on which carving and impressing takes place beyond the mind, to tree bark, hearts and earthen dirt, we can see more distinctly the productivity of aligning the linguistic and the material. As Cavell notes, Thoreau's hoeing in "The Bean Field" chapter of *Walden* appears as a daily writing practice.[143] Physical labor, combined with its narration, transcends the two-dimensional limits of

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[142] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays & Lectures,* Ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library Classics of the United States, Inc., 1983) 83.
[143] Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 22.

paper and makes marks with surface-breaking depth in the ground. Edward's lengthy commentary on grafting in *Images of Divine Things* works to puncture natural surfaces as well. In his mystical map of correspondence, the joining of trees carries a breadth of signification: the believer is reunited with his Christ-stock; Christ-as-branch dignifies the barren human stock; the church receives the unifying blessing of Christ's seed. The grafting activity itself is, of course, defined by cuts and grooves that will facilitate the joining of one entity's tissue to another's; but, additionally, Edwards is explicit about the language-moving force of this correspondence, about its capacity to capture a process by which divinity can be transmitted, and material conversion can occur. "Christ is ingrafted by the Word's being ingrafted, which is able to save the soul."[144]

The location of transmission in the form of a tree is instructive: Edwards' vision works on the what John Irwin in *American Hieroglyphic* identifies as the gap between a prelapsarian Tree of Life easily linking ground and heaven, language and its natural source, and a "Phallic Tree" that nurtures language in increasing states of distance from its natural sources, language that hardens into its own object, refers back to itself rather than to God.[145] In the figure of the tree itself, Edwards envisions a path of resolution, whereby physical contact facilitates the restoration of contact with a divine source. His own correspondence theory is not identical with but in a stance of reception to the Edenic one: his congregants cannot simply wind their minds back to a capacity to receive nature-as-language; instead he offers them a system of signification which incorporates the

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[144] Jonathan Edwards, "Images of Divine Things," *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 11, *Typological Writings*, Ed. Wallace E. Anderson and Mason I. Lowance, Jr (New Haven: Yale UP 1993) 112.
[145]John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphic*: *The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1980) 32-36.

givens of separation and lostness into the possibility of an ongoing, willful turn back to God.

Perry Miller describes William Ames' chronological ordering of the stages by which an art born in God's mind finds form in a printed matter, thus representing a picture of a graduated road from God to text. "First, it lay in the mind of God; secondly, it was positively enacted by God; thirdly, it was clothed with objects and forms by the mind…our knowledge of the arts is 'that effigy which either exists in the speculation of a rational creature, or in the delineation of it, which is set down in a book.'"[146] Images of mark-making and reading work are final steps in this vision of the transfer of divinity from the God-entity itself to a mind desirous of knowing it, or finding it within himself.

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Color, like impressing-activities, negotiates the breach. I have begun to wonder if the usefulness--and pervasiveness--of color in philosophical discourse comes from our belief that color is a profoundly <u>outside</u> element. We know there is red inside our bodies, and probably some white, pink, and brown, but darkness—not even an identifiable color—might be our primary association with the inner palette. Perhaps it's for this reason that investigations into perception so often harness color to crack apart assumptions about the sameness of sensation over time and across minds, to create space between a sign, a referent and a mind and among the instances that they meet. Perry Miller, discussing Petrus Ramus' utter faith in the power of reason to negotiate objects and names, says: "[H]e said that as the eye perceives colors, so the mind sees arguments

[146] Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982) 165.

without needing any other demonstration."[147] The recognizability of color by the eye is a given. Charles Sanders Pierce says, "Look at a red surface, and try to feel what the sensation is, and then shut your eyes and remember it…When red is not before my eyes, I do not see it at all." He surprises us out of the assumption that the recognition of color is ongoing and without context. And James: "I know the color blue when I see it, and the flavor of a pear when I taste it…but about the inner nature of these facts or what makes them what they are, I can say nothing at all." Blue is a given—until we are required to speak of it. In each case, though the use changes, color is invoked for persuasive ends: its force is connected to its associations with something certain, something outside, something we can agree to. It serves as a useful flash of the known in the midst of a larger investigation of speaking and writing amidst the vague. Color, we assume, has the special attribute of language-free presence and non-object status, and a particular dynamism comes from playing with evoking those attributes via the names of colors--via words.

Jonathan Edwards' use of color in his own constellations of divinity has a rhetorical range that's fueled by these special attributes. In *The Mind*, he uses color to come up against the very edge of defining the mind's contents: "It is now agreed upon by every knowing philosopher that colors are not really in the things…but strictly nowhere else but in the mind. But yet I think that color may have an existence outside the mind with equal reason as anything in body has any existence outside of the mind."[148] Color is harnessed for its simultaneous recognizability and placelessness as Edwards stymies

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[147] *New England Mind* 155.
[148] Jonathan Edwards, "The Mind," *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 6, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings,* Ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980) 350.

assumptions about the body's makeup and the distinctions among its substances--material, energetic and divine. In *Images of Divine Things*, however, color stays put in its emblematic role, as Edwards includes its significance among his long roster of divine signs. He says, "'Tis a sign that the beautiful variety of the colors of light was designed as a type of the various beauties and graces of the Spirit of God, that divine beauties…are so often represented in Scripture by beautiful colors."[149] He goes on to note the jewel-encrusted gates of Jerusalem and the "blue, purple and scarlet" ornaments inside, the likening of God's appearance to "jasper and sardine stone," and Joseph's spectacular coat. Color becomes a sphere where language can work, where the mind can drop back into the body and forget to wonder about its difference from that of the beasts. For there's a beauty in that forgetting, a grace.

My favorite example of the power and self-evidence of color to shock a philosophical investigation into quiet submission comes in Claude Levi Strauss' "Sunset" chapter of *Tristes Tropiques*—the narration of his screening of a setting sun from onboard a Brazil-bound ship, shortly after departing from Marseilles in 1934. The vision of a complete performance with so many rapidly morphing acts, the surprise of finding the gaudy, neon and jewel-toned in the natural and the daily, and the drive to narrate the spectacle in detail combine to topple momentarily his professional sense of identification. He no longer needs anthropology; or, anthropology for a moment is contained in the joint beholding and transcription of a sunset. "If I could find a language in which to perpetuate those appearances, at once so unstable and so resistant to description, if it were granted to me to be able to communicate to others the phases and sequences of a unique

[149] "Images of Divine Things" 67-69.

event which would never recur in the same terms, then…I should in one go have discovered the deepest secrets of my profession."[150] His language in this chapter jumps out of the skin of its usual container; he stretches for the words to mark the vision of the sky and rushes to include it all in eight pages of sunset hypnosis: he sees "bloated but ethereal ramparts, all glistening, like mother of pearl, with pink, mauve and silvered gleams," then a "laminated [mass] like a sheet of metal illuminated from behind, first by a golden, then a vermillion, then a cherry glow"; there are "bulging pyramids and frothy bubblings" and "streaks of dappled blondness decomposing into nonchalant twists" and a "spun glass network of colors…shrimp, salmon, flax, straw" that, with the final setting, becomes "purple, then coal black, and then…no more than an irregular charcoal mark on grainy paper" as night finally arrives.[151] And then he returns to being an anthropologist, making his way through South America without the accompaniment of a painted sky; he returns to being a structuralist, a writer, and to black and white

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I think it would be useful to find a history of moving images in American philosophy: to find film before it existed. We need a theory of film that engages with origins far older than photography and semiotics not afraid of the divine, and we need an American philosophy that's, owing to the powers its imagination, accidentally contemporary. I say that we 'need' these things but I mean that they already exist. They seem like perfect companions—this body of writing and this medium.

[150] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* Trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Penguin, 1992) 62.
[151] Levi-Strauss 62-69.

When I encountered James' use of the figure of the kaleidoscope to capture the workings of the mind's ongoing mutations toward relative equilibrium, it struck me as the perfect verbal twin for Stan Brakhage's *Text of Light*: "But as the brain tension shifts from one relative state of equilibrium to another, like the gyrations of a kaleidoscope, now rapid and now slow, is it likely that its faithful psychic concomitant is heavier-footed than itself, and that it cannot match each one of the organs irradiations by a shifting iridescence of its own? But if it can do this, its inward iridescences must be infinite…"[152] In his film, Brakhage finds the entire universe in the dynamic acrobatics of light in conversation with a glass ashtray. Sixty one minutes exist as a series of pushes: finding happens again and again, blur finds form, mush finds iridescence. A condensed telling of art history of the twentieth century parades itself unwittingly across the screen: the foamy skies of Hudson River School give way to the more saturated expanses of Color Field painters; receding hills and valleys become flattened panes of light and hue.

Film offers the chance to let one's eyes move according to the plans of another, to attach to an outside stream. Two streams run at once—on screen and inside the head, and the audibility of the inner one is heightened by the pressured presence of another: one's internal motion receives a rare chance to find its boundaries (rather than two distinct streams, one provides a container for another). There is an experience of difference without the need to speak back, to take turns, and because of this, time is saved. It's not unlike reading, of course, and the associated wish that the movement of the eyes back and forth will facilitate a turn. And there's a physical presence of streaming activity too—the passing film frames, ongoing, continuous, more essential and less acknowledged than the

[152] "Stream" 229.

objects they present. This combination is made sacred but unannounced by the housing presence of the dark room.

While Cavell doesn't narrate his ultimate turn to film in terms of its affinity with his primary object of study, American philosophy, perhaps it was inevitable that one world of moving pictures would give way to the other. Wallace Stevens holds both worlds in *Carnet de Voyage*, where color drains and blooms from nature's objects according to the streaming rhythm of the setting sun.

> The green goes from the corn,
> The blue from all the lakes,
> And the shadows of the mountains mingle in the sky.
>
> Far off, the still bamboo
> Grows green; the desert pool
> Turns gaudy turquoise for the chanting caravan.
>
> The changing green and blue
> Flow round the changing earth;
> And all the rest is empty wondering and sleep.[153]

The turn winds back behind the poem, toward a picture plane, and slides along horizontally, from word to word. The ending day in one frame is the equivalent of the turning earth in another. If we want to speak to each other from our "better hours," we might have to stand in both frames at once.[154]

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[153] Wallace Stevens, "Carnet de Voyage," *Wallace Stevens Collected Poetry and Prose* Ed Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library Classics of the United States, Inc., 1997) 522.
[154] "Divinity School" 86.

CHAPTER THREE

From the Notebook of… **Robert Beavers**

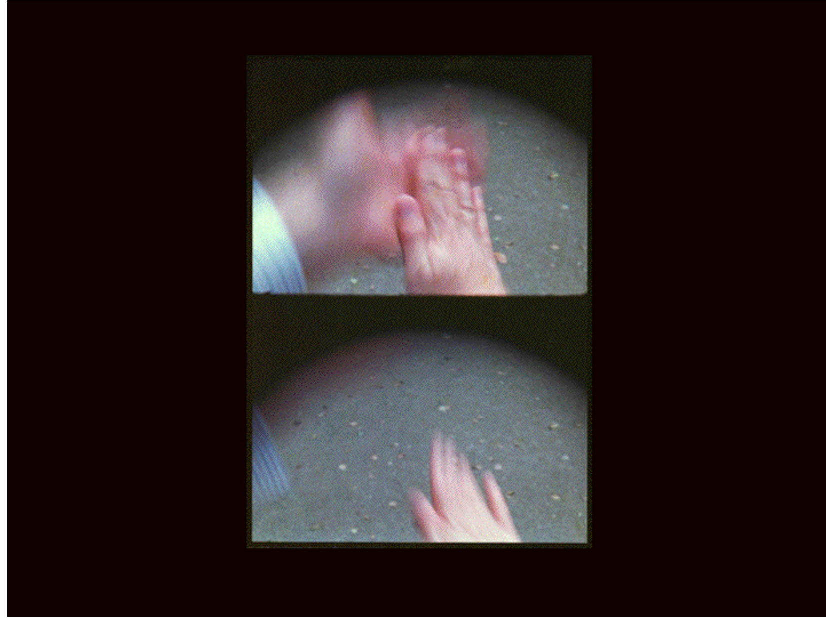
In September 1967, when Gregory Markopoulos corresponded with the Austrian Film Museum in Vienna about screening his work in an upcoming "New American Cinema" program, he enclosed a note. In typewritten caps, he urged Peter Kubelka and Peter Konlechner, the museum's founders and co-directors, to take note of the work of an 18-year-old filmmaker named Robert Beavers, and to consider buying a print of his first film *Spiracle* for $200. “THE EXTRAORDINARY THING ABOUT MR. BEAVERS IS THAT HE HAS HAD NO OTHER FORMAL FILM TRAINING...THAN PICKING UP A BOLEX REFLEX CAMERA AND SETTING TO WORK...THOUGH VERY YOUNG HE SHOWS A KIND OF PERFECTION AND NOBILITY SELDOM SEEN IN THE NEW CINEMA: OR IN ANY OTHER CINEMA FOR THAT MATTER.” Markopoulos taped three film frames, featuring his own profiled face superimposed on the landscape of Hydra, to the bottom of the note—an introduction to the new filmmaker's vision. "P.S. He has never been shown, to this date, by anyone!"[155]

Thus began a committed relationship. In 1969, Kubelka and Konlechner showed four of Beavers's films: *Winged Dialogue, On the Everyday Use of the Eyes of Death, Plan of Brussels*, and *The Count of Days*. Today, after the Temenos Archive (a two-room, 70 square meter space in an industrial office building in Zumikon, a Zurich suburb, dedicated to the preservation of Beavers’s films and materials and those of Markopoulos, his long-time partner), the Austrian Film Museum holds the largest collection of his work in the world.

[155] Gregory Markopoulos, *Unpublished letter*, 1967, Austrian Film Museum Archive.

In 2010, I paused between these two locations: after a week of work at the Temenos Archive, on the verge of continuing my research of Beavers' films at the Austrian Film Museum, I made my way through the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. My mind still metabolizing his films, acclimated to their distinct rhythms and preoccupations, the history of Western art suddenly leapt forward in bas-relief, and openly announced its central plot line: the shifting representation of hands. Egyptian tombs, Greek vases, Byzantine icons, Dutch tableaux--etched and painted hands not only delivered evolving pictorial meanings but morphed rhetorically in accordance with the centuries-long duel between artist and the two-dimensional picture plane. Even Modernism seemed to submit to this momentary teleology--brush stroke ridges, drips and hard-edged lines the representatives of the newly imagined hand.

In My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure, his eighteen-film cycle, Beavers consistently follows the elusive beauty and transmitting powers of the hand, through visions of handwork and craft and the incorporation of his own spontaneous bodily gestures. In his first experiments made at eighteen and nineteen, *Early Monthly Segments* (1968-70/2002), self-portraits and portraits created at monthly intervals as he was uncovering the possibilities of camera and craft, the hand already plays a primary role as the filmmaker holds and manipulates the elements of his work: filter, lens, and film. And in *Ruskin* (1975/1997), the repetition of a single hand lifting and lowering a book is a central motif in a moving meditation among the sites of the English critic's writing.



hedge (1980)

Beavers's is a cinema of complex associative poetics, and the filmmaker's own hand, as a represented form, serves as a gathering site, a plate of integration. About *Amor* (1980), shot in Rome and Salzburg, whose world of imagery includes the making of a

suit, the restoration of a building, and the clapping and movements of hands, Beavers explains:

> [I]n [the film]--where you have the tailor and the tailor in relation to architecture--you also have the hand and both sides of the hand within the space of the image and sound. I was interested between the subjective sense of uniting certain sounds with the inside of the hand and others with the back of the hand. For myself, I feel an extraordinary power that goes through the hand: this relation between handwork and objects. A favorite writer of mine, Francis Ponge, speaks to the mute expressive power of objects. I am someone who very much communicates through these means. Of course indirectly I am showing the presence of the human being through this hand work.[156]

And although *The Suppliant* (2010), Beavers's most recent film, stands outside the Hand Outstretched cycle, it too speaks a manual dialect. Shot over the course of a couple of days in 2003 in and near the Brooklyn Heights apartment of art director and designer Jacques Dehornois, the film centers on its namesake, a small bronze statue (a replica of a Greek sculpture now in the Altes Museum in Berlin), upward-gazing with hands held open and high. Beavers chose to film the statue only in the early morning and late afternoon, and as his camera gently travels its limbs and surfaces, contour is revealed via highlight in the dark. In the film's opening shots, rough scratching sounds suggest a kind of mark-making activity that's responsible for the vertical lines of light running along the statue's limbs and the circular pools resting on its torso. The combination of the back-and-forth sounds, the progress of line, and the hazy edges of light conjures the materiality of charcoal--distinct but ephemeral, ready to blow away as dust, the preliminary angel of art. Beavers's long-time use of the traces of lens turret turnings as

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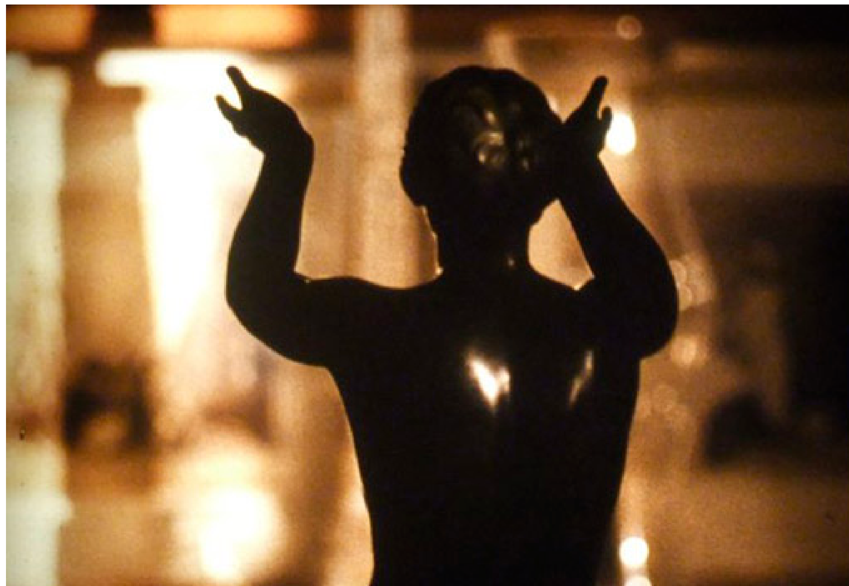
[156] "Winged Distance / Sightless Measure: A Conversation With Robert Beavers, Part Two," Interview with Michael Guillen, October 25, 2009, http://theeveningclass.blogspot.com/2009/10/winged-distance-sightless-measure_3062.html.

transitional elements (for entering and exiting images as well as joining them) here becomes a sort of charcoal too: a borderless black that obscures the distinct moments of start and stop.



The Suppliant (2010)

The specter of mark-making in *The Suppliant* is a reminder that for Beavers the hand is inseparable from another primary area of attention: the materials and processes of reading and writing. His films feature books, journals, correspondence, and writing-in-process (unfolding at a typewriter, or on paper with pen), ink and hand interacting in a variety of positions. Books not only appear as represented objects, but function as forces of germination; some of Beavers's films exist in dialogue with his own deep encounters with reading: *Ruskin* (1974/1997) speaks to its namesake's *The Stones of Venice* and *Unto This Last*, and *From the Notebook of…* (1971/1998), shot in Florence, emerged from Beavers's readings of Leonardo's notebooks as well as Paul Valéry's and Giorgio Vasari's writings on the artist. But reading is more than a point of inspiration; these films

simultaneously engage viewers with the rhythms and expectations of reading in the context of cinematic spectatorship.

Bookbinding: frames from *Work Done (1972/1999)*

I had gathered from my encounters with Beavers that writing played a prominent role in his craft; he often carried a colored folder containing sheets of hand-written notes connected to a current film. And I imagined that were I able to study some of them at the Temenos Archive, I might discover discrete keys of entry into his films. Were his investigations of colored light and shadow in dialogue with Goethe or Newton? Was the logic of his filter combinations grounded in ancient theories of vision—or perhaps in Josef Albers' studies of complementary colors? Had he looked at Tintoretto's Christ cycle before he captured architectural details in Venice? I didn't anticipate, however, the global impact of my encounter, at the archive, with Beavers's decades-long practice of sustained writing, and the weight these accumulated pages would come to bear on my experience of his films.

**

Two years prior to my research in Zumikon, however, I had encountered the intended location for the archive. In 2008, I was one of about 200 travelers who gathered in the remote mountains of Arcadia in the Peloponnese for a screening event called the Temenos (discussed in Chapter Five). We had assembled to watch a portion of Markopoulos's magnum opus *Eniaios*: his 80 hour film made of re-edited footage from all his previous films. Markopoulos had imagined the Temenos (an ancient Greek word meaning "a piece of land set apart for the worship of a god") as a combined open-air theater and archive for his and Beavers's work.

Markopoulos used bold, abstract language threaded with religious aspirations when he wrote about his vision for the "Complete Order of the Temenos" in the 1970s: "With the arrival of the Twenty First Century and the building of the rectangular foundation of the Temenos suggested before the glorious benediction of the Madonna of Orsan Michele…will there be a respect for the filmmaker's Intention; for the films of Beavers and Markopoulos: the Temenos with its catalogue of Films." Indeed, he assigned the archive a central role: "When the future film spectator of the Temenos will wonder how the handsome square has been achieved, he may well contemplate in the archives of the Temenos the very source of the Success." But throughout the decade, this grand vision (he predicted that a future spectator might remark, "It is like being in a rainbow!") remained an idea.[157]

Unhappy with American screening and distribution conditions, the two left the U.S. for Europe in 1967. Critical of the stifling of artists' intentions by institutional

[157] Gregory Markopoulos, "Towards a Complete Order," *Cantrill's Filmnotes 21/22* (April 1975): 28-30.

interests and curatorial egos ("bad monies and grim politicizing"), and committed to protecting the divine potential of film from an insensitive and sullying culture of film presentation and dissemination, the filmmakers spent the next several decades abroad.[158] Markopoulos devoted the final decade of his life to the epic *Eniaios*, designed to be shown only at the chosen Temenos site in remote Arcadia; it was fully edited but not yet printed when he died in 1992. He did not live to witness its 2004 premiere or the establishment of the Temenos Archive.[159] During his lifetime, he and Beavers had stored their materials in a Swiss bank vault, and in the mid-1990s, lawyer and businessman Thomas Bechtler donated a dedicated archive space, first in a Zurich office building and, in 2003, in the current Zumikon location. The Temenos Archive, then, is one crucial element in a larger history of Markopoulos's and Beavers's "place set apart." It emerged from an insistence on protecting the artists' visions and the wish to bring spectators into unsullied contact with the medium in a context that supports its singular powers.

**

When I entered the Swiss archive for the first time, the combined forces of removal, entwinement, and will that characterized this society of two was evident on the surface of the whole space. Hundreds of bound, embossed, color-coded volumes of Beavers's and Markopoulos's writings, many covered in hand-painted paper by master bookbinders in Basel, Frankfurt and Paris, line the shelves. They contain distinct categories of thought and text; in addition to voluminous notes accompanying each film,

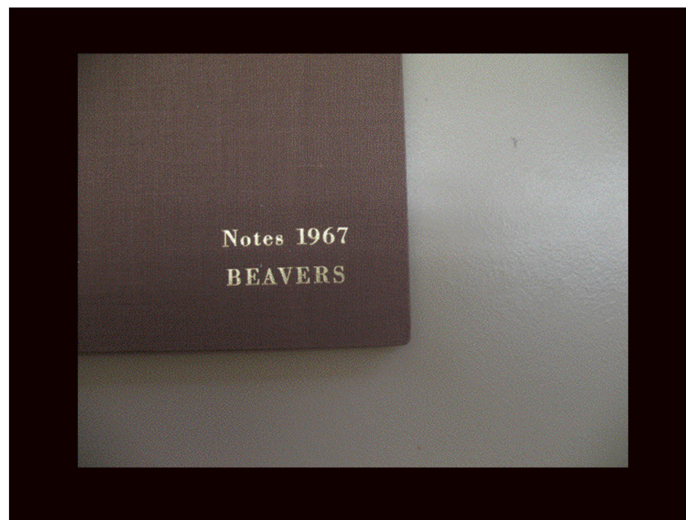
[158] Markopoulos "Toward" 29.
[159] Today, the Temenos Archive is dedicated to the complete restoration of the *Eniaios* cycle; volunteers work with Beavers on the repair of thousands of splices so that internegatives and projection copies can be produced. Beavers also oversees ongoing fundraising for the restoration.

there are commentaries of paintings seen and books read, personal diaries, and correspondence of all kinds. Even notes for projects never realized are bound and embossed with gold letters.

Top: Temenos location in the 1980s (film screen is black rectangle in center)
Bottom: Beavers with screen frame at Temenos site

The Temenos Archive contains hundreds of hand-bound volumes that contain the writings of both Beavers and Markopoulos. The archive has no institutional affiliation and there are no plans for its future beyond Beavers's lifetime.

Buchbinderei
FLÜGEL
Basel


Notes 1967
BEAVERS

Four decades after leaving the U.S., Beavers lives today in Berlin. But he rejects the word "expatriate," adamantly wanting recognition as an American filmmaker. He offers little explanation, except for the recollection of his early encounters with his elderly neighbor in whose yard he appeared at age seven. Tiny Berniece Hodges, an artist herself, read Nathaniel Hawthorne to him. Her "entire perspective…was deeply New England. I don't think I'm alone. I think there's a substantial part of the American population that is still vitally connected to the serious spirituality of the country—which also has its playful side—but, it's strong. All of our boats are anchored to that."[160] Mrs. Hodges came from a long lineage of Bostonians, and Beavers too identifies his roots in the New England soil.

To speculate more deeply about Beavers as an American artist I want to turn to Stanley Cavell—and to the chasm between his primary theoretical objects: film and American philosophy. In his vision of American philosophy, "Emerson and Thoreau are the founding thinkers of American culture…but the knowledge of them is not possessed in common by that culture."[161] Their import has been repressed. Cavell wants to reverse this amnesia, to recover a cultural heritage that is itself devoted to recovery—of the human, the ordinary—from the forces of skeptical philosophy. He wants to redeem a heritage devoted to bringing language home, not to prelapsarian origins but to a New World characterized by a "vision of every word in our—in human—language as

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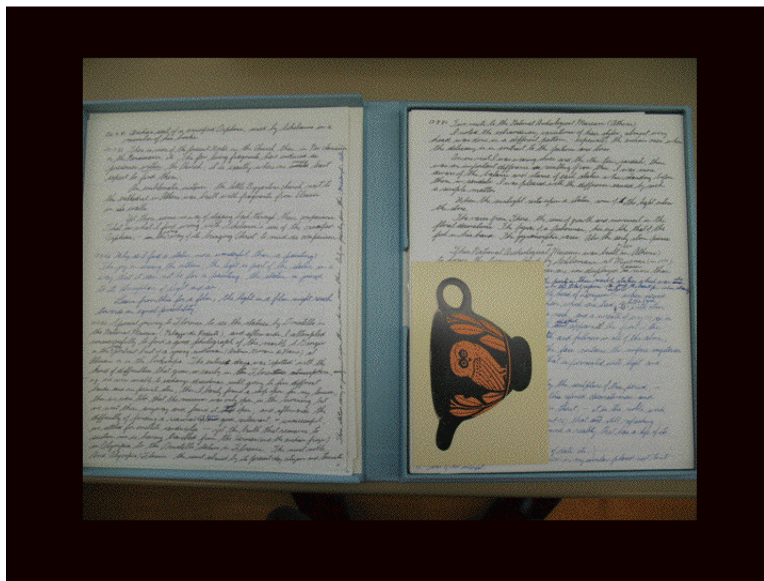
[160] "Winged Distance / Sightless Measure: A Conversation With Robert Beavers, Part One," Interview with Michael Guillen, October 25, 2009, http://theeveningclass.blogspot.com/2009/10/winged-distance-sightless-measure_5054.html.
[161] Stanley Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 43.

requiring attention, as though language as such has fallen from or may aspire to a higher state," where philosophy and self-knowledge are intertwined.[162] And Cavell sees this labor occurring primarily via writing about reading and writing—something I earlier called "writing in the present tense." By understanding that "Emerson's and Thoreau's relationship to poetry is inherently their interest in their own writing," we can understand that "the house being built in *Walden* is *Walden*."[163] When Thoreau hoes his bean field "it's an emblem of the physical act of writing, as though the sheer fact that a thing is written is as important as what is said."[164]

I want to include Beavers in Cavell's American cosmos, and to nudge Cavell away from an exclusive focus on narrative film so that he might discover points of contact between his two theoretical discourses. In *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cavell repeatedly uses the word "magic" to dilate the phenomenology of film. "How do movies reproduce the world magically? Not by literally presenting us with the world, but by permitting us to view it unseen," he says.[165] "We don't know how to think of the *connection* between a photograph and what it is a photograph of. The image is not a likeness; it is not exactly a replica or a relic, or a shadow, or an apparition either, though all of these natural candidates share a striking feature with photographs—an aura or history of magic surrounding them."[166] In both cases, Cavell stays close to

[162] Cavell *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, 113.
[163] Cavell *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, 51.
[164] Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 25.
[165] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 40.
[166] *Cavell World Viewed*, 18.

both the notion of the camera as a mechanically reproducing machine and to an understanding of the indexical nature of the reproduced image. If, as Tom Gunning has



Foliation
Top: Oak leaf from the sanctuary of Dodona,1984
Bottom: Diary of responses to art works seen

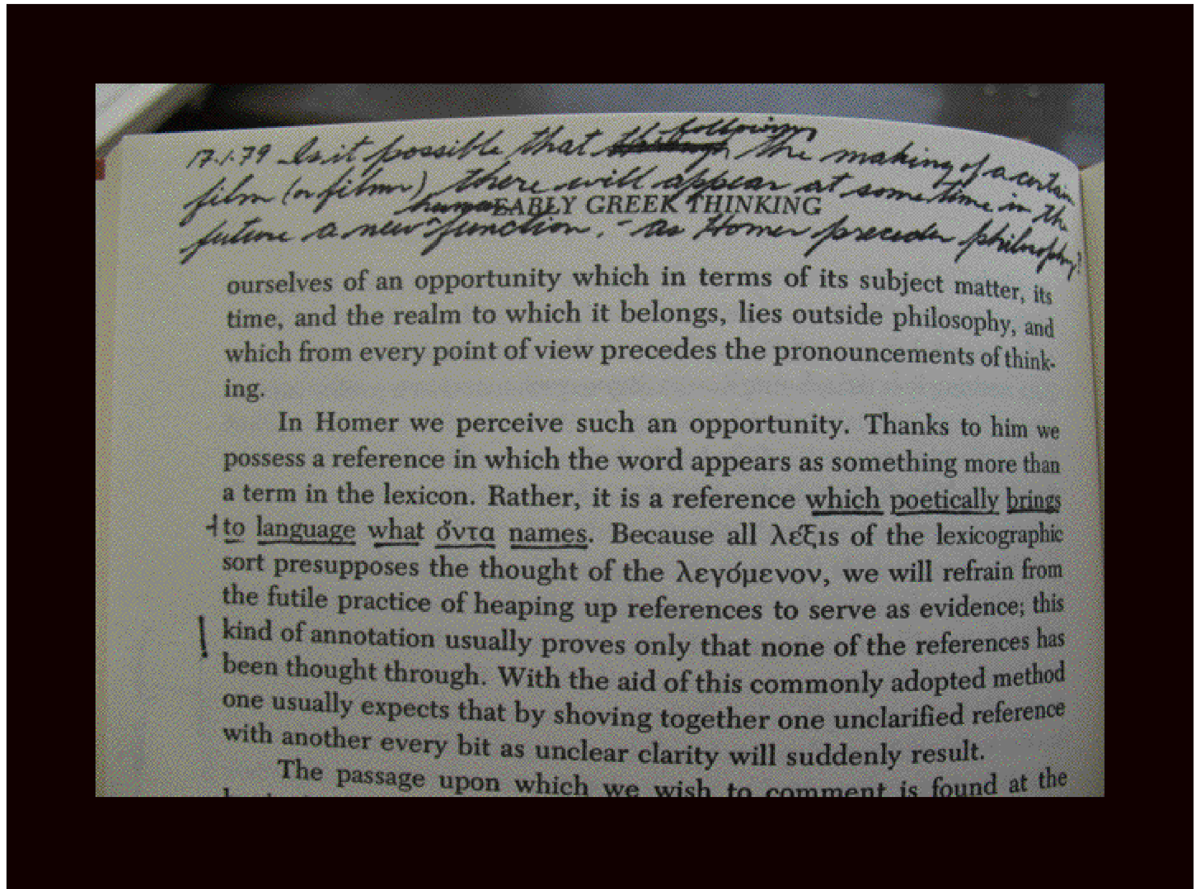
argued, avant-garde cinema can shed light on the limitations of classical discourses on cinematic indexicality, it does so in particular ways, and Beavers' films offer the chance to contemplate states of relation not only among image, object, and word – but within cinematic forms whose very representational orientation is toward distant processes – namely the motions of mind – to which we have no visual access.

**

The Temenos Archive holds books of deep significance to the filmmakers, documented with date and place of acquisition, or the giver's name, and filled with the marks of intimate conversation – points of both disagreement and affinity. Beavers's shelves include works by Aurelius, Aristotle, Emerson, Goethe, Plutarch, Ruskin, Stevens, and Wittgenstein, as well as studies on ancient marble, Francesco Borromini, and early film technologies. The most cherished of these books are also hand-bound. Among Markopoulos's shelves a row of faceless, ecru books whose covers have been torn off sits just under a multi-colored collection of bound ones: volumes that hadn't made it to the bindery at the time of his death. It's at once a reminder of the self-sufficient, present-tense archiving the artists engaged in—the material valuation and care of objects of reading and writing central to their creative processes—as well as its untenability: after Markopoulos's death, Beavers ceased these book-binding efforts in favor of other priorities.

Beavers's earliest experiments made in his late teens, *Early Monthly Segments* (1968-70/2002), offer a glimpse of the artists' domestic environs in Switzerland, Germany, and Greece. Markopoulos, whose fame was at a high point during these years, is typing and addressing envelopes. In the archive, as Beavers pointed to bound volumes

containing copies of some of these letters, as well as responses and associated demands for payments and reminders of mounting debt, he explained that Markopoulos is writing letters in these early scenes, soliciting funds from companies, individuals, and



17.1.79 Is it possible that following the making of a certain film (or films) there will appear at some time in the future a new function, – as Homer precedes philosophy?

EARLY GREEK THINKING

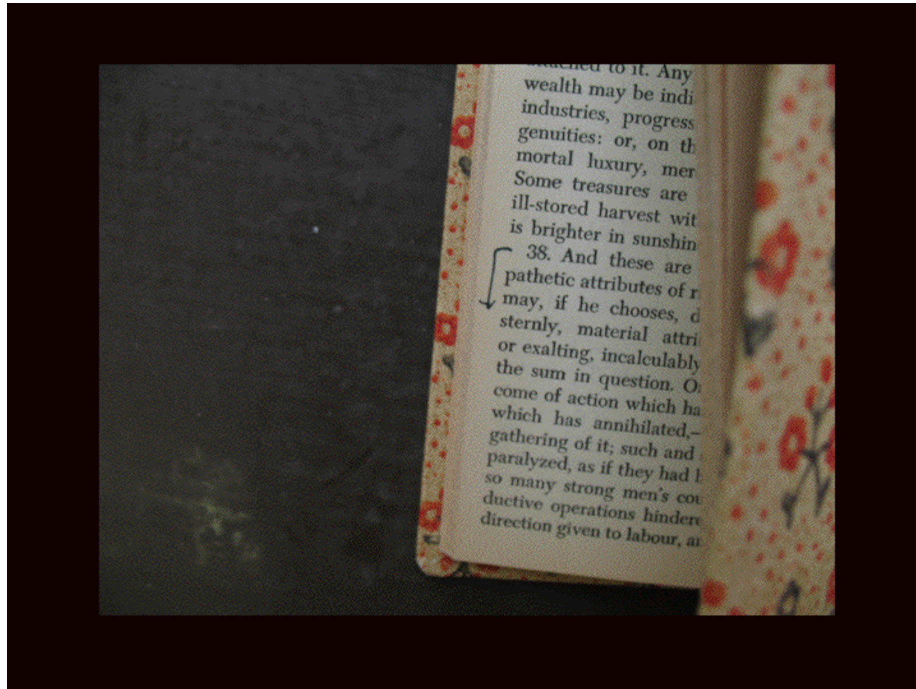
ourselves of an opportunity which in terms of its subject matter, its time, and the realm to which it belongs, lies outside philosophy, and which from every point of view precedes the pronouncements of thinking.

In Homer we perceive such an opportunity. Thanks to him we possess a reference in which the word appears as something more than a term in the lexicon. Rather, it is a reference which poetically brings to language what ὄντα names. Because all λέξις of the lexicographic sort presupposes the thought of the λεγόμενον, we will refrain from the futile practice of heaping up references to serve as evidence; this kind of annotation usually proves only that none of the references has been thought through. With the aid of this commonly adopted method one usually expects that by shoving together one unclarified reference with another every bit as unclear clarity will suddenly result.

The passage upon which we wish to comment is found at the

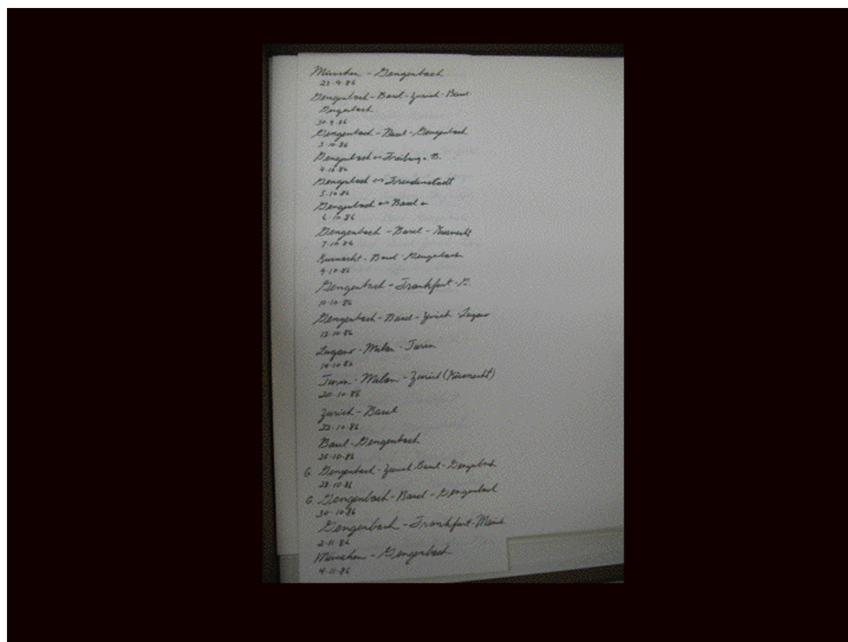
In dialogue with *Early Greek Thinking*

cinematheques, so that Beavers’s early explorations could go on without interruption or frustration. He had encouraged Beavers to set monetary concerns aside in order to nurture his emergent gifts and promised that the two wouldn't starve. Despite acute financial struggle, the two held on to certain luxuries (often precariously, via credit): they bought hand-made suits in Florence, customized galoshes in Switzerland, got haircuts from Visconti’s barber in Milan, and invested in the book binding itself.



Top: Shooting notations in Beavers' copy of *Unto This Last*, filmed for *Ruskin.*
Bottom: A row of Markopoulos's books prepared for binding at the time of his death.

Theirs was a highly itinerant life—the two lived only in hotels and pensions in various European locales so not to be depleted by domestic responsibilities, and following the creative impulse was the greatest priority. In the context of their extreme mobility (Beavers's personal journals include a log of all train travel in 1986: 111 trips in total), the energies of binding, formalization, protection, and documentation emanating from these many books feel like counter forces: efforts at stabilization and grounding in the face of precarious material conditions.



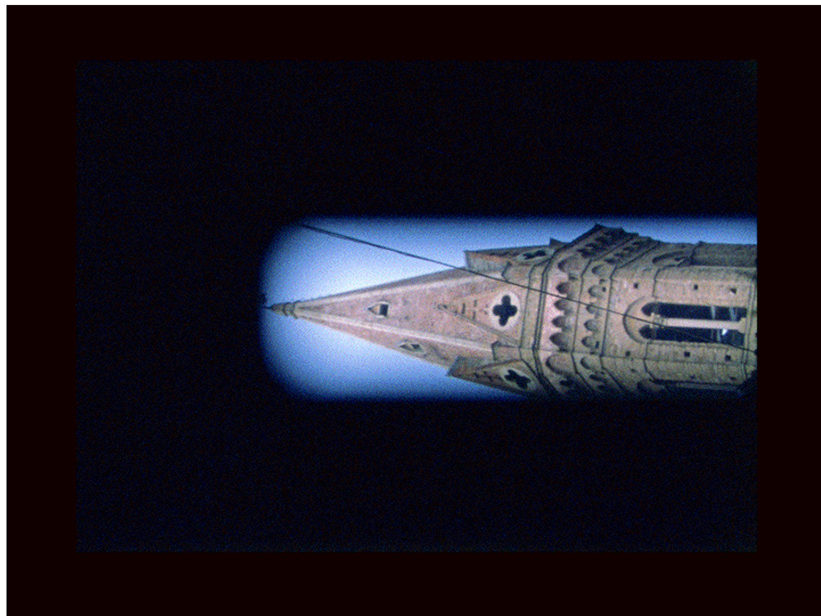
Tracking train travel, 1986
Cavell: "The writer describes himself as 'look[ing] up from my book' upon hearing a train pass, and it takes a moment to realize that what he calls 'my book' is the one he is now writing."

**

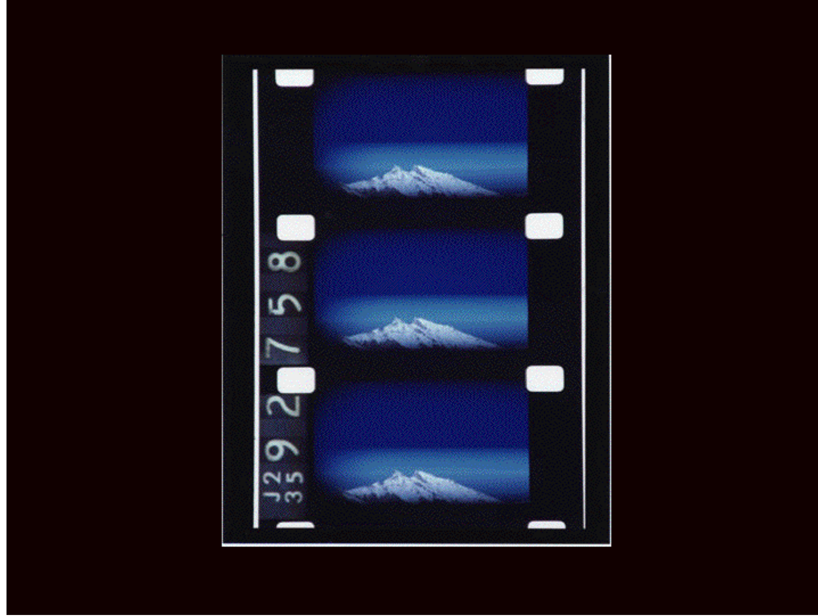
The lives of Markopoulos and Beavers are inextricably bound, but to open any of Beavers's film notebooks is inevitably to confront the distinctness of his work and

cinematic language. Beavers's filming notes diligently record, in consistent, neatly composed cursive, his evolving thoughts about vision and film. Bound boxes embossed with dates are filled with dense stacks of loose sheets of chronological notes; a single box might contain notes for several films. Dated entries span the entire arc of creation of a given film—from earliest conceptual germinations and observations through shooting, editing, and printing. The registers of voice cover an equally wide expanse: self-instructions about what to shoot, philosophical observations about the camera, mind, and eye, exquisite dialogues with books, and angst about botched sound mixes sit side-by-side. Ongoing lists of images and sounds Beavers plans to and then has recorded co-exist, often without obvious distinction, so that past and future tenses are permanently confused. These lists become sites for the unfolding of Beavers's deep associative work—one that proposes and revises relationships among elements before, during and after shooting, as the alignments and groupings among objects, characters, sounds, colors, and ideas become increasingly clear. And among conceptions and sketches of his inventions involving colored light and image-masking are shards of the material elements themselves--transparent gelatin slivers in various color combinations and distinctly-shaped mattes are affixed to the notebook pages.

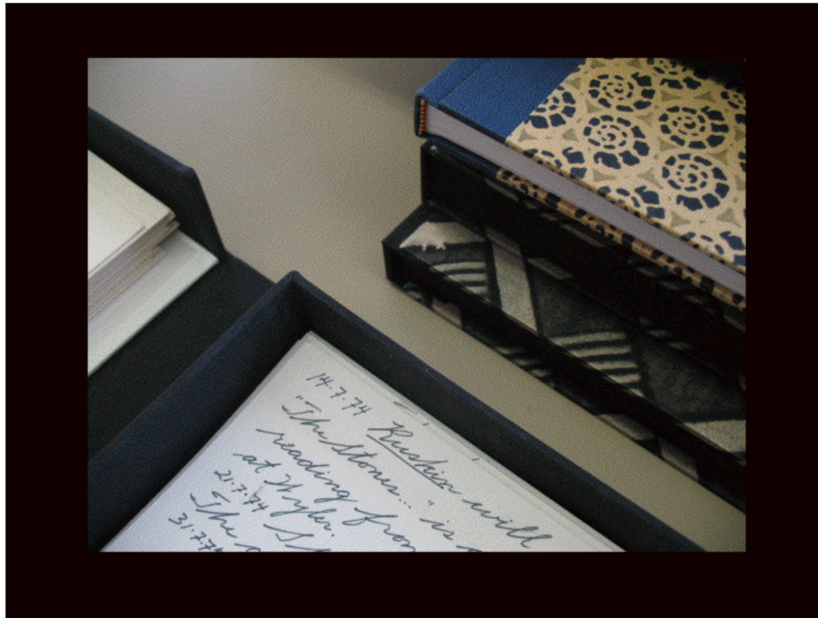
Still Light (1970/2001)

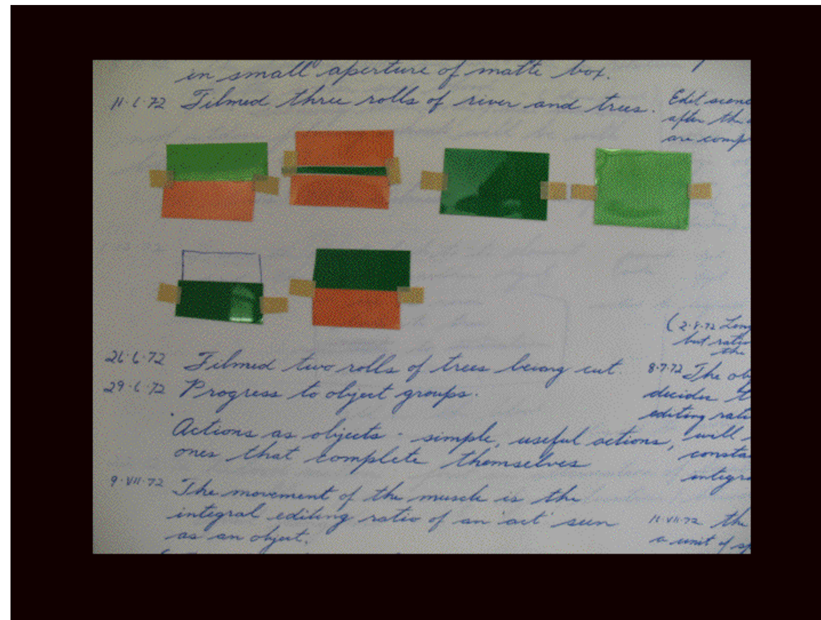


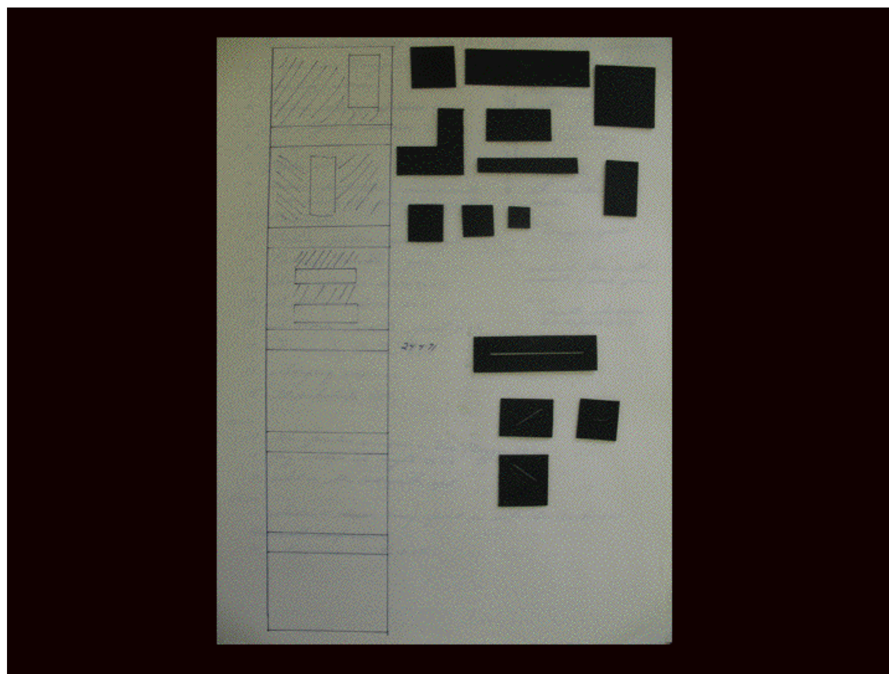
From the Notebook of… (1971/1998)



Work Done (1972/1999)

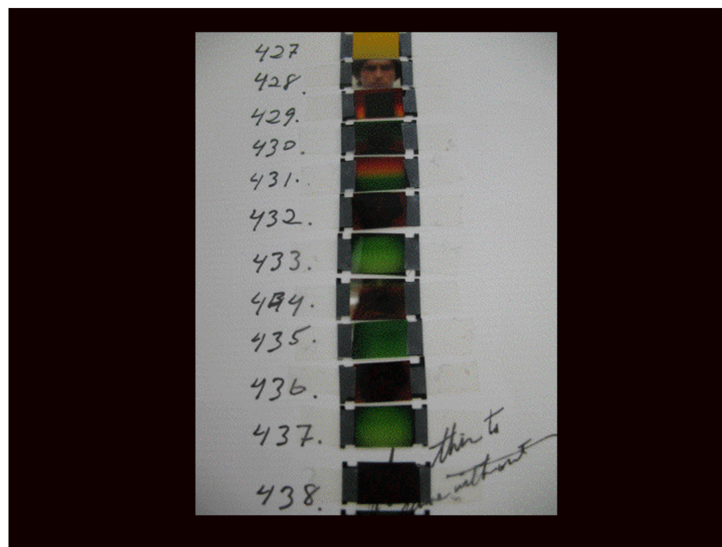






The notebooks also contain detailed records of Beavers's singular mode of editing, which also occurs on paper. Rather than relying on a Steenbeck for repeated viewings, Beavers generally projects his footage once and thereafter reviews it by hand, memorizing it. He places each shot on its own spool, and tapes two frames from each

shot to paper to map the entire body of material, making the entirety legible at once. As be begins to edit, he tapes one frame of each selected shot in the sequential order of his imagined film on a new sheet of paper, and adds hand-written notes about transitions or effects. He uses the pen to evolve further his thinking about order, drawing an arc, for instance, to indicate duration. His is a cinema spun from reliance on the mind's eye—he also rarely looks into the camera while shooting.



Beavers edits his films with pen and paper

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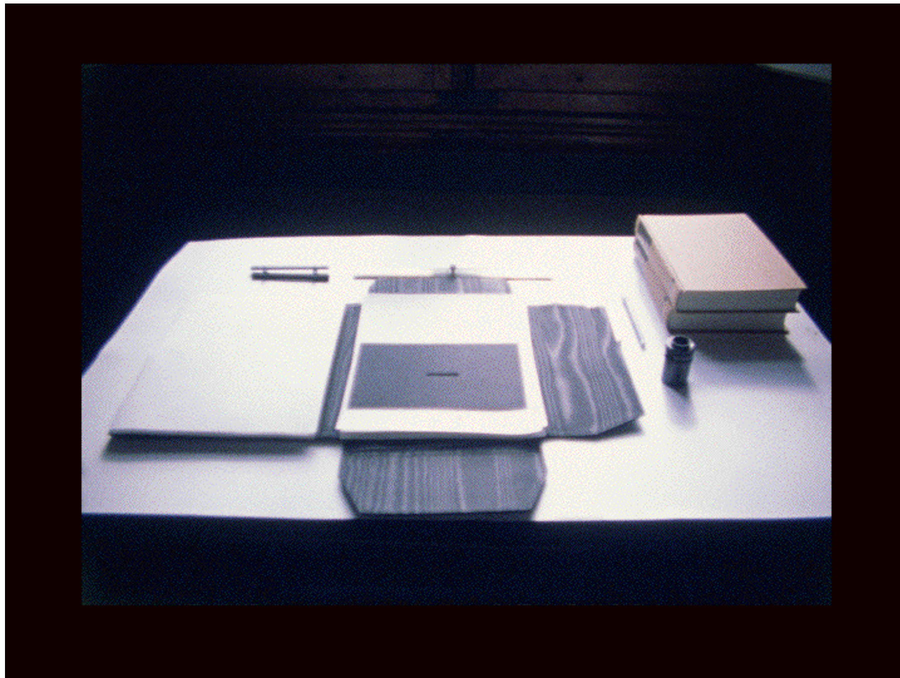
From the Notebook of… directly engages writing and the archive itself. The film is a turning point in Beavers's oeuvre, the first made outside Markopoulos's protective encouragement (Beavers took full financial responsibility for the project), and the last to use superimpositions, moving mattes and a numerical approach to editing. Shot in Florence and structured itself as a notebook with mattes that simulate turning pages, the film moves among shards of text from Beavers's own writings, views of the city, shots of flying doves and an elderly wood carver, and scenes of the filmmaker's work: under a window whose shutters Beavers repeatedly opens and closes, a desk covered with the elements of both writing and filmmaking (camera, notebook, lens, books). The pieces of Beavers's writing that appear are fragmentary not only in their isolation and decontextualization from the home of their surrounding text, but in the speed with which they often appear and disappear, stymieing full legibility, and their embeddedness among complex compositions—the film's turning pages are divided into shifting and multiple zones of image, text and mattes. I'd imagined that I would conscientiously peel pack the layers of this film at the archive, and sync up the fragments of Beavers's writing with both their sources and the filmmaker's identification with Leonardo and his art, filling in the gaps created by the experiences of interrupted reading in the film.

The first words in the *Notebook* notes, "Firenze 10-2-71," surprised me: the long, highly complex film (originally 60 minutes, reduced it to 48 when Beavers edited the cycle two decades later) was completed that same year. And some of the first entries suggest another film altogether: "A film of a person without showing the person…title: Disappearance(s)" and "Film of a painting (large)." A month later, however, Beavers

writes, “These notes will be the form of the film on L. da V.’s method,” and the following day: “The notes are the device of the life, an outgrowth of it, not independent like a ‘work of art.’” Despite a small “N.G.” beside this last statement, suggesting that Beavers later dis-identified with this remark, the notion of writing as ‘device,’ distinct from a ‘work of art’ which is ‘independent,’ pointed my thinking in several possible directions: toward the chasm between Leonardo’s famously voluminous notes and his



Desktop with elements of both filmmaking and writing, *From the Notebook of…* (1971/1998)

penchant for leaving art works unfinished, toward Valéry’s short book on the artist, *Introduction to the Method of* Leonardo *da Vinci* (1895) which is concerned, per its title, with thinking and process above all, and toward something I had come to observe about Beavers’s career. He consistently prioritizes concern with finding the right contexts for showing his work, those that (due to curatorial vision or the material conditions of theater

and projection) will support his desire to "awaken sight" with film, over the fortification of his own proper name as an artist and opportunity for exhibition.

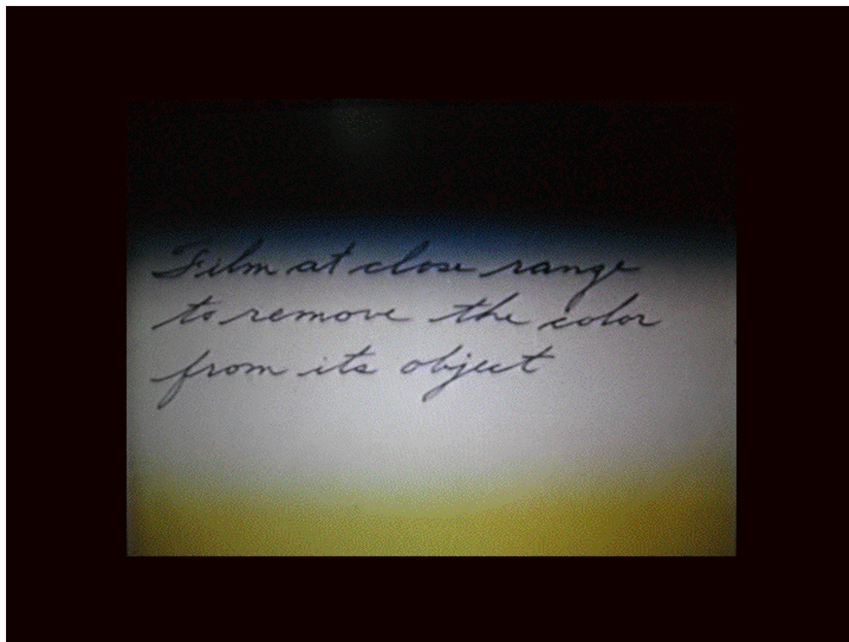
The acquisition date of "1971" inside Beavers's copy of Leonardo's *Notebooks,* coupled with the fact that Markopoulos and Beavers did not live in Florence until that same year, confirmed the impossibly rapid time line articulated in the filming notes. His shooting notes —"Birds near Bargello," "S. Spirito dome," "the painted window on Via Maggio" — quickly follow the announcement of a Leonardo film with April and May dates. But on a separate page, Beavers documents the shooting of his own note fragments; next to the first several words of each note filmed, Beavers lists the date of original composition—they span from 1968 to 1970. Many of these dates are visible in *From the Notebook…,* but I had not known that none of the notes appearing in the film originate from the period during which Beavers was deliberately making the film: all precede the *Notebook* notes, as I saw clearly when I later encountered them, one by one, spread across the earlier notebooks. The fantasy of one-to-one correspondence and mutual containment between the film and its notes faltered—the notes themselves would not produce the kernel of complete elucidation of the film. One note featured in the film reads, "Film in which each…," but it flashes too quickly for complete reading. In that instant the viewer comes in contact with an entire film conceived and illegible at once. Not every element can be folded back into the work; some fall off into the extra-filmic past or future. Like Pascal's Pensées, the strips of text in *From the Notebook of…* were composed in multiple moments, later sorted and re-combined. They ultimately refuse the originary position we might want to place them in--as the sketches for the final work.

This stretch of pages from 1971 altered my understanding of *Early Monthly*

Segments as well. Taken together, *Segments* functions as a silent prelude to the full My Hand Outstretched cycle and also reappear embedded within the cycle (this time with sound), side-by-side and in dialogue with the five films made concurrently. The relationship between the *Segments* and these five films (*Winged Dialogue* and *Plan of Brussels* (1967-68/2000), *The Count of Days* (1969/2001), *Palinode* (1970/2001), *Diminished Frame* (1970/2001) and *Still Light* (1970/2001)) becomes apparent in viewing the cycle: repeating locations, actors, and filter color combinations show Beavers moving between distinct works in a short period of time. But in confronting the archival materials, I saw that *Early Monthly Segments* were as directly generative for *From the Notebook of…* as for the films that preceded it. In my reliance on the narrative of *From the Notebook of…* as a pivotal film in Beavers's artistic genesis, distinct from the earlier films (often called his first "masterpiece"), I had failed to imagine a chronology of incubation that would keep pace with its completion in 1971.

The quick coming-into-being of the film sheds light on the impact of Beavers's and Markopoulos's chosen mode of life – its independence, rhythms and priorities – on Beavers's filmmaking. In 1970 the two attended the first Filmmakers' Festival in London, organized by Simon Field and David Curtis (Beavers screened the first reel of *Still Light* and shot the second part, featuring Nigel Gosling, while there) and met Sylvio Lofredo, a Neapolitan painter and former Kokoschka student who had grown up in Paris. Greatly impressed by the beauty of the nudes in Markopoulos's *Illiac Passion* (1967), Lofredo invited the two to Florence, his current home. When they returned from the festival, Beavers and Markopoulos faced financial difficulties in Switzerland, and, accepting Lofredo's invitation, moved to Florence (their pension is the interior space

featured in *From the Notebook of…).* But grave day-to-day challenges persisted—Lofredo asked acquaintances for money so the two could buy film, and sold his own watercolors in exchange for their meals—and Florence was an entirely unknown city. And yet this combination of forces — the latent energies contained in three years of notes, Lofredo's interest and support, the inspirations and pressures of this new environment—conspired and allowed for the consolidation of *From the Notebook of…* as an idea. While many of its elements had been generated years before, a chance encounter with a stranger and an intuitive decision to relocate brings us to "Firenze 10/2/71" and the start of a new notebook and film.



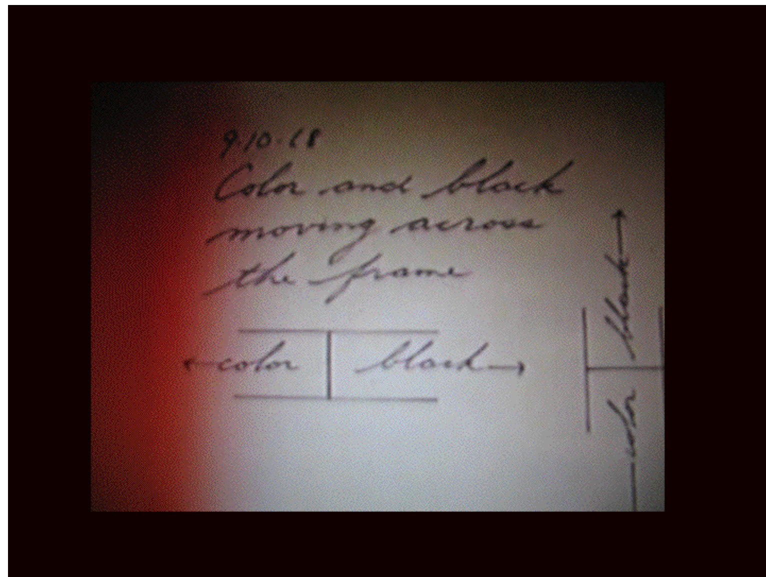
From the Notebook of... (1971/1998)

But looking forward in Beavers's writings provides useful context for *From the Notebook of…* as well. The third entry in the film's notebook features a small schematic drawing of a camera, matte box and moving matte, and the following explanation: "A matte bisecting the lens, moving from right to left and back, disappearing when

perpendicular." Here Beavers outlines the moving matte strategy responsible for the illusion of turning pages in his film, a striking formal invention I assumed to spring explicitly, and with logical intention, from his engagement with Leonardo's notebooks and his identification with a writing-centric creative process. But later notes forced me to complicate this straightforward analysis. "The fold in bi[n]ocular vision shows as the middle of the frame…" he wrote in 1975 (and re-copied in a 1976 notebook), and, in 1976, "The fold is the depth between the eyes where the two images are placed in perspective." Beavers's decades-long, observation-based discovery of the ways camera and film can heighten consciousness of the conditions of vision are at work here in his interest in the creation of a moving composition that's analogous to the invisible workings of our eyes. As in his related realization that we inevitably blink when we change focus, or his attention to our inability to see the backs of our own bodies, Beavers dwells around the limits, black spots, and gaps in human seeing and feeling—and in so doing, paradoxically opens a door to a refreshed and revitalized form of seeing for the spectator.

In his remarks about the vertical dividing line of the screen, the one that characterizes much of *Notebook*, it becomes clear that the illusion of page-turning in the film is secondary to an intimate conversation between eyes and lens about the way two images become one and allow for the perception of depth. He had taped a matte to the outside of his camera compendium in shooting *Notebook*, moving it back and forth. When fully perpendicular, "the matte…disappear[s]," he had written in 1971, invoking though not yet making explicit a connection to the invisible discrepancy between the images produced by our two eyes. The *Notebook* spectator is as if confronting a book

whose spine is toward her, even though the "pages" are visible; she is in back of pictures of stereopsis and reading as much as she is looking at a semblance of them. Leonardo is known, of course, as the originator of perspective, and Beavers's later notes reveal that a dialogue between approaches to the representation of deep space in Renaissance art and cinema is not only part of the representational world of the film, but exists at the core of its making.



From the Notebook of… (1971/1998)

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The notebook excerpts that Beavers selected for use in the film represent an enormous spectrum of shifting rhetorical positions and tenses: dialogues with self from every angle, reminders, discoveries, queries, and goals. There are technical and logistical documentations ("ordered Kodak filters nos. 29, 22, 12, 61, 48, 36," and, a month later, "the above are too dark"); concepts and seeds for potential future films ("a film of mistakes to show the possibility of creating by factual error," "film all actions having nothing to do with making films"); self-instructions regarding matters both material ("film at close range to remove color of object") and abstract ("make the composition equal the editing"); hypotheses ("will the movement of the matte stop the light?"); observations technical ("note the first frame of a shot sometimes receives more exposure") and poetic ("shutter in camera is like wings on insect—both create movement, one in space the other in the eye"); and aphorisms ("film is not an illusion of movement—it is movement."). The register-morphing quality of the notes extends to other elements, as objects drawn, shot, written about and conjured via association trade positions quickly and often. A matte, for instance, alternately appears as a word in Beavers's notes, a piece of black board lying on a notebook page, and an invisible element lodged in the camera's apparatus, creating the book-like form of the film. In the archive I learned that these extraordinary leaps are not simply a function of the cutting and assembling of *Notebook*; they ongoingly characterize Beavers's unbroken writing.

A similar tendency to jump confounded Leonardo translator Jean Paul Richter in 1883: "[O]n one and the same page, observations on the most dissimilar subjects follow each other without any connection. A page, for instance, will begin with some principles

of astronomy, or the motion of the earth; then come the laws of sound, and finally some precepts as to colour. Another page will begin with his investigations on the structure of the intestines, and end with philosophical remarks as to the relations of poetry to painting."[167] I had wondered how to interpret the sheer boldness of Beavers's identification with Leonardo, but the urgency of this question withers in light of the fact that writing itself—the practice of a continuous observation of the mind in all of its motions as an accompaniment to and foundation of art-making—functions as the primary tie. Valéry, whose work on the artist Beavers read prior to Leonardo's, supports this orientation to the Renaissance master. "Remembering that he was a thinker, we are able to discover in his works ideas which really originate in ourselves: we can re-create his thought in the image of our own," he said. "It would be necessary to invent him if he did not exist…A Leonardo may, as a notion, exist in our minds without our being too bewildered."[168]

From the Notebook of… is both spun from and marked by an infinite range of back and forth motions, and for a spectator willing to acclimate to these rhythms, the film can catalyze consciousness of an infinite range of reading and seeing cadences, sometimes overlapping and entangled. There is, for instance, reading, wanting in vain to read, not trying to read, and refusing to read. Particular motions and attentions of eyes and mind are activated when text is near, or when the possibility of reading surprises the eyes out of the expectation of continuous seeing. "In many of the films…the movement is

[167] Jean Paul Richter, ed., *The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci* (original title, *The Literary Works of Leonardo Da Vinci*) (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1888) x.
[168] Paul Valery, *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo Da Vinci*, trans. Thomas MacGreevy (London: John Rodker, 1929) 31, 48.

not the usual kind of movement in film. In *From the Notebook of…* I sometimes use the word 'locomotion': it's a movement in place. The movement is a dual movement of reading and seeing. The spectator is constantly being guided from one to the other and back. It's a constant flux between these two different ways of using the eyes," Beavers describes.[169] When, in the latter portion of the film, bright green leaves appear on pages of the divided screen, as if a kind of botanical precursor to letters, reading and seeing are now one.

The flux Beavers describes is supported by the associative work of the film. As he builds relations among elements represented and invoked, all of which are characterized by opening and closing movements, he is not simply suggesting comparisons among apparently unlike objects but moving spatially from creator to spectator to apparatus to film. The explicit consciousness of "like" and "as" that can characterize early viewing of film—where the spectator is guided to bring together and compare the wings of a bird, pages, window shutters, and the eye—later breaks down as this comparative network drops to a background position and allows for more nuanced seeing. The unseen camera aperture, the filmmaker's, and the viewer's eyes are as much parts of the world of correspondence and association as the forms seen in the film, such as the multiple windows and the doves. In this essential breaking down of category, the sets of phenomena and objects being joined into rhythmic relation include those in the spectator's interior with things seen on screen and invoked off it. In this way, the spectator is invited to feel herself a part of this universe, to participate in the associative chains of Beavers's creative cosmos, and produce her own off-shoots and branches.

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[169] "Winged Distance / Sightless Measure, Part Two."

Back and forthness characterizes both the small marks of return to discrete ideas in Beavers's writings as well as the epic scale of the My Hand Outstretched cycle. In the decision to revisit his films in the 1990s, to re-enter and re-edit them into a folded whole (the borders between films are marked by the sound of fluttering birds' wings—an image and sound tied, throughout the cycle, to turning pages, breath, and the opening and closing of eyes, shutters, and lenses), there is also a return to the original spirit, the vision of a separate and containing unity, of the Temenos archive and screening space. While some scholars have focused on the grandiosity of Beavers's and Markopoulos's embrace of the long-form epic work, in fact the scale of both *Eniaios* and *My Hand Outstretched* increases activity and mobility for the spectator more than it demands reverence, particularly when the works are viewed in concentrated sittings. Beginning with the Whitney Museum in 2005, several museums across the world have presented Beavers's cycle in its entirety over the course of several days. This long duration gives spectators the rare opportunity to immerse in and adjust to the rhythms of Beaver's vision, which in turn creates the possibility for self-observation of one's own associative motions as they emerge over many films and days.[170] "The elements of the film create order and relation, which the spectator must complete."[171]

Across its neatly demarcated and carefully-bound volumes, the Temenos Archive provides a picture of a career-long embrace of writing-in-process, constant and mobile enough to ensure contact between the artist's discipline and intention with the mutating forces of time. Toward the end of *From the Notebook of…,* a close-up follows Beavers's hand as he re-copies one of his previously made notes, this one a sequence of color filter

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[170] Chapter Five discusses the active spectator nurtured by *Eniaios* in detail.
[171] Robert Beavers *Untitled (Vienna Aphorisms)* 3.

combinations. The note complete, his pen moves to the upper left corner of the note where he re-inscribes the original date of its composition, here obscured by shadow. “A note and the same note written after some years,” Beavers wrote in a 1976 notebook. “Where is the meaning if the same words were intended differently?”

Seeing letters in formation and ink spreading, as we do in these shots of Beavers’s writing in *From the Notebook of…,* temptingly suggests a fluid connectivity, a sync, between hand and mind. But in the shadow of this picture of mastery is one of fragility as well: the gap between what we are able to do and say and what we understand (the out-of-sync-ness of our intelligence and stupidity), between those human capacities we experience as automatic and those we have learned willfully, and the simple fact that we do not understand how we learned to write. In this arena, the very fact of writing becomes captivating—its own primal scene; here content shrinks back and ink remains wet, and the ability to bend line into letter and produce strands of legibility seems an overlooked form of magic. In both Beavers’s films and in the notebooks lining the Temenos Archive, we encounter language with the aura of writing still in tact. The very fact that he re-entered his completed films in the 1990s, updating them in accordance with shifts and maturations in his vision (and, of course, generating new notebooks for the films), speaks to a radical prioritization of writing that never ceases.

Writing supports Beavers’s loyalty to not knowing:

> I am alone when I’m filming…not planning. I have my notes and I’m thinking about what I’m doing so I’m not in a trance; but there is a level in which it is not thought out and I think my usage of gesture is happening on that level. It is an intuitive searching and the central part of the filming as it develops. In a number of films, I can feel that I did not really know what I was doing; I’m one of those mixtures: I know

> what I'm doing, I'm thinking certain things, and then I also don't know what I'm doing.[172]

Careful daily composition facilitates an ability to submit to the unanticipated, and nurtures and contains that which Beavers cannot yet see. Paradoxically, creation springs from closely following the mind, via writing, in order to leave space for the unknown. The process, then, is one of diligent and trusting tending rather than permanent inscription. As Beavers leads viewers into awareness of our most ordinary but blind spots, gesturing toward "eyesight conscious of its binocular force," he follows the unbroken line of his own writing to restore sight, and, like Cavell's Emerson and Thoreau, engages in the work of repair.[173]

Beavers has long been motivated by the desire "for the projected image to have the same force of awakening sight as any other great image."[174] His dialogue with Leonardo in *From the Notebook of...* is part of this career-long commitment to elevation, and the alignment of film with art. But unlike Clouzot's *The Mystery of Picasso*, another project that probes mark-making in and as cinema, there is no duel in Beavers's films between one type of artist and another. Nor is there the notarizing signature, a proper name, that ensures Picasso's ink will fascinate. One of the stunning achievements of Beavers's films is the integrated encounter they provide with a sea of image and composition types I'm used to seeing separately. Watching his films, I sometimes see not only Leonardo but Ad Reinhardt, John Baldessari, and Mark Rothko stream by. I am not suggesting that Beavers is a collagist alluding to these artists, but simply my relief in

[172] "Winged Distance / Sightless Measure, Part One."
[173] Robert Beavers, Temenos Archive notebooks: 5300.
[174] Robert Beavers, "Frames of Mind,"(interview with Henriette Huldisch) *Artforum* (September 1, 2005).

finding necessary forms and pictures freed from art historical/art market narratives explaining the totality of their origins and creators. For Beavers's viewers, no choice has to be made between conceptualism and color field abstraction, the lyrical and the structural, or the notebook and the film.

Part II

Two Heads

CHAPTER FOUR

Cubes and Clouds

1. Wittgenstein's Shapes

When someone says the word 'cube' to me,
for example, I know what it means.[175]
Wittgenstein

What does Wittgenstein have to do with American philosophy? Russell Goodman, in *Wittgenstein and William James*, argues that James' *Principles of Psychology* and *Varieties of Religious Experience* had "a vast *positive* influence" on Wittgenstein's philosophy.[176] He uncovers details of Wittgenstein's acknowledged admiration of James ("Whenever I have time now I read James's *Varieties*…This book does me a *lot* of good," he wrote in 1912), but, more importantly, provides a firm foundation for Wittgenstein's claim (made with ambivalence at the end of his life) that he is "trying to say something that sounds like pragmatism" by tracing the impact James had on Wittgenstein's thinking about religion, experience, practice, and ordinary language.[177]

Cavell offers a different vision of the entwinement of the Austrian and the Americans. The second half of the title of *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, a slim volume of the Carpenter Lectures he gave at the University of Chicago in 1987, *Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein*, makes clear just how central Wittgenstein is. Moving not according to chronological impact as Goodman does (via James's influence on Wittgenstein) but rather via the logic of his own philosophical discoveries, Cavell discusses the impact of Wittgenstein on his understanding of Emerson and Thoreau, and vice-versa: it's a picture of mutual clarification not historically argued but framed by

[175] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001) 46.
[176] Russell Goodman, *Wittgenstein and William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), viii.
[177] Goodman 3, 11.

Cavell's own experience of reading over time. "Wittgenstein's attacks on philosophy, and on skepticism…in appealing to…the ordinary or everyday use of words…are counting on some intimacy between language and world that they were never able satisfactorily to give account of. It was in Emerson and Thoreau that that I seemed to find what I could recognize as this space of investigation."[178] Cavell locates an essential affinity between Emerson and Wittgenstein in their interest in the capacity of philosophy to usher words back one-by-one: "Emerson will say…that words demand conversion or transfiguration or reattachment; where Wittgenstein will say they are to be led home, as from exile."[179] Like Cavell, my immersion in Wittgenstein preceded my study of Emerson and Thoreau. In what follows, I will add another reading of Wittgenstein that can retroactively illuminate the American philosophical propensity for "seeing shapes."

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The *Philosophical Investigations* is filled with gestures of pulling-apart: word from meaning, meaning from object, object from identity, picture from use. From the very start, the sustainability of the scenario in which every word has a meaning--the object for which the word stands--is surely in great trouble, as Wittgenstein threatens to snip the flimsy cord tying the object to its apparent companions. Though the tirelessness of these acts of pulling us away from the temptations of meaning-as-object sometimes seems to point to the inevitability of total disintegration, the equally forceful gestures of bringing-back to use land us instead in the zone of reconfiguration. The acts of separation in the *Philosophical Investigations* are neither complete nor final:

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[178] Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein,* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989) 81.
[179] Cavell *This New* 82.

Wittgenstein's terrain is not marked by discrete forms whose livelihoods are dependent on supreme boundaries, but rather by newly formed connections, collisions between former bedfellows.

Due to its dense interiority, the *Investigations* is difficult to have a conversation with; Wittgenstein himself describes the project as "a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of…long and involved journeyings."[180] How does or can one enter? Just as Wittgenstein doesn't *report* on his findings about language, it is not likely that we as his readers want to take on that role.[181] One can, however, find a speaking place *after* "discipleship" (where, as Cavell notes, the reader becomes student to Wittgenstein as master, a troublesome and paradoxical position given the anti-authoritarian spirit of the text) or, alternately, depending on the nuances of one's tendencies as a reader vis-à-vis attachment and identification, after integration and *before* discipleship.[182] Further, it seems desirable to play with the tensions that arise as one searches for a readerly mobility that's distinct from the undeniable motion of the text--for instance between the desire to jump out to patches of more familiar kinds of content (such as psychoanalysis, values and the spirit) and the fear that one is leading oneself astray with these excursions.

For these reasons, and others which I'll come to, I want to investigate the *Philosophical Investigations* by means of two words, two concepts, two forms, two pictures: cube and cloud. I am suggesting neither that they lie buried in the work nor that they have self-evident roles to play here. Rather, they emerged for me in response to the

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[180] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 5.
[181] Stanley Cavell, "Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 70.
[182] Cavell "Availability" 71.

pointed need for holding mechanisms given the challenges of Wittgenstein's text; I needed to find a way to converse with his vision of "picture language" without feeling trapped by a "language game," and to speak about the tension between wanting to treat one of the numbered remarks as if it has stand-alone, out-of-context sense and mistrusting that a remark can be lifted with its meaning left in tact. The invocation of "cube" and "cloud" allows me to lightly and temporarily pin down a passing sense without the burden of betrayal (of the spirit of the *Investigations*), and lets attention to *use* be tinged by a willingness to harness the intuitability of words that Wittgenstein also recognizes. Further, a strong aura of potential picture-use collision (one of Wittgenstein's primary topics) hovers around each.

'Cube' and 'cloud' are approachable from numerous angles in the "labyrinth" of language ("You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side an no longer know your way about.").[183] A cube might function as or conjure perfection, an ongoing present, as something solid or as two rhombi (depending on one's vantage vis-à-vis a schematic drawing), an emblem of the perfection of identity that results from sameness in dimension and length, a picture of 'meaning' as discrete and handle-able, a form with clear and sharp boundaries, a goal and destination, the ultimate object (one might consider Wittgenstein's 'slab' a relative of the cube, slightly more modest, functional: a picture of use?). Drawn on paper, a cube represents three-dimensions: do we know what they are? Have we visited each of its planes and surfaces or can we only approach the cube as a unity?

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[183] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 69.

Clouds hover between earth and heaven; they seem to get in the way of clear vision; they block the sun; they filter the sunlight; they disappear over time; they disappear on approach; they are not still; they cannot be contained; they are not solid---and yet their profiles sometimes appear so distinct that we are inclined to name them, to compare them to unlike things. Perhaps they are emblems of confusion, or the fact of their insecure borders reminds us of a hazy state of ego-affairs between self and other.

This *variety* of uses and connotations, however, does not suffice as justification for my approach. It is instead the possibility of their connections and disconnections to the following that lends “cube” and “cloud” such a great range of movement:

> The evolution of the higher animals and of man, and the awakening of consciousness at a particular level. The picture is something like this: Though the ether is filled with vibrations the world is dark. But one day man opens his seeing eye, and there is light.
>
> What this language primarily describes is a picture. What is to be done with this picture, how it is to be used, is still obscure. Quite clearly, however, it must be explored if we want to understand the sense of what we are saying. But the picture seems to spare us this work: it already points to a particular use. This is how it takes us in. [184]

A picture-fantasy of blindness giving way to vision rears its head prematurely, and with great force, in many forms of philosophical inquiry. Given an apparent closeness, we can see why concepts of clarity and cloudiness can be so difficult to extricate from association with this ubiquitous schema (Wittgenstein forges this extrication through his use of “clearly” and “obscure” in the above picture of dawning consciousness: they point to urgency and use, respectively, rather than to sight and blindness.). But this difficulty does *not* dissolve the possibility that Wittgenstein is authentically invested in clearing

[184] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 157.

away confusion and promoting the resulting clarity, in "resolv[ing] philosophical paradoxes"; indeed, the livelihood of these activities is vital and relevant in the *Investigations*.[185]

Clouds and cubes stand in a kind of pseudo-opposition to each other, not perfectly polarized nor crystallized with connotations of "good" and "bad" but wholly capable of taking on roles associated with the other. As certainty is dislodged from its old haunts in the *Investigations*, it does not simply die; rather, it gets dispersed. Following this dispersal via a mobile constellation of clouds and cubes will, I hope, help chart the paths where un-doing is not total, where needs remain, where identity is not lost, where independence unfolds irregularly with respect to authority, and where the value of "self-knowledge" does not stand in paralyzing opposition to the tricks played by pictorial phantoms of clarity and confusion. In many ways, Wittgenstein seems to teach tolerance for the initial (and perhaps ongoing) discomfort that greets the kind of returning activity the *Investigations* demands. There is very little support in the text for finding solace in the discovery of the ways we sometimes use language to lie; instead, we must search for something else.

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"Cloud" and "cube" are not absent from Wittgenstein's own language, and I neither want to proceed as if their presence were simply my contribution nor concentrate exclusively on their literal appearances in Wittgenstein's text. "Cloud" (in addition to a number of words that play pictorial foil to forms of clarity such as "haze", "gaseous medium," "fog" and "atmosphere") appears less frequently than "cube," but makes a

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[185] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 63.

number of striking appearances, including as early as Wittgenstein's reference in his introductory remarks to the entire work itself as "precipitate," suggesting cloudy origins.[186] (This is obviously tied to his oft-quoted picture of "[a] whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar" in its interrogation of the excessive linguistic surface area over which philosophy has traditional spread itself out.)[187] Borrowing from his own *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, he describes the requirements of orderly logic as follows, rhetorically positioning himself as observing the function of an ideal: "…no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty can be allowed to affect it.—It must rather be of the purest crystal…as the most concrete, as it were the *hardest* thing there is."[188]

However, this opposition undergoes something of a reversal when Wittgenstein describes the effects of blind allegiance to "meaning" in its conventional, one-to-one correspondence sense:

> …this general notion of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible. It disperses the fog to study the phenomenon of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words. [189]

This reminds us that a desire for something definite—-the attempt to externalize and concretize an ideal of thought and meaning--in fact generates quite the opposite: fog. I like to think of Wittgenstein's 'slab' as the ambassador of this repeating notion. It's the object whose undoing we witness first in the *Investigations*--a hard, simple, utilitarian form which both easily embodies the dream of one-to-one correspondence and then gets

[186] Wittgenstein *Investigations* ix.
[187] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 88.
[188] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 38.
[189] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 3.

split from its meaning-companion, leaving in its trail what we could call some of the first "clouds" of the work. As Wittgenstein walks us through a vision of classic, Augustinian training—-a child's attention is directed to a slab as an adult points to it and simultaneously utters "slab"—-he simultaneously introduces us to the fragility of this education. "But if the ostensive teaching has this effect,--am I to say that it effects an understanding of the word?"[190] "[I]s the call "Slab!" a sentence or a word?"[191] "But what does using one sentence in contrast with others consist in? Do the others, perhaps, hover before one's mind?"[192]

This introduction to both the formation of clouds in the path of dispersal of objects *and* the use of clouds as a defense against admitting non-understanding or misunderstanding comes in the first pages of the *Investigations* by way of Wittgenstein's undoing of the Augustinian narrative. But as reading continues, how does the rhetorical angle of these processes shift and expand?

To clarify my question, I'll turn to an example involving William James, whose presence by name is striking in a work so remarkably devoid of proper names, so determined to do philosophy without leaning on its codified forms. In remarks 412-420, a stretch of text turning over the notion of perceiving one's own consciousness, Wittgenstein tours us across divergent planes of this multi-faceted quandary, letting each one find favor with the light before shifting the position of form once again. Owing to the essential questions about the tension between piece and continuity that runs throughout the entire work, I had turned to James and his "stream of thought" for help before the

[190] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 4.
[191] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 7.
[192] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 8.

name “William James” finally emerged in the text. My initial delight—-I had been on the right track!—-came from treating “William James” as what in my reading short-hand I’d call a “cube”--a resting place, an affirming point of orientation, and a name of familiarity sufficient enough to produce some atmospherics that might carry me for a spell. The carrying was short-lived, however, as James is quickly followed by the picture of the empty loom (“You think that…you must be weaving a piece of cloth: because you are sitting at a loom…) and the picture of announcing one’s consciousness (“Is it identical with being conscious? To whom might we state this fact?”) and then the picture of authority (“Surely we can’t have a chief without consciousness!”).[193] I think of the peculiar rhythm of change here-- where landing points turn to air and fuzziness gives way to a picture of authority, a back and forth not only between *pictures* of solidity and lostness but among readerly perches and falls--as one of *morphing:* the relations among ever-emerging shapes that momentarily represent the total of these drawn and received pictures.[194]

We know that when Wittgenstein warns against the refusal to let function and role lead us through grammar, he’s saying: do not transport circumstance, surroundings, nor a range of possible uses to an imagined halo around a word:

> “You understand this expression, don’t you? Well then—I am using it in the sense you are familiar with.”—As if the sense were an

[193] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 106.
[194] A different notion, but one that also approaches language needs on a spatial terrain, can be found in the following remark in the *Investigations* (p. 40): “The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement…The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty.—We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction…we are unable to walk….Back to the rough ground!”

> atmosphere accompanying the word, which it carried with it into every kind of application.[195]

Surely we can imagine such a halo, but can we handle those in our own midsts? A variety of questions crops up as we consider the possible pressure this remark places on the rest of our reading: can 'grammar' be transferred to elements larger than words? Must we reject each gesture (such as pushing to materialize something we can't recall or letting atmospheres left-over and well-loved from our previous investigations lead us without slicing them open first) that reminds us of ones whose undoing Wittgenstein has called for? Can we sometimes afford to forget about pictures when the call of intuition sounds?

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On a number of occasions, Wittgenstein makes explicit use of the potential flexibility of a classic two-dimensional representation of a cube:

> …if you see the schematic drawing of a cube as a plane figure consisting of a square and two rhombi you will, perhaps, carry out the order "Bring me something like this" differently from someone who sees the picture three-dimensionally.[196]

And again:

> You could imagine the illustration appearing in several places in a book…something different is in question every time: here a glass cube, there an inverted open box, there a wire frame of that shape, there three boards forming a solid angle.[197]

In the second example, "the illustration" refers to a graphic representation of a cube, printed in the book, and follows remarks on two uses of "to see," each of which has its

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[195] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 41.
[196] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 30.
[197] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 165.

own object: “this” (i.e. a drawing) and “likeness” to something else. In this small patch of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein concentrates a striking kineticism: a distinction between uses of “seeing” is made via references to drawings of faces, and the word “likeness” hums with uses as both resemblance and as an object-image that represents something. On the one hand, there’s a surface straightforwardness: Wittgenstein is zeroing in on the grammar of “to see.” On the other hand, he’s implicitly harnessing possible clouds or auras: such as the notion of the face as the representative of person-body, and the power of the picture to stand for that face. The image is a likeness of the likeness and it becomes possible to see how pictures can function as destinations: we think we recognize something, and we stop.

In following this with an illustration of and remarks on the cube, Wittgenstein creates a disjunction between the explication of various ways of reading the cube (inverted wire frame, open box, etc.) and the acting-out of the glue-y terrain composed of linguistic pictures, picture-objects and comparative relations. It feels as if parsing out makes room for clouds as much as clears them away, a notion I will return to shortly.

In the first example of Wittgenstein’s “cube” use, above, in which he describes the effect of different interpretations of a schematic drawing on carrying out an order, the key distinction is between seeing the drawing as representing two- or three-dimensional space. It might be helpful to recall that the slanted lines that allow a possible reading of a drawn form as three-dimensional come from the convention of perspectival drawing. These slanted lines represent a receding plane, and also mark the achievement of mastering the confines of two-dimensional space. When Wittgenstein asks, “Whence comes the idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails laid to infinity?”

he pushes potential expectations about the forward motion of reading, competence, thought and comprehension up against a picture of thrusting forward into space.[198] After all, the slanted parallel lines of the schematic cube would go on forever--infinitely--if it weren't for the stopping action of the back plane of the cube, serving to turn lines that suggest direction into a reassuring and discrete form.

In another instance, Wittgenstein uses "cube" to pose questions about the promise of a tantalizing and identifiable present and what he calls "a flash":

> When someone says the word cube to me, for example, I know what it means. But can the whole *use* of the word come before my mind, when I *understand* it in this way? … Can what we grasp *in a flash* accord with a use, fit or fail to fit in? … What really comes before our mind when we *understand* a word?—Isn't it something like a picture? … Well suppose that a picture does come before your mind when you hear the word "cube", say a drawing of a cube. In what sense can this picture fit or fail to fit the use of the word "cube"?[199]

Such questions about the temporal and spatial limits of cube-comprehension remind us that a similar set of questions must be asked about 'picture' itself. Wittgenstein grounds us in part by his own use of picture-words--slabs, chess pieces, photographs, drawings, color samples—-which forces us both to confront the ease with which we want meaning and object to slide into partnership at the very moment he's prying them apart, and to acknowledge that a "photograph" is not necessarily a "picture" (but that he will likely draw the former into one of the latter). For in order to quell the unproductive function of pictures, Wittgenstein increases their presence in the *Investigations*. Paintings, portraits, sketches, schematic drawings: all serve to dramatize our dependence, to draw us into a unfamiliar space where our attachment to meaning-as-object is harnessed as much as it is

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[198] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 72.
[199] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 46-7.

undone. We follow Wittgenstein's remarks on "color samples" as we simultaneously begin to wonder how we know how to follow, and why he has chosen this particular term on his path toward letting philosophy breathe, air out. When I said above that Wittgenstein is 'making room for clouds,' I meant that the theater of his writing-—this acting-out—-gathers temporarily in forms among his remarks.

Pictures come in all sizes here: the entire work, he tells us in his introduction, is a "landscape," a "series of sketches"—a reminder, it seems, that Wittgenstein *means it* when he says: "And the best that I can propose is that we should yield to the temptation to use this picture, but then investigate how the application of the picture goes."[200] In other words, leaning on pictures and their auras is not simply self-conscious rhetorical strategy limited to the conceptual tenor of the *Investigations*.

But between the 'slab' and the entire *Investigations*-as-sketch, are, of course, the many medium-sized acts of drawing-up-pictures to firm up a developing sense:

> Here it is difficult…to see that we must stick to the subjects of our every-day thinking, and not to go astray and imagine we have to describe extreme subtleties…We feel as if we had to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers.[201]

> Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle".[202]

> If someone were to draw up a sharp boundary, I could not acknowledge it as the one that I too always wanted to draw…His concept may then be said to be…akin [to mine]. The kinship is that of two pictures, one of which consists of colour patches with vague contours, and the other of patches similarly shaped…but with clear contours.[203]

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[200] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 99.
[201] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 39.
[202] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 85.
[203] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 31.

On many occasions, as I followed a given picture-as-bait deeper and deeper into its sense, relieved for the aid of a visual schema, I would suddenly find myself jerked awake by a question: am I in the midst of a figurative space? And if I'm not, what do I call this understanding-language-by-way-of-a-beetle box?

The pictures play roles of temptation too: that of quick access to the finish line. Wittgenstein often poses questions revolving around overlap, boundary and separation, buoying them up urgently to the surface by way of the law of identity, and the knot of conflation between existence and sameness:

> To say "This combination of words makes no sense" excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language….If I surround an area with a fence of a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary…So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what I am drawing it for.[204]

What to do, in these situations, with the auras or clouds of association that begin to circulate for the reader, the ones that begin to insist on a correlation between grammatical and psychic boundaries, and the idea that Wittgenstein is suggesting that our assumptions about boundaries with respect to shared grammatical terrain not only relates to but *points* to the locked-up chamber of similar assumptions about identity itself? But where did this idea *come from*? Will it be detrimental, against-the-grain, to hope to tease it out as reading continues?

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For me, a tension quickly develops between the drives to articulate two kinds of notions about my reading of the *Investigations*. I could say I gathered the following:

[204] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 117-8.

- Meaning in language must be followed along paths of use rather than through words' essential meanings
- Various uses of the same word can be seen to connect via "family resemblance"
- The rules of language games can be definite, indefinite and can change

And I could also say these things:

- The absence of an explicit discourse on metaphor in the *Investigations* comes from a tacit challenge to place seeing-as *before* figuration—to see figuration before we name it that (or: figuration isn't the discrete language game we treat it as)
- The fantasy of a one-to-one relationship between word and meaning appears to submit to logic but is more like an unproductive form of free-association
- The tensions that consolidate into *libido* can also be traced in unconsolidated form in spatial relationships to language

This second kind of report, one that admits findings larger than one might be able to argue rationally out from the text, could be the result of the dreaded "imaginative misunderstandings" that David Pears remarks on in his "Literalism and Imagination: Wittgenstein's Deconstruction of Traditional Philosophy," where fanciful interpretations constitute faith in the very 'private language' that Wittgenstein argues against.[205] But it also constitutes one way to articulate what *it's like* to take in the *Investigations*, an activity that, in its attention to the grammar of reading and its spelling-out of particular instances of meaning-from-use, might be as necessary as defining Wittgenstein's place in the history of Western philosophy.

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[205] David Pears, ""Literalism and Imagination: Wittgenstein's Deconstruction of Traditional Philosophy," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* Vol. 10(1) (2002): 4.

In the spirit of this uncertainty about handling the clouds that can serve to structure an encounter with the *Investigations*—for that's one way that I see fruitful readerly interaction occurring: by finding and bringing auras in and to the text, and then letting them flourish, harden, disintegrate, etc.—I'm struck by the ease with which remarks on the *Investigations*' kinship to psychoanalysis have been folded into critical thinking on Wittgenstein. For Pears,

> [the] treatment of the mistakes…of other philosophers is often called 'therapeutic.' For there is an obvious analogy between the origin and correction of these involuntary misunderstandings and the origin of emotional disorders and their cure by psycho-therapy.[206]

For Cavell, there is no direct statement of analogy per se—that would be out of keeping with his atmospherics—but there is a push toward the results of health and something akin to the spirit, aided by the force of Freud and psychoanalysis. At the conclusion of "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," Cavell discusses the only *relative* pitfalls of "discipleship," saying:

> I do not see that the faults of explicit discipleship are more dangerous than the faults which come from subjection to modes of thought…whose origins are unseen…and which therefore create a different blindness inaccessible in other ways to cure. Between control by the living and control by the dead there is nothing to choose.
>
> Because the breaking of such control is a constant purpose of the later Wittgenstein, his writing is deeply practical and negative, the way Freud's is. And like Freud's therapy, it wishes to prevent understanding which is unaccompanied by inner change. Both of them as intent upon unmasking the defeat of our real need in the face of…fantasies ("pictures") which we cannot escape.[207]

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[206] Pears 4.
[207] Cavell "Availability" 72.

My point is not that psychoanalysis is absent from the *Investigations* nor that I did not struggle with an ‘irresistible inclin[ation]’ to shuttle over to Freud during my readings of this work in order to firm up some glimmers that were difficult to maintain.[208] It’s rather to ask whether we can admit to the difficulty of simultaneously holding our desire for something primitive (the fruit of attending to language on a use-by-use basis) and our need to use codified discursive forms to guide us along the path that first desire irregularly carves. Psychoanalysis can play a cubic role, providing narrative and theoretical containment; outside of the therapeutic space it *can’t help* but play such a role, and is thus almost always bound up with the dawning light/out-of-the-cave picture.

For me, quiet cries inhabit the *Investigations*—-living not in the text but through it—-cries such as:

- I want an identity
- The fantasy of one-to-one correspondence is powerful
- I want my body and my mind to know each other
- It is difficult to know one’s own objects
- I want to imagine physical objects in the place of other ones
- I don’t know what direction I’m pointing toward
- I want to find health via language
- I miss God

Despite their apparent kinship to those we associate with the generic analysand, I don’t hear these cries as Oedipal ones; they don’t suggest resolution by attunement to private

[208] Wittgenstein *Investigations* 86.

psychic language via the recognition of another. They are *like* Oedipal cries at the level of the sentence, but not within the surrounding context of their use.

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I think we would do well to consider ourselves the creators as well as the receivers of the darkness-giving-way-to-light picture of the arrival of wakefulness and vision, and to slightly dim the bright lights of consciousness, and quietly lighten a corner of the cave. This might allow us to spend more time where we know life exists, and to speak about the shapes that float in the middle of language, between the oppressive and imagined extremes. Our language has a being beyond us; it will not submit to our searches, and I see the *Investigations* as knowing and enacting that.

I am reminded of the peculiar rhetorical tenor of Wittgenstein's preface, and its difference from the body of the *Investigations* themselves. "If my remarks do not bear a stamp which marks them as mine,--I do not wish to lay any further claim on them as my property."[209] Given his remarks-to-come on the roles that the pictures of "labeling," "stamping" and "impressing upon" can play in the concoction of certainty, it's a striking group of words, and an ambiguous one. But perhaps it's worth recalling that "impressions" function as much in the *Investigations* as the hazy senses of things that we wish to codify without back-up as the results of stamping activity: the shapes pressed into a physical substance that leave a permanent marker of some kind of presence.

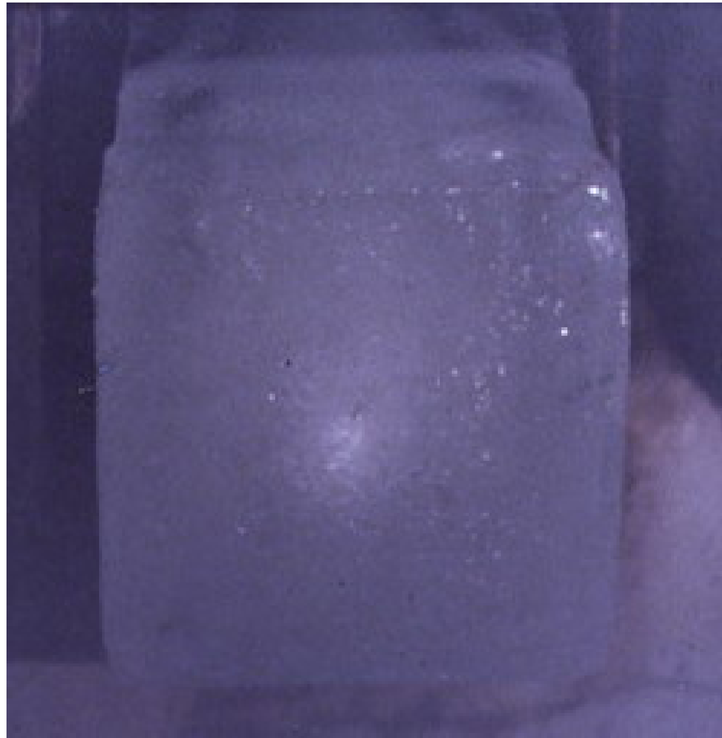
An impression, therefore, is both a cube and a cloud.

[209] Wittgenstein *Investigations* x.

2. Work Done

"There is a force in observation in which the observer gains a power over the object;
and the more patient is the observation within its stillness,
the greater is the force that accumulates toward a later action."[210]
Robert Beavers

What James asks of us is not to add too much to experience through hypothetical considerations, and also not to mutilate it in its solid elements.[211]
Henri Bergson



Ice block, *Work Done*

In the opening image of Beavers's *Work Done* (1972/1999), shot in Florence and the Alps, a block of ice juts out from a dark vault in a stone wall. The front surface of the ice is centered in the frame, an angled ajar door, to its side, helping us read the fact of receding deep space in the darkness behind it. With gleaming, slightly rounded corners,

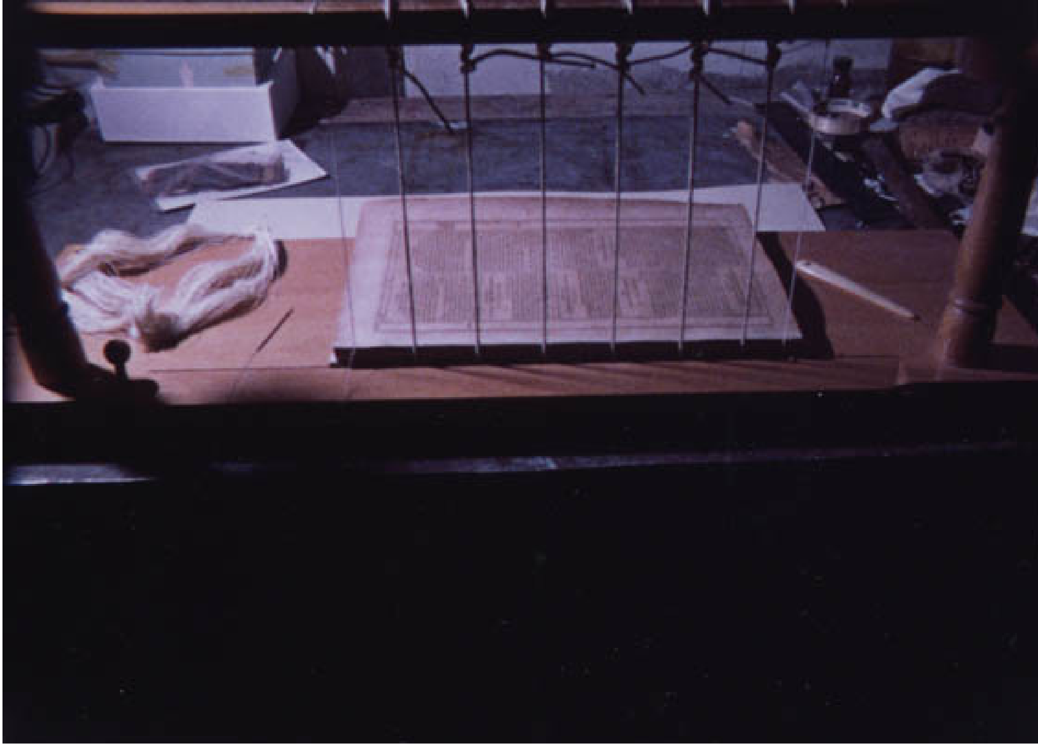
[210] Robert Beavers, *Untitled (Vienna Aphorisms),*Temenos Archive, 5.
[211] Henri Bergson, "On the Pragmatism of William James," *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Mineola: Dover, 2007) 179.

the ice block exceeds its protected chamber, shooting out from the wall, a reminder of its latent capacity to melt. But in the present tense of the shot, its solidity is secure. In the shots that follow, the ice block appears variously as square and cube, in shifting combinations with the right angles of both screen and cut-out mattes that frame and block out aspects of the image. The receding planes of the ice block are alternately visible and obscured due to camera position, distance, and the interruption by mattes lodged in the camera compendium.

In this way the ice, while central, is an element in a larger field of investigation of the cinematic representation of three-dimensions that unfolds in the first minutes of the film, as we encounter a range of doors and openings: the locked doors and open doorways of the surrounding vault pace, the small wall opening from which the ice juts out, and the "doorways" of both aperture and compendium that are perceptible not directly but via the introduction of a new visual plane created by moving mattes that indicate an entirely different spatial register from the one of the photographed interior. This shallow plane harkens backward, away from the screen – toward a chamber, another vault, containing both the interior body of the camera and the fact of the filmmaker's own head, that connect it to the eyes and mind that captured the image.

Work Done is a composite of several distinct locations/events in and around Florence: in addition to the ice vault, a mountainside location with running water, a pile of cobblestones on a street, a forest where trees are cut down, a bookbindery where an antique volume is repaired, and a restaurant where Florentine blood pancakes are fried. Shifting colored filers heighten the exquisite beauty of the natural settings and distinguish

them from the urban images, as Beavers intensifies the blues and greens of the Alps and the water and sky above and below.



Bookbinding, *Work Done*

"Like many of Beavers' films, *Work Done* is based on a series of textural transformative equivalences: the workshop and the field, the book and the forest, the mound of cobblestones and a distant mountain,"[212] J. Hoberman has noted. Indeed, transformation marks not only the material processes occurring within a single context—the turning of pages into a book, or blood into a circular pancake, but functions as a through-line connecting the separate worlds.

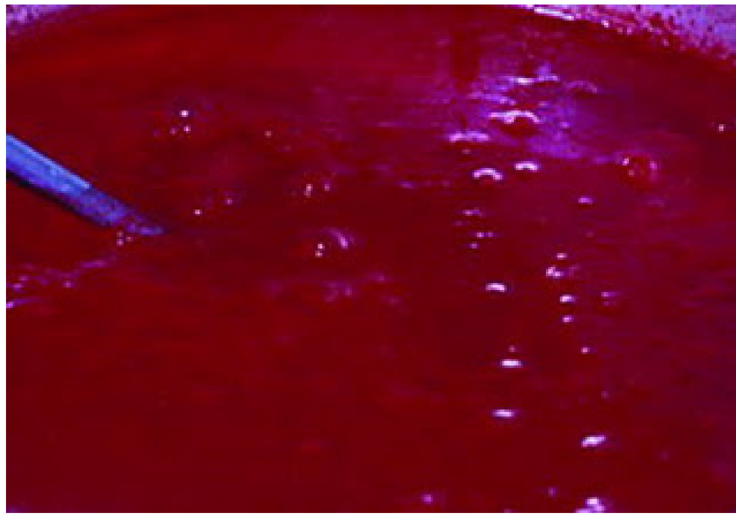
[212] J. Hoberman, "Renaissance Man: Robert Beavers's Spirit of a Vanished Age" *Village Voice*, March 5, 2002.

The Alps filtered through color, *Work Done*

Beavers says, “I began with an image of a block of ice, then went to the transformation of the solid element in the next image, which was a river. Then I filmed the cutting of trees, followed by the binding of a book. Each object was seen in itself and the unity was implied. In the first version, I did not intercut any of the scenes until the last element, the blood, is introduced and then I intercut with all of the earlier elements except the ice. It was as if I were saying that it needed all of these images to represent the ice in the film. This is one way of seeing it.”[213] The morphology Beavers describes resonates with Zen Master Thich Nhaht Hanh’s concept of “interbeing” (also echoed in his use of the word “intercut”), which proposes the freedom gained by training ourselves to perceive the reality of connectedness: “If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential

[213] Tony Pipolo, “An Interview with Robert Beavers,” *Millennium Film Journal*. (Nos. 32/33 Fall 1998) 11.

for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are. 'Interbeing' is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix 'inter-' with the verb 'to be,' we have a new verb, inter-be."[214]



A vat of blood, *Work Done*
C.S. Peirce: "[W]hat a thing means is simply what habits it involves…To see what this principle leads to, consider in the light of it such a doctrine as that of transubstantiation."[215]

Beavers's invocation of the transition from ice block to body of water (in his words, "the transformation of the solid element") in *Work Done* also hums with Pragmatic potential (fitting since, as James reminds us, "Pragmatism" comes from the Greek *pragma*, which means action or work). Indeed, both James and Peirce find right angles and "solids" particularly useful in their own philosophical investigations; objects alternately hard, sharp, and clear, whether cubes, gems, or crystals, show up frequently. For Peirce, the dilemma of *How to Make Our Ideas Clear* (the title of his 1878 essay)

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[214] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step* (New York: Bantam, 1992) 54.
[215] Charles Sanders Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," *The Essential Peirce Vol. 1*, Ed. Nathan Houser, Christian J. W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 126.

involves un-doing an old philosophical model that correlates precise definition with clarity of idea. “It's now time to formulate a method of attaining a more perfect clearness of thought.”[216] Like Wittgenstein, Peirce refuses the old “gems of logic” but does not dismiss the search for clarity. He proposes that it be found, radically and alternatively, not in static and authoritative abstract principle and definition, but in a vision of plasticity and potential, one grounded in action, experience, and the specific. Truth, then, is bound in time; like Wittgenstein’s “use,” we can see it when we look at a fact – of language or belief – in action. It is only in such a context that meaning is known; an object is not hard until it is tested, acted upon. An idea is known by its effects, and Peirce illustrates this by invoking our assumptions about what it means for a thing to be enduringly and factually hard—a simultaneous deepening of his attack on the false certainty of philosophy’s “gems of logic.”

> Let us illustrate this rule by some examples; and, to begin with the simplest one possible, let us ask what we mean by calling a thing hard. Evidently that it will not be scratched by many other substances. The whole conception of this quality, as of every other, lies in its conceived effects. There is absolutely no difference between a hard thing and a soft thing so long as they are not brought to the test. Suppose, then, that a diamond could be crystallised in the midst of a cushion of soft cotton, and should remain there until it was finally burned up. Would it be false to say that that diamond was soft? This seems a foolish question, and would be so, in fact, except in the realm of logic. There such questions are often of the greatest utility as serving to bring logical principles into sharper relief than real discussions ever could. In studying logic we must not put them aside with hasty answers, but must consider them with attentive care, in order to make out the principles involved. We may, in the present case, modify our question, and ask what prevents us from saying that all hard bodies remain perfectly soft until they are touched, when their hardness increases with the pressure until they are scratched.

[216] Peirce 125.

> Reflection will show that the reply is this: there would be no falsity in such modes of speech.[217]

Peirce's analysis captures the uncanny way that pragmatism values the imagination (in great contrast with the colloquial usage of 'pragmatic'): not with an arbitrary embrace of any view of truth, but by challenging logic to test its claims in the present tense of a linguistic utterance, or a thought, and to locate truth in its case-by-case uses, ever coming-into-being rather than already there to be dug up and found. Art, then, has everything to do with pragmatism, as Bergson suggests in his stress on *invention* in discussing William James: "We invent the truth to use reality, as we create mechanical devices to utilize the forces of nature. It seems to me one could sum up all that is essential in the pragmatic conception of truth in a formula such as this: *while for other doctrines a new truth is a discovery, for pragmatism it is an invention*."[218]

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When the Austrian Film Museum presented a week-long retrospective of Beavers's films in 2010, the Albertina Museum, just two floors above in the same building, hosted a Michelangelo exhibition—"The Drawings of a Genius." It reminded me of Mrs. Hodges's lesson about the special multiplicity of the Renaissance artist—someone who could be poet, painter, and musician all at once. Not only is the spectrum of Beavers's engagement and inspiration vast—including sculpture, architecture, painting, philosophy, and poetry—but he's explicit about his motivating desire "for the projected image to have the same force of awakening sight as any other great image." As we know, avant-garde cinema presents challenges to the markets and discourses of art: offering not

[217] Peirce 132.
[218] Bergson183.

objects but time-bound projected light, its masterpieces largely unknown and its geniuses rarely inscribed in our books of common culture. As the final screening ended in Vienna, applause persisted, and Beavers rose and simply bid the audience farewell, saying, "We go onward." It was clear that Beavers had reached his spectators, and that it was time to keep moving.

Earlier that day, Beavers had met with a small group of students over coffee and tea at Friedl Kubelka's School for Independent Film. He pulled a square striped with bands of transparent color out of a small filter box. The students leaned in and marveled at this tiny graphic object responsible for luminous fields of projected color. "I have a question," one student asked. "How do you get the images to fly off the screen?" She was referring to the borderless exits and entrances of images into realms of black that function as primary transitional elements in many of Beavers's films. "It's quite simple," he said, orienting his Bolex toward them. "I simply turn the lens turret while the camera is filming." "Have you ever seen anyone else do this?" the student wondered. "Yes," Beavers replied, immediately and with a modest smile, neglecting to tell the students that he had been the first.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Incubators

The night sky, with the rhythm of a language,
urging connection to come forward out of its roomy and uncontaminated vat.[219]
Ann Lauterbach

SPECTACLE ON A GREEN LAWN

The sun went down in June of 2008, and Robert Beavers offered spare guidance to the 200 pilgrims who had gathered in the remote mountains of Arcadia in the Peloponnese to watch *Orders III-V* of the American filmmaker Gregory Markopoulos' 80-hour *Eniaios*. Beavers, organizer of the three-night screening event called Temenos, also a filmmaker, and Markopoulos' long-time partner, invoked the Greek god of healing Asclepios. Ailing visitors seeking a cure slept inside the god's sanctuary in a state of *enkoimesis*, or incubation. The next morning, a priest interpreted the resulting dreams and found in them the counsel of the god. Cured visitors thanked Asclepios by tossing gold into a fountain or returning later bearing altars, statues and replicas of once-afflicted organs. Markopoulos (1928-1992) conceived of the spacing among the flickering images in *Eniaios* in the hopes of nurturing Asclepion incubation in his spectators.[220]

Six months earlier, Beavers had presented his own *Pitcher of Colored Light* (2007) and a reel from *Eniaios IV* at the Views from the Avant-Garde program of the New York Film Festival—my first encounter with the work of both artists—and the impressions left on me were so distinct that I had found my way to Greece with little rationale beyond the beckoning force of those images. I knew almost nothing about

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[219] Ann Lauterbach, *The Night Sky: Writings on the Poetics of Experience* (New York: Viking, 2005*)* 50.
[220] He "imagine[d] himself a member of an emergent, select order of psychic healers…possessing the skill to subliminally plumb the pre-verbal mysteries of an archaic past," wrote Kirk Winslow in "Intergalactic Trance-Migration." *Millennium Film Journal*. (Nos. 32/33 Fall 1998) 79-80.

Markopoulos' films, and Beavers' brief mention of Asclepios on the opening Temenos evening offered a welcome structure with which to contain the stimulations of the coming days. I reached back to a dream from the night before, my first in Greece, and saw that incubation had begun.

I had dreamt of an egg-shaped man, a New Yorker, TV producer, and hustler, whose seductions I could only partially resist. He had the oversized and suited body of Wallace Stevens, and a never-ending apartment of jewel-colored rooms. My feelings about this man were mixed: the old-fashioned aura of show-biz around him struck me as corrupt, but time alone in his apartment led me to gather the possibility of his depths. I learned that he had spent time in Paris as a young man – in snapshots he was tan and thin, dashing in a white uniform. And after a nap and a face-washing (all my make-up went down the drain), I met him uptown at a semi-circular leather booth for brandy. In the final moments of the dream, he created a wild spectacle in the middle of a green park lawn.

He had assembled a bouquet of golf clubs, and attached to the top of each a spray of colored feathers, mimicking a blossom. At the last minute a woman searched for a dark blue feather—the tableau of colors was not correctly balanced, and the addition of blue to one corner of the bouquet-top fixed the composition. And then a handful of children helped send the bouquet into the air; it grew bigger according to my lifted vantage point in the sky. The egg-shaped man was a spectacle-maker. He had launched the feather-flowers for the pleasure of the children.

Like an analysand's first dream, this one was a collage of prefiguration: the picture of a color spectacle in the sky over a lawn (the Temenos screening situation

itself); the idea of cleansing and purification rituals (the face-washing, nap and brandy) necessary, according to the conventions of Asclepion mythology, to prepare for the incubatory dream-state; a deep ambivalence about submitting to a masterful figure whose visionary powers, creative bravura, and maleness are inextricably bound; and a wish for involvement in the creative act (the woman's blue feather addition) beyond the position of worshipful spectatorship.

THE FACILITATING FRAME

As *Order III* wound through the projector, local children arrived at the grassy clearing prepared by volunteers earlier that week, mowed and strewn with red bean bags. The children sat close to the screen (stored with a local carpenter since the 2004 Temenos event, and then reassembled, painted and tethered to the ground), and erupted into spastic laughter at the sight of red- and blue-suited art pair Gilbert and George, featured just before a series of portraits of artists and patrons –painter David Hockey, art historian Daniel Henry Kahnweiler, surrealist Leonor Fini, dealer Hans Schlegel, ballerina Marcia Haydée, sculptor Barbara Hepworth, Zurich café proprietress Hulga Zumsteg and poet Edouard Roditi – in Markopoulos' "Genius" and "European portraits" reels. The laughter followed the flashing pattern of the images: frame-long glimpses of Gilbert and George (two lips divided by a seam; a hand in a pocket; a shiny button on matte fabric; a curly parenthetical point of black hair resting over a white arc of collar) catalyzed eruptions that bloomed and died down in rhythm with the silent screen. Like these, many *Eniaios* images are only one frame (1/24th of a second) long, and all are bracketed and isolated from each other by intervening lengths of black and white leader. The unit of the single frame and the still image were preoccupying, essential elements of cinema for

Markopoulos: "It is, perhaps, a fallacy to believe that film is constant movement."[221]

A central figure in the American avant-garde in the 1950s and 60s (in addition to filmmaking, he published extensively in Jonas Mekas' *Film Culture*), Markopoulos grew discontent with American screening and distribution conditions, and he and Beavers left the U.S. for Europe in 1967. He had wanted to live in Europe since his first visits to Greece and Italy in the 1950s, and the two spent the next several decades there in self-imposed exile. Markopoulos refused screenings, removing his films from distribution and demanding the excision of a chapter about his work from P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film*.[222] In 1980 organizers cancelled a screening of the *Illiac Passion* (his 1967 interpretation of *Prometheus Bound* starring Andy Warhol and Jack Smith) at the National Gallery in Athens when they learned of the film's substantial nudity. Another screening in Tripoli similarly fell apart. So Markopoulos walked out of Lyssaraia, his Arcadian ancestral village, and found the spot where his films were meant to be seen. "We chose a site surrounded by terraced fields, suspended in a sparkling atmosphere with a view that reaches to Olympia and the Ionian coast," Beavers recalled.[223]

Markopoulos had written about his idea for the Temenos during the 1970s (*temenos* is an ancient Greek word meaning "a piece of land set apart for the worship of a god" or "sacred grove"); it was to function as an open-air theater as well as an archive and library for his and Beavers' work.[224] Discovery of the site freed him to conceive of his monumental final film, the silent, 35mm *Eniaios* (meaning "unity" and "uniqueness").

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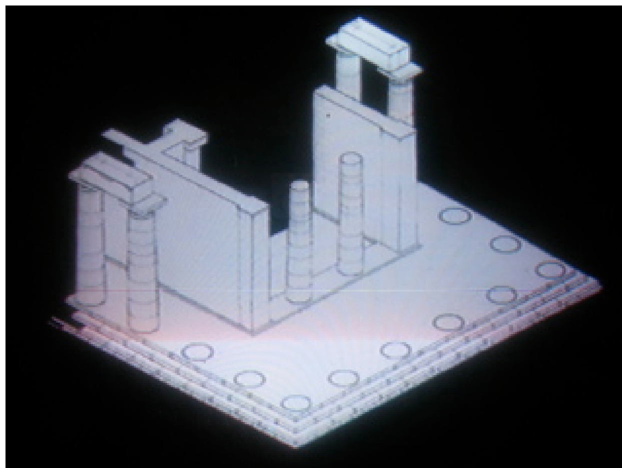
[221] Gregory Markopoulos, "The Intuition Space." *Millennium Film Journal*. (Nos. 32/33 Fall 1998) 72.
[222] It was re-incorporated into the 2002 edition.
[223] Tony Pipolo, "An Interview with Robert Beavers," *Millennium Film Journal*. (Nos. 32/33 Fall 1998) 31.
[224] "An Interview…" 31.

The tiny town of Loutra, where Temenos pilgrims stayed, is known for its therapeutic springs. According to Asclepion mythology, purification rituals prepare cure-seekers for the incubatory dream-state.



Temenos 2008:
He had launched the flowers for the pleasure of the children.

Made of re-edited footage from all his previous films and meant to supercede them as an integrated epic work, *Eniaios* contains 100 individual titles in 22 cycles, or orders, of three to five hours each. Markopoulos spent the final decade of his life working on the project, created exclusively for the Temenos site; it was fully edited and notated when he died in 1992, but not yet printed. He felt he had seen *Eniaios* by winding through its 170 reels.

In 1980, a handful of foreign guests and dozens of visitors from the region, including six priests and their families, attended the first open-air Temenos screening—a "symbolic effort in [the] direction" of Markopoulos' ultimate vision.[225] There was neither running water nor public buses; the "only existing road was one that could make you fear for your life, or at least for the life of your car," Beavers said. Early September screenings continued annually until 1987 (when Beavers and Markopoulos turned their attentions to archiving and preservation), followed by the *Eniaios* premiere (*Orders I* and *II*) in 2004 and the second *Eniaios* screening in June 2008.[226]

On the night of our arrival, townspeople welcomed us in Lyssaraia with grilled meat, bow-shaped cookies and local wine. Diagonal sunrays shot out of a gathering of peach-tipped clouds like a Divine Mercy painting, and the sky was so low and at ease among the rows of receding mountains that the sunset appeared to rise out of the ground. The birthplace of Markopoulos' father, who emigrated to Toledo, OH, where Markopoulos was born (but spoke only Greek until age six), Lyssaraia has a winter population of 10, including one child and woman.

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[225] "An Interview…" 27.

[226] One copy of *Eniaios* exists; thus far, only the first five orders have been printed.

DIALOGUE IN BLACK AND WHITE

Each evening, two buses brought 150 Temenos pilgrims from Loutra (a tiny spa village known for its therapeutic natural springs where most of the foreign guests stayed) 20 km north to a mountaintop spot just outside Lyssaraia. We walked another kilometer on sweet-smelling, winding *monopati* down to the screening site as the sun shifted and set.

When projection began, the sky was dark but a handful of clouds still alert; later the sky blackened and stars replaced the clouds. Everything decomposed into a series of steps: in the die-down of an image a few frames long (followed immediately by black leader), I counted eight stages before my eyes registered true black. The falling of night, that fact that ushered in the start-up of projection, revealed its own stages under the auspices of the screen. And from the bus window I counted eight layers of receding mountains: they looked like paper cut-outs.

In the transition from white leader to black, the border of the screen disappeared and a flame chased after the receding light; then the screen re-constituted itself, matching the tone and hue of the sky. At times, following a spell of white light, the edge of the screen shook with paroxysms; it undulated, coronated with a neon halo. And the screen was liable to slide as well; its transparent, superimposed twin accompanied my eyes into fully black regions of the sky. But *Eniaios* is also literally embedded with a black and white dialogue: Markopoulos encoded titles into the film by giving each of the 24 letters of the Greek alphabet a numerical measure, translatable into a corresponding number of frames of leader (alpha is one frame, beta is two, etc.). The title letters alternate in color: the first is white, the second black.

Eniaios offers a kind of primal-scene access, usually denied, to the dynamics between the acrobatics of the screen itself and the image contained within it. The separation between images makes possible glimpses of perceptual overlap and bleeding free from their prescribed presence in the form of cross-dissolves and superimpositions; instead the eyes, screen and sky conspire to create these effects.[227]

Walking to the site on the second evening, I stared at the setting sun for too long, and a constellation of dots with uneven, cartoonish edges flew before my eyes. It looked just like a film I had seen before—*Scherzo* (1939) by Norman McLaren. I recalled suddenly that I had seen the word *scherzo* written on the side of a purple and yellow polka-dot box in the window of a closed shop in Megalopolis earlier that day. The box and word had been deposited, but disappeared until the sunspots retrieved them along with McLaren's tiny film.

THE NEW SPECTATOR

On the precipice of the first four-hour screening, Beavers had given us permission to fall asleep. Let the mind wander, he said. Do not worry about retaining the images. Brief spells of cinematic snoring had never been so acceptable—simply part of the Temenos landscape. One evening, I sat next to a woman who snored for three hours. When the last reel ended, she promptly awoke and turned to me: "There were a lot fewer people snoring tonight, weren't there?"

But I was hesitant to believe Beavers. I kept running lists of fleeting *Eniaios* images, attempts to fix them into permanence alternating with self-instructions to release

[227] The few superimpositions in *Eniaios* come from in-camera editing.

control and observations about the impulse to bring language into the process of image-intake: *Woman in blue seated in blue chair, with something on her lap that's black and white - Stop naming the image, identifying it! - NAVY is all I will say - Bald head turns, radical black stripe of eyeglasses across side of head - Woman seated under Chagall in gold frame with pink tulips and white rims on table – Forced to engage with a perceptual unit that's not the unit of the edited piece of film - Jewels: the window portals, the short images – Big Dipper just dropped! - Relationship b-w revelation of the single image and coming into being the entire film - Amoeba angel fresco? swaddled in lots of white leader, vv short.*

Daytime conversations circled around comparisons of nighttime attention: Did you close your eyes? Fall asleep? Look at the stars? On the first evening a British book indexer explained wild almond tree grafting (hybridizes well with peaches and apricots) and olive tree terracing to me as we drove to the screening site. Afterwards he looked profoundly depleted. "Are you disappointed?" I asked. "No, he said. But it was arduous." Beavers acknowledged "questioning where the border is between intensity and exhaustion"; we all shared a sense of the labor of the viewing experience, though it led some to crumple (and to locate the problem in themselves – as a failure of taste, vision, or understanding) and electrified others. Beavers was delighted in the attention he'd witnessed over the last two days, he said on the third—but disappointed by the distracted video bootleggers, who added, without permission, an array of glowing LCD screens to the starry screening site.

Legends of Markopoulos—his ego, mastery, and gigantic vision—floated, vaguely threatening, over Loutra. When Beavers expressed polite disapproval of the

stealth videotaping, a fantasy of boiling Markopoulos (he would have grabbed the cameras and thrown them on the ground!) developed as a comparative foil. When Beavers returned to the screening site three times on one evening, to pick up straggling walkers and recover the briefcase and passport he'd left behind, someone suggested Markopoulos continued to control the Temenos site from above, keeping Beavers there.

In the end I found the anticipated specter of Markopoulos' ego flimsy and irrelevant. He had created a spectacle so thoroughly committed to ephemerality and subjective vision that I felt perfectly safe receiving what Beavers called the "gift" of Temenos without contingent pressure to worship a new god. I never sensed that Markopoulos, like the Asclepion priests, instructed his pilgrims on the proper thank you gift (*iatra*) for a cure. Instead, all signs pointed *away* from the object—the thing represented in the film image, the artist himself, as well as his intention—and toward an encouragement to *use* Temenos as freely and particularly as one could. An encounter with *Eniaios* is one with a lifetime of vision, spanning the five decades of Markopoulos' film career and spread across two lives (since Markopoulos' death, Beavers has thoroughly dedicated himself to manifesting the Temenos). Contact with, and personal acclimation to, such long swaths of vision-in-formation is one of the primary Temenos gifts, and perhaps following one's own use of its equally lengthy aftermath is one kind of reciprocity.[228] But there is no rush to announce results.

I dreamt of a female artist, one with meager talents, preparing to make Christmas

[228]Per Lewis Hyde in *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, the livelihood of a gift is dependent on its ongoing circulation--it can't be hoarded, set aside, protected, or stopped, but must be continually folded back into movement. The medium of cinema, then, has great gift-giving potential; in the case of *Eniaios*, the flash-like encoding of imagery into spectators' minds facilitates one untraceable variety of gift-passage.

gifts. Soon she would order small circular pieces of wood: charms. In her world there is an appreciation for any form of creative output—even if the result is not art.

VIEWS FROM EPIDAURUS

Stories of sickness and cure floated around Loutra too. Slightly disoriented and far from home, bound by the shared journey, strangers-turning-to-friends traded intimate tales with ease: the survival of two heart attacks and a wildly incompetent doctor; the rapid decline of a close friend from metastasized cancer—no time for closure; the physically ill or emotionally limited spouse who did not come along on the Temenos trip; the discovery of therapy in the midst of a dusty marriage; the patient (this told by a therapist) who rejected every love object to avoid potential loss. P. Adams Sitney told a story of Maya Deren's response to fellow filmmaker Stan van der Beek's announcement that he had cancer. I'm so sorry, Deren said. I put a curse on you because you didn't wear a suit to my screening. She reversed the curse in a voodoo ceremony with spilled blood -- and van der Beek went into remission for the next 15 years.

Like Markopoulos' screening site, the Asclepion sanctuary in the coastal town of Epidaurus was called a *temenos*. It was here that the sterile, paralyzed, broken and blind came, looking for a miracle. The Epidaurians believed Asclepios was born on the summit of Mt. Titthion (Greek for "nipple"), a mountain famous for its medicinal plants that graduated into the tranquil plains of his sanctuary—today a wide field of ruins and an archaeological museum featuring shards and reproductions of the thank-you statuaries left for the god.

Suffering pilgrims followed a series of preparatory steps prior to the climax of curative incubation: a walk along the Sacred Way, supplication at the feet of a statue of the god, purification at a fountain, sacrificial offering (an ox from the rich, fruit from the poor), and submission to priests and *paianists* who chanted hymns in order to open the soul to a visit from the god.

The cured recorded narratives of their Asclepion miracles on stone tablets; over 70 have survived:

> Pandharos the Thessalian had blemishes on his forehead. Whilst sleeping in the Abato [incubation room] he had a vision. The god wound a band around his brow. He ordered him to come out of the Abato, to remove the band and dedicate it to the temple. At daybreak he arose from his bed and removed the band. His forehead was completely clear. The blemishes were stuck to the band. Then he offered it to the temple.
>
> A certain woman from Messene, called Nikoboule, longed to have a child. She slept in the Abato and the god appeared in her dream holding a large snake. The snake slept with her. Inside a year the woman gave birth to two sons.[229]

Two days after the conclusion of the Temenos screening, I arrived in Epidaurus. I was looking for the very first image in the *Eniaios* "Dedication" reel, a close-up of the ruin-stones at the Pyre of Heracles resting on emerald green grass, but the grass under the Asclepion sanctuary fragments was parched and tan. A bus arrived in the parking lot, and I sat by an elderly priest. He studied a blue plastic bag and then folded it carefully into a single compact square, and spent the rest of the ride sneering at a young girl in white short-shorts who talked un-self-consciously on her phone behind us. "Po, po, po," he shook an irritable finger at her.

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[229] Angeliki Charitonidou, *Epidaurus: The Sanctuary of Asclepios and the Museum.* (Athens, Clio Editions: 1978) 14.

I returned to Nafplion, the harbor town with marble streets I had chosen for its proximity to the Asclepion ruins, for a final night. After the Temenos weekend, Nafplion was barely tolerable, designed for tourists looking for encounters with new varieties of tchotchkies – whimsical neon daisies with smiling faces, Victorian marionettes, and marbleized candles shaped like gods. I fell asleep to the flickers of an unfamiliar Mark Wahlberg movie, broken to pieces by a repeating Bacardi ad.

That night I dreamt that I approached the two organizers of Views from the Avant-Garde (where less than a year ago I had first encountered Markopoulos' and Beavers' work) as they stood at a circular table. I suggested that next year's program cover boldly feature the acronym made from the event's initials: "VAG." They looked at me blankly, and I slapped them simultaneously on their backs, attempting to diffuse the tension and condescend all at once. "Alright then, we'll find a good picture of a robot and use that instead!" I said firmly and walked away.[230]

WRITING ON THE WALL

It was Ezra Pound, her former fiancé, who suggested to the Imagist poet and prose writer H.D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886-1961) that the fused serpent-thistle symbol mysteriously embossed on her imagination had Asclepion roots. Symbol of death and healing, a snake often accompanies the god in ancient images, twisted around his staff. H.D.'s private symbol—a coiled serpent and a thistle carved into two halves of a stone

[230] Filmmaker Su Friedrich may have had something similar in mind; after the announcement of the 2008 *Views* program, she wrote to the organizers chastising them for their ongoing failure to curate the work of more women. Her letter was widely circulated by email.

block—came to her in a dream, or "merely a flash of vision" (she wasn't sure which).[231] Born into a Moravian community in Bethlehem, PA, H.D. probed the mystical sources and circulations of her creative powers in *The Gift* (written 1941-43), and spent a lifetime de-coding and transmitting personal symbols and signposts in poems, memoirs and novels. Pound first suggested "H.D" as a moniker, and it stuck; Doolittle said it provided a useful out from the pun of her last name.

H.D. and Markopoulos were entwined in my mind, a picture sealed by their joint allegiance to Asclepios. Like Markopoulos, H.D. was an encoder; she fantasized about brains-as-telegraphs: "We want receiving centers for dots and dashes."[232] Both American experimenters who spent much of their lives in Europe, the two are bound by a primal identification with Greece as an originary creative source (H.D.'s entire corpus engages Hellenic mythology and literature); concerns with incubation, sleep and cure; and devotion to film (H.D. wrote regularly for the journal *Close Up* and participated in the experimental filmmaking group POOL in the 1920s and 30s).

When Beavers told me that Stan Brakhage once gave Markopoulos H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* as a gift, my desire to find her, to set the two artists side-by-side, hardened into a necessity. I liked the idea of metabolizing Temenos under the feminine guidance of Doolittle. And it was just a day's trip from Nafplion, in her room at the Grand Hotel D'Angleterre et Belle Venise on the Ionian island Corfu, that H.D. experienced a life-altering vision of projected "writing on the wall" in April 1920. She saw a sequence of

[231] H.D. *Tribute to Freud*. (New York: New Directions, 1974) 64.
[232] *Notes on Thought and Vision* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1982) 26.

"I say,/take colour;/break white into red,/into blue/into violet/
into green;/I say,/take each separately,/the white will slay,"
H.D. wrote in *Magician [Master]*.

forms so compelling and stymieing that she sought Freud's help in unraveling it: a soldier's head, a mystic chalice, a lamp in the form of the tripod at Delphi, a cluster of tiny creatures, the goddess Niké ascending an illuminated ladder, and a sun disk from which a man reached out to pull Niké into the light. Freud deemed the picture-writing a "dangerous symptom" and ultimately read it "as a desire for union with my mother," said H.D.[233] She was proud to present her images to Freud, to behold the co-mingling of the poet and the psychoanalyst's researches and gifts. "Here is this hieroglyph of the unconscious or subconscious of the Professor's discovery and life-study, the hieroglyph in operation before our very eyes."[234]

I think of H.D. and Markopoulos as kindred protectors of the poetics of separation. They prevent overlap and merger between discrete images, and know the importance of singling out frames, symbols and colors in the process of divining, naming and re-ordering one's own objects, psychic and material. H.D. loved the semi-circle of precious antiquities on Freud's desk, gods, goddesses and figurines, each a sharply-shaped representative of a unique mythological constellation; she was captivated by the idea of hieroglyphics—pictures that could be unlocked and hold their reliable forms at once. "I say,/take colour;/break white into red,/into blue/into violet/into green;/I say,/take each separately,/the white will slay," H.D. wrote in *Magician [Master]*. She called her poems "little boxes." (Pound called his failed early poems "stale creampuffs.")

And although the landscape around Lyssaraia is dry and brittle—covered in tall fawn-colored, thistle-like vegetation—it is full of discrete nuggets of moisture: honey, olives, grapes, figs, pears, plums, and blackberries. Stretches of bee boxes line the road,

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[233] *Tribute* 44.
[234] *Tribute* 47.

rows of brightly painted wooden cubes; and shrines, miniature steepled churches crowded with candles and icons, appear as mountainside markers of death. Markopoulos kept his *Eniaios* images separate, "little boxes" protected from each other by stretches of black and white leader.

BED OF STARS

The overnight boat to Corfu offered a spectacle of sleeping arrangements: outdoors, on deck, bodies curled in frozen embrace with pets and children; indoors, in a communal room, spread blankets demarcated familial territory (it was crowded, though, so an oversized German couple and a gaggle of Italian model-types tolerated overlap); and private rooms featured lacquered green and red doors. At 4am, I took a walk and discovered the back half of the boat was for rich people—a round royal blue reception area led to flashy watch shops and all-night lounges. Near the stern I found a dirty porthole that looked out onto a house-size tangle of nautical materials, metals and knobs in every shade of orange and yellow. The churning of fresh, flat waves, produced over and over at a mechanical pace, surrounded the entire ship in a meter-thick border of foam.

I arrived at the Hotel Konstantinoupolis in Corfu Town at 8 a.m. and fell asleep immediately in a room permanently stamped with the memory of cigarettes. I dreamt that a boy announced: "a bed of stars."

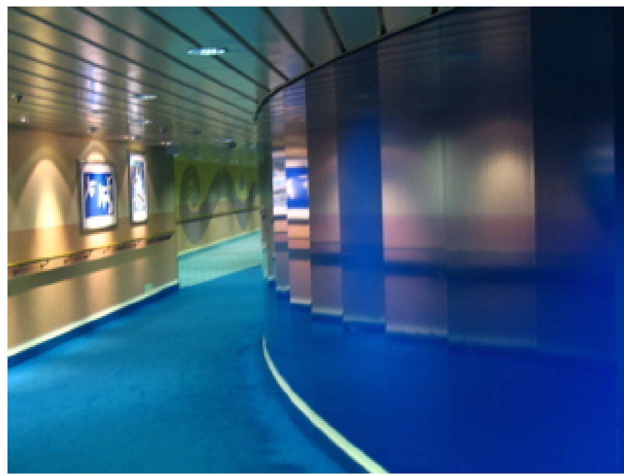
In 1913, the Italian psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi wrote to Freud from the Grand Hotel D'Angleterre et Belle Venise in Corfu, where H.D. saw writing on the wall seven years later. He'd been struggling with sleeping disorders but his cure was underway.

"More than half of my stay in Corfu is over, and I think I can affirm from now on that I can successfully take home a quite considerable reinvigoration as well as the conviction that my nightly sleep disturbances will have to be ameliorated by an intervention on the turbinate bones of my nose. I was naturally much more receptive to the beauties of the island on the days which followed nights on which I slept well. I thought of you countless times and wished I could have enjoyed, in an accustomed manner by your side, the beauties..."[235]

"[T]here is no faith and no hope/without sleep," H.D. wrote in *Magician [Master]*. She incubated famously for curative purposes—on the Scilly Isles off the coast of Cornwall in 1919, where she healed from a constellation of war-time traumas (the deaths of her brother and father and the dangerous labor she survived while giving birth to daughter Perdita) and produced the aphoristic *Notes on Thought and Vision*; in the Corfu hotel room, where she saw writing on the wall; and at 19 Berggasse in Vienna, where she reclined on Freud's couch five times a week in 1933 and 1934 during two series of psychoanalysis. H.D. dedicated her recollection of the Vienna period, *Writing on the Wall*, to "SIGMUND FREUD, *blameless physician,"* borrowing Homer's term for Asclepios from the *Iliad*.

Stilia at the four-star Hotel Bella Venezia on Zambeli Street was delighted by my interest in the hotel and, though she hadn't heard of Hilda Doolittle, pleased to learn of a noted American associated with Corfu. (She was also politely appalled that I was staying at the shabbier Konstantinopoulos: "I assume next time you'll be lodging here?") She

[235] Eva Brabant et al., eds. *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sandor Ferenczi*. (Cambridge: Belknap, 1994) 476.



Sandor Ferenczi wrote to Freud from the Grand Hotel D'Angleterre et Belle Venise:
"More than half of my stay in Corfu is over, and I think I can affirm from now on that I can successfully take home a quite considerable reinvigoration as well as the conviction that my nightly sleep disturbances will have to be ameliorated by an intervention on

the turbinate bones of my nose."

regretted to inform me that H.D.'s Belle Venise had been destroyed, bombed by the Germans in 1943. As consolation, Stilia served me an iced Nescafé frappe and took a framed bill from the original hotel, soiled and torn, off the wall so I could inspect it. We toured the back gardens and she wrote down all the flower names: *jacaranda (*slender blue bells*), glitsina* (heavy lilac-like cylinders), *contessa* (crepe paper blossoms). At the front reception desk, a single white rose floated in a low glass.

Flowers figured prominently in H.D.'s vision of intimate gift exchange, emblems of desire passed back and forth with those who shared her secret language and served as helpmates in her ongoing quest for accurate translation. "[V]iolets were laid on the pages of a paperbound copy of Euripedes' *Ion*, open on the table of my Corfu Hotel Belle Venise bedroom. It seemed a 'mystery' but Bryher"—the novelist Annie Winifred Ellerman, H.D.'s long-time companion and co-interpreter of the wall drawings—"must have left them," H.D. recalled in 1933.[236] She sent gardenias to Freud (his favorite) when he was in London exile in 1938; he offered her dark-leaved orange branches during one of their sessions.[237] In *Paint It Today*, H.D. recalled her mother's over-protection in the form of flowers: "she put morning glories through the string of every birthday parcel."[238]

Stilia remained hopeful: she sent me to the Corfu Literary Society to continue my search. I arrived and asked for the director, Mr. Papadatos; a man with an eye patch and a blue polo shirt paused and replied, expressionless, "you are speaking with him." The Literary Society would be of no use to me, he said. As I walked out I was heartened to

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[236] *Tribute* 167.
[237] Apparently Freud himself was not a strict Freudian.
[238] H.D. *Paint it Today*. (New York: NYU Press, 1992) 43.

discover a carved owl, the Society's emblem, on the front door. As a child, asked to keep quiet in her father's book-lined study (a room she identified with Freud's analytic room), H.D. was captivated by a stuffed snow-owl under a bell jar. In 1932, the painter Kenneth Macpherson—Bryher's gay husband and H.D.'s lover (the three operated as a family unit and together managed the film group POOL)—designed a bookplate for H.D. as a Christmas gift: an owl perched on a branch carved with her initials, encased in a dome of leaves. "The OWL is almost too occult to gaze at…I love it so," she said in gratitude.[239]

But I was vaguely ashamed by the literal—and in vain—approach I'd taken in my search for signs of H.D.'s presence on Corfu (had I expected the local news station to dig up archival footage of her 'writing on the wall'?), and by my naïve delight in finding shadows of her symbols. I took the owl on the Literary Society door as a sign–permission—to call off my search.[240] As H.D. plainly announced in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, "my sign-posts are not yours, but if I blaze my own trail, it may help to give you confidence …to get out of the murky, dead world of overworked emotions and thoughts."[241]

THE SEA GARDEN [242]

Down the hill from the gardens, forests and Doric temple ruins of the Mon Repos estate just above Corfu Town, I found a tall succulent plant with a grey stalk, its branches tiny s-curve offerings, younger and pale green, on the edge of an empty beach. A cactus,

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[239] Diana Collecott, "*Owl* note." *H.D.: Woman and Poet*. Michael King, Ed. (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1986) 143.

[240] When she could not locate Freud's favorite flowers, H.D. said, "but in imagination, at least, in the mist of a late afternoon, I could still continue a quest, a search. There might be gardenias somewhere." *Tribute* 11.

[241] *Notes* 24.

[242] The title of H.D.'s 1916 volume of poems: her first published book.

a pine tree and an olive tree crowded around it, and all of the forms leaned above the water in perfectly-edged profile. Inside the woods, vegetation was dense and tropical – dead weeping palm leaves and waxy fans – and coniferous all at once. All of the best forms had been gathered into one frame: the desert and sea and the tropical and temperate.

On the hilltop, the estate garden over-stimulated me; there was something intensely adorable (not *cute*, but worth loving) about it that I couldn't understand. It was not lush—but craggy, sharp, dry and old-fashioned. All the blooms were tight and tiny, the trees stout and arthritic. The roses were spaced far apart, rows bracketed by terracotta scalloped tiles; every flower had plenty of room. A marigold-colored mess spread out on the ground, a bright violet vine was speckled with red-petaled dots. The garden was the result of someone's vision. I thought of the filmmaker Marie Menken and the way she shot Dwight Ripley's Long Island garden in 1957, and saw for the first time what was required to make a film: show up with a movie camera, alone, in a place that makes you want to jump.

I had grown attached to a cloud of blossoms next to a hillside monastery in *Order V* of *Eniaios*, and decided later they were pink laurels, or rhododendrons. When I saw them again on both sides of a Mon Repos footpath, I tried to capture them with my camera. The results were disastrous—dilated digital blossom close-ups. There was nothing to retrieve.

I followed the path to the end of the grounds. Back on the street, violet-fuchsia flowering bushes were pruned into a continuous row of arches. A bus of precisely the same color passed underneath, and Mon Repos was gone.

INTOLERABLE RADIUM [243]

In *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H.D. tells of Lo-fu, a Ming Dynasty poet who studied an apple branch with profound concentration until he had memorized its every turn and shade. "Then he went inside and in his little cool room out of the sun he closed his eyes. He saw that branch but more clearly, more vividly than ever. That branch was his mistress now, his love."[244]

When, far from the shore, I pushed my head out from underwater at Paleokastritsa (H.D. visited in 1920, just before the hotel vision), my eyes opened to the sight of a hilltop tree I knew well, a thin conical pine from the last hour of the final Temenos projection.[245] I imagine the *Eniaios* images I am left with as lifesavers: partially dissolved gem-like slivers, already inside. Like the colored rock candies that Jacques Rivette's Céline and Julie trade mouth-to-mouth, they are facilitators of time travel and reminders of old secrets. I am grateful for the separation among the images in *Eniaios* because now they are mine.

Markopoulos drew a line around a generous field in the creation of *Eniaios* and the Temenos, one that included not only his projected film reels but the place and the journey and every register of time, including sleep. As any good magician or psychoanalyst knows, it's the deliberate chalking of a particular square that allows for the discovery of personal order and private mythology. And hence, on my final night, in

[243] "I say,/worship each separate;/no man can endure/ your intolerable radium," H.D. wrote in *Magician [Master].*
[244] *Notes* 44.
[245] Beavers: "The projected film image reaches deeply. It can remain with the spectator and awaken thoughts long after the actual screening." "*An Interview…*" 34.

Athens, everything wrapped up. *Living Golf* on CNN featured a tournament in Crete: an update of my first dream about Markopoulos the TV producer blasting blossoming golf clubs into the sky. And that night, I dreamt of pouring soap into a small hole in the ground; then I rinsed off under a spigot. Perhaps this phase of purification was complete.

CHAPTER SIX

A Conversation with Robert Beavers

1. ON PARTICULAR FILMS

RR: You've said that *Work Done* represented a shift in your approach, away from internal realities and toward the external world. I wondered if you could say more about this, whether the film came as a response to an intuitive desire to make the shift, or if the making of the film crystallized the desire to shift? What does it mean to be in greater contact with the outside?

RB: To be more specific, instead of speaking of the outside or the external world, I think one should maybe talk about objects, because in the decision and the direction that I found for filming *Work Done,* I concentrated on objects and beginning with the block of ice. Also related to that was how I filmed, and my choice was to bring the act of filming closer to the editing, to simplify the editing by trying to conceive of the order of the images as they would appear in the film during the filming. And that is quite different from all of my other work and what that meant for me in 1972, when I filmed, in Florence and Switzerland, it meant that I could not place creating the meaning through a later stage of editing. I intended to more consciously be aware of my way of seeing and filming, *during* the filming. And this was possible through the objects that I chose.

RR: Do you mean another mode of making could be split -- where there's a period of filming and then later a kind of making sense of and coming to consciousness about that?

RB: You have to remember that the films that I made before *Work Done* were *From the Notebook of* and *The Painting*. *From the Notebook of* is the culmination of that earlier

way of filmmaking which also is an organic process, but the editing after the filming plays a much more dominant role than in the first version of *Work Done*.

RR: You were attempting to shoot in the order that images would appear.

RB: Yes, and staying in relation to the object - not questioning how I can capture the reality of this object in the filming and in the choice of the order of shots of scenes, concentrating on the object. I thought about this much later, so this is not something I was thinking at the time, but it may have to do with what I was learning by seeing early Italian painting.

RR: How so?

RB: Because with the Italian Florentine painters or Tuscan painters - this is what used to be called "The Primitives," a long time ago - what is possible to see is their invention in how to show the visible world: how to show an object; how to show a foot standing on the ground, and what is so inspiring is their inventiveness and later, you know, it's not so visible because there's a whole rhetorical structure to what is being presented in the image so, in the early painters, sometimes it's difficult to look at them and appreciate them. When I look at Giotto, for instance, which I don't do very often, I can't always appreciate it. The first one that I could really appreciate was Piero della Francesca. But there were Sienese painters later who I could be giving as examples.

RR: So these are also attempts at representing the world in a pre-perspectival -

RB: No, but it's exactly at the, you could say at the cusp. So it's at that moment, yes, and there is a certain poetry in that - that is wonderful.

RR: So, you can feel that it [perspectival representation] is not a given yet.

RB: Right, right, exactly.

RR: You can feel the discovery of it, which is kind of amazing.

RB: Yes, yes. Florence and Sienna and Italy - that's a great gift that they can give for someone who is able to receive it, so I think that had some influence to some small degree. I was very involved with Leonardo's notebooks, also.

RR: Speaking of *From the Notebook of*, I think often with that film there's the temptation to assume that the "notebook structure" of the film is completely primary, in other words, that that was the leading motivation. I know you talked a bit before about something much more subtle and complicated having to do with relating the mattes to the lens and to sight. Am I right that it wasn't so much, "I want to create a film that looks like a notebook…," but that you were experimenting with the moving of the mattes and in so doing discovered this structure?

RB: Yes, I mean, I'm making a film, and so I'm interested primarily in what feels alive to me in filming. *The Notebook* was important; that is a very early film; it was filmed in 1971, which means I was twenty-two years old and it's a bit shaky. The technique is not really fully in place; it is experimental, in some ways, and I also had unfortunately problems with the film lab in the developing in Switzerland - for instance the temperature of the lights. But aside from that, it basically was a very important step for me, because it is the first film that I made where I knew I had to make a very, an important commitment in order to realize the film within my own daily existence at the time. Because of Gregory's own dedication to his work and the independence with which one lived, in the sense of - the central point of the day was surviving and nourishing one's own work. The best example of my use of the lens [was] the filming of the ice [in *Work Done*]. I think this is a very lovely use of the mattes because with that, but I think also in *From the*

Notebook of, I allowed myself to direct the light into the matte box as opposed to - usually it was used as a compendium to *prevent* light from entering and you would have this black area which could be used for superimpositions in *From the Notebook of*, for instance, or the earlier films. But in the filming of the ice, I did use artificial lighting because it was very dark and I allowed the light to come from behind and go onto the side of the matte that was facing the lens and so that was a simple accident, you know, first I saw that the light – I was having some difficulty making it dark – then I saw that the light went onto the matte and it created a haze, a light surface, instead of black, and then I developed this later also with *Sotiro*s, again, this catching the light on the matte, not just using it to block out the light.

RR: And what is that space where the ice is shot?

RB: It's a workshop, to make the ice, I would think for restaurants - I don't know what the ice was used for. But it had obviously had been there quite a while and, you know, you used to have refrigerators also where large pieces of ice would be used; you would put it in this cooling box.

RR: How did the coda to *Ruskin* come about?

RB: Well, the [first version of the] film was made with a spoken soundtrack, and the quotes from Ruskin that I had a young actor read were from *Stones of Venice*. But I wasn't satisfied with that soundtrack and so probably a year later, I decided on the coda and that took quite a bit of time. Because I wanted to bring his writing in but you know, with *From the Notebook of* and *Ruskin*, there is the idea of doing a film about someone, so there's a biographical element. In each case, my idea was, how to do this without using these wonderful inspiring figures as a crutch or imposing upon their own work. So, I

don't know, you could say they're in a way homages. In other words, I wasn't trying to make a documentary about Leonardo's notebooks or about Ruskin's writings, because the kind of film that I make is something else. But I wanted to bring my relation to these figures into the film, and I thought, reading excerpts from his text was not a good result, and so then I thought, I will show pages of his book and it was an intense moment when I filmed, and prepared the material for that final section of the film. You know, it's always a question of – whether it's said or not – the biographical moment of the person who's making the work – so I can know what that moment meant to me and think that probably had an influence on the way it came out. But, you know, it's also not necessary to explain things by going into that information.

RR: So, you mean, it was an intense moment for you personally.

RB: Yes.

RR: It strikes me that when you're talking about your approach to this biographical element, that part of what's so powerful in both *Ruskin* and *From the Notebook of* is the way that you're exploring the sense of creative identification.

RB: You know, I'm still thinking about that.

RR: Could it be connected to your interest in elevating filmmaking to the level of other forms of rat that have been more unanimously -

RB: Well, they have a greater history to them.

RR: So, it's a kind of alignment [between film and other arts] -

RB: Well, it's not simply a question of reaching upwards. It's important to have this seriousness of continuing to work, and to find, maybe, to find encouragement where one can. So, for instance, yesterday I went to see the "Stein Family Collecting" exhibition [at

the Met] because I have been continually for the past few years nourished by my interest in Matisse. So, this was a great opportunity for me. You know Matisse also had something like those early [Italian] painters. I learned that, and this is really kind of on an "art historical" level, but he was close to Leo Stein who had been living in Tuscany and interested in the colors of the early painters and, for instance, in that early period, maybe before 1910, suddenly pink was being brought back into the palette - according to this little placard [at the Met] because of their interest in the early painters. With someone like Matisse, he's a very generous entity - so there's unlimited possibilities.

RR: I love this idea of "encouragement" being not something that's given to you but something that we all must sort of find ourselves. It's an active process of finding the places where encouragement is alive for you.

RB: Exactly.

2. THE CYCLE

RR: And how did you come to decide to undertake the enormous task of re-editing most of your films into a cycle?

RB: Well, it must have had to do with Gregory's re-editing for *Eniaios*. But I don't know his reasons – [LAUGHTER] so there you are, it doesn't get me very far. What happened is, I may have edited one early film very drastically. *Winged Dialogue* - it was something like sixteen minutes long and I edited it to three minutes - and then the next one was *The Count of Days*, and when I looked at the copy of the original version - this is a film made in 1969 and I was looking at in the early, maybe the late eighties - I thought it was so bad, so repetitive, so overly long and the soundtrack was so bad, so aggressive, that I thought "I have to re-edit this if I'm to not to reject it"; so that one also I reduced

from forty-five minutes to maybe seventeen minutes. I mean, there are the films which I would show only [in the context of] the whole cycle. And that whole [re-editing] process lasted more than ten years.

RR: Do you recall at what point…

RB: They haven't all succeeded, Rebekah.

RR: The re-edit?

RB: Yes, you know, some things get lost; some things are gained, and that's the fascinating thing to experience. There's an integrity, for instance, in *Work Done*, in its first version, that is lost in the second version, there are other things that are gained. [With certain films] I might think that the film is so linked to a certain moment in my own awareness of filmmaking and, when you're no longer in that moment, it's: "what are you doing?" In other words, you could divide makers into two schools: the ones who think nothing should be touched once it's done and those who never stop touching when they're done. So, I don't know, there are examples where I think, yes, maybe they're right, that you shouldn't touch it but there is a momentum that the maker has once he makes the decision to re-do.

RR: And in your experience of having been with audiences who have now, over the past years, in Vienna and other places, had the chance to view the entire cycle in a condensed way over the course of a few days - does that feel, not exactly as you've imagined it, but is the cycle as it's being presented satisfying your sense of what you had in mind?

RB: Oh, I think more than what I had in mind. I think I have been given a gift that I couldn't have foreseen. I'm very happy with it. But you know, that also depends on the

institution and the space in which it's being presented - so, when you were present in Vienna [for his retrospective at the Film Museum], I am very grateful for the institutions [such as this] – they are so dedicated to film.

RR: Do you recall how the title came to you for the cycle?

RB: It came as a flash, in a flash; I was traveling with Gregory on a train, late at night, heading somewhere to go to Greece.

RR: And there it was?

RB: Yeah.

RR: And was that in the midst of the re-editing?

RB: More towards the end. Oh, no, it must have still in the middle, because I continued to work. There were films that weren't filmed yet, one or two.

RR: And do you recall the emergence or discovery of the lens turret turning strategy?

RB: Yes, actually, that's quite early, I think I have a strip of doing that during, maybe filming *Early Monthly Segments* - so, in Switzerland, or maybe, I think it is the period of *Work Done*. Which would make sense because, you know, it's not so long after *Work Done* that it's with *Ruskin* that I'm using it.

RR: And do you recall whether it was something that emerged accidentally?

RB: No, it didn’t emerge accidentally. You know, with the *Early Monthly Segments*, I continued to film them probably until about *Work Done*. There were *Monthly Segments* filmed at the time of *From the Notebook of*, and that gave me a momentum for trying things and this (the lens turret turning) was one of them.

3. THE GIFT ECONOMY

RR: We just began to touch on this, but your work imagines an active spectator whose presence is vital to the of completion of the film and I wonder if you can articulate your wish - or what you want from the spectator - in terms of how you imagine receiving the message that your film has been received [by an individual or audience]? If we think about your work having to do with the kind of ongoing release of energy, where does it end? Can it continue after the instance of projection?

RB: Yes, obviously. You know, it's very interesting because there's this whole continuum in the sense that it doesn't have to even be my films. Because the Temenos event in Greece also brings me energy back - you might even say it's more radiant, but that goes in a different area because it goes into the area of programming or curating, but this is also a continuum once you step outside the actual process of making a film, and extend it to how you want it seen, or the whole area of archive, and this is all connected. All of that is connected to your question. And you could say it is also under the heading [of] "transference."

RR: Hmmm.

RB: And then "transference" is just another word for "education," also…

RR: Transference of?

RB: The entire area of the psyche.

RR: Onto what? This larger cosmos of activity that can't be separated?

RB: Yes, and it's also not separate from much larger areas of the human soul, because this is also important. Maybe I came late to realizing the real and central importance of it – that how or what one person does can develop for others, and how the arts in general are not separate from society or other important -

RR: I'm not sure that I've ever heard you use the word "soul" before.

RB: Well, it's just one of a number of words. And you know, you can use the word "soul," you can use the word "heart." That's also a word that isn't used anymore,with all of its values of what it means. Someone who is reading the Bible might use the word "heart," for instance; someone who's reading Plato might use the word "soul" or "psyche." Not just reading, I mean, someone who is *living* in that direction.

RR: So tell me if I'm hearing correctly - it's not simply a question of, you know, have audiences "gotten" your films or walked through the doorway [of direct seeing and perception] and have you received that message; it has to do with a much broader approach to a much broader vision of what filmmaking is a part of - that there's this ongoing back and forth between energy given out and received and so on, and filmmaking is a piece, in your life, obviously, a very central piece, of that constellation.

RB: Right. But in my own biography, I had the experience of living with someone [Markopoulos] who made the choice to invest in solitude, and having invested in solitude [earlier in my life], later in my life, it's [now] possible to invest in my relation to other people through my work because I have already invested in - call it solitude, call it whatever you want.

RR: Right, and also, I assume that once you have that capacity [for solitude], it's there, it doesn't go away.

RB: I mean, I think of it as all quite unusual because those weren't necessarily my natural capacities. It's something that happened, you know, when someone says, "it's something that happened - is that ever the case?

RR: Right - because not *everything* can happen.

RB: Right, and then it's quite wonderful in that the question of when something happens, then what?

RR: Because there's chance - and then there's the reality of who we are and something essential [in us that limits chance].

RB: Yeah. So I'm very, I'm content with the people who are responding to the occasions of the films being seen. I work at it… well, I hardly work at it; other people are working with me, but it's an example of this type of existence of traveling with and showing films and so forth; it is just a whole mode in itself. Gregory passed away in 1992, and I founded the Temenos structures in the mid-nineties and began to bring the work to the public from then, so now it is already fifteen years that this has been developing and so, you know, there are some individuals, like Susan Oxtoby who's now at Pacific Film Archive [with] whom I came into contact at that early moment, and so there's a whole friendship and understanding of the work. Maybe this is not so unusual; I don't know - I think writers have contacts with editors, and they have contacts sometimes with critics, and filmmakers have contacts with programmers, archivists, critics, and the audience, the public. So, when I speak to a public, because I'm not doing it so often, I use the occasion to the best of my ability.

RR: Yes, but does there come a point where… money has to follow this release of energy?

RB: Money…well, there you surprise me - how do you mean that? I mean, one has to exist. I have to -I need money, I have none of my own, so, you know, I ask the institutions that are organizing the events to pay an honorarium…and I do have, what I

said about the mid-nineties, I did create two not-for-profits. So, there is a foundation in New York and there is the association in Switzerland.

RR: Right. I guess I was just thinking about when you were talking about some of the other arts, and I was thinking about the writer and the publisher and the agent and the artist [who has the] galleries - in all those situations, there's an accompaniment of, you know, very well-worn tracks of …

RB: Yeah, our tracks are no so well-worn. And… and they may be more like [those of] musicians. Recently I've been thinking, in relation to this, because you brought in money - someone was speaking about the Jews and used a phrase that caught my attention, because they talked about the Jewish idealistic practicality as opposed to a practical idealism, or maybe it *was* practical idealism, and that's an area in which I'm not so strong. It is in our present state, generally, a very important quality that has not fully been brought to the light. Maybe attaching it to a certain national/racial group doesn't make any sense but that's [the context in which] I heard the phrase. And what that means is the fight to keep the idealism but to bring it into reality. You see, at the beginning of our conversation, you talked about reaching high for film, to bring film up to the other arts. The general problem with the arts is that, and you're also touching upon it when you talk about the "gift economy" - you know, this is all related - how to allow things to exist that are of a spiritual quality?

RR: Right.

RB: And you can find it one way or another. It can be a publisher who has had the courage to start his own company; it can be someone who undertakes to organize film screenings - all of these things which are at the boundary of economically not feasible.

How to bring this in, and not to be crushed over time, because things begin with an enthusiasm and they continue. And the Temenos, and the screenings, and my encounters with many individuals - this is the undercurrent. And it comes back to this word "transference" because… that's on a human level, you know?

RR: Isn't it in a way allowing money to be part… I'm sorry that I'm referring to money.

RB: Yes, no, it's fine, it's fine. I mean, Ruskin wrote that book that I was so interested in, *Unto this Last*.

RR: But I think we've got to allow ourselves to let money be one of the things that we transfer onto… I mean, it's part of this larger thing.

RB: Yes.

RR: It's part of this world we live in and so, it's - we don't *have to* but it's - it could, it might be necessary.

RB: It might. It's necessary because you know, Marianne Moore called it the, what was the expression she used? The expression might've been "the commercial superstition" and what she meant is, in our society, in particular, if it doesn't have a high price, it's not considered valuable. That's the, you could say the negative side of looking at things. But you know, she is a poet; she is writing, she's encountering people very often who have no respect and give no value to, for instance, to poetry, so she could so succinctly use her art, her talent for writing, to create words that let one see this, by calling it the "commercial superstition," because value and price don't have to go together.

RR: Right.

RB: But with money, sometimes it's good if it *does* go together because that is an important part of society. In the arts, unfortunately, and this isn't new, in the arts, the market mechanism has to do with an artificial rarity so fifty artists who may all be of equal value are not paid and one is paid. And that's in order to create this false market value, and that's Ruskin was already writing about that. So, I've tried to stay, to navigate a course outside of that situation, and I will go back to my biography again and say, you know, I lived with someone who really 100% believed in the Romantic artist - so he believed in begging and he believed in spending what he didn't have. Creating debt – and he accepted this; it agreed with his temperament, and somehow he was nourished by it. I cannot reject that, but I don't think it's mine, and I think we were both lucky that we were different.

RR: Probably two people believing that equally strongly could…

RB: You know, what did happen…this is sort of off the record…

RR: Yeah… completely…

RB: What did happen is that when you ask someone that you don't really know for help, it's a bit like, you know, someone [begging for money] that you encounter in the subway, but on a different level - but you do find out remarkable things about that person [whom you ask for help], but it's not the kindest thing maybe to always to do, to put someone on the spot that, it's socially not…

RR: You mean, to say, "Gimme money!"

RB: Yes, to make your urgency known to someone.

RR: You don't do that a lot with strangers.

RB: Yes, or with anyone. But you know there are many examples of this outside of Wagner. I can think of the example of Mahler, for instance. I read once that he brought, at the time he was the director of the Vienna Philharmonica, and he brought them to London and something went wrong and they didn't have the money to go back. And he had to go to a Rothschild and explain to this person that if he did not help them, Mahler himself would have to pay and it would ruin him. But that's an example; those are really examples that are still happening; I can remember someone telling me that Diaghilev, with the dancers, the Ballets Russes, he had to always ask for rooms on the ground floor…

RR: Why?

RB: So that they could go out the window if they had to…

RR: Wow!

RB: So, I mean, this happens.

RR: Even in elevated regions.

RB: Right, yes, and with our filmmakers who are using a medium that has no social éclat - until recently. The structure that is in place for music, of course, has been developed over centuries - because there again, you also have an immaterial work that is a work in time – like film projection; there is not this object that you're investing in and it needs support, and the way it has gained support is by developing a social structure that is also still very fragile. It leaves a lot of people out. But it's there, and we have the beginnings of that for film; you have Anthology [Film Archives] and you have the Film Museum in Vienna. And what's so wonderful, in the States, is the fluidity, that's it's good side. The bad side is maybe that there's lack of a sense of history and preserving things.

But the fluidity is important; [regarding] my own background… I went back to where I grew up, south of Boston, and there's a whole community of people from Brazil living there. So, this vision that people carry with them when they come to the States, that is one part of this interaction and what can happen, what can develop.

RR: And maybe part of not being afraid [of lack of structural support for film] is realizing that we are, in our collective acts of transference, we are all always creating reality anyway; so, for me to say, "well, film is crumbling" [Kodak going out of business, etc.] is beside the point. You must just channel the energy [of enthusiasm].

RB: Yes.

4. THE DISCREPANCY

RR: You've mentioned before that you often don't look in the camera while shooting.

RB: I don't know if that's true. I think there's a tendency there…

RR: Okay, a tendency.

RB: But that can be actually misleading. It makes it sound as if I'm quite casual. I'm looking in the camera but it's not always important to be looking through the viewer of the camera while - after I've composed the image. So I look into the camera, I think about it and press the button, and the film is usually on a tripod. Someone who's hand-holding the camera would automatically be looking through the camera at the same time that they're filming, so that's a different area. But there is a wanting of, there is a searching for the image, and that searching for the image is partly related to looking through the camera but it's also somehow related to the whole moment.

RR: I guess that's the part I'm asking about, the fact that as carefully as things are set up I imagine there's…

RB: Right, this discrepancy you talk about.

RR: The difference between wanting an image and the image that you get. Is the discrepancy between them productive - or is it irrelevant, as long as desire is motivating the making?

RB: You know, there's always a discrepancy…

RR: Is the working through of the image in the time of the shooting - is that reliable in terms of producing an image even if it's not that image that you imagined? Can you kind of rely on that?

RB: Yes… yes.

RR: The preparation of the vision and the energy.

RB: Yeah. I mean, sometimes one's surprised and it doesn't, it's not there. I found once, it was almost an hour, it's the only time it ever happened to me; I filmed an hour perhaps of film at Deerfield [Academy, where Beavers went to school] some years after I had not been in the school and I was very disappointed with the result and I destroyed it, which is something also, I must say, that I do regret, really. I think everything you film you should keep, because in the development of time, you don't know what value that image might have later. But my tendency has always been to film for one project. I'm not someone who creates an archive of material from which I edit. My way of working has always been more for [a particular] project so that means I have no material, really, to draw upon, to edit later; I must film new projects.

RR: But would you say in your experience that this discrepancy's just kind of a given?

RB: You know, it's very interesting, because there are the intentions that I may have had that are there almost from the beginning of the filming: it might be a little abstract,

they might be… whatever they are, some of those never appear in the material. As many times that I try, they are not yet in this film - they might appear in a later film but I don't [yet] have the way to reach them. Other things will appear [instead]. I think it's very important, this discrepancy, it's very important. I could even say – I don't know if it's true – but I could even say the things that look exactly the way I may have intended them are more difficult to develop further.

RR: Makes sense - because it's like a stop.

RB: Right.

RR: It's too satisfying.

RB: Yeah.

5. THE SEEING BODY

RR: A question about the biocular fold which seems to inform so many of your observations about vision and experiments with film. In your notes I get the sense of a sort of laboratory or a self-observation that's just incredibly nuanced and it's sometimes hard for me to imagine -- for instance, you're talking [in your notes] about "the moment of transfer between one eye and another as an image is pulled into the fold" – and I wonder how you bring yourself into consciousness of such a thing.

RB: But, you know, if I'm able to put this in words – which I have done at some point – it's already not so subtle or so connected to the art, to the filmmaking.

RR: Right- it might be an idea that you're working with.

RB: I don't know if the area of the biocular fold is so distinct; but maybe it is a kind of tic that I have, I really don't know. Because I don't think of myself as thinking about it that much; I do, maybe I do, because even in my current, most recent filming of the

windows in the Zumikon house, the movement of the camera across these windows, in the perspective that they are, must have to do with the biocular fold. There's the winter casement and it's the double window and then at a certain angle, you know, you have all of these verticals that are, you could say, changing the harmonic relation…but I don't know about the biocular - these are all things that I touch upon here and there and go back to again - but they're not really theoretical. They're areas of interest.

RR: One thing I'm often struck by is how essential - at least it feels to me like you're relying so much on the experience of the filmmaker's [your own] body in the making of films; there's a kind of reliance on the sensation and intuition of the body and that's folded into the making at the level of hand and touch. That [kind of touch and sensation] is something that's easily available - but I think maybe also the biocular stuff is not something about which one can say, "okay, now I'm gonna get in touch with experiencing these two different images my two eyes see," but that in reminding oneself of the idea of biocular vision, it does bring one into a consciousness of this most everyday working of our body that we are usually not aware of. So I tend to think of those questions of biocular vision as part of the inhabitation of a larger body.

RB: Right. Yes, yes, I think you're right… but body *and* mind.

RR: Right.

RB: Because it is, as you said, becoming *aware* of it.

RR: Right.

RB: Which means it is a conscious observation. But I think that's a back and forth movement, which I am thankful for, and I think it had to do more with my youth -- at

certain moments, sudden discoveries in this way. And then they can be important for a long time.

RR: You mean, coming to learn and be conscious of…

RB: Well, just the moment of, as you said, the sensuous moment of being aware. Or being aware of this moment in the senses. But it isn't the senses alone; it is the senses, I hope, built as a medium.

RR: A question about the writing - I've been spending so much time looking at your notes – they're just incredibly extensive and on-going and rendered so neatly in script - sometimes just a few words a day. And it made me curious about the conditions of composing them - maybe they totally vary? But whether you dedicated time to writing or carried paper with you or took notes on scrap paper and then transferred them…

RB: Oh, I think a little bit of this and a little bit of that, it did vary from period to period. I seem to need it; I do not think it's absolutely necessary. It's simply some people need that; but it could almost be an obstacle, you know? If it gets too much in the way - because the main thing is continuing the work; it's possible that when my filmmaking slowed down, that I needed it [the writing] more in order to be in contact with the continued developing of it.

6. THE NEW ENGLAND MIND

RR: I recall you once in referring to your own "New England Mind," and this is also the title of a well-known book by the Americanist Perry Miller, and maybe you were even referring to that, but I wondered if you could say a bit more about what that means to you, a "New England Mind" -

RB: Oh, I have no idea what it means; but you know, another way of saying that is only to say that I grew up as a boy in Massachusetts and there was a tradition there and so it was a lived experience and even though my mother's a New Englander (but my father was not - he was from Upstate New York), the central figure when I think of it is this elderly woman named Berneice Hodges [a neighbor who befriended and influenced Beavers as a young boy] and, that and my schooling - but Mrs. Hodges, you know, she was an example of this.

RR: Was she a religious person?

RB: Well, you know, New England and religion, this is a wide area. I think she was the first person whom I ever met and I met her, you know, when I was quite young, who took witchcraft seriously. I don't know if it was she who told me this but, you know, at Harvard, there was a department to study witchcraft because of what had happened in Massachusetts, so she had a book about that. She had been religious and had had a very big disappointment in what she encountered, socially, in religion. But, no, she was a fine ethical person and it's hard to believe, an artist - so not a typical femininity, even though she was very feminine and small but I remember she told me once, her three idols were Lord Byron, Sarah Bernhardt and Napoleon…

RR: What a funny group.

RB: Yeah, I think she said to me, "they all disappointed me." Because she did have that high ethical viewpoint, you find that depicted very perceptively and tenderly by Virginia Woolf.

RR: And she was an artist?

RB: Yes, she worked with wood. She carved until her arthritis didn't allow her to carve and she had commissions for some private people and also for some churches in Boston.

RR: Well, certainly I don't want to force or press it if it's not there, but I guess I'm just curious about this kind of lived experience you're talking about, and whether we call it New England or just American in general, it doesn't matter… but can you put it into words?

RB: I mean I do think of New England as a kind of - I think even Wallace Stevens said, "the only place that people think…" What did he say? It was such a funny way of putting it, as if the only serious writers or society thinkers were in Boston, and the rest of the country was enjoying themselves…

RR: He's saying that's the fantasy?

RB: Yeah.

RR: But when you talk [in your writing] about the spiritual life of the filmmaker, is that… do you have any sense of that being seeded [for you] in New England soil?

RB: Just as an American, but, you know, I know America only through New England, only through Massachusetts, I should say; you could say my "axis" is between Massachusetts and New York City.

RR: But what if we broadened out to America - can you just say a couple of words about your sense of spiritualism?

RB: Well, when I say, "New England," you know, I do mean a *visionary*. I can remember we had a very dear, wonderful Greek painter friend, in Athens, and he insisted a number of times, "you can't do anything you want…the artist is limited to what they can do" and it's very important to know what one *can* do, I think, to know where ones sources

are. So even though there are many things in the States that I may think are telling me my sources are not here, something deeper in me says that my sources *are* here… it's just that they're not appearing in the *New York Times*.

RR: Right.

RB: And it is the generosity of someone like Mrs. Hodges that I think of in this way. Also, when I was a child, I saw someone like Eleanor Roosevelt on television and I thought, “this is special!” Or Margaret Mead, or I don't know who else…strange that I should be mentioning all women.

RR: And so Mrs. Hodges introduced you to this notion of "the Artist”?

RB: I think she was the first person to. You know, I stood upon the -- was cherished by the women in my family -- their strengths, but Mrs. Hodges was the first one to open a wider world to me, and, you know, the wider world that she opened was the one that she knew, and it was this perspective that comes out of the late 19th century, early 20th century, so it's not by chance that she should be the person to give me *The Stones of Venice*, in addition to Tacitus or I don't know what else. Tacitus I never read but *The Stones of Venice* I read…

RR: So she gave it to you when you were quite young…

RB: No, not so young. I was maybe sixteen.

RR: And was she a serious reader?

RB: I can't tell you that. I mean she had, her social background came from such that she had the complete edition of Thackeray or Charles Dickens or I can't remember what other authors, but she and her husband, they were free spirits, you could say early hippies, you know, dropped out of their social background; she received her woman

friends from her social background two or three times a year – that was all. And for the rest, she was doing her woodworking and she was doing theatre with children and such things.

RR: Interesting.

RB: Yeah… and the [elderly] couple that I have filmed [for his new film being shot in Zumikon, Switzerland] share some of those qualities. He, for instance is a musician who has retained the essential spiritual quality of music, and places that first and professionality second. So it is very interesting that people who do not build a career [in art] sometimes can give [share something about creativity with others to a greater degree than those who are professional artists]. That's another level of this question.

RR: The kinds of people who are able to kind of create in a way that's stable and secure, but are somewhat outside of that professional career identity - there's something that can be very generative about that.

RB: Right.

CONCLUSION

Revelation of Roots

Pitcher of Colored Light (2007)

Robert Beavers once told me he had begun to re-consider the genius of Wallace Stevens. He had no doubts, however, about Elizabeth Bishop. Curious, I bought her *Complete Poems* and found my interest focused on "The Weed," a tale of an assertive plant that breaks the narrator's nighttime slumber by emerging, fully rooted, from her heart. Her death state reversed, eyes now open and head erect, the narrator watches a tiny film suspended in water on the weed's leaves: "A few drops fell upon my face/and in my eyes, so I could see/(or, in that black place, thought I saw)/that each drop contained a light,/a small illuminated scene;/the weed-deflected stream was made/itself of racing

images."[246] The two—the woman and the weed—raise their heads to speak about her heart, now split in two. This vision of botanical blooming in the dark, the liveliness- and leadership-providing powers of the plant and its droplet-containing cinema, and the intimacy between woman and weed brought me straight back to Beavers and to *Pitcher of Colored Light* (2007), the first made in the U.S. since *Spiracle* in 1966.

Shot at a single location – the filmmaker's now 90 year-old mother's grey shingled house and garden in Falmouth, Massachusetts -- *Pitcher* telescopes images gathered over the course of four years into one cycle of seasonal change. His mother's extensive and carefully-tended yard and gardens figure centrally, and from them Beavers has collected a variety of both magnificent form (daisies, dogwoods, pine needle starbursts, pleated fuchsia and crepe-paper poppy petals, yellow blossom cascades, thickly-veined, open-faced leaves) and moments of being (snow-covered, wind-agitated, barren, newly born). The botanical beckoning of *Pitcher* — my first encounter with Beavers' work — was so forceful that, like Bishop's narrator, I followed it – first to the Temenos in Arcadia and then into a deeper investigation of Beavers' body of work.

An essential alternation between interior and exterior space characterizes *Pitcher*: a rhythm of exchange between the darkness and ever-moving shadows inside the house, where his mother lives alone, and the sun-lit contours of her flowers and gardens. But within this back-and-forth structure, Beavers builds a more complex relational rhythm between inside and out. The shadows themselves function as transitional elements; vertical camera moves combined with fades and quick focal changes jaggedly transport the viewer between locations without a clear announcement of the border between them:

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[246] Elizabeth Bishop, "The Weed," The Complete Poems 1927-1979 (New York: FSG, 1984) 20.

a pink-blossomed tree gives way to the suggestion of Beavers' mother's cap of grey curls; from an upward sweep of the yard emerges a dark room identifiable only by a single lit window. So too does sound draw these opposing spaces into union, swaths of indoor (a creaking chair, music, fragments of his mother's speech) or outside (wind, rain, birds) noise unobtrusively enveloping a sequence of alternating images.

And among the mundane objects of the dark interior emerge forms whose beauty is as undeniable as those outside. They are drawn, by Beavers' camera, into frame-filling, jewel-like states: blue and orange windowsill figurines, tomato-colored oval place mats, a porcelain rooster, a foil origami ornament, and the object of the film's title – cast on a wood-grained wall, the shadow of a glass pitcher that bleeds in colored gradations from red to yellow. It's as exquisite as the open-faced periwinkle flower with a white pinwheel center in the garden.

Pitcher of Colored Light (2007)

In *Pitcher* the mediating work that mattes play in his other films comes from the windows themselves and the shapes generated by the objects before them. We see the yard through the form of a hanging glass butterfly, behind the black silhouettes of cut roses on a countertop and Beavers' mother herself, surveying the grounds. In these compositions with graphic elements that dissect space and simultaneously marry interior and exterior, Beavers draws attention to the presence of the camera and to his own active looking and construction of this person and place.

Within the progressive seasonal structure of the film and the accompanying shifts in vitality and mood as winter approaches and then disappears, time slides forward and back. Beavers' own childhood is invoked via repeated views of a hanging pastel portrait of the filmmaker as a young boy, by the tone of his mother's solicitous queries ("Robby, what do want for your breakfast?") and in images of the neighbor boys at play. His mother looks forward as well. "Come follow me and I will give you peace," she sings, and then explains: "I was gonna choose that, you know, for one of my funeral songs." But she conveys a spirit of parental guidance as well, offering her son pieces of wisdom earned with late age. She encourages, in fragments of address, a kind of in-the-moment presence to Beavers – urging him to listen to the birds and describing the desire to pray that comes with aging. "After I weed I just come in sometimes and lay straight down on the floor and listen to something on the radio. It feels so wonderful," she says.

Beavers answers with his own form of steadfast presence: in the restless, flickering shadows that cover the still insides of the house, he evokes the combined loneliness and serenity of the space and reminds us, as he says in his own description of the film, that "the sense of place is never separate from the moment." The film is in

many ways a vision of mutual containment between mother and son, suggested also by the figure of the pitcher itself. In images of the self-sufficient care and mastery with which she engages in domestic and maternal labors – sewing, ironing, baking, clothes-hanging, gardening – Beavers' patience allows the artistry of both her work and creations to radiate, and we glimpse one version of the story of the origins of the artist.

The camera that approaches and discovers Beavers' mother in *Pitcher* is a gentle one, drawn to tactility and texture like extended fingers, sometimes hesitant ones, aware of potential trespass. The quality of intimacy between mother and son is evoked but not sharply announced in *Pitcher*; as Beavers himself aptly said, "This is not Grey Gardens." The articulation of her shape unfolds in details of her body and voice. We hear her but we never see her speak; she consistently ignores the camera, fully absorbed in her own activity. She emerges, too, via associations of both form and color with objects and aspects of her habitat. Her curls are tied to her dog's hair and a curtain's ruffled edge; a flowered housedress folded over a chair to the garden itself. In one sequence, Beavers moves from a shot of his mother ironing a pink shirt to an array of magnolia blossoms that have fallen, stem-side up, to the ground. When we return to ironing board, Beavers' mother removes lint from the spread of pink fabric with her thumb and forefinger, as if she has picked up one of the fallen flowers.

In his short essay *La Terra Nuova*, Beavers uses a botanical figure to convey the kind of intuitive following required for the discovery of a film's shape. "Like the roots of a plant reaching down into the ground, filming remains hidden within a complex act, neither to be observed by the spectator nor even completely seen by the filmmaker…The filming is a search for correct contours, and is activated by a physical sense that is similar

to trying to find a location that has been seen only once. Memory searches for the right direction. Drawing together details and hints, this sense is nearest to touch in its awareness of proportion. It is this quality in the filming that I compare to the roots of a plant."[247] The coming-into-form of *Pitcher* was difficult: it took more than five years to film and edit. For Beavers, the process of filmmaking requires the humility to wait for what one wants and a willingness to be led by forces beyond intention. In this way do new ways of seeing emerge at the very moment of filming—and then inevitably recede. A year and a half after he completed *Pitcher*, Beavers returned to his mother's house: "I am amazed; I can't see how I made a film there—now I see nothing." Beavers was eighteen years old when he and Markopoulos left the U.S. for Europe; *Pitcher of Light* is a rare sharing of his own roots.

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[247] "La Terra Nuova," The Searching Measure: Writings by Robert Beavers (Berkeley: PFA, 2004) x.

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