

Letter to Robert
Creely

Jan 7, 1972

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Dear Robert,

I began the day talking with Jane about the moon, reminded by your Introduction to my book, that the three Pittsburgh films began at that moment when I, speaking to The Carnegie Museum audience, said that the last person NASA would ever think of sending to the moon would be myself, telling them what a mistake that was and how all the world knows but won't admit it that the space program has actually been cut back to very little beCAUSE they didn't get an image; and I then went on to say that this was another example of the poverty of this civilization due directly to their refusal to USE The Artist; and that then led naturally to my telling how I had tried ^{for} years to get into a patrol car for a day or two, had tried again and again in Boulder & Denver, etc. Mike Chikabis 'picked up' on that immediately and had me in that police cruiser two days later. Haven't reached the moon yet, but . . . Anyway, you gave me that story back again along with the whole clear sense of Pathe/Melies. In fact, your Introduction has created an urgency that I read The Brakhage Lectures, Vol. I, again right now -- like, what did I SAY? Wonderful. And look, I am especially pleased the Intro is short; I mean, so many people take the occasion of writing an Introduction to write a book themselves; and that is always so much like those, yes, CHAIRmen who exhaust everyone with talk introducing the main speaker. Of course, in this case, if you did write a book on the subject, it would clearly surpass my volumn; and I wish you would and would let me write the introduction. You are the only poet I know who from the very first had a clear 'fix' on film and vision. I was awed right off. You took the weight right off my past conversations with Duncan, who did always and only want to send me to Hollywood, or Meltzer who forever and ever started every film conversation with reference to some old Betty Davis movie, or McClure who wanted me to take him to Hollywood, etcetera. We began our conversation immediately with the eyes; and oh I remember it very well, you spilling salted nuts into the flower box, you and I picking them out along with gems of thought precise as the best 'cut' and linking them as surely as if you too spent your life 'splicing'. I had hopes that Zukofsky would be able to do this too, he the great 'editor'; but you remain the only one, only poet who immediately and continually understands from scratch. Oh, please, someday DO write a film book, Robert. (There are so many commas in that last sentence because I feel presumptuous as hell saying that; but my greed for such a book overcomes all timidity.)

Okay, after the 'moon' conversation (and Jane was quick to remind me of the difficulties of sending an artist there -- "Two days moving away from the earth?, you'd have asthma, claustrophobia, you'd want to stay there", etc.) . . . anyway, I went into the livingroom and put Schubert's 6th quartet on the phonograph. It begins with one solid basso note, the deepest sustain base in the world, a note the contains EVERY other note in it; and I said to myself "That's IT" and rushed upstairs to write this letter; I mean, it is a smooth solid note . . . not a Russian basso's lowest reach but rather deeper base beCAUSE it is so vibrant it contains, by vibrancy rather than physics, EVERY other possible note which is to follow. "Document", I said, taking two steps at a time. And here I am and don't know what further to say, what else

there IS to say. The start is always seeming to be "out there", as you put it. Of course it isn't; but the point is it pretends to be. The music is acting and must create its own sense of having given a ground for the rest of itself to be "within". Schubert does it always most beautifully with timbre; and that is why the world has been so fardy recognizing his equality with, say, Mozart. Wolfgang did it with interstice, something which could be more easily academized; but how do you write long boring jacket labels about TIMBRE. Well, all those who do that will find a way, of course; but it has taken them by surprise, I think, only recently and perhaps as a tangent to electronic music. And that field did, of course, get too much stuck a long time on interstice, leading to all those sine-tone pieces, sinus ticks, etc.

It's exciting too, your "sun play". You present it so that 'play' can also be a verb. I'd missed that altogether, perhaps because my sense of that is camera dancing with the sun, camera hand-held. Griffith never actually picked it up; and how sad that is that he spent all those lonely years in The Knickerbocker Hotel without ever once imagining picking up an 8mm camera. I did recently get this quote from him:

"What I really want to do is make you see."

I'm paraphrasing; but that's the gist of it. The trouble with it is the word "make", dramatist's inevitable downfall, the vessel on its side leaking aesthetics.

I'm reminded too, by you, that IF the artist is unable to eat the bear's, the world's, heart he will inevitably eat his own. It comes out a little corny; but it's a good folkquip for artists to keep in mind.

Griffith is very much in mind again because all my next year's lectures (if they rehire me) will be -- yes, I can title that series right now for you: "Narrative as Religion"; and I am concentrating upon, what else?, the German film-makers of the 20s whole first semester: the makers of "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (there are about 15 men, including Lang, involved in that one); Fritz Lang, then; F. W. Murnau (and this is my great personal 'discovery' of this year); perhaps Wegener; perhaps Leni; and certainly the Austrian Erich Von Stroheim. But, you see, the names are mostly unknown. The heart of the matter, this narrative fulfillment of the decadent, so called, painters and poets of late 19th century (mostly French and English, note THAT!) blossomed in German studio film-making between 1919 and 1924, with a few of its 'masters' surviving with a work here and there, more and more occasionally, until about 1929. As usual, there are very few sound films, then, worth a damn. Murnau died in a suicidal car wreck at about the time Hollywood was forcing him to consider Sound. Lang went on to make cheap gangster flics. The great cameraman of the era, Carl Freund, photoed "The Mummy" (his last possible claim to fame) and ending turning the camera on and off for the "I Love Lucy" show.

Ah well . . . Anyway, I hope to prove from all this that Narrative as an Art is always a Religious matter.

I've got to go now. Richard Grossinger and Lindy and their boy will be arriving any minute. Then I must pack to be off to Chicago and Pittsburgh on a trip with Rarc. I'm taking "The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes" to The Pitts. Coronef's office for their okay, hopefully, that I can release it.

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