

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

ONE OF THE FOUR CARNEGIE MUSEUMS OF PITTSBURGH

Independent Filmmaker, Stan Brakhage, Lecture, Part I

Date of Recording: September 18, 1973

Location: Carnegie Museum of Art

Running Time: 93:24 minutes

Format: ¼-inch audiotape

Date of Transcript: November 2015

Department of Film and Video archive
Lectures and interviews with artists
ID: fv001/002/028/A

Sally Dixon: Good evening. Welcome to 1973's beginning of the season, once again for the third year in a row we have Stan Brakhage to start the year. We are going to see all of the films that he has made, or a number of the films that he has made since he made the Pittsburgh Documents, which was started in September 1970, his first trip to Pittsburgh with the museum at that time. I don't know how many of you have seen his earlier films or are familiar with his work.

But I would just briefly like to say that if you have not seen any film of this kind, that you might find it easier not to try to fix on images or look at them in a sequential fashion as you would say a Hollywood movie, but rather just let the images travel through your eyes and let the meaning arise as it will. In other words, don't strain your eyes to grab it and build as you go. I am sure you will enjoy them, I trust you will. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to welcome Stan Brakhage back to Pittsburgh. He has injured his back making a movie, so he will really sit and do most of this.

Stan Brakhage: I hope you don't mind that, actually I like this form better anyway, but it's not a normal one for the stage. I really prefer to also be sitting, which creates a better equality with all of you who are sitting because I rather detest someone being singled out in that sense, except to the extent that it's useful. It's useful enough that I face you but I hope not necessary to stand. I also don't like to stand for things, sometimes I have to because I feel that the things that I care for very much and that I am deeply concerned with need protection against forces that seem either unconsciously or deliberately to want to stamp them out. That gets me up on a hobby horse of a sorts and I rage and rail and take positions way beyond what I mean.

I am trying to get to whatever I have to say about the films simpler and simpler. I see so many friends here, "hi Bob". I am going to try and keep this as informal as possible and speak a bit now and then show a couple of films then speak briefly again, and during these speaking sessions open it up for questions from any of you who might care to ask any. Primarily to give a little break between films, because I think this area of filming, film making, this area of film I should say is sometimes because of the condensation of ideas or images it gets hard to just look at one after the other a whole evening long.

I always try as much as possible as I am able to make an auditorium appearance like this somewhat similar to the kinds of shows that I have in my kitchen, or at least in my home somewhere other. That demands a freedom of people's part. That is a freedom to come and go, to be as relaxed as possible.

Usually we show a couple of films and have something to eat or a cup of coffee or sit and talk a bit and then show a couple more.

The first two films, I am starting off with two difficult films in a way, in the way that people might tend to find any film difficult. That is to say that they both propose new forms to film making. New forms are always well, of that previous generation Gertrude Stein said, "the new art always has some ugliness in it." Either she or Picasso, they were quoting each other so much it's hard to remember in those days. It's Picasso actually, and Gertrude quoting him here and there with that idea. [00:05:14]

He stated that, I think and I paraphrase of course, that the new work, the work which proposes a new area in art has in it all of the struggle of the person who made it. Later then, people can come and do something in this area and make it very much more simply beautiful because they know what they are doing, unlike the one who originally proposes this area. I would like to add to that, that I have all my life tried to defeat that kind of idea of that generation.

I have wished and struggled very hard that everything however new could be as beautiful in every contemporary sense of the word, or every ancient sense of the word that the struggle itself should be seen as beautiful. This is all particularly appropriate for the first film we will see, *The Process*, in one way and for the second film, *The Riddle of Lumen*, in another. I would like to tell you a little bit about how *The Process* came to be made.

We had a donkey called Roscoe, and he lived with us for several years. Occasionally the children would ride on him but he was not really a donkey for riding. Once in a while Jane would, it's so hard to know how to qualify Jane for people that don't know her. What I am supposed to say there is, my wife, but I have never been able to think of Jane in that possessive sense. How does one, this is a problem for a woman's lib. How does one refer to blank, blank, if you don't say my wife?

No one has invented anything in the language for that yet, but I stumbled over that long before there was any trepidation about it socially. Jane Brakhage, maybe that's one simple way to do it.

Audience: [laughs 00:07:43]

Stan Brakhage: Fine, thank you, Jane from this point on. Jane had often had ambitions to take Roscoe and make a sled or a cart of some sort for him, but nothing ever came of that either. One day we heard, much to our surprise, that they were to have the national donkey racing contest. It would occur in Rollinsville, Colorado, which is our post office box town, about four miles from where we live in the mountains of Colorado.

For some reason Jane got all excited about this, and there was a great drive in her at this point to make some relationship with the neighborhood at large. She knew that Roscoe would happily carry her on his back and run for her, so she took him down to Rollinsville and all the children came along, and I came along with a camera in hand. What happened of course was one of the saddest afternoons of our entire life.

It was really a promotion scheme by the local booze hall to attract a bunch of people and donkeys together for one afternoon in the main street of Rollinsville, which is a street that looks somewhat like a western movie type street and to shame themselves and the donkeys. I mean there was no real race proposed. There was a lot of drunken foolishness in which the donkeys were much disgraced and disturbed and terrified, and the people laughed at them all afternoon quite cruelly.

After the few foolish attempts to relate to this, Jane and I and the children and Roscoe went home. One thing that had happened as a result of this is that Roscoe had seen a female donkey that caught his eye. He ran away that night and was to be found in the field with this lovely lady that he had discovered. We went down and brought him home again. He ran away again. The second time when we appeared at the field he refused to budge, and nothing short of a pulley and ropes lifting him into a truck really was going to budge him. [00:10:14]

We gave him to the people who owned the lady and he lived very happily with her for years, but it had this quality of sadness about it. We had lost our friend. I had shot footage that afternoon which appalled and horrified me, and I had very mixed feelings about the entire event. It had become in our lives a complicated event. I set about, after a couple of years wait as is usual, to try to do something with this footage.

I intended it to be a film called The Donkey Race, and it was to be part of a series of films of this kind of material that I had collected over the years called the Donkey race and other holy days. That is, the other material dealt with

other festive type occasions or what were supposed to be festive type occasions. Christmas at the public school, Halloween, et cetera, events birthday parties and what not.

I worked on and off for a year on this material and even though I would have strong inclinations, I mean I never work on any material that doesn't draw me, and this material certainly drew me to it to do something with it. Sweat would break out all over and I would struggle with the material, but nothing seemed to be coming of it. After two years I had so subdivided this material into tiny bits and pieces that it was scattered all over the room in lengths quite short for the most part.

I was about ready to give it up in total despair when I ran across some passages in Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era*, which is a book that deals with Ezra Pounds the Cantos as a long poem centering principally upon light. The Cantos is something I have been reading and re reading all my life, at least since I was 17. I was very inspired by these reminders of light and light in relationship to process. Suddenly it occurred to me that in the attempt to struggle with this complicated afternoon all these blanks and these fumbings, these particles of neurosis in myself which blocked my working with the footage; themselves could be the subject of the film.

I started off trying to recreate or create some semblance of the thought process of the attempt to remember, remember, put together the bones so to speak, of this occasion. I worked on that then for several months and came out with a film called *The Process*. *The Process* doesn't go anywhere. There is no donkey race in it; it never gets to the donkey race. It fumbles in its attempt to remember something of some such thing.

In the making of it, I try to be as true as possible to the qualities of rhythmic color flashings that occurred to me during an extremely concentrated remembrance process. *The Process* stands for a great deal more than memory process in itself because in fact our only fix on any kind of process would be memory process. Don't expect the film to arrive at anything because once something has been arrived at the process is obviously over then something else begins.

The second film came not long after the making of *The Process*. It had risen out of years of wish to create something in film that would be kin to "The Riddle". "The Riddle" is a forum that is much despised today, that is to say the only forums that most of its process reaches is through bubble gum wrappers

or some such thing. "The Riddle" really was in its heyday, that is from say the ninth through the twelfth century, one of the great forms of worship if mystery. The intrinsic thing about "The Riddle" was that the men and women who made riddles did so without any concern with the solution of the riddle.

[00:15:00] To make it correctly it must be that there was a sense of solution that is of a rounding or an answer, an echo at least, that was possible as a result of the riddle but the emphasis, if you follow my meaning, was not upon this. It was upon the celebration of the mystery. To fairly celebrate the mystery one has to feel that it is solvable, at least by God if not by human beings. The tradition of the riddle then began that one poet would propose a riddle. Another poet, without solving the riddle would extend that riddle.

He would extend the possibilities of that riddle in such a way to show that he really dug the first riddle but without revealing the mystery. Some of these riddling answers and echoes passed on for generations, in fact way beyond the twelfth century but in increasingly degenerate forms. I suppose the last public burst of them in England might be called the Mother Goose Tales, most of these were raised in relationship to.

I wanted something that did this in film, and one of the most enticing things to me about this possibility was that in film that the riddle always had in its traditional heyday the absolute necessity that it be beautiful. It must be so beautiful that first of all the poets would be intrigued in a much more business like fashion, could they extend the riddle and prove thereby that they understood the riddle.

The important thing about the riddles were that people who had no interest in writing poetry, and in fact who read very little of it would become intrigued by these riddles just from the standpoint of their beauty. To be true to the riddle form, it had to be consciously beautiful so that people who made no attempt to solve the riddle would enjoy it for its beauty. That was my sincere attempt in making The Riddle of Lumen.

I don't think you should fuss yourself as anyone in the audience would solving this riddle because it's not a riddle made like literature that you could solve with words. If there is anyone here who makes films who is intrigued with the idea of extending this by an echoing answer in film, then that would be a great joy to me because that would be taking this drive back to source. For those of you who don't know my work, its intentionally, all the films on this evenings program are intentionally silent and they are so for many reasons, which

maybe we can discuss if any of you have any questions about it. Thank you.
[end of speech 00:18:07]

Thank you, any questions? It was a lovely atmosphere to see the film in, for both of them. They are both rather fragile films in a sense that they don't withstand a lot of disturbance and noise and so on. I had gotten a little leery of viewing them in public even with receptive audiences because there tends still to be this tension of the audience and the public theatrical excitement. These films really in that sense are home movies.

Anybody have anything particularly you would like for me to talk about at this point while we take, for those of you who arrived late, I am going to speak briefly in between every couple of films just to give a break so that it isn't a continuous concentration on the screen when it's possibly calling on reserves of visual energy to enjoy them. If there are no questions I will proceed ahead talking about the next two. Yes?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:20:00] In The Process, would you remove the splice marks?

Stan Brakhage: He asks, in The Process would I remove the occasional splice mark if I could. I could of course, although it would be very difficult with The Process. I decided at some point, finally I have to say no I couldn't, but it requires backing up a little bit to say what I mean. This footage had become so worked upon in so many attempts to make the donkey race. The donkey race had in various forms of the first three minutes of it or so been sent to the lab and printed and even at one point a section of it printed in a negative, color inter negative, and sent back that the film was getting very fragile.

It was spotted, it was scratched and of course as I began working on the color inter negative, that which comes across orange with an image with most of the shadows in green in it, that aspect of it, that's a very fragile type of film, and of course it got marked. This work very well exemplifies what I was describing when I quoted Picasso's remark, I mean there was such a struggle with this material over a year and a half period that it was marred and marked. Of course there is that part of me in the first place I might add, which would have it all pristine and perfect and no splice mark showing and so forth but that did toward the last, in other words in the process of making The Process, which you just saw.

That footage was in such a state that it was very difficult to splice and make splices hold, and much of it-shorter, shot. Then we have the additional

problem that Eastman Kodak about four years ago took all the cotton out of film base leaving it pure plastic without bothering to invent a cement that would hold this together effectively as previously, at least. In fact all over the country cement splices made in the last four to five years are popping apart in the cans. That is, a splice will adhere on, a pure plastic splice with the ordinary cement will adhere up to about two years maybe and then pop apart.

I also was faced in that sense with the social dilemma of the time I am working in, it's going to be, it's very difficult to splice in comparison with what was available previously. At some point in do remember deciding, while making this film, that I would -where I had to make a new connection with fragile material, that I would leave the splice line showing, but at the instant that decision was made then I felt then the splice line has to be used integrally within the work. It must occur according to a sequence of necessary rhythms, if it's going to be there, it's got to be useful.

For me, the indications on a physiological level, that is where I took my inspiration, from physiology or my own thought processes was, in blinks there is a quality of whether, I had notices that under different kinds of thoughts there is a quality of whether the blink appears to come from below or from above. That is, whether one is really conscious in the blink of the lash coming down or feels first the twitch of the lower lid before the lash comes down.

I made a distinction of this sort because it occurs also, there is a kind of twitch which begins to be visible even with the eyes closed, with eyes closed and trying to remember there is after all a firing of one image or another into the field of consciousness. This sometimes appears to come with a twitch from below as distinct from one above. My splice mark stands as, and I must admit, an ineffectual symbol of this activity. That's the most integrity that I could give it within the work.

What I would do is now, and since then I can say I have been searching for more effective ways to represent or recreate this phenomenon than the splice. Ordinarily of late I in putting to, and I do throughout most of the process, put two frames of black between all scenes and splice that. Many of these flew apart in some of the earlier printing processes of making this film. With some of the more fragile footage I then began putting up with the splice line and then I had to add splice lines other places tear apart given splices and make a splice line visible to carry on the continuity of that evolution in the film. [00:25:38]

If you do study the splices in other words, if that interests you in viewing it, they will answer you with an integrity, a rhythmical and even a symbolical integrity as I feel everything in the film should do. I don't know what integrity random spots have on film, but that's sort of a loose symbol that every filmmaker is stuck with, and there is a correlation in all human scene of spots, right? Spots before your eyes, I could make a popular song of that. Any other questions?

Let me be clear about this, ordinarily I start out wishing for the most pristine perfect even commercial, in fact I start out wishing for a tremendous commercial success even, a film that everybody will love, even my mother. I mean, not that she shall only love it, which is another thing that happens too often, but she and P. Adams Sitney in New York or whoever, Ken Kilman or Annette Michaelson, or-and all my friends and many of my enemies are often in my thoughts at the beginning of thinking about a film.

When the working actually begins, then the terms actually of the working force, at that point that I actually am pulled into the work then I am attending completely what the film tells me it needs. Of course it always has marks and dots and splotches and things of that sort attended on its making. Another film, I don't know if it has been shown here, yes it has, the first showing we showed the Machine of Eden, a film that has a- when I went out to film there was a spot on the inside of the prism of the bolex.

Of course I didn't see it while shooting, because the beam splits at that point and part of the beam goes through the eye piece that I was looking through and then the rest goes onto the film. That that was going onto the film was carrying the image of this spot. When I got back from that wonderful day of shooting and I got the film back from it, that is, I was horrified it was a ruined day's shooting. I cleaned diligently my bolex and went out and shot it again and managed to get another day as magic and shot wonderful footage. It came back and had many spots.

That won't surprise anyone who has a bolex and has ever had that problem. That is the hardest piece of glass to clean in the world. I went at it again, went out a third time and had a wonderful day also and shot footage and assumed that third days footage was the one I would use in the film. When I came to making the film, the needs of the film itself as it was a kind of creation myth, a kind of child's creation myth, the needs of the film demanded the use of the spot. The majority of the footage that was used was from the first and some from the second days shooting.

Because if you have one spot and you are going to hatch images off of it you need some shots that have many spots as a stepladder. The majority of the footage that went into that film was from the spotted or what most people would consider ruined shooting. I must acknowledge that this fuses me terribly when I am in the process of making it and I feel this is awful, this is a degradation, what is happening to me, what is this.

I trust the film in that sense, and the impulses that go entirely toward the film. That's how- I trust them only up to the, I trust them only in the first place, then in the second place I don't trust them so far as that I don't make as many of these things absolutely necessary. That is, they must then conform along all lines of being. They must conform rhythmically, these spots. They must, splices and their recurrence must have a pattern.

[00:30:00] I also don't mean to imply that I am perfect at this. There are now splices in The Process that I would take out if I did that sort of thing that is if I went back to films and kept re-doing them. The reason I don't do that is that I was very deeply impressed at an early age by the fact, to me the unarguable fact that the first edition of Whitman's Leaves of Grass was the best, at least in the sense of those poems that occurred in it and all following editions.

His lifetimes work of re-correcting and re-correcting and so called improving or deepening these poems seems to me to have ruined those poems that were in that first edition. I found that true also the few times I have attempted something of that sort. There is no film ever made that doesn't seem to me to have many things weak in it, things where I feel I didn't attend carefully enough to what is in my care. Yes?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:31:05] How can you judge that?.

Stan Brakhage: How can you tell when you think about something later in life when later in your life you think about what a fool you made of yourself at some earlier time in your life, and you think that but then in a way it's foolish thought because that is when you become the true fool. Those mistakes, if they were indeed mistakes that you made, have now become integral with your life and you would not be where you are thinking about them if you had not made them.

It's very complicated, I have had films that fell into disfavor with me. In fact for years I said that Window Water Baby Moving I didn't think was a work of art. I thought it was almost a work of art, which is rather unbearable for me. Then when I came to make the Pittsburgh films I suddenly was re-involved in a

quality of making which re-illuminated for me Window Water Baby Moving. It came very highly into my favor.

The appreciation of an art is always personal and always immediate I feel, just as the making is. I mean we have a lot of propaganda to the contrary by such things as the great book series or what your colleges have all agreed on is a master piece and do teach to everybody. That is okay as a process, but when it becomes ... but only to the extent that we can also each of us individually hold on to the assurance that our individual appreciation is absolutely omnipotent.

That's the same way in the making, in the making there is no omnipotence at all because I just usually like an idiot, I have been called away to the phone while working on a film and had someone say, Mr. Brakhage, and it's taken me up to 30 seconds to be able to say yes. I am not using that part of my mind that knows my name. That raises an interesting question we might talk about too, areas of the mind which intrigues me at the moment.

Mistakes, I mean at every-I think it's in that sense, it's always personal, personal in the making and personal in the appreciation and always immediate. Some of the films that I have detested the most when I saw them or felt bored by are the ones that haunted me, and that later then I returned to again and again and I recognized as the most important of all films to me, both in work of my own making and that of others. I don't hope to have answered anything, but do you have any further question along that line?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:34:17] Well, I couldn't see- there situation where a splice, which is a bad splice and you know it is, but you have three in a row and they all sting [inaudible 00:34:30] but it's a question of degrees, the material in other words-well, it looks like these splices turn the image [inaudible 00:34:42]- there is a dichotomy [inaudible 00:35:00]?

Stan Brakhage: You mean a bad splice technically, no?

Audience: [Inaudible 00:35:06] No, a bad splice in photography [inaudible 00:35:08].

Stan Brakhage: That's so delicate and impossible a thing to ever assuredly say.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:35:22] That is the answer to my question

Stan Brakhage: Yes.

Audience: [Inaudible 00:35:28] What I am interested I is the film series, the one that stuck with the most is [in audible 00:35:47] the one in the second day and you incur a time and the weight of emotion.

Stan Brakhage: Yes. I am trying always to attend to everything that I can see and feel within the strip of film, both in making it and in seeing it mine or others later. In fact I never really can quite think of it as mine once a film is, at any time in the making of it. I am attending rhythm also. At some times the emphasis for the reason for using an image is more the rhythm than anything else, at other times more the tone. The ideal is that rhythm, tone, symbol, if that is involved as it often is in my work though not literarily, rhythm, tone, symbol and so on shall all be as well as many other things, of equal necessity, but how often does one get such a miracle shot as that?

The tendency is that the film moves along the line of emphasis here and emphasis there, but the rhythm becomes-I think is generally the more overwhelming choice to me, because to me, particularly in something like The Riddle of Lumen, it is the varying qualities of the rhythms of light that make of this a movie.

Audience: To me, one of the effects of both the films is meant [inaudible 00:37:22] to change consciousness with whatever movement between space [inaudible 00:37:25]. How did you [inaudible 00:37:34]?

Stan Brakhage: Eight frames is the bottom that I usually have available in the bolex, although when I worked with a variety of eight millimeter cameras I sometimes had as little as four frames a second, and I have with an airflex at times had as little as four frames a second. 64 is usually the top that is available to me either with the Bolex or the Bell and Howell that I primarily used, although I have had cameras that would take 120 or 30.

These are always usually- but in that range of 8 to 64 is what I usually have available as a possibility when I am shooting. Very often I shoot slower for reasons of light or intensity than I do with any particular concern with what might be called a reality of speed. In most filming, now certainly this is not true say of the styles that I was working on in the Pittsburgh films. In most shooting the-although I must say in Deus Ex also there is a great variety of shift of speed of motion.

In most shooting that I do I don't have a fix on what would be a reality of movement that is 24 frames a second, because in the first place I don't accept that as a reality of movement. It's a pretty good socially accepted semblance of movement created by film. For me, I am also concerned not just with what one sees with the eyes open, but memory processes and eyes closed, and things move very swiftly and very, very slowly as we know from dreams, in the imagination.

The mind can play back a scene in a great variety of speeds. I use them also, and very often for instance there are color qualities that can only be captured if you saturate a film at one frame a second. For some of these scenes, even where they have movement, I will ask someone to sit very, very still and shoot long sequence single frames even though I am not after any trick effects or anything other than to get a quality of that red fully saturated onto the film in emulsion. [00:40:03]

There are varieties of reasons for doing all these things, although they are not done with the reasoning process when I am working or not, what we ordinarily call a reasoning process. I am just without thinking, like we would say loosely, I am shifting the focus, the speed, et cetera. I think we should move on so that some who just want films will get too bored with this too long a talk. I will try to make the rest of the sections very much shorter for you and then at the end I will entertain as many questions as you have.

The next two films, the next one is called *The Shores of Faust* a fable which followed very quickly on the heels of *The Riddle of Lumen*. I think of it in the same line of thought as *The Process* and *The Riddle of Lumen*. Here again the inspiration is literary form, "The Fable". I think the simple thing to say, you will find I have tried to adhere to the classic necessities of "The Fable" throughout the making of this including that every fable has somewhere, usually in its middle, a moral.

Telling you that in my film I have a visual semblance, somewhere within this film I have a visual semblance of a moral, might give you some idea of how I am translating from literature to vision. I hope it won't too much disrupt the enjoyment of the film for that reason. This film, look what is it happens in the fable or its other forms, the fairy tale ,its tangential forms of fairy tale and so on.

The princess says to the prince, you must go and get the dragons head before I will make love with you or marry you, or whatever it was the custom, make

you king. He walks miles and encounters many people and has many struggles and acquires gifts and swords and what not that he needs and encounters the dragon, cuts his head off after a big bloody western type battle, or eastern too, be it a Chinese dragon. Comes dragging it back, throws it in her lap, she is satisfied and they live happily ever after.

Ah well-The universal truth of this story and the one that certainly strikes me as its influenced all my life in my daily exigencies is that the prince is really just walking back and forth. That's what this fable is about really, animals walking back and forth and opening up thereby to those who can see all the treasures of the world. At one moment there is a hoof that comes down and it is followed by what to me is as if that hoof came down in the cosmos, and it split it open with a field of stars made mostly out of dirty snow bouncing light into Brakhage's camera. So much for that.

We could not set up to show the eight millimeter Sexual Meditation Motel, so I am substituting a very much earlier made film which I came to think after making these light films had a lot to do with it, and it's called Bast, and its dedicated to both a personal cat that had just died from some images taken of her earlier and the Egyptian cat goddess whom she was named after.

Maybe have questions later. We are totally into a different area of film now than what we have been, with what is coming and what we have seen, The Sexual Meditations.

There are six of them all together. We can only look at five. They are all quite short, and shorter than anything we have seen so far. What to say about them? Well, I have to levitate the atmosphere a little bit now somehow. These films really arise out of fantasies, direct fantasies during masturbation and more than that they arise out of a most wonderful aspect of the process of masturbation is I have experienced it.

I am one who really has a very happy sex life but has still held tenaciously onto the joy of masturbating all the same. During the process of trying to arouse myself it very often happens that the images that I am using to create this arousal take on a life of their own, which becomes so enchanting that the mind begins following the images and the penis begins to get limb. This is a moment of ultimate choice actually, to come or not to come so to speak.
[00:45:37]

Most usually I follow the images because I know I can always come later. The quality of the imagery at the exact moment when it's poised upon this choice is that area out of which all these sexual meditations have arisen, thus the name Sexual coupled with Meditation. Usually then the images go on in there having a life of their own to become more surely meditative than sexual, but at that instant poised upon a pin there occurs for me a moment in everyday life so to speak that is aesthetic. That is, it corresponds very exactly to the creative process as I understand or what a work of art should be.

God knows, this is rare enough in life and ought to have inspired something. Let's look at the first one I have to show you. We can't show the first one because that was made in eight millimeter called Sexual Meditation Motel. The next one was made here in Pittsburgh and it was made strangely or perhaps actually understandably enough at the time I was making the active scene with one's own eyes. That is, daily I was going down to the morgue and facing a situation that was almost overwhelmingly unbearable for me to face from day to day.

This film, Sexual Meditation Room With View sprang out as an alternative, kind of working that went on at night then. It took several days to make because a great deal of it is shot a frame at a time. Some of you may know Sharon Rupert who appears in this film, and Mike Chikiris who is also in the film and Ruth Dupray [Inaudible 00:47:39] and ... who was the other one? What?

Audience: Brad Neil.

Stan Brakhage: Brad Neil, right, just to have the full cast named here. For those of you who know Sharon by the way, she just got very happily to judge by her letter, ecstatically happily married to someone in Austin, Texas last week. Sexual Meditation Room With View, then we will look at Sexual Meditation Fonds Room Yale. I for a long time wanted to do a film about Yale. So far I have only managed this. If I never could do another, this will certainly do.

Sexual Meditation Fonds Room Yale, and as befitting so honorable an institute as Yale, it's a very, very exceedingly tame and excruciatingly subtle Sexual Meditation. Usually it passes, most people don't remember it. Then comes Sexual Meditation Office Suite. Sexual Meditation Office Suite I have to tell you people often ask me how long does it take to make a film and how much time and money and so on.

It's impossible to answer and to just give a simple example, to cut out all the years of building up to be able to make such a film let me say that just to get the physical environment of this office suite, I for two years while traveling, a millionaire friend of mine, a man that I had known since high school would make available to me the couch in his office suite at night. I became very haunted by this office suite almost from scratch because my friend developed whatever fantasies he had in his office quite openly. Now, they exist in all business offices in fact, as I looked around at them, I think the business office is really secretly devoted totally to sex, but in most offices it's very concealed, hidden and very illusive.

My friend Gordon is more open about it so that the possibilities of office suite and sexuality were immediately available on the surface so that therefore you could make a film. Then, Sharon Rupert came to Denver and she had worked in the previous film, she also appears in this one and some other people, objects and things, so let's look at them. [00:50:25] [end of discussion 00:50:27]

[beginning of discussion 00:50:37] During the week I'll show also maybe some of this-maybe I'd like to see if we can show all six of them together at some point because they make a full statement, but the two more that we have that we can show are Sexual Meditation Hotel and Open Field. That, I believe ends the series at least I hope so, because oddly, I found that as I got deeper and deeper involved in this moment of fantasy, it began interfering with my sex life, so I went for Open Field like one should always do at a moment like that and I think completed it.

Again, with the case of Hotel it's hard to say how much money was expended to make it, it's interesting that I was invited by the University of Chicago to come and give a program. They put me in the Palmer House Hotel. The minute I walked into this hotel I knew I would make a film there someday. When I was in the room I sat and brooded upon it and I really felt very deeply there was a great film that-or at least some kind of film that could be made here.

I felt greatly that a film could be made here, so that when they hired me then to come and lecture every other week and start that series of lectures there, I made one of the conditions that they must put me in the Palmer House Hotel every time I came.

Well, two and a half years later, all those many sessions-I mean, I really think that my primary interest in doing Chicago at first was in order to have this

hotel available. It fascinated me because it's like an old nineteenth century grand hotel that's become pure whore, but with a heart of gold or something corny like that. I mean it would have to be corny. Have any of you ever been to the Palmer House in Chicago?

You must go there sometime I mean this is-well, you'll see something of it of what I saw of it or in it, but it took two and a half years before the film finally arrived, I brought equipment, I carried that heavy film equipment again and again, there's all the expense of the aeroplane trips, all the expense to the college or the hotel and everything. Thousands of dollars finally and out comes this three minutes.

Open Field on the other hand just sprung out of no previous inclination whatsoever in one day. Mike Chikiris came to visit us in Colorado and he wanted to make pictures of wood nymphs; a kind of a city person's idea of what to do on your vacations in the mountains. I was charmed by it and of course there were some-several children; ours and visiting neighbors and it was suggested that perhaps a trip to the great beaver dam or the great Open Field with the pond where some beavers were might produce swimming parties in the nude and Mike could get wood nymphs.

I was annoyed by the whole project and yet insistently went along and carried the camera equipment. I thought-it was a big drag to me and I didn't really expect anything to happen, and once we hit this field suddenly-I mean the girls went up to Mike and said we won't take off our clothes unless you do, so he did and he figures has a major part in this film.

All of it was an incredible moment of magic; childhoods end and-well, you'll see it for yourself, but the thing I was getting at is it fell out in this one day. I had great reservations about going, I did not care to walk and walk to the pond and it had no attraction for me, but it suddenly became this incredible magic day.

Then, the work began because in order to get the qualities that I was in mind, I had to really invent several different forms of bi-packing. That is, instead of working with superimposition, working with packing two strips of film together and printing the light through both at once which produces quite markedly different qualities than superimposition. [00:55:14]

In superimposition of image such as you see when you double expose the same shot in your camera, all the whites in either of the shots dominate. In

other words and will erase all blacks that they occur over. In bi-packing it's the opposite and-so, you'll see something of it for yourself. [00:55:46 end of discussion]

[beginning of discussion 01:07:41] I have just two very little films left, but I would like to open for anyone who has a question at this point because there might be someone that has a question they'd rather have entertained before seeing the last two films and then I'll be open to as much discussion as you like from that point on. Anyone have a question? If I don't see your hand, I'll-okay. The last two are very tiny little films, but they're very important to me.

One is called The Presence and the other The Wold-Shadow and they offer opposite extremes of filmmaking. Actually, I think it'd be good to have a couple of films that nothing is said about, so why not. No questions, fine. Then, after the films are over if anybody has any-okay. [end of discussion 01:08:49]

[01:08:50 beginning discussion] Wait a minute for the-I'm-I think we're sufficiently friends now I can chew my tobacco. This is not a Hooch bottle, but it's my travelling spittoon, which is good to warn people about so they don't try to cup a drink. I chew tobacco and spit into this. I'd be much more relaxed if I can have my tobacco. Any questions? Yes?

Audience: [inaudible 01:09:46] Why doesn't your films have sound?

Stan Brakhage: I have made a number of films with sound-excuse me just a second. I had made a number of films with sound and I'm not in any sense against the sound film and I'm very much open to the proposition of working with sound. In fact, much to my surprise I have applied for a grant to get sync sound equipment and it looks like I might get it, so I obviously have some feeling in myself or intention to work with sound again, but I haven't made a sound film in the last six or seven years-at least that long.

[01:10:35] Really, the simplest way to put it is I don't think film needs sounds I think that's evident any more than a painting wood, but on the other hand paintings that make sound; a painting that would make a sound is an intriguing idea.

I think that there is a problem that's very much underestimated by most people by-who consider the arts in that it is extremely difficult to appeal to more than one sense at a time by an art and have it remain an art.

The simplest way to put this is that Opera is a problem. We have some great Operas, and I'm certainly grateful for them, but they are very,very rare indeed in comparison to the enormous amount of energy that went into the making of Operas over the last several hundred years.

I think the reason for this is that these areas of the mind that creatively work with sensibility are quite separate; that is the ear and eye area. The verbal area we now know is almost exclusively located and in fact, in adults you can't say it is exclusively located in one hemisphere or the other of the brain in most people it's in the left brain.

There was a wonderful article in the New York Times, September 8th issue on the two hemispheres of the brain. It is a specialization of humans to locate speech in one or the other hemispheres. Of course, we do know that the different areas of the brain.

One would say it's a great dream to get all these areas together and create one great art masterpiece that sings, that speaks with poetry, that's dramatic, that's-etcetera, and this drive has been most insistently pursued in Opera.

Now, from another-and are very few examples of really great Operas. From another standpoint, just personally speaking, I have not the ability with sound than I do with let's say maybe with hearing than I do with seeing or certainly with creating in sound even though I've studied music all my life, piano and violin as a child, when I was a boy soprano soloist in very actively sang on national broadcast and so on.

I love music first of all the arts. I struggled hard to-I studied informally got to know personally and studied informally with Cage and Verez. I had many friends, Jim Teni and Morgan Zobatnic [inaudible 01:13:49] are old friends of mine with whom I've discussed and worked actively on sound, but I've come more and more assured that every sound that's made in a film that exists on the sound track as distinct from one that occurs from the audience inhibits seeing for anywhere up to 10 to 15 seconds later.

Just even the expectancy of sound inhibits the ability both in myself and in others with whom I've discussed this at length, the ability to literally perceive, so when a film is preceding a long a basis of extreme subtleties or rhythm, color, tone and etcetera, any inhabitation can be thought of as something that you don't want or any sound that you feel compelled with that film you can think of as very expensive.

I don't know how better to deal with the question than that. Any other questions?

Audience: [inaudible 01:14:56] from what I understand, the way you are creating a film is similar to the way of [inaudible 01:15:02]

Stan Brakhage: The way of what?

Audience: [inaudible 01:15:07] the way of painting on wood and that process [inaudible 01:15:09]

Stan Brakhage: I think very close to that. I think film is closer to music as an art form than it is to painting, but I think it's very much closer to painting than it is to drama for one other example or still photography. In the spectrum of arts that film seems to be close to, music comes first to my mind than poetry.

Poetry because-poetry just naturally so concerned with thought process in the first place or the creation of words, and then maybe painting and painting certainly is very important because these two are chair visual-primary visual relationships of course, and then maybe drama; depending on the drama, depending on how much the drama is an event as distinct from a psychological drama.

The far end of the spectrum is still photography. The big mistake that most colleges make is that they assume that to study film the student must first master still photograph. If he does so or painting.

Audience: [inaudible 01:16:24] that's not really what I wanted-

Stan Brakhage: I'm sorry.

Audience: [inaudible 01:16:27] I just wanted to go back to [01:16:40] it kind of disturbs your eyes and I want to stop watching the film.

Stan Brakhage: That specific film?

Audience: Yeah, that specific film [inaudible 01:17:06].

Stan Brakhage: Well, I think again as I said, art appreciation is extremely personal and I don't know what to say about any person's reaction to one film as distinct from another film on the level of likeability, but-as to what my purpose is in the making it's usually to be able to see something. Also then of course to organize to make a gestalt of an entire experience which is usually a very internal experience with me.

When something moves me, I pick up the camera and try to work with it or try to work with the light that's bounced off that thing that moved me or with some equivalent of that thing be it say a thought that has no imagery.

Some films arise because there's thinking that doesn't seem to have any imagery guiding it or prompting it. In the first place, I don't believe that can never be true, so I'm searching for the imagery that's guiding this and I distrust thinking that isn't related to imagery.

Again, in this article in the New York Times of September 8th, in the New York Times magazine, they now have almost certain proof that the human mind is divided-the brain is divided into two halves that in-say if your primary vocal half that is the half of your brain it controls your speaking is your right brain, then in your left brain will be located music appreciation, special comprehension, pattern recognition, recognition of faces to name a few things that they've really distinguished.

Now, there's only a thin connection between these two brains, Corpus Callosum, in some people it is cut for reasons of brain injuries or to stop severe epileptic seizures. With these people they've been able to study these distinct behaviors of these two halves of the brain. [01:20:02]

In almost all people today the one that dominates speech which is most usually the left brain is dominant and the other; the right brain in this case would be recessive. Therefore, our musical appreciation and in fact the appreciation or the expression of almost all that we call creative will be in a brain that is dominated by another brain; a speech making brain.

Now, what I'm trying to get at with this to entertain your question is that- Frankly, my speech making brain must be dominating the other one because I'm having trouble getting at it, which I think is what I'm trying to get at.

I mistrust a thinking process that is not informed by imagery, so these will lead me to search for that imagery by way of equivalence in the outside world, and it occurs to me that all film making in this sense is probably prompted by this and in fact finally that all art is. This subdued brain that each of us has must find some way out through this massive word making. By word making I don't just mean speech I mean thought without words is to most people incomprehensible.

I think it is somewhere in the struggle between these two brains of the one to find the source of something that's prompted something of the verbal thought in the other that does lead to the making of art, most assuredly must lead to the making of dreams.

It seems reasonable to me that what Freud called the subconscious is really the subdued brain. Albert Einstein spoke often of the fact that his ideas came to him first in vague images, which he then had to struggle horribly hard to find words for or finally numbers for, equations for.

I'm making a case that the creative process in men and women, which I've always believed except for a certain few doubtful periods of my life was possible to any human being is really located in that subdued brain. You see, it is a process of training. They find, for instance, that ghetto kids have a great deal of trouble verbalizing as a result or at least consequent with this, these ghetto kids have a much swifter recognition of pattern, much greater grace and facility of movement which is also located in the opposite of verbal brain.

I don't know how much further to take this. The eyes are so-the man who's doing most of this work his name Roger Sperry he's at CIT (California Institute of Technology). Before he even began working on this double brain area, he had discovered that there were cells; nerve cells that had such a precise coding; chemical coding that they could search for the exact place in the terminals -they could move through other nerve fibers even with hindrances put in their path to connect with cells of exact terminals of the visual cortex.

I'd always known the eye was very special as an organ in this sense, even in early physiology books I discovered that the eye is the only-the organ in the body that grows cells from two directions from itself as eyeball along the line

to meet other cells of exact same nature moving from the brain toward it in the development of the fetus.

Whatever we're talking about here is a consideration crucial to the eyes how we see which does so crucially inform all speech, but speech then dominates I mean the human animal is peculiar in the sense so far as we know in the sense that at an early age; at an infancy age, one side of the brain is designated to specialize in certain specific things to the expense of the other primarily verbal; the ability to verbalize or think logically, think in terms of integers, numbers and so forth. [01:25:16]

How this occurs to me without all these reading, of course, is simply that something moves me deeply, I do not know why- that beetle, and I'm prompted to therefore to take a picture of it like we say, which means just even on the simply home movie level just seem even as an amateur so to speak which I always hope primarily to be to catch this image and hold it in time to have a way to hold something of this image in time.

I think I'm searching for things that this more suppressed side of my brain is trying to get at so that the words don't float on nothing. Just as it's occurring to me I'm gripped by something and I want an image of it.

Then, I begin working with this image because what the light is just bouncing through the camera is not sufficient to what-to satisfy something in what has been called-what might have been called my subconscious.

There comes a moment to answer this other gentleman's question about splice, which I've been thinking about all these even. Is he still here even?

There comes a moment when I'm ecstatically dissatisfied. That is when a splice, whether to cut one more frame or one less is-that choice is poised as on a pin. If I do one more thing to it I will be satisfied which means the whole thing will drop like a cake that's overloaded.

If I -or up to that moment there was always a dissatisfaction that hadn't reached that equipoise. It's-I don't know, it's hard-you see I'm searching for words to express something that really isn't verbal. I mean, I'm just trying to find the words that will say something about a state of making. Trying to arrive at some instance where one feels-where I feel I've done all I can to satisfy some need that I can never name.

Well, never-who knows once, a poet, Robert Duncan slapped me down very hard for saying there were things that were too deep and complex to speak of, but poets can be more Hoity Toity about things like that. They do deal directly with the bringing of words into being even though they're most often using old words, they are always using them newly which is what poetry is.

I'm always trying to find something that's prompted those words as I ... like anyone else can only think along the lines of words. Then, people start speaking of feeling and I can say, well, I feel whatever that is I feel that this is it or as close to it as I'm going to get and then I stop, make my splice.

I'm not concerned with making splices that-with some sense of making splices that will last forever. I'm thinking also of that incredible moment where a fetus says in the translated by Ezra Pound all of the Greek drama. It all co-hears he screams just as everything is breaking apart.

That the films are never meant to co-hear in that sense to be coherent. I distrust that in art anyway. In fact, I don't regard it as [pause 01:29:18] no, I love Classical too. I'd love to be a classist. Here, I'm thinking-rely very much on the distinction of Donald Sutherland in his great book called On Romanticism there's one you want to get to if you can, a really great book where he really struggles to define the difference between Classical, Baroque and Romantic

Well, I think everyone living is stuck with being a romantic, although a big case has been made for considering Picasso Classical. I think that was easier to do when Donald Sutherland was young than it is now or-Classical.

Classical being defined simply as something which essentially rounds-encloses itself so much to itself that it doesn't speak to anybody like the Sphinx for instance.

Baroque being defined by Donald as this kind of classical or solid base played off against a series of variations. Romantic then being in fact, those variations, open ended, and having no real enclosure and speaking to practically everything. I'm paraphrasing him he says it all very much better, but then he doesn't take 800 pages to say it, but the last page is a beauty in that because having dealt with Classical, Baroque and Romantic, his last chapter is composed of three things; a period, a semicolon and a comma to stand for those three.

That's a metaphor that I hold very strongly in my head, it's unbeatable, but I think if we're not romantics if the living are not romantics then we're into something else that hasn't been defined yet. Yes?

Audience: I'm very struck by your passion it is and I remember you made this film in about 1966 [inaudible 01:31:14]-

Stan Brakhage: About, yeah.

Audience: [inaudible 01:31:22] You have never made another film like that.

Stan Brakhage: No, that's true.

Audience: [inaudible 01:31:29] It is very simple, its about a cat

Stan Brakhage: Most people don't see the cat, Bob, till they've seen it four or five times at all.

Audience: I didn't see the cat until you had mentioned the cat [inaudible 01:31:40].

Stan Brakhage: Well, in fact, it's birthing of cats also. Those black blotches in there are a little kittens' newborn. It is a sole story of birth but it is told very elementally, very musically and-yeah, I showed it because I felt it had some relationship to the process actually and I hadn't thought that before this evening actually.

That's a film that I haven't looked at much of late that suddenly is very important to me again, so that's why I brought it and I don't know why I brought it-I think I brought it just because it was a movie that Salley hadn't seen, and then when I had to replace motel I suddenly saw this would be the one because it has some relationship to the process maybe and I think it does. Yeah?

Audience: You also said that, but I also think that this was one of the most impressive things you have ever done- [inaudible 01:32:45].

Stan Brakhage: Thank you.

Audience: [inaudible 01:32:50] It is so simple, it is staggering. Really, it does not lead to anything.

Stan Brakhage: Well, of course, it's not all that simple. Well, we'll look at it some more this week and it will get more complex for me I think.

Audience: Well, some people may make films in black and white and that's totally cool-
[inaudible 01:33:15]

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.