

Eaton, New York

22 August 1971

dear & good Sally,

lord bleeding Jesus no I have not ignored your letter of July 9. (Ah. On July 9, 1945, when I was nine, I saw my first total eclipse of the sun.) But times have been inopportune. I worked 3 weeks getting a new roof on my house & the milk-house...there remains another little building...and, finally it ceased raining indoors. Unfortunately it also ceased OUTdoors, & today is the first water in 16 days I think.

It seems, as Whitman would say, a Year of Meteors. The entire Fall is already scheduled fuller than the worst of last year, or the best. In the Spring, it appears that I'll be teaching at FOUR colleges (add a curious thing at NYU). The kinescope for CRITICAL MASS is finally shot and back from Ohio, but not yet processed. It is an oddly gritty thing, but contains the most succinct single-image developing metaphor for a certain kind of thought process that I have yet developed. There has been an immense storm of new short films, I think by the new year I shall have completed a total of over thirty films which means about ten new ones. Woodchucks ate the leaders from my pea vines, and some young beans, but all else looks magnificent even for the very late start. Castorian beans setting pods right and left, I hope yours are too. Cherry tomatoes ripening finally the size of tennis balls, which teach us the virtues of cow shit. I have had, and I really overcome something in saying this at all, momentary glimpses of a sort of mental & spiritual infinity in connection with the Magellan serial. On the practical side, I may have found a way to shorten it a little, maybe get it down to six hours.

So that I have been, sometimes, in incredible ecstasy.

On the other hand, it is sometimes quite lonely here. My wife (?) is currently in Colorado. For the 80th birthday of my grandfather, whom I love beyond measure, reason or hope, God in his mercy granted that the man awake from a night in which a stroke deprived him of the power of speech. Then a week later came a total remission, and he is as homerically gabby as ever. Last night, after the strangest series of omens driving home from an auction, I slept, and then awoke to find that some one of the local drunks had run over my very beautiful and dear black cat Bancroft. I buried him under a young weeping willow I had ready to set out today. As the weight of the tree bore upon him, he uttered for the last time the little growl with which he always answered my call. And then, as I finished planting the tree, there was a cloudburst, and THEN, in the name of all that's sacred, the most vivid DOUBLE rainbow, the first I have ever seen.

Is the world really like this, or am I....I don't even know what to call the sensation, like fear. Beautiful and terrible as the aurora.

I was in the city (oh yes, The City) a week ago. What a miserable place, I dunno how anyone stands it. Or how I stood it for 12 years. Couldn't sleep for the noise. That there are no seasons one had known, but neither are there times of day: it doesn't get dark at night, It doesn't grow light by day. I don't want to leave here. Massa Brakhage, he set up in maountin, an' naow I unnerstan why (though he seems unhappy on it of late, I hear. But in midSeptember it's once more into the puke.

Which brings me to the nexus of a problem:

that I don't know what my schedule is yet (I.e. as to days of the week) so that I won't be positive when I can make rendezvous with the corpses. Sept. 13 et seq. I'll know. BUT I don't want to hang them up either. How flexible is it?

Yes it scares the hell out of me. I'm not a squeamish person by nature either. But I was thinking about it today, carrying my poor cat from the roadside: that an instant had made him from someone I cherished, that lit my days, into a thing that I loathed and feared almost to touch. What was at stake was my own mortality, I think. It was not only for the good times we had had that I cried, but for the immeasurable loss that we all must anticipate.

There is a latin motto common on the walls of autopsy room: it means, the dead teach the living. It gets down into the nitty-gritty when the carcass is disassembled. I must make those images for what can be learned. I think I already know how they go into the film. One thing I am committed to in this Magellan colossus: I want to use extremely reactive material, that is, images in whose presence it is literally difficult to breathe. ZORNS LEMMA contains an iconography as banal as possible, I want CLOUDS OF MAGELLAN to formalize fully stuff at the other end of the emotional scale, things that are, for one reason and another, very difficult to handle in the mind. Images of death and dismemberment are among them. BUT dealt with in perfect rigor, no looseness, no "instinct", no romantic bullshit. At all. I don't know if it makes the art any better, but I can't live that way. I suppose I want, on one level, to see how much I can handle. Risking my sanity is part of the fun. It's almost the only fun: my genes didn't equip me to be Nuvolari, or Edmund Hilary, etc.

Where I stay while there we can settle later; your offer is very kind. It'll be a large project: 3 or more cameras, tape, prob/ an assistant, though I suppose I'll end up doing without the assist't and finishing it all bone tired & sweated out, with that dry, exquisite sense of victory that making footage always gives me.

OF course if the Chatham thing cd/ be worked, that wd be a great thing. I think I cd/ promise them a really heavy trip on this go. I shd/ incline to have footage developed in Pittsburgh, & I suppose they cd/ see some workprint from it, with luck (and money). Cd/ also show some new work, get drunk, raise hell, & go through my usual standoffish rigamarole of trying to find an island of affection,

III/

may even plain human carnality in America's dispassionate & dry bosomless heart. By that time, at my present rate, I shd/ be shaggy enough, ever my yearnings, to offend even the most tirelessly star-crossed into bemusement. Howsomever! yes, wunderbar. Chatham, ho!  
what else?

does this find you returned once more from Fla(gella)herthy? if so, cheer up, I understand even Sisyphus has vowed not to go next year. Honestly, I still hurt from that thing, in spots. Though I wonder how much of it was sheer horror at returning to prep-school life (complete!) which I loathed with a hatred that still raises my snarling muscles. What a horrible way for people to live: and what a perfect essence of everything that is frigid and nasty in wasp culture (o Lord yes, MY culture, Your culture). Lawder's inextinguishable cannabis almost made it tolerable at some moments, but this is advice that you will have too late, & anyhow he said he wdn't go this year either.

I'm working on scheme to get to Japan next year or year after. Also contemplating funky tour of Europe, with films, next Spring IF I can find someone to make the jitney with me, since I get mean after five days alone in strange towns.

Psilocybin, on reflection, is still utterly remarkable. It rather changed my view of myself, in that a) I feel more vulnerable than before....much more; b) I mind feeling vulnerable very much less; c) for quite intricate reasons, it confirmed enough of my thought to leave me feeling more confident about my work (Mike Snow also said this, about acid). Other changes also. I must describe to you...and the writing would be merely tedious. That episode was not, incidentally, my first experience with hallucinogens...and certainly not with hallucinations as such, which are a different bag. Ps/ is VERY different from either mescaline or LSD: so that, if one came from a culture whose assumptions led one to expect to see a god in whom one believed (I do not believe in the judaeo-christianity) then there is NO question whatever in my mind that one would. That expectation, though, strikes me as working against the profundity of the experience.

The other item:

Etants donnees: 1e. la chute d'eau 2e. le gaz d'eclairage

Given: 1. the waterfall; 2. the illuminating gas

which is the Duchamp posthumous piece in Philadelphia. Have you seen it? If Ezra is my father, then Rose Selavy is my mother. So there's another cat out of the bag. All raw nerves tonight, Sally, as you see from the jumble. But I suppose I'm hanging free, as you put it.

Please write to me. Quickly. In the country. Love, love



# CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

ONE OF THE FOUR CARNEGIE MUSEUMS OF PITTSBURGH

Copyright © Creator, by permission. All rights reserved.

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

## **Commercial Use Is Restricted**

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

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