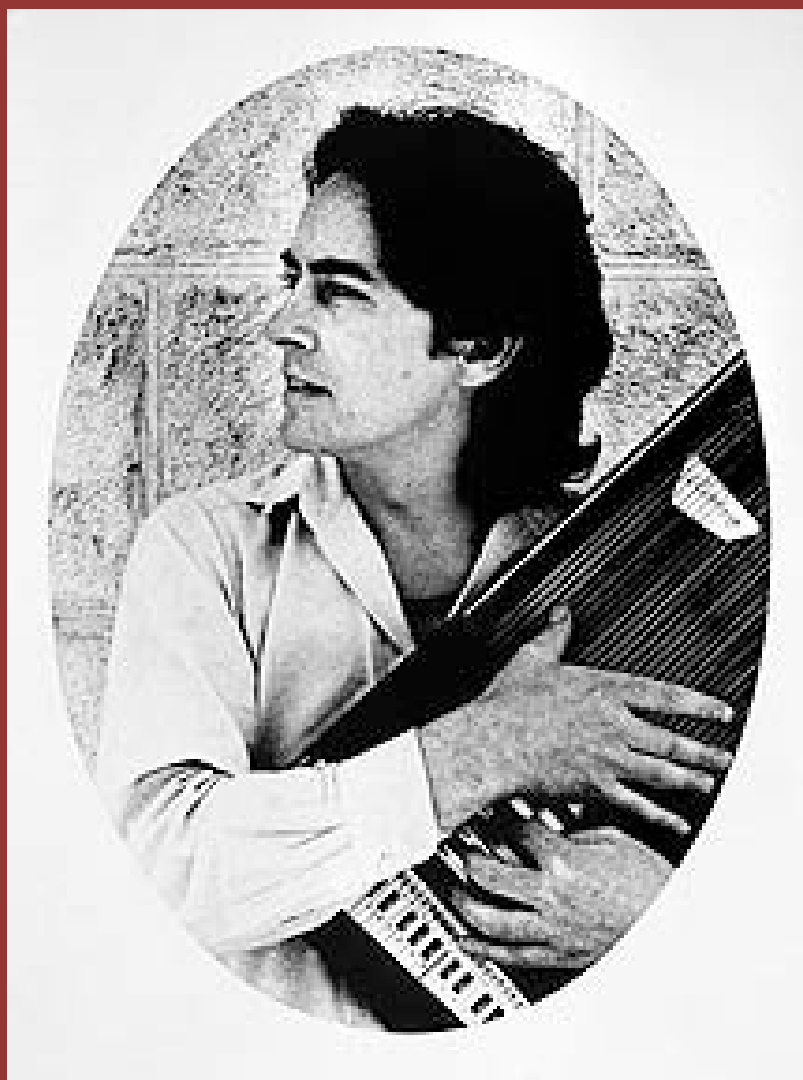


# The Flame is Ours

The Letters of  
Stan Brakhage  
and  
Michael McClure  
1961-1978

Edited by  
Christopher Luna





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# Introduction





The story of the mutual respect and friendship that developed between Stan Brakhage and Michael McClure after meeting in San Francisco is finally coming to light after 50 years. It amounted to the meeting of two of the giants in their respective fields, and was also the beginning of an aesthetic conversation between two of the great artist-thinkers of the twentieth century, a correspondence that would continue until Brakhage's death in March 2003.

Brakhage eventually settled in Colorado, and for four decades, McClure and Brakhage wrote letters to one another in which they discussed politics, family, finances, and art. They sent each other works-in-progress and discussed the possibility of collaborations. Whenever possible, they arranged performances, screenings, and lecture opportunities for one another. They struggled with what Brakhage referred to as "the money problem" and attempted to make a living, as many American artists do, in institutions of higher learning. Perhaps most importantly, they steadfastly retained their artistic integrity in a culture that usurps and eventually strips all meaning from the aesthetic developments of its artistic progenitors.

It must have been something of a relief for Brakhage to meet McClure. At the time, many of the people in his social scene were poets, and it was not easy to find poets with whom to discuss film. In an interview that I conducted with Brakhage in preparation for my Masters thesis in 1998, he mentioned his frustration with the limited knowledge possessed by some writers:

I found poets, with very few exceptions, remarkably *stupid* viz.-a-viz. the possibilities of any visual art, especially film. They all wanna talk about old John Garfield movies, or things like that. Now I'm gonna name the exceptions—Michael McClure, Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, and Guy Davenport. And I will finally, against all odds, include Louis Zukofsky, who because of Celia, in the middle of showing him a film that I dedicated to him, suddenly realized what I was doing, that it was something different from poetry, that it was something important . . . and Olson, on the last day, *finally* came to see something of *Dog Star Man*, and recognized that it was something.

From the age of nine, Brakhage assumed he "was a poet and wanted to be a poet." As a young man, he saw himself as an artist similar to Jean Cocteau—a poet who also made film. But the poet Robert Duncan soon changed his perspective. In his early twenties, Brakhage exchanged housework duties for room and board in the home shared by Duncan and his partner, the collage artist Jess Collins. Brakhage would later humorously refer to himself as their "houseboy." This arrangement allowed him to meet poets such as Louis Zukofsky, Jack Spicer, and Robin Blaser, as well as contemporaries such as

Michael McClure. Brakhage described his first impressions of McClure, the poet with whom he would come to realize he shared both an affinity and an aesthetic sensibility:

When I was staying and cleaning up house for Duncan, McClure used to come over and read his poetry, and he was hot *stuff*. Duncan was very excited about McClure. William Carlos Williams was shortly to write a very beautiful statement about McClure's poetry. . . . Duncan was very taken with him. He was a real poet, whereas I, every time I tried to write a poem I was the butt of every conceivable kind of joke.

The "most painful but most valuable thing" that Duncan gave to Brakhage was to help him realize that he was not a poet, as he had previously thought. "This was extremely painful to me, but an important recognition," Brakhage recalled. "I could have wasted, God, half my life, *all* my life, trying to be a poet." Duncan's honesty saved him a lot of time, "and you could almost say my life." Brakhage was later relieved to have avoided joining the ranks of the countless "fake poets" in the culture, "people that have not been given the gift that Duncan gave me, and/or, they've been given it and haven't taken it." According to Brakhage, Duncan pushed him out of poetry, causing him to focus his energies on filmmaking:

Duncan demonstrated clearly to me over the course of a year-and-a-half that I was not a poet. . . . He didn't go around attacking my poetry all the time. . . . His house was a center for poets, and just by watching Michael McClure, and watching him work, I came to see that I was not a poet.

Some later described Brakhage's films as poetic, a label that he rejected.

A filmmaker is not a poet. He might be *poetic*, but I've always despised that word, with its "ticking," you know? "Po-e-tic," what does that mean? I don't want that appellation, because I respect poetry too much. I care more about poetry than I do any other art, OK, always have, since I was a very small child. But I am not a poet. . . . You can't be, by wishing to be something, be it, any more than I could, by wishing to run the hundred yard dash and be in the Olympics, achieve that. I was never, physiologically, in a position to be able to do that.

On November 16, 1961, in what must have been one of the first letters that Stan Brakhage wrote to his new friend, he stated, “I do see you so much more as Michael (rather than Mike) since our New York encounter, some audio-visual sense of mine removed from whatever dragons you may or may not have slain – in other words, I mean it as sound-sense rather than symbolically (as Gertrude Stein would say) . . . oh hell, I mean it as a compliment in some inter-personal sense; and let it go at that!” He proceeded to praise several of McClure’s poems and essays, including “Revolt,” “Dark Brown,” and “Rant Block,” work which would define McClure’s early career.

McClure’s groundbreaking essay “Revolt” (which appears in *Meat Science Essays*) was inspired by the first stanza of his own poem “Rant Block,” which begins

THERE IS NO FORM BUT SHAPE! NO LOGIC BUT  
SEQUENCE!  
SHAPE the cloak and being of love, desire, hatred,  
hunger. BULK or BODY OF WHAT WE ARE AND STRIVE  
FOR.

The first line of the poem is a response to Charles Olson’s paraphrase of Robert Creeley included in his landmark essay “Projective Verse,” that “FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT.” Many poets were influenced by Olson’s essay, but what makes it so powerful is that it allows each writer to adapt its concepts for their own purposes, as McClure did.

Noting the “erotic and universal” nature of what he had written in “Rant Block,” McClure embarked upon an “investigation and exploration” of revolt. This study begins with biology and physiology, subjects about which McClure and Brakhage shared an interest that was more than merely academic. It is not surprising to learn that Brakhage understood the dense prose that would become *Meat Science Essays*; the filmmaker spent much of his life attempting to replicate physiological processes, particularly hypnagogic, or “closed-eye” vision.

McClure begins “Revolt” by pointing out the similarity between the “3 layers of flesh” of the phylum and the flesh of human beings. He then describes the planaria, “small flat black worms with triangular heads that live in icy streams” and feed upon the “tinier beasts in the water.” The planaria are “the first higher beasts,” creatures that possess “the first definite upper and lower surfaces to the body and the first large eye organs, and complexities of nervous system, and digestion,” qualities which make them “our farthest close cousins.” (The planaria also make an appearance in McClure’s “For Artaud,” in which they “move and dart or crawl unseen” through the “cold black water,” and “all is clear and holy and not beautiful/ to them.”)

The mouth of the planaria is located on its body. Evolution caused the mouth to move from the body to the head of living creatures. Once the mouth and the head are united, McClure writes, “together they assert a more single spirit in control of all behind them.

Head and mouth control gut in evolution after the planaria. But the old body spirits of revolt remain as tiny voices even in mammals.”

McClure refers to the asexual division of the planaria as one type of revolt. Sexuality is another form of revolt:

At all times revolt is the search for health and naturality. Revolt is a desire to experience normal physiological processes that give pleasure of fullness and expansion. The problems of the earth, or the enactments of life itself, are desire and hunger. The basis of all revolt in one phase or another is sexuality. The Erotic impulse is the impulse to destroy walls and join units together in larger and larger structures. That is the heat of Romance!! To create love structures, the old visions, self-images, *phorms* and patterns must be disavowed or destroyed. Anything that chains life to preconceived goals and preconceived reality must go – they threaten the meat itself.

In the essay, McClure describes the last section of his long poem *Dark Brown* as “a revolt against a vision and a return to mimesis of the real.” The poem remains a remarkable example of writing that seeks to provoke a physiological, emotional, and intellectual change in the reader. In “Fuck Ode,” McClure’s explicit celebration of the sexual act, each muscle of the “huge figures fucking” revolts; like the planaria, each muscle “seeks to become a lover.” In “Revolt,” McClure envisions a “revolt of complete meat and spirit,” and vows to “fight the passing vision within myself that freezes into a cemented way of seeing.” He defines liberty as “the possibility of constantly achieving new experience without hysteria or fear-caused chance taking.”

Revolting in fear leads to a kind of feedback of one’s weaknesses, and results in either “an undesirable life” or “a new but *formalized* pattern of living:”

FEEDBACK is energy that is not fulfilled and expended completely in a gesture of desire. It is left-over energy washing back in us like a broth that nourishes attitudes and strengthens patterns. The patterns become stronger and cause gestures to be half-hearted and conventional and make more feedback. The new feedback in turn makes the patterns and attitudes of action stronger and the desires are further weakened. They must struggle to show themselves: willessness, faintness, and incapability grow in a cyclical process. It is a cycle and it must be broken for liberty.

In his first letter to McClure, Brakhage also correctly notes a link between McClure's smoke-nets in "For Artaud" and imagery in Brakhage's *Wedlock House: An Intercourse*, in which Brakhage uses "cigarette smoke screens leaking in and out of darkness-lightness-flashes entangling the figure of Jane and myself in this search film of the first months of our marriage." A disturbingly honest portrayal of the fear that lurks behind the bliss of the newlywed, *Wedlock House* is both claustrophobic and terrifying. In "For Artaud," McClure states, "I KNOW ALL FROM MY BLACKNESS." McClure's poem begins:

The nets are real—heroin ( sniffed ) clears them. Peyote

(5 buttons)

dispels them forever perhaps. Or until we come out  
and smear ourselves upon all we see or touch. It is real!  
They are real! We are black interiors. Are battlegrounds  
of what is petty and heroic. Projecting  
out all that is base and slack from us. But  
not far enough!  
And not all—but part / of all / a minute quality to foul  
the air.  
And not base and petty but the struggle ( heroic )  
and its opposite. As we writhe to see  
they cohere and cannot  
see it.  
OH BEAUTY BEAUTY BEAUTY BEAUTY BEAUTY  
BEAUTY IS HIDEOUS  
We are black within and sealed from light.  
And cannot know it. To move  
out from / there / where it is black and mysterious  
thru desire and reaching.  
AND NOT PROJECT THE BASE AND SLACK!

In the letter, Brakhage praises the use of nets in "For Artaud," and attempts to place what McClure has accomplished in the poem in a context that includes both their mentor/elder Olson as well as their more immediate contemporaries:

[T]hat you start ("For Artaud") with "The nets are real – " makes you immediately (in my mind) one step closer (nearer to my knowledge of them) than, say, [Charles] Olson in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us" who has his scapegoat from the start to call to "disentangle the nets of being!" Wonderful as that (his) poem (and all of his) is (and more especially was) to me, its working cannot move into the life I now live since making *The Dead*. Even two years ago, when we had our angels and demons and men going up and down those ladders practically on parade (as you will read in *Metaphors On Vision*) Olson's poem was more like a masterpiece than something contemporaneous with us. I take it for summation; while your

smoke nets are (not contemporaneous . . . what the hell do I want/?)  
 potential (no!) . . . something growing in relation to my own realizations.  
 For instance, that “Black” takes a practical (non-too-much-symbolic)  
 stance in relation to “interiors” (OF COURSE) and that all has this air of  
 practicality (such as “But not far enough” – as if you could, might  
 ((irregardless of whether or not you ever would)) measure how far was far  
 enough) and that a word like “slack” as you manipulate it becomes an  
 almost technical term, as if you were manipulating the hulk, ship, of the  
 state of being into a physical dock, and that you’re right down to the nose  
 of the thing, that is (“a minute quality to foul the air”) that you can smell it  
 – as both Jane and I learned to smell fear and could almost categorize its  
 various shades of differences (a soapy-sweat smell with sour-milk sense  
 ((tho I don’t drink milk so must internally produce its sense to in some  
 way match the natural effusion from others for my own emergency . . .  
 and for what? . . . to communicate?)) with varying degrees of the stench of  
 decayed meat ((as it can be found in the center of the smell of most  
 expensive perfumes)) and the scent of perfume ((with its periphery of  
 death-decay)) and not that you name it, as for instance Duncan might  
 attempt, but that you make it moooooove thru the whole poem. I am not  
 rating appreciation here, but making distinctions. It is as fine [in Olson’s]  
 “In Cold Hell, In Thicket” to have the white tree gone that completely into  
 ((“the dark place, the twigs/ how/ even the brow/ of what was once to him  
 a beautiful face” being so much to do with [Jackson] Pollock, as I knew  
 and know him) as it is in, say, Duncan’s “Crosses of Harmony and  
 Disharmony” to describe it (“Shares of the Moon is man his tree” sending  
 “the image of a rose/ from its particular fragrance to the sun.” or with the  
 distinction “from where I was saw”) or as is most clear in “The  
 Structure of Rime X” (“where thi’ has the sound of tree and th^ has the  
 sound of nut”) as it is, say, in “The Breech” “to handspring/ through a  
 barrier of white trees !”;; but I handspring with you there, that is there is  
 action in it for me, just as I too won’t meet Jackson Pollock in the  
 crossings of paint and feel-see-know the “smoke we make with our arms.”  
 in the gesture. Perhaps a good part of my felt relationship to your work is  
 due to the practical necessity in my art of finding the external visible  
 reality beginning for creating the photographic image, which then of  
 course goes on to be what IT IS. Even in working with hand-painted  
 images, closed-eye vision guides each step of the way (as you will find in  
*Metaphors On Vision* my expressed desire to take a camera under my  
 lids).

In “Rant Block,” McClure eloquently expresses his desire to liberate himself from his intellect, to write poems that reflect every human being’s ability to “burn with fine pure love and fire, electricity and oxygen.” By opening the poem with the lines “THERE IS NO FORM BUT SHAPE! NO LOGIC/ BUT SEQUENCE!” he declares his understanding of Olson’s aforementioned command, “FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT,” adapting it to his own relationship to the flesh.

In “Scratching the Beat Surface,” published in 1982, McClure breaks down the relationship between projective verse and his own work. Projective verse poems are “unique, special, not easy,” and require a compression of experience. He writes that both he and Olson sought “the world from which poetry comes.” Olson understood that projective verse “comes from a complex body,” and that the poetic line is created by a “breath and energy interaction.” This understanding resonated with McClure’s own sense of the poem as an organism.

The breath, like the word, is part of the body. One must hold a deep view of our organism in order to search for the real, the meatly, the physiological STANCE. Metaphorically, there is a solid ledge of our own substrate from which we must leap out like a predator (or dart from gracefully like a gatherer) in order to create true poetry.

But after knowing Olson and studying his ideas, McClure came to “object to his concept of ‘anagogic,’ of poetry *leading out*.”

I believed that the spring of poetry must be more physical, more genetic, more based in flesh, and have less relationship to culture. It must, I discovered for myself, be something that occurs before the anagogic, something that happens before the *leading out*—it must be “pre-anagogic.”

McClure further argues poetry must emerge from a “systemless system.” In his view, “each individual’s actions and patterns are a recapitulation of the old deep patterns in the meat.” While he agreed that form was an extension of content, he found it difficult to apply this understanding of form to his own work, because he felt that it didn’t go far enough. “Rant Block” emerged from his struggle with this question:

As I worked with plays and essays, I found a writhing multidimensionality of thought. As my knowledge of biology expanded I was not content with critical descriptions and analyses of literature. They were confined to reason and logic. Yet reason and logic, in their usual manifestations, create a veneer over potent forces that are not yet faced in the art of Poetry.

When I was studying Olson’s poetry a poem grew in my notebooks as I have heard that some Beethoven compositions grew: a line would occur—I’d try it with other lines—more would accrue to it. I would take a section and then more would be added and discarded. At the end, rather than a tortured and studied poem, it felt like my most sudden thought. I had

carved through to reach spontaneous thought and to let it speak as if it had been written spontaneously.

Writing the poem showed McClure that it was possible to create a poem “that would come to life and be a living organism,” an idea that was admittedly “preposterous but then, so is much of art.”

Brakhage was apparently very inspired by “Rant Block,” especially the final line of the second stanza:

SNOUT EYES

As negative as beauty is.))

LEVIATHAN WE SWOOP DOWN AND COVER

what is ours. Desires

OR BLOCK THEM. SICKNESS—ACHES.

Are heroes in simplicity with open eyes  
and hungers. Truth

does not hurt us. Is more difficult than  
beauty is. We smolder smoke pours  
from our ears in stopping what we feel.

( free air )

Your hand, by your side, is never love.

Brakhage writes that while the concept of feedback “strikes closest to where my thoughts are now moving,” he is also impressed by McClure’s use of smoke-nets in “Rant Block.”

[T]his is where the nets touch closest to this home – “Your hand, by your side, is never love” – being the closest to a haunt line I’ve had in years, and that I’ve been involved many months in a film, possibly to be called *Virgin Mountain*, which involves Jane and two neighbor girls which contain rungs of the ladder of what-Jane-is-to-me and (No I can’t explain in any way yet all that) but let it go for now – except a question, if possible to answer or point to where my reading answer is . . . how “nets of smoke upon the world.”, it being “upon the world” my being bothered. Please understand, all questions are meant in the most practical way (are in no sense criticisms – I taking you at your word and words thoroughly) and should not be bothered with, if a bother. I encourage the reply, “if you don’t know, why do you ask,” if there no growing something in it for you.

“Rant Block” can be read as a manifesto, a spiritual struggle rendered into language, spilling over with viscera, hope, and rage. McClure writes that he is “A FIRE AND I MOVE IN AN INFERNO/ sick I smolder/ and do not burn clear.”

Smoldering makes nets of smoke upon the world.  
I am clean free and radiant and beauty follows this.

Not first but follows.

What is love or hatred but a voice I hear



of what I see and touch. Who is the man  
within that moves me that I never see  
but hear and speak to? Who are you  
to stop me? Why are you here  
to block me? All I choose to see  
is beauty. Nerves. Inferno!

Fakery of emotions. Desire for presumption. Love of glory. Pride.  
Vanity. Dead and unfilled desires. Regrets. Tired arms. Tables. Lies.  
BLOOD AND MUSCLE BLOOD AND MUSCLE BLOOD  
AND MUSCLE BLOOD AND MUSCLE

Calling pure love lust to block myself and die with that upon my  
head?

Wit and false stupidity with no point to it but the most tangled ends  
unwitnessed by myself in fulfillment. When I found you sleeping  
why didn't I? Would you love me for it? Do I care? OH. And smoke.  
AND NOT THAT FINE SWING  
of wing or fin!

In a letter marked "Dec. somewhat '61," Brakhage asks McClure to visit Colorado, discusses how much the Experimental Cinema Group can afford to pay the poet for an appearance, and suggests that McClure record a spoken-word record for Western Cine.

Immediate offers flying my way for every kind of commissioned "ART" film up to \$175,000 proposed feature based on William Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*, as Mad. Ave. falls all over itself trying to "create" an American Bergman. Temptations galor, all of which I've had (after intensive struggle) the good sense to turn down. I am right now these days finishing the little (about 5 min.) hand-painted-over-photographed-image film on the birth of our third child Neowyn – to be called *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular*. I'm enclosing a bit of it to send along to you – a piece too much worked on to go into the final film; but held close to the light, there may be an image or two left on it.

This tension between a suspicion of fame and the very human desire to be recognized for one's own work was present in the minds of both men at the time. In the letter Brakhage describes McClure's "2nd Mad Sonnet" as "wonderful and immediately appropriate to myself."

OH HOW I WANT THEE FAME!  
FAME, THOU VIOLET LAOCOON OF TOILING BRAWN  
and writhing snakes enwreathed on upturned  
GRIEVED FACES  
Oil and sweat shake from the locks of the famous,  
and though they moan they are stoic as a tree.  
Fame loops out fat coils like a half-forgotten dream  
and binds men's wrists in their romantic agony.

---

Fame you are a rotten plum!  
I wipe you from my fingers  
with a rosy napkin.

-----

LET ME SEE THE LOVE TENDRILS  
of woman and child!  
AWAY FAME!  
My spirit is not trapped by love of fame.  
I am not hungry for death's attitudes.  
BLESS NIGHT.

On January 9, 1962, Brakhage informs McClure that the poet's essay dedicated to iconic sex symbol Jayne Mansfield has inspired him to work on his latest film. *Dog Star Man*, an epic lyrical masterpiece, presents the struggles of the filmmaker and his family to survive in the mountains as a microcosm of the universe. It would come to be Brakhage's best-known film, and was named one of the 100 best films of all time by the Library of Congress.

"In Defense of Jayne Mansfield" so completely right feeling for me right now that (in midst of being work-blocked) (and in midst of 102 flu temperature) I literally rushed to my work room and most visually began the beginning of *Part I: Dog Star Man*; and I am now over a hundred feet into the editing and rolling powerfully forward without (so far) any stylistic wobbles to right and left-over from Prelude. It is most particularly that difference in prose-style between "In Defense of Jayne Mansfield" and "Revolt" which most immediately struck me – the "literary" perfection of the latter (or that which makes me called it "the most perfect essay in my memory") as distinct from the sure right feeling of the former (the incontrovertibility of the non-argument as set forth with a clearly calculated but all the same uncomplicated simplicity) . . . I don't mean anything like Heart versus Mind or Romanticism versus Classicism (particularly I don't mean any "versus" at all) but just that your recognition of the "health" of the "darkness" or "blackness" of the love of Jayne Mansfield (love being a never quotable object in this essay) is so matter-of-fact true that it doesn't even have to shame the non-recognition in others, something like no strain to it, clear but naturally never precise, so that the total feeling at the end is one of amazement that Jayne Mansfield ever needed defending and yet a clear sure understanding that she did, and now does only in the mind of the disembodied reader – tho never in the mindless body of the motion picture viewer. Your writing here is healthy in the same black way. NO, I see on re-reading the above that I'm not able to explain why this essay affects me as it did, does. It has, perhaps, something to do with all recent, almost feverish, studies of Duchamp, whole concept of sex-to-"ready-mades", his chess move from "The Bride" & "the Bachelors" themes, particularly in the large last "Glass" to his "objects" at hand, as it were, etc. and my most influencing

parcels arriving weekly from Ray Johnson, and disciples of his, and the whole coming “generation of the superficial” as you proclaimed or titled your view of the contemporary SCENE, and that natural continuing drive of mine to make all films out of the excitement you found in the “Dailiness Film”, which in itself will never make a film now as it’s a written something but which might in some very large sense be called the scenario for *Dog Star Man*, etc. THE SOMETHING ABOUT THE WHOLE ANTI\*ART ARTIST WHICH IS RIDICULOUS IS THE IMPLICIT NON\*RECOGNITION THAT THERE NEVER IS, OR WAS, SUCH A THING AS A CONTEMPORARY ARTIST. There are just seekers and makers moving and operating under the surface of all pretensions as biologically naturally as your flatworm. . . even tho’ the surplus of storms along the surface these days do tend to muddy things a bit – but that which is working is never really aware of the muddying . . . except perhaps as the excuse with which we laze (when for instance, I stop actively piecing things together to sit aside and “think things over”, etc. – my laziness, too, being functional but with a greater potential for enjoyment if I simply removed myself utterly from the SCENE and stopped trying to punch-clock my operations and then cheat on the job. Hell, this is turning into a letter to myself.

In the essay, McClure compares Mansfield to Thoreau and Poe; all three, he claims, “capture human imagination by their *existence*,” and share a “secret darkness.” According to McClure, “A blackness and sexuality and mystery cloudily surrounds all lambs of this world—there is an intense secrecy to everything soft.” Mansfield, Poe, and Thoreau are all “immortal” and “cause us to tremble.”

Sexuality itself is cloaked in darkness. Mansfield is portrayed as a supernatural entity “blocked from completion and fulfillment.” Mansfield’s blackness contrasts with her iconic counterpart Jean Harlow, whom McClure describes as “the most white.” In the poet’s view, Mansfield’s breasts and vast smile” are “a meat spirit that we can barely conceive of.” In conclusion, McClure proclaims, “Let’s give honor to beauty in all beings and set men and women free so they may make their secret selves apparent” – a goal both he and Brakhage share.

Both men were set free by their realization that in order to create, one’s own physiology had to have a prominent role in the process. As the letters contained in this volume demonstrate, both Stan Brakhage and Michael McClure endeavored to eradicate the false separation of the body, mind, and soul that has led to lifeless art that is woefully incomplete.

It took many years to arrange the letters in the correspondence below. Many letters were undated; some were available to me only in fragments. In addition, many of the letters that Michael McClure wrote to Stan Brakhage during this period are now lost. I have attempted to give the fullest picture possible with the material that was available to me; however, this collection is necessarily incomplete.

I am very grateful to Michael McClure for granting me two interviews, the results of which serve to illuminate the correspondence and provide context for many of the events that are mentioned in the letters. After each excerpt from the interviews I have indicated the date of our conversation in parentheses. McClure was also very helpful in the preparation of the notes that follow many of the letters in the correspondence.

All material in brackets was written by Christopher Luna, who is also responsible for all footnotes unless otherwise indicated.

# **The Letters**



**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

Stan,

Bruce<sup>1</sup> said you wanted me to drop a note to you. Things sound interesting with you. B. says you are working on a feature length nightpiece in color. I just came up with a new night thing myself a kind of typewriter exercise from the middle of the night:

The cigarette burns. Do you know it? The child

is an image of me. We are cylinders of air

Love, wrapped in a bundle of tissues  
and organs. The nectarine

Like an old Rothko. The skin  
red, orange, irregular of broken lines and smooth  
patches. She moves in the rooms and screams.  
I write this night piece because the lines  
are broken. The preceding is halted.  
There is a plume of smoke over my head.

So it is the way it goes – NIGHT is the most interesting anywhere. It will be interesting seeing what happened to the color film at night.

If you see Windy tell him he left SF without my permission, he said he was leaving but I didn't think he would.

Things are not very exciting here, I think Bruce's arrival will help in that way. Robert [Duncan]<sup>2</sup> and Jess [Collins]<sup>3</sup> are the only ones doing much of any interest everything else here is phoney and I am unrelated to it. I mean on the writing scene. Larry [Jordan]<sup>4</sup> is working steadily on the theatre. I think there is a pretty good chance it will open – but not nearly as soon as Larry expects unless some miracle occurs. There is supposed to be some kind of article this week in *Life* and *Time* on the "SF Renaissance," I think there will be a picture of me in *Life* – I can imagine it now, I suppose I will be sort of tacked onto the glory of [Allen] Ginsberg<sup>5</sup> as an afterthought. I am so full of cultural evangelism of St. Luce<sup>6</sup> that I could puke. The magazines have finally caught on to ART and WRITING – they can entangle that last one half of one percent that have held out and really impress the other 99 percent as never before. [Kenneth] Rexroth<sup>7</sup> is beating the bass drum and singing a hymn to the amalgamation. You see we are really a bunch of goodhearted child anarchists and Stevenson liberals etc. concerned with the downfall of morals and corruption of the spirit staunch puritans in the mask of buddhism with a reverence for life etc. of course he is talking about Lawrence Ferlinghetti.<sup>8</sup> Toujours perdrix!<sup>9</sup>

Jess is illustrating and designing a children's story of mine called "The Boobus and the Bunnyduck."<sup>10</sup> Once upon a time a Boobus and a Bunnyduck lived in a

little house in a very large garden. The boobus had little blue shoes almost like moccasins and a pink coat and a pink sunbonnet. The Bunnyduck had light blue fur and dark shiney eyes like the boobus' eyes. The boobus' eyes were bright blue just the color of the bunnyduck's fur. the house they lived in was made out of wood. It was not very large but it was old and cozy, etc.

Recently I've been hung up on a tarot card (number 18) and wrote a sequence on it of about 5 poems and a story. Four of the poems will be in Evergreen 4<sup>11</sup> whenever that comes out. Now I am working on a more active approach to the poem and kind of stalled in the process – my ideas before always included a kind of stasis and listening on my part.

a new thing starts tho:

---

The shark's tooth is perfect for biting. The intent  
matters. I am sick of beautiful things  
/ and I would make a robe of gestures

without beauty except for the beauty inherent  
in words and motion.

so take it from there. Things go on as usual Oh if you are interested in a new  
magazine that has come out

MEASURE

33 S. Russell

Boston 14, Mass. .75 the copy. Mostly poetry

I will be in the second issue.  
you and your ideas.

Let me know what is happening with

Mike

2324 Fillmore, San Francisco, Calif



[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 11/16/61]

November 16, 1961

Dear Michael,

And I do see you so much more as Michael (rather than Mike) since our New York encounter<sup>1</sup>, some audio-visual sense of mine removed from whatever dragons you may or may not have slain – in other words, I mean it as sound-sense rather than symbolically (as Gertrude Stein would say) . . . oh hell, I mean it as a compliment in some inter-personal sense; and let it go at that!

Your essay “Revolt” is really fine, probably the best essay (if not the only one) on the subject which I have ever read. But then it is that so much of all your writing comes to both Jane and I as if conversant with the specific processes of our everyday struggle. It was, even before reading the recent things, always shocking to me that, removed as we are behind all these mountains from what you might call the “contemporary scene”, our most personal struggles have seemed to find so much contemporaneous utterance in your most personal works of creation.

Let me try to be more specific; because I would very much like for this to be more than a gesture correspondence between us. Take your smoke-nets (I even have that one in vision: *Wedlock House: An Intercourse*: where I use cigarette smoke screens leaking in and out of darkness-lightness-flashes entangling the figure of Jane and myself in this search film of the first months of our marriage) . . . that you start (“For Artaud”) with “The nets are real – ” makes you immediately (in my mind) one step closer (nearer to my knowledge of them) than, say, [Charles] Olson in “As the Dead Prey Upon Us” who has his scapegoat from the start to call to “disentangle the nets of being!” Wonderful as that (his) poem (and all of his) is (and more especially was) to me, its working cannot move into the life I now live since making *The Dead*. Even two years ago, when we had our angels and demons and men going up and down those ladders practically on parade (as you will read in *Metaphors On Vision*), Olson’s poem was more like a masterpiece than something contemporaneous with us. I take it for summation; while your smoke nets are (not contemporaneous . . . what the hell do I want/?) potential (no!) . . . something growing in relation to my own realizations. For instance, that “Black” takes a practical (non-too-much-symbolic) stance in relation to “interiors” (OF COURSE) and that all has this air of practicality (such as “But not far enough” – as if you could, might ((irregardless of whether or not you ever would)) measure how far was far enough) and that a word like “slack” as you manipulate it becomes an almost technical term, as if you were manipulating the hulk, ship, of the state of being into a physical dock, and that you’re right down to the nose of the thing, that is (“a minute quality to foul the air”) that you can smell it – as both Jane and I learned to smell fear and could almost categorize its various shades of differences (a soapy-sweat smell with sour-milk sense ((tho I don’t drink milk so must internally produce its sense to in some way match the natural effusion from others for my own emergency . . . and for what? . . . to

communicate?)) with varying degrees of the stench of decayed meat ((as it can be found in the center of the smell of most expensive perfumes)) and the scent of perfume ((with its periphery of death-decay)) and not that you name it, as for instance [Robert] Duncan might attempt, but that you make it moooooove thru the whole poem. I am not rating appreciation here, but making distinctions. It is as fine “In Cold Hell, In Thicket”<sup>2</sup> to have the white tree gone that completely into ((“the dark place, the twigs/ how/ even the brow/ of what was once to him a beautiful face” being so much to do with [Jackson] Pollock, as I knew and know him) as it is in, say, Duncan’s “Crosses of Harmony and Disharmony” to describe it (“Shares of the Moon is man his tree” sending “the image of a rose/ from its particular fragrance to the sun.” or with the distinction “from where I was saw”) or as is most clear in “The Structure of Rime X” (“where thi’ has the sound of tree and th^ has the sound of nut”) as it is, say, in “The Breech” [*Hymns to St. Geryon*] “to handspring/ through a barrier of white trees !”; but I handspring with you there, that is there is action in it for me, just as I too won’t meet Jackson Pollock in the crossings of paint and feel-see-know the “smoke we make with our arms.” in the gesture. Perhaps a good part of my felt relationship to your work is due to the practical necessity in my art of finding the external visible reality beginning for creating the photographic image, which then of course goes on to be what IT IS. Even in working with hand-painted images, closed-eye vision guides each step of the way (as you will find in *Metaphors On Vision* my expressed desire to take a camera under my lids).

I won’t even attempt to go into *Dark Brown* here: and even “Revolt” would be too soon yet approached, except that I can say it is (page 44) the FEEDBACK concept that strikes closest to where my thoughts are now moving. Damn it, I’m tired, but I must just – on “Rant Block” \*\* say that this is where the nets touch closest to this home – “Your hand, by your side, is never love” – being the closest to a haunt line I’ve had in years, and that I’ve been involved many months in a film, possibly to be called *Virgin Mountain* which involves Jane and two neighbor girls which contain rungs of the ladder of what-Jane-is-to-me and (No I can’t explain in any way yet all that) but let it go for now – except a question, if possible to answer or point to where my reading answer is . . . how “nets of smoke upon the world.”, it being “upon the world” my being bothered. Please understand, all questions are meant in the most practical way (are in no sense criticisms – I taking you at your word and words thoroughly) and should not be bothered with, if a bother. I encourage the reply, “if you don’t know, why do you ask”, if there no growing something in it for you.

I will send you, and Morton [Subotnick],<sup>3</sup> copies of *Metaphors On Vision* just as soon as the nuns of St. Mary’s College, South Bend, run them off for me. The nuns turned out to be a jolly bunch as far as I was concerned, flipped over my “vision” lectures, etc. and in no way attempted to censor me. Anyway, they’re running off copies of *Metaphors On Vision* for me which should be here in a couple of weeks. I have already scheduled you to come here sometime in February. I can not only guarantee you \$50.00 for a poetry reading, but (if you can bring Larry [Jordan]’s<sup>4</sup> long film which photographs you over and over again

in relation to shop window glass, reflection devises, et. and/or any other film you've had anything to do with) (and if you're willing to give even a brief lecture on film) I can, in addition, get you \$100.00 from the Experimental Cinema Group.<sup>5</sup> I could do the same for Morton (if he would, could, bring the two Jordan films he's composed music for). In addition, would you please send me copies of your plays. I personally would like to direct at least one of them while you're here, that is have it ready for a two-night (at least good reading) production which would mean additional profit (probably) and certainly royalties of some kind. I am starting to direct plays again (will do a [James] Broughton<sup>6</sup> next Jan. when he's here) and would very much like to work dramatically with your language. I would need to start in the *immediate* future, as I am relatively slow worker stage-wise. Also, if you're interested, I've lined up an excellent opportunity (with people I've worked with many years as a lab and sound recording studio, and people most definitely honest and agreeable) for you to cut an entire LP recording of yourself reading poetry which (they say) can be sold at the very reasonable and encouraging price of \$2.00 a record and still make a profit for all concerned. If Broughton is agreeable, they will cut one with him in January. Tell me when February is best you, send the plays, and leave the rest up to me. We're looking forward to it more than you can imagine. Also let me know about the film possibility. Would you like me to simply write Jordan, or have the Experimental Cinema Group write and just rent the film for the decided date in February? or do you have the rights to bring it yourself and collect the full fee?

Excuse hodge-podge of the latter part of this letter – which I should have written first – but I will write more specifically when I get definite dates, etc., get confirmations from you, and get plays.

Disobeying your instructions, I opened the painting to have a much wanted view and was so amazed at what I saw that I made arrangements to have it wrapped tight and shipped in a case rather than subject it to the hazards of the bus. I want it to go on the ceiling of the children's rooms; and when I've sat with it awhile, I'll write some more . . .

Please tell Morton that I'll send him a long letter also within the week – also sketching out plans for his possible second coming to this area . . . if interested.

Extremely tired now. Best of everything to your lovely wife and daughter who hasn't met me yet but whose beautiful sleeping self I won't forget, and write when you've the time. . . ONLY PLEASE SEND PLAYS, as I'm most anxious to begin again with dramatics.

Best,  
Stan

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 3/14/62]

Crisman  
Salina Star Route  
Boulder, Colo.  
March 14, 1962

Dear Michael,

The last several months has been all nightmare haunted by my impossibilities, most particularly to aesthetically make a splice. All life has then been plastically splicing itself around me for my vision with maddening simplicity; but always myself at work table incapable of putting one piece of film to another in any which way. Then, all then, complicated by John Cage's<sup>1</sup> appearance here (myself variably twisting the pocket-books of the music department student organizations to raise the money – meeting almost complete opposition from faculty, insults traveling both ways; but finally even getting enough money out of them so that there could be two concerts) and long talks with Cage and pianist [David] Tudor,<sup>2</sup> recalling all old times, Cage's invitation to Jim Tenney<sup>3</sup> and I years ago for a beer, himself talking out his whole philosophy in a three hour many beers session which changed everything for my 21 year old self and pitched Jim out of Julliard and on into the lap of [Edgard] Varese,<sup>4</sup> etc. . . and then John now talking still on and on fastening the tie-strings of the incredible net he's been many years a'building, and subsequently my studying his book *Silence*: that being THE most completely perfect aesthetic structuralizing religious what-not statement yet made (to my knowledge) in our times. It IS the "terrible machine" which will separate the men from the boys, as the saying goes, in all creative endeavors. Few will survive. It is a marvelous book! I have survived:

Last night all ice broke in the looking. Somehow, in all slowness pain despair, I had thought I was getting nowhere. Then I realized, last night, I was some 400' (over 10 minutes) into *Part I: Dog Star Man* AND THAT IT WAS ENORMOUS. There is no form for what is making these splices work except that they DO. There's not a "chance operation"<sup>5</sup> in the entire ensemble. Jane was stunned to complete silence . . . and then, out of *Silence*, asking: "What then is form?" With a naturalness of not even looking (tho' I hadn't touched the book for two months) I picked out *The New Book/A Book of Torture* and automatically opened to the very page wanted: "THERE IS NO FORM BUT SHAPE! NO LOGIC BUT SEQUENCE," etc. on thru the entire poem, wringing out the smoke nets with each line, then straight on to *Dark Brown*, which seems to me to arise naturally from this very point in your work, even more (to me) than "solid moving through an inferno" – and I read aloud the entire *Dark Brown*, illuminations spinning themselves out in the air to ember away as mysteriously as closed-eye vision observed – that kind of burning (to me) seeming to REALLY MAKE SPACE in the black, it all becoming a kind of star-black un-consuming itself. The drive toward vision in this work!. . . how have you managed it? , at your age, as they often say to me, etc. "BUT WILL NOT BE DRIVEN TO MADNESS TO SACRIFICE", being perfect catch-up for the Aelf-scin sparks, and then to the

external: “When all fear to use their eyes” and the turning round-on-itself of “IGNORE THE BLOOD RED BEAUTIES” – ah, yes.

Well, in short, you’re an immense inspiration to me . . . and somehow your lines have been traveling along with me all these difficult months, helping make space . . . bless you. The only real glimmer I had of it before last night was on receiving “THE SURGE,” especially that you did not mean “emotive analogies”. And if only I could be showing you the “more total view” of this new work as if it’s un-spinning; but there’ll be many many months yet, perhaps more than a year, before it is shaped to move its rounds. Still I am much hung up on (and this may most clearly show you where I am): “I love you is the key” . . . out of which moment spring the whole tree following -- somehow in relation to my knowing that I am (in the film) always moving toward the cutting down of the tree and the absolute smashing of its dead branches into kindling, etc. (did you see, i.e. consciously recognize, the placenta in relation-to the tree in *Prelude*?) And then the line in [Kenneth] Patchen’s<sup>6</sup> *Journal of Albion Moonlight*: something like: “When you chop down the solitary tree, the whole forest moves closer to heaven.” “IS NOT THE OLD MALE SIGHT OF IT/ as dead as hell?” Yes, and from that the drive to somehow get Jane into the editing room, not just to be seeing it unfold, nor to in any sense be “directing”, but to really just have the other halves of these eyes there – yet their not functioning in any film-making way – HOW SPIRITUALLY TO DO THIS? The casualness of this wife of mine – how I trap her in that very statement . . . how to break out.

I’ll enclose some Cage articles for your amusement.

Now I’ll really be reading some of the list of books you gave me.

There is a group of students here who are planning a benefit program to raise \$150.00 for Michael McClure to come here and read poetry WHENEVER HE WISHES, etc. That is, no strings whatsoever attached. I have had nothing more to do with it than that I’ve bitched around here for months that there wasn’t enough money raised for you to be able to manage to make it without too many immense sacrifices, etc.

Now, as to my coming to S. F. How about 2<sup>nd</sup> week in April? Morton Subotnick is also trying to raise some funds at Mills College; so we’ll wait and see what turns out there.

All best to you and family.

Stan

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

## THE SURGE<sup>1</sup>

This is the failure of an attempt to write a beautiful poem, I would like to have looked at as the mindless coiling of a protein that has not fully achieved life – but one that is, or might be, a step towards living-being. We live in the visions of highest genius – each day we see through the eyes, brains and physical spirits of Plato, Darwin and Dante. The glories of their visions allow us to see more fully, but too often their seeings are accepted as finalities. We have not even totally assumed the meanings of Marx or Freud, and still make confrontations with their ideas. The message embedded in the dialogue *Euthyphrye* [Look up] by Plato, is one that is enormously fresh. Why have we not gone beyond what was already known by the older geniuses of mankind and begun to prepare a *Paradiso* of our own sciences and genius? Darwin's portrait of life is real and true but it is only 15 degrees of a circle. Let us see all and feel all kinships and meanings, and great unity, in the rushing mass of plasm that has begun to fill the darkness between the stars . . .

THE SURGE! THE SURGE! THE SURGE! IT IS THE SURGE OF LIFE

I seek

TO VIEW. . .

Plato and Darwin are the dead heads of glorious vision.

Dante turned to the woman Beatrice  
in Paradiso and she spoke:

“Tis true that oftentimes the shape  
will fail to harmonize with the design  
when the material is deaf to answer.

Then from its source the creature deviates;  
For though impelled toward the highest heaven  
it has the power to bend in other ways –  
just as when fire is seen to fall from clouds  
if the first impulse of its natural bent,  
turned by false pleasure, drives it to the earth.

--No more, if I judge rightly,

shouldst thou marvel

at that ascent, then at falling rill

that plunges from a mountain to the depths.

Twould be as strange, hadst thou stayed down below . . . “

IS NOT THE OLD MALE BEAST SIGHT OF IT

as dead as Hell?

Our view of Life is still so young and so worn  
and ripped by the brutal tatters we made of it!

Subtle Plato and Darwin opened worlds to us by stating  
what we knew and our admission threw us into to

reality! How blind is blind?  
How deaf and dumb is our dumbness? Who now can  
read Euthyphro without the shock of a tingling  
truth that is already dead and buried? If we admit,  
we do have fresher eyes. There's a calm intertness  
of joy that living beings drift to and from. (And it is far  
back when the Universe began . . .  
and it is here now too.) I do not mean the mystic's view.

--Or that of a man locked in the superstition of his own repression.

Not emotive analogies!  
I mean there is a more total view:  
It shifts and changes and wavers,  
and weakens as our nerves do, to finally make  
a greater field and more total sight,  
YEARN FOR IT . . .

I love you is the key.

THE SURGE OF LIFE may not be seen by male or female  
for both are halves. But perhaps the female,  
who is unprincipled, sees farther and into more.

2.

OH HOW I HAVE BEAT MY HEAD AT IT in male stupidity!  
And here . . . here in my hand, is a picture of the living Universe  
made by a woman as a gift of love in a casual moment:

--A valentine in ball-point ink. It calls all  
previous images to abeyance. The dark and radiant  
swirlings in my head seem clumsy – tho I trust them too.

She says it is a tree that is not a tree.  
It might be a placenta with thin branches or veins.

The stalk of it narrows to a gasp of life  
and stretches downward and spreads into what  
might be the earth or the top of another tree  
((Is there a forest?))

(Upon the lower treetop, or earth, lies a creature coiled  
and incomplete, with round and staring eyes.)  
Intersecting the narrow trunk, or crossing it, in  
mysterious geometry, is a palette shape.  
then it spins around and round, before ascending  
up the stalk into the boughs, a creature that  
is a ring of meat divided into the individuals  
comprising it. They are hot upon each other's

tails. They stare after one another and outwards  
with round eyes. Some beasts of the ring  
are dots and blobs or teardrops of primal meat.  
And some are more whole creatures. Some contain  
within themselves, midway, an extra pair of eyes  
to show their division is not complete. (Or  
to assert the meaninglessness of all division  
that is based on eyes or other organs.) Those eyes  
deny that a single head or set of senses divide  
lives in a greater sense. The ring is one:  
The creatures  
swell, spring free, and dart up the cincture  
to greater space above.

A long, large, snake-shaped molecule of flesh  
coils from the earth  
around the palette and caresses the higher branch  
in sensuality.  
The high part is a heart: within it a man's head and shoulders  
rise from a batwinged heart with thready tail –  
and a heart upon the thread-tip. Nearby is a circle  
(a vacuole?, a nucleus?) with a shape inside that might  
be any living thing from a vulture to a dancing child.

High and low outside are stars that are  
living sparks or moths.  
TURNED UPSIDE DOWN THE DRAWING HAND  
not more nor less. It is a gentle  
tensile surge,  
a woman views.

3.

Yes, all things flow! and in our male insistency on meaning  
we miss the truth. The mountains do pour, moving in millionic  
ripples over thousand aeons. Demanding brute reality we forget  
the greater flow and the black immediate is larger – and it is  
and isn't, But Life, THE PLASM, does not flow like lead does.  
It SURGES! Is that the difference? – And it is one great whole  
--and isn't. It is something sweeter than we are – we must feel  
and hear it too! Male and female have and do not have importance  
--they matter! It is not relative but real!  
In black immediate I feel the roaring meat mountain  
herds of Bison and of Whales or Men or solid  
American clouds of birds 100 years ago.



Then I am moved by meanings and sights of  
the smaller surge: Then I, dreaming,  
partake in the surge like a plains Indian  
on horseback and I know my smallest gene  
particles are forever spread and immortal. Distances  
and hallucinations then can cause no fear;  
life is primitive and acceptable.

Is all life a vast chromosome stretched in Time?  
Simply a pattern for another thing?  
But the pattern like the chromosome is the Life,  
and the surge is its vehicle.  
IT DOES NOT MATTER:

It is the athletic living thing of energy:  
All else is a soundless and sightless pouring.  
THERE IS NO TELEOLOGY!

Inert matters pour in and out of the Surge  
and make sound and sight. But neither  
they nor the Surge will wait. It is another matter.  
Space, Space, Space, is a black lilly holding the rosy,  
full, flowing, and everspreading and con-  
trasting, spilling flash.

The woman's easy sight of it can be bolder than the man's.  
She admits that we can never know, and tells  
us that the question is useless words.  
The surge can never see itself for the surge is  
its self-sight. and its sight  
and being are simultaneous.  
There is no urge to see or feel – for it is sight  
AND FEELING.

Except for the glory  
GLORY  
GLORY  
GLORY  
GLORY  
GLORY  
GLORY  
it does not matter.

But desire to know and feel are not eased!  
To feel the caress of body and the separate  
physical tug of each desire is insanity. The key

is love  
and yearning. The cold sea beasts  
and mindless creatures are the holders of vastest  
Philosophy.  
We can never touch it.  
WE ARE BLESSED.

---

Praise to the surge of life that there is no answer  
--and no question!  
GENETICS AND MEMORY  
ARE THE SAME  
they are degrees of one  
molecular unity.

We are bulks of revolt and systems of love-structuring  
IN A GREATER WHOLE  
beginning where the atoms come  
to move together and make a coiling string . . .

Beyond the barrier  
all things are laid upon a solid  
and at rest . . .

Beatrice . . .

Beatrice . . .

Paradiso is opening.

WE ARE AT THE GATES OF THE CHERUBIC!

Michael McClure

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 4/62]

Somewhere beginning April

Dear Michael,

I showed your new poem “The Surge” to Donald Sutherland<sup>1</sup> (*Gertrude Stein: a Biography of Her Work*) who became tremendously excited, says he would have a copy of his translation of Antonio Machado’s<sup>2</sup> writing sent your way (tho’ there is another translation coming out soon you might watch for) – Sutherland finds this your “best poem”, also closest to some of his own digging in Machado, etc.

I will be in S.F. around noon of April 8<sup>th</sup>. He (Broughton) has lined up a definite program for Canyon Cinema on April 15<sup>th</sup>, with a possibility of U.C. program on April 10<sup>th</sup> and another possibility at the theatre where [James] Broughton works on April 19<sup>th</sup>. These latter may fall thru, but you should contact him before setting your date to check against conflict.

Best,  
Stan

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/3/62]

May 3, 1962

Dear Michael,

The instant I got back here I was confronted by a British sculpture and wife whom I'd encouraged to come out here when meeting them on last trip to east – found they had gambled their last money on this trip and were hopefully depending on myself to help get them established in this area (which I somehow miraculously managed to do within the next week: jobs, house, et al.) and then that they were also here for U.N. week at C.U. [University of Colorado at Boulder], which immediately led to the fact that Bob [Robert] Creeley<sup>1</sup> and Bobby [Louise Hawkins],<sup>2</sup> his wife, were also here. I've wanted for years to meet Creeley, so anxiously that (despite unshaven condition and just-off-train wrinkles in my suit) we all (Jane, our three children, British sculpture and wife) rather crashed a huge formal party at the Vice-President-of-the-College's house with such a graceful style, and such well-behavior from the children, that we charmed the entire assemblage and had lovely meeting with the Creeleys. But Bob was gradually coming apart at the seams from Boulder stuffiness and un-week and he badly needed an all night drunk-blast and talk session about THE REAL, etc. . . and tired as I was I arose to the occasion and we-all have become fast friends in one hell of a wonderful hurry. I also managed to get him a recording session with Western Cine for later record release. Then, in midst of all this, I got an invite to go to Albuquerque for lecture show mid-May, and as that's where the Creeley's home currently is – it is all a delight. They had no sooner left and the sculptor provided for, than I got notice that I'm to be flown air-jet to NY to photograph satellites (for ionosphere readings: i.e. non-war – hopefully), a couple showings of my own films there, then fly Albuquerque, then possibly LA, and if so then Santa Barbara, and if so, then SF by end-May again on my way back home. Wow, what a ring-a-round. Somehow in midst of all this I have managed to read *The Feast*<sup>3</sup>... wondrous wonder that it is – power of ritual . . . you've touched the rite of drama as no one else, to my knowledge, in this age (WHY DOESN'T ALL THE WORLD STAND EARS\*EYES RIGHT UP AND RECOGNIZE YOU, YOU INCREDIBLE GENIUS?) I mean as "play-rite" also --- and I read and re-read it, and aloud, and have already become so excited I have contacted an actor who could do *Yeorg* beautifully and begun steps toward producing it when you're here. I haven't got on to reading the others yet, this *The Feast* being even altogether too much for me at this time, particularly as any kind of mental vomitorium is utterly out of the question, the whole atmosphere of the play not sticking but, how should I put it? – being absolutely undigestible whirling crystal ball within one and inviting THE DANCE of the spectator as never before. AND SOUND! Well, Michael, and I do mean this in all humility, you and I must also collaborate just as soon as at all possible – for my thoughts have run right to the brink of the reversed spoken as most source for unsticking literate meaning and freeing the words to new conception; but, as you know, I have not at all the power with language to in any way do more than vaguely dream of what you've begun to

actualize in this most marvelous drama. It cast a wondrous (tongue-twisting) spell over even the British sculptor. I also (earlier) read “The Surge” aloud and got Creeley much with it, much excited – and what a lovely out-going excitement there is to this man.

What I haven’t yet had time to do is contact your fan club here and check on the finances; but I imagine mid-summer will be the ticket. Somehow, the most memorable moments of all my visit to SF were those spent with you, Jo Ann, and the children in the Golden park. Bless you all. Box for Jane arriving shortly.

Best,  
Stan

P.S. Trust you saw Knickerbocker’s<sup>4</sup> interview, and might you consider sending essay to him?

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

*Dog Star Man*

By Michael McClure

In *Dog Star Man Part One* Brakhage learns from his two earlier films *Prelude* and *Anticipation of the Night* . . . The other debt in evidence is that the beautiful shots of the bearded hero's face and some scenes of mountain, cliff, and forest, or solitary green fir bough sweeping in the wind are reminiscent of moments of Eisenstein's *Ivan*. In *Ivan* the striking scenes printed on memory are the broodings of Ivan's face from the summit of a crag while he looks down upon medieval city or holds soliloquy with his soul as the camera comes in for a profile of his jagged nose and chin with foxy beard pointing to heaven or hell. Where Eisenstein must show Ivan brooding in solitary state in a logical sequence of dramatic events, Brakhage may show only the shin of his hero – or a grimace of deep emotion & turmoil against whiteness or sky . . . Where Eisenstein shows the whole & ush of plot in an earthly drama that reaches to the cosmic, Brakhage reverses the process and shows the cosmic and divine drama of flesh and thought and memory and hallucination and aspiration reaching towards the earthly.

In *Dog Star Man* all possible views are taken. The man dressed in ragged pants and boots with beard and hair to his shoulders accompanied by his dog struggles up the mountainside fleeing to a holocaust that may be real or imaginary – but the man is real! We see man and dog . . . the hand fights in the snow for a new grip upon icy rock . . . then a passage of whiteness with an almost invisible pattern of pink within it . . . aloud . . . mountain . . . canyon . . . dog . . . tree . . . blackness . . . part of face brooding against sky . . . the man falls . . . the season changes . . . he climbs . . . the memory, or fantasy, of the man dancing naked to the waist like a messiah in flickering firelight . . . he faints, struggles, and hallucinates, becoming immortal in his striving.

As in all works of art *Dog Star Man* is an adventure that is not distinguishable as either a physical adventure or a spiritual one but the two become inextricably woven together to prove the unity and sheer beauty of man and universes. Criticism speaks of levels but *Dog Star Man* refuses the levels and they become indistinguishable. The camera is outside of the man photographing him . . . The camera is an eye inside of the man seeing his organs . . . The camera does not distinguish between future fantasy and past memory of the man . . . The camera does not say whether it is inside of the man's organs or the dog's organs. The camera does not say when the outer world is imagined or when it is real.

The rhythm of *Dog Star Man* is an intuitive adaptation of the pacing of classical drama, whether it be Noh theater or the wanderings of Faust. Classical drama is composed of self-contained scenes that blend one into the other leaving the spectator thrilled but awaiting the next . . . the scenes must have grandeur and unhurried rhythm while containing athletic and/or intellectual and emotional action. The accepted pacing of film is seven-second sequences or scenes. *Dog*

*Star Man* doubles or more than doubles the seven-second expectation. Each of the long (14-20 second) scenes is a photographic marvel too proud to rely upon technical excellence and interested only in beauty and an artist's ideal of sight. . . . Each scene whether in the cave of an intestine or looking up into the branches of a forest from the fallen snow beneath is a memorable sight. Combined one after another the scenes heave up into the construction of a human tale that is given credence as a divine happening.

*Dog Star Man* is the *most* self-sufficient and innocent film . . . self-sufficient in the sense that Chaplin is. No music is needed to watch Chaplin because his dance is all the music we need. *Dog Star Man* is silent in the sense that the greatest silent films are. In *Dog Star Man* the film itself becomes a dance of editing and moves as the best silent actors do with their physical movements with their physical movements with arm, leg, tongue, and face . . . The film breathes and is an organic and surging thing . . . It is a colossal lyrical adventure-dance of image in every variation of color.

Canyons, mountains, trees, blackness, blood stream, whiteness shot with pink, remembrances dog and man become actors in the medium. The versatility of sixteen millimeter becomes like the flashing of verse and gains the same possibility of immortality and vision . . . The film is innocent of taste and combines varied types of film, distorting lenses & altered film speeds.

Taking a historical view of Brakhage's films *Dog Star Man* is the culmination of *Anticipation of the Night* and *Prelude*. *Anticipation* is the first long film. It has upset and angered many since it received Cannes Festival protest prize. *Anticipation* is an almost dizzying swoosh of image after image in two-to-four second scenes and repeats of scenes. There are forty minutes and much of it imprints upon thought and keeps returning. After the last sequence of fast pastel shots of polar bear, and flamingo, and baby crawling upon grass, it ends with the shadow of a hanged man. The unseen hero having this film-dream is visible for the first time in the act of his suicide . . . he has entered his soul and decided upon self-destruction. The film has caused booing and audience demonstration at more than one showing. Nobody seems to know what is going on – *that it takes place inside of a man's vision* and the spectator merely has to watch. *Anticipation* is a story shorn of explanation but it is often viewed as an abstract film rather than an almost home-movie-like recording of experience and decision upon death. There can be no doubt that the audience is aware somewhere deep & they *do* disapprove.

In Spring 1962 Brakhage was awarded The Independent Film Award Makers Award for *The Dead* and *Prelude*. (*The Dead* is a drifting blue gray film of deep serenity and feeling photographed in a Paris cemetery.) *Prelude* is colossal objective film of the powers of nature – from splended shots of solar corona shooting bursts of flame into outer space to descents into the secret processes of the interior of muscles and living organs beating and gaping and closing.

*Prelude* uses the sequential style of *Anticipation* and almost by accident destroys the logic of relativity as it darts from massive to miniscule – from sun to bloodcell. *Prelude* is an exercise in transmuting the film into drama but it is an adventureless drama because there is no man in it – a drama only of beauty. *Prelude* is picture music. *Prelude* takes place in the imagination of a man working with pictures of the objective world. *Anticipation* takes place in the mind of a man contemplating suicide and moves with the swiftness of anguish. *Prelude* is creative contemplation and moves more stately.

*Dog Star Man* owes the objectivity of the nature and hero scenes to the grandeur of *Prelude* and draws the intense realization of the subjective from *Anticipation*, but *Dog Star Man* is greater than a synthesis of earlier works. It is as if *Dog Star Man* were a film in which the mental recording of *Anticipation* were encapsuled in the style of *Prelude*.

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage - undated, fragment of a letter, from Jane Brakhage's scrapbook]**

sat for awhile on the steps feeling disconsolate then tried to make it right by standing by your window but it didn't work at all. There's something surprisingly villainously unfriendly about glass between people. Maybe it has to do with the aurora Olson mentions or maybe it's – I don't know, but anyway there I was and you were somewhere else. Crystal noticed it too. So anyway, we were getting depressed about the glass and so we left. Actually, it wasn't all glass.

Love to all Brakhages

the sky here is incredibly beautiful orange pink & blue [indecipherable] heavy rains & hail.



[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 6/3/63]

June 3, 1963

Ah God, YES! – what a beautiful statement on *Dog Star Man – Part I* . . . bless you. I was so moved I could not read it straight thru, had to stop and walk around, work out some of my emotions, etc. And you did sound in good shape, too, despite difficulties [. . . ] – BUT, I mean (re: your guarded self) how you CAN “take the long and humorous view”, such as “I think I shall commit suicide by a seizure of black rancorous laughter on the steps of the Senate”, etc. I too have something to say on the subject of FINANCES: that is, did find myself saying, while being interviewed, that 19<sup>th</sup> century fairytales pass on an equation: the hero must slay the dragon to get THE HIDDEN TREASURE to marry the princess to go to the castle to live . . . happily ever after? ??: which must be wrenched awry in all sub-consciousness because of the spirit trap the mind does thereby impose OUT OF CONNEC TEXT . . . all reawakening in myself the realization of how much Villiers of the Isle of Adam<sup>1</sup> had begun in *Axel* in terms of destruction of the twin illusions of romantic Love and HIDDEN TREASURE – but then, too, how un-carryable (explanation of why so out-of-print) his vision was (is) because only referential to death. Then too, I’ve been (as you may not know) on the loooooongest lecture-tour yet (just having returned a week ago) thru the whole Eastern scene, appearing at 8 colleges, ranging from Princeton thru Bard, making about \$600.00 above all traveling costs, etc., cutting out debt back to just about where it was before we left for SF last Sept., all the time very involved with THE MONEY PROBLEM, looking for jobs, contacting Foundations, yackatyyacking on the subject as deeply and as superficially as possible, finally finding turning point (for the whole trip, all concerns, re: vision, *and* finances, etc.) in company of Charles Olson, Gloucester . . . partly by way of what he said but mostly by seeing how trapped he was, is?, despite all his greatness, right there where we all are, were?, , , I can’t go into the whole matter, in letter, at this time because I don’t want to interfere with my thinking it thru to some deep conclusion; but I will write this much: when you asked, in your letter, if I didn’t know someone who could send him some money, I (as usual) began frantically searching my mind for some patron to hit, both (as usual) for myself and for him . . . when suddenly, somehow as a result of all Eastern conferences, and as a result of talking with Jane on the subject, we both found such a source of patronage unending – that is, we sat down and made out a check for \$25.00 for Phillip and then a check for \$25.00 for Charles Olson. And things have been moving anew ever since.

I have just re-read the statement on *Dog Star Man – Part I, Prelude*, and *Anticipation* (and it is, really about those 3), and (tho’ I don’t care about fact trifles when the whole truth of a work process is being revealed at such depth) you probably have the right to know of a few errors which you may want to correct: *Anticipation of the Night* received a Brussels’ World’s Fair (“Exposition of Experimental Film”) award (a protest award put up by Pre-Selection Committee in protest to the decision of the final judges – said award being

granted “for the totality of Brakhage’s work submitted” . . . consisting of 6 films, including *Anticipation*,) I have never entered THE CANNES FESTIVAL, whose awards might better be called THE CONNED AWARDS, etc. The “baby crawling on grass” occurs only in a sequence of said, about ¼ to 1/3 the way thru, nowhere near the end. The “unseen hero” is shadow cast at the beginning and reappears, as shadow, again and again during the first ¼ of the film – is, then, thrown up again, this time as hanged man, at the end. Aesthetically, or rather technically, speaking, it is his shadow form which creates the specific night of the film, that which occurs ¼ thru to ¾ thru in the body of the film. My Spring 1962 Award WAS an INDEPENDENT FILM AWARD but not an INDEPENDENT FILM\*MAKERS AWARD, the latter being title for another organization.

Everything else is ABSOLUTELY CORRECT, or at least I would hope so – bless you.

No time for more now, as Jane is waiting to go to town, waiting so as to get this off in the mail to you.

Just one quick note, the Branamans,<sup>2</sup> and friends Morgan and Lisa, all came thru here Memorial Day, making a most memorable scene in their fantastically painted house atop pick-up truck, all dancing thru the sterility of the community where we are still here being, charging the whole total atmosphere in such a way as to drive Jane’s parents away for the day, drive away all the surrounding natives so that we too, Jane, I, all children, animals, had once again a sense of community we could be joined to – their departure, that afternoon, for Wichitahhhhh, leaving us here feeling very lonely and as if NOT LONG FOR THIS-HERE (Yes MERE) UPPITY MIDDLE CGLASS (Yes GLASS) WORLD.

With all wishes to be seeing you,  
Jo Ann, Janey, soon, somewhere,  
Stan

Dear Stan, I'm  
dreaming of a lion consciousness  
ness drama... WHAT IT  
IS TO BE INSIDE A LION  
WHO IS A MAN - you must  
not mention this to anyone  
for it is my dearest  
secret. But imagine a  
theater that becomes the  
interior ~~the~~ of the body  
THE SPIRIT & finally  
the consciousness of a  
man symbolized by  
lion I must not dwell  
too much on LION for  
truly it will be only  
the new Romantic man  
Hah Blahh I don't know

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage - undated]

Dear Stan, I'm dreaming of a lion consciousness drama . . . WHAT IT IS TO BE  
INSIDE A LION WHO IS A MAN - you must not mention this to anyone for it is  
my dearest secret. But imagine a theater that becomes the interior of the body  
THE SPIRIT & finally the consciousness of a man symbolized by lion. I must not  
dwell too much on LION for truly it will be only the new Romantic man Hah  
Blahh I don't know

what I am talking about. Except the new theater that I begin to catch sound of – that I am weighing new things as once I weighed the world for images of poetry. Talk I retracted that hour against poetry (bless *you* – in your words). My new textbook shall be [John] Ford and [Christopher] Marlowe & sweet Shakespeare & Plato's magnificent *Symposium*! I think I have drunk Webster to the very dregs & know his soul by heart. So *Bottom*<sup>1</sup> arrives timely to fill the new bookcases I've built.

Let me know when & I'll unhinge San Francisco & build Brakhage shelves with vampire proof glass doors – A MEWS to take musing flights from. We must all go to Venice and be healthy in that city of decadence. We will make a film of a new *Symposium* first & go to Venice next. (Do I prophesy?) I have about 8 trillion plans – *always* a sign *that rest is needed*? So I'm resting (actually working 12 hours a day to keep the Bogey away – but keeping myself away from vomiting except for a poem here & there. My subconscious is getting in control but not overtly so yet. Though I feel that happening at last & go into dreams & dream-thoughts awaking in strange places.

Yes, I saw Branaman . . . dropped GS (gently).

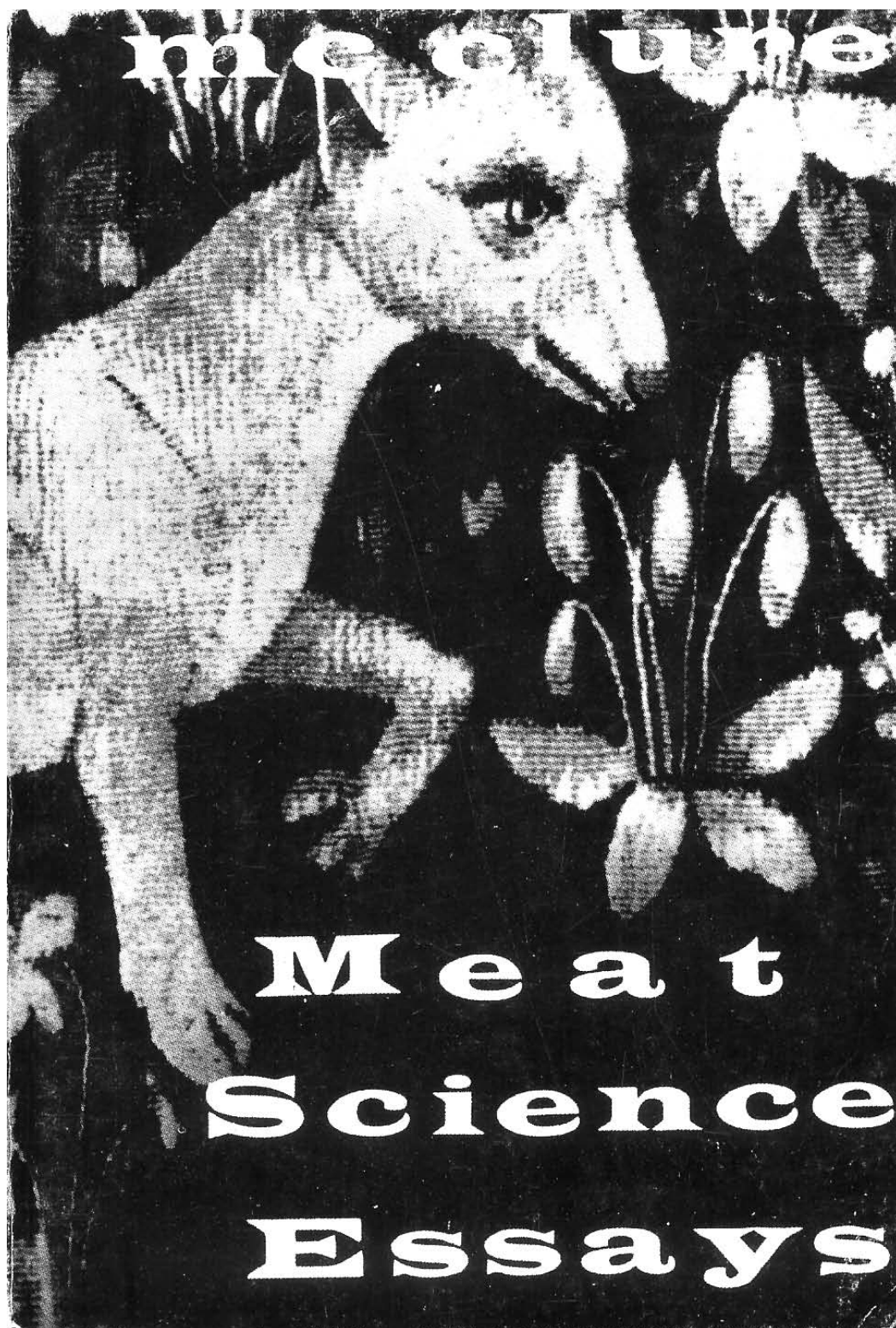
Now back to *Tamburlaine*.<sup>2</sup>

OH, Yes I believe (thank you again) I'll be reading at midnight of Spring Equinox in Fles<sup>3</sup> L.A. theater.

GAHROOOOH!

Alan Marlow<sup>4</sup> writes me that he is going to do *The Blossom* so perhaps you can judge it in 3D. If so, I will be there for opening night in NYC.

Love you all  
M



Meat Science Essays, cover second edition , City Lights 1970

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your "yea" or "nay" or whatever — tho' I would like to see it printed everywhere (so deep is it in comprehension) — even on the shires — Thos. Gordon (P. 100) as said to the Rev. Dr. Gordon

your "yea" or "nay" or whatever — tho' I would like to see it printed everywhere (so deep is it in comprehension) — even on the shires — Thos. Gordon (P. 100) as said to the Rev. Dr. Gordon

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[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure - 8/4/63]

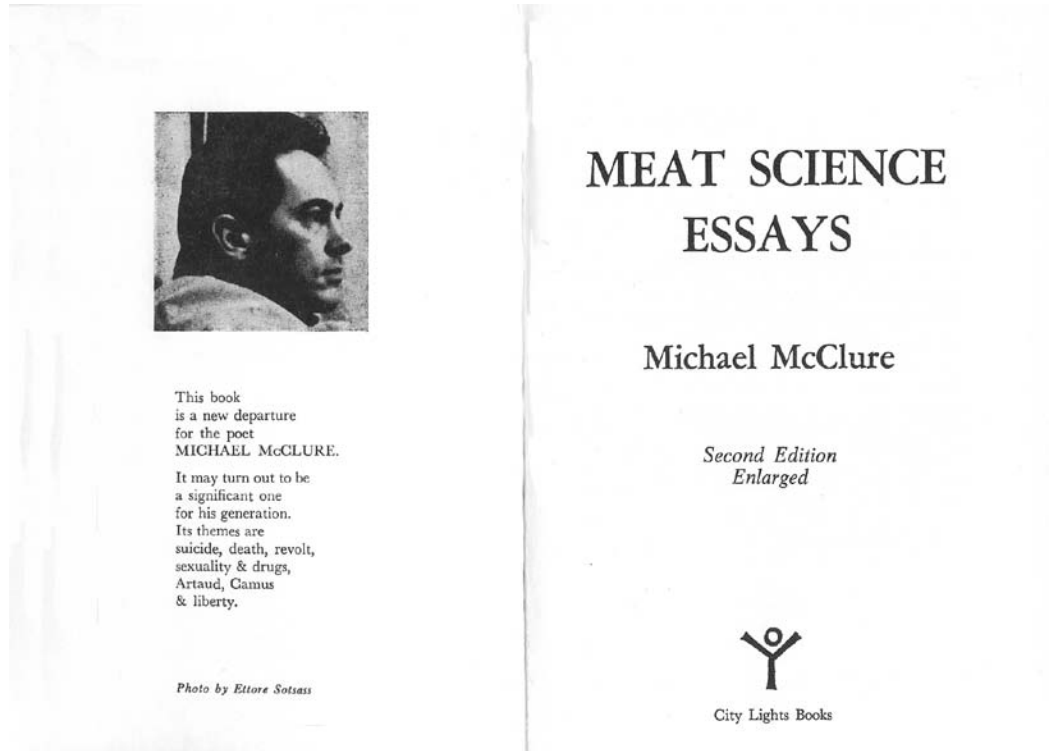
c/o Theatre Innovations  
4201 Hooker Street  
Denver, Colorado  
August 4, 1963

Dear Michael,

The above will give you some idea of where we are – living in a theatre lobby, as we actually are (tho' the quarters, of this old house-with-theatre basement, most used in my past experiences here for inter-missions, given us now by two friends sensing our desperate needs, lent for indefinite time for whatever we can afford to pay, damn little, these parts of this magnificent old house are really most IN-habitable and altogether a blessing for us after months of living with in-LAWS); and the other above will give you some idea of what I am, these days, most working with (a whole new technical field, to say the least, opened up and into what might generally be called "The first true film collage" and what will specifically be called *Moth Light*,<sup>1</sup> or *What a moth might see from birth to death if black were white* – and these strips therefrom as gifts of partial thanks for the joys you've sent our way, of late):

*Meat Science Essays*<sup>2</sup> being the most thought-provok-and-engendering we've been aloud-reading in this house-holding, causing us (as has second-most [Robert] Duncan's *Daybook* in origin) to be looking out, albeit somewhat lonesomely, to larger environs, concerns, etc. . . as your *Essays*, and Duncan's, are so marvelous free of being Righting-writing, in area, style-of, etc., where that most usually occurs burdensomely (and God knows we can bear very few more burdens these days than those already saddled on us.) So much of our conversations (i.e. what YOU said) are focused herein, but as if the lens were held by you in such a magical way that maximum visibility were possible with that quality of claritas possible only when the sun's eye, also, is permitted maximum focus, burning all to a crisp in pace with reading – I mean, with "pace," to praise that marvelous sense of timing, to be differentiated from timeliness, in your writing, as almost always with you, as I wrote of in praising the *Preacher's Dream-Tale* . . . bless you.) I am provoked only, in these essays, negatively by your use of the impersonal "you" – which may, indeed, be my problem as the rhetorical use of that "you" has been particularly bothering me all over the place. I do take note that you use it consistently; but then also I notice that it predominates, takes over, in all essays on drugs (except the last two, "Heroin" being an I-piece, essentially ((remarkable in that you say, in there: " – there is not so much I. I is an interference with near-passivity:")) and cocaine being essentially an it-piece); and I *have* found that impersonal "you" as the most tremendously powerful possession-trick going – I mean, how all "pushers" make most use of it . . . but then, of course, this is sensing dangers beyond the periphery of your immediate, very immediate, writing; and my thoughts are, as you well know, tangent upon a particular avoid-dance of my own.

*Film Culture* wants to print your piece on *Prelude* and P. Adams Sitney<sup>3</sup> will probably be writing you asking permission. Even tho' *ARTFORUM* has done so (and how good it was to see it there) *FC* may still want it for *Film World People*, etc. Just give them [RIGHT MARGIN] your "yea" or "nay" or whatever – tho' I would like to see it printed everywhere (so deep is it in comprehension) . . . even written on the skies—Thank you, Blessings to Jo Ann, Janey, all friends, Stan



Meat Science Essays, inside cover, second edition, City Lights, 1970



Stan Brakhage with camera over his face, Cambridge, MA, c. 1984 by Robert Haller



[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 9/63]

Mid Sept., 1963

Dear Michael,<sup>1</sup>

Just a brief note to accompany the enclosed with the change news: we will be leaving Denver on or around Sept. 25<sup>th</sup> and going to live in Custer, South Dakota, where I have a film job (commercial) waiting my arrival. Angels willing, I am going to try to “make it”, and much needed money, there awhile. If you write anytime after the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> of this month, I suggest you send it c/o Nauman Films, Custer, South Dakota.

I would like to know your opinion of these first few pages of the book dedicated to you. People who already know film technique have been unable to judge of the value of what I’ve therein attempted; and I’m not too sure if I should go with it – at least, I won’t be able to for some time now, anyway . . .

I was glad to hear (from P. Adams Sitney who just spent the week here with us) that *Film Culture* is going to print your beautiful article on *Dog Star Man*, *Anticipation*, etc. (P. Adams thinks it’s the finest piece of writing they’ve yet published, as do I – the next issue should be out in a month). They’re going to print *Metaphors On Vision* (first as a pre-subscribed book to get some money for me and then as an issue of *Film Culture*) sometime around the turn of the year. I spent all week with P. Adams getting the thing into final shape; and I’m balls tired of it and feel thoroughly bone-picked by this time (tho’ I am excited anew by The Introduction which will consist of a transcription of a very fine interview about the working relationship between Jane and I ((with ample credit to the inspiration of “The Surge”)) and all films made since our marriage).

*Mothlight* is finished and is the most indescribably beautiful film I’ve yet made.

Blessings to you and Jo Ann and  
Janey—Stan



Sterling Bunnell and hawk San Francisco 1965 by Larry Keenan

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

Dear Stan,

*Metaphors On Vision* is one of the first new big romantic books.

Enclosed is a copy of *Love Lion Book*<sup>1</sup> – perhaps it is the scenario for us.

I've just had a vision of THE NEW AMERICAN THEATER with Gerd.<sup>2</sup>

We start on Broadway with the *Spirit of Faust*, Calderon, & Webster. Everything is beginning to make perfect sense. WE MUST SPEAK WITH EACH OTHER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE! Is it possible to stop in San Francisco—*YOU MUST*—on the way to Custer? In the meantime speak with Gerd.

Love,  
Michael

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

NOW,<sup>1</sup>

WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN BY WHAT YOU QUOTE OF OLSON REGARDING MYSELF AND YOURSELF AND THAT APPELATION OF NARCISSIST? In the first place Stan, you are the prey ((or should I say the possessor of)) a theory of *disciples*, consequently to have disciples you yourself must have a Master or Masters. I can understand your mimeographing your letter quoting Olson conversations in the light of the above. I can be extremely interested in the letter and pleased to receive it. I cannot see a god-damned thing of any pleasure in finding my name linked with Narcissism. Perhaps you see yourself as a Narcissist and find that romantic or of pleasure to you. On the other hand, I AM NOT A NARCISSIST and I take no pleasure in seeing such references to myself.\* Because I am beautiful – or because certain segments of the world at large find me so – I have had to put up with that kind of name calling and I am sick of it. I am a lover of beauty wherever I find it. I do not even own a mirror more than a foot square and I usually only look into it to shave or brush my teeth. When I go to a friend's house who has a full-length mirror I usually look in it to keep my body image straight. I do not revel in my beauty. On the contrary, it has caused me a great deal of pain and increases the envy of those jealous of my genius.

I am interested in whatever beauty of presence and motion and movement that I can bring into being and I am interested in whatever beauty I can create in myself or in the world as well as whatever beauty I can find in the world. To call me a Narcissist is an insult because it injures what I truly am. Should I destroy my beauty like [Alfred] Jarry or [Antonin] Artaud as an affront to the middle class? Not on your life! Should I allow people to insinuate that I worship the contour of my muse or my cock? (Tho I do not condemn those that do.) NO! Should I go on listening to people saying that I am a Narcissist? I have listened to that for quite a while from Robert Duncan (in the past), from Allen Ginsberg and from petty gossip mongers. Now, I discover it in a mimeographed letter  
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

It is very difficult to believe that such things are said in innocence when I know personally that the people saying it have brains and eyes! To see it in a letter from a friend was genuinely frightening. I felt like a little boy. I was scared. And what is that *affliction* crap? Olson has a bad side just like anyone else. What are you doing – feeding it? You're pumping admiration into the megalomania vent. If you want an exposition of that kind of thing go read *Conversations With Eckermann* (Goethe/Eckermann). I told Ginsberg about the letter and the Narcissist reference and he said, "Well aren't you?" I spent fifteen minutes arguing with Allen and he conceded that I am not and that he started the rumor a

---

\* My grandfather was supposed to have been the most beautiful man of his generation according to all who knew him. That's enough to take the wind out of my sails. I am his genetic dilution!

long time ago, and that he was the one who told Olson that I am a Narcissist. He finally admitted the whole thing was untrue and HIS RUMOR and that he started it because he was envious of me.

He wrote a certificate to say so:

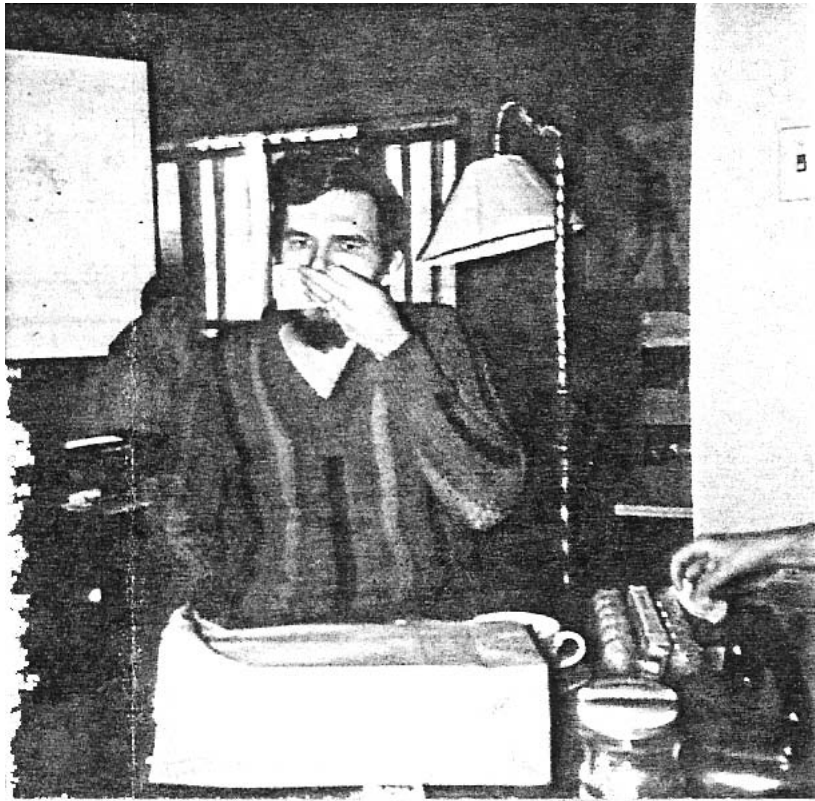
“I, Allen Ginsberg,  
a love starved eastern jewish hairy loss  
do admit circa 1956 – 60  
tears streaming from my eyes when I was not agossip  
hopping from cafeteria table to café stairs  
having conceived a jealousy for the body of Michael McClure  
his starry eyes valorous face and blackie hair  
and the naked human skin of his poetry pages  
which I gleaned alas as mere seraphic texts  
out of my own abysmal nervous breakdowns  
(coveting Jo Ann co-equal  
in his creation)  
and not knowing properly how to express my adoration  
ashamed of his tenderness and my own withheld  
having pathetically babbled all over my universe that he  
was a narcissist resisting my imaginary kisses,  
arms which at the time didn’t exist  
Having recovered partial trust in my belly and remorse,  
let this later indulgence set us free.  
Allen Ginsberg  
1963”

Maybe some good came of it because I also wrote a little poem-proclamation and put myself straight with Allen regarding my inattention to him as a physical person – though I have not seen him as a POET before and always where came the poetry from? But should I have to go to every poet and gossip monger and argue fifteen minutes and demand an indulgence?

Because someone is homosexual or momentarily petty must I suffer the weight of their projections upon my image? All right I will because I believe that time will relieve me of it all – but must I read it on posters and in mimeographed letters being sent to god-knows-who by a friend? Must I pretend that I am so fucking objective that I can take a smiling higher broader view and say to myself they didn’t really mean NARCISSIST and they are speaking on such a terribly high plane that I am named something I am not? I WISH TO GOD I WERE A NARCISSIST, SO I COULD GET PLEASURE OUT OF THE BEAUTY OF MYSELF THAT I HAVE CREATED, AND FORGET THAT I AM AN EAGLE OF POETRY AND A GENIUS, AND THEN SPEND THE TIME THAT I SPEND IN WORK AND LOVE CARESSING MYSELF AND ADMIRING MY PRODUCTIONS!

What do you mean, Stan?

And what is that other crap about shy? And about desire to control the world and so on? I am SHY. That is not a bad thing to say about me, it is true, I'll admit it anywhere anytime. BUT I DO NOT DESIRE TO HAVE ABSOLUTE POWER OVER THE WORLD AND ANYONE WHO HAS READ MY WRITING OR KNOWS ME PERSONALLY AND SAYS SO IS A LIAR! – OR MISGUIDED. I want to see the whole world free, FREE TO FOLLOW EACH PERSONAL AND INDIVIDUAL UNIVERSE AND DESTINY and that is one of the reasons that I wrote *MEAT SCIENCE* [Essays]. Shall I expect to hear next that I am a practicing Catholic? All of the mumbo jumbo in the world does not cover simple statements that are false and for purposes of insult, and self-aggrandizement, and detriment to others. Robert [Duncan] said once that someone called him a something-or-other but he didn't care or let it influence his



Picture of "Brakhage smelling money" taken by Ed Dorn in Pocahontas - a couple months ago ... Nov. '64

Brakhage smelling money by Ed Dorn November 1964

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

best wishes and love.

Michael

ASSISTANT: To think that we should find it in the ruins of ancient San Francisco and perfectly preserved by an encrustation of ~~solidified~~ <sup>solidified</sup> lava. I hear he was a Narcissist...

Dr. FUTURO: Yes, that is what the old records claim.  
(over)

friendship, because he (Robert) had said worse things about people . . . and about that particular person. But maybe that was before the mimeograph craze! I don't know any way to get this across in a letter.

By making me a partner of your self-abasement in the process of glorifying Charles you have raised a potential wall between us which I here take it upon myself to tear down.

I do not care what things you say about me nor what things you think about me – for we are all beings free and adrift – but when you commit falsehoods about me to letters and then mimeograph and then hieroglyph them in people's minds you are forgetting the solid basis of friendship about which our feelings waver – but to which the feelings should be able to return to without constrictions or prejudice.

best wishes and love,  
Michael

**[McClure's handwritten postscript:]**

Dr. FUTURO: Yes, this is undoubtedly the body cast of the 20<sup>th</sup> century poet Michael McClure! Put it upon the lab table!

ASSISTANT: To think that we should find it in the ruins of ancient San Francisco and perfectly preserved by an encrustation of solidified lava. I hear he was a Narcissist. . . .

Dr. FUTURO: Yes, that is what the old records claim.



Futuro cont.): Look his head is too large & it is definitely of an odd shape... and (haha) look at that ski jump nose... Bags under his eyes too - a balding alligre type - I can spot them. Look here, weird body type - never seen anything like it before - a most unlikely combination of meso, endo, and ectomorphs. Simultaneously thin, fat & muscular with some almost feminine fleshy padding.

ASSISTANT: Egad, look at the size of his ears!

Dr. FUTURO: Definitely a peculiar animal

ASSISTANT: Do you think he could have been a narcissist?

Dr. FUTURO: Not unless he was totally mad  
Lunchtime's over. We'd better get back to business.

Long Live Life,  
Michael



Futuro cont ) Look his head is too large & it is definitely of an odd shape. . . , and (ha ha) look at that ski jump nose. . . Bags under the eyes too – a balding allergic type – I can spot them. Look here, weird body type – never seen anything like it before – a most unlikely combination of meso, endo, and ectomorphic. Simultaneously thin, fat & muscular with some almost feminine fleshy padding.

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Long live life,  
Michael


LATER P.S.

Got trapped into a discussion with  
a BLIP named 'Chuck' 2 nights ago. He  
claims he edits Film Quarterly. Apparently  
he has written articles contra Brakhage.  
Sadly he wasn't intelligent enough to  
argue with - or I should say too hungry.  
He wanted to discuss FORM - whatever  
that is and do some professional nose  
picking. I shamed him for 45 min  
but it made me feel bad.

Love to all  
Brakhages  
&  
Glorious

BOA VOYAGE

Wrote 2 new mod sonnets

I'M ASHAMED OF MY PRECEDING ~~BLAST~~  
but send it to keep straight.  BLAST

LATER P.S.

Got trapped into a discussion with a BLIP named “Chick” 2 nights ago. He claims he edits *Film Quarterly*. Apparently he has written articles contra Brakhage. Sadly he wasn’t intelligent enough to argue with – or should I say too *hung up*. He wanted to discuss FORM – whatever that is – and do some professorial nose picking. I shamed him for 45 min. but it made me feel bad.

Love to all  
Brakhages  
&  
Glorious  
BON VOYAGE,

Wrote 2 new mad sonnets

I’M ASHAMED OF MY PRECEDING BLAST but send it to keep straight.

Dear Stan, I won't even try to cover up or clean up the preceding raving attack of ~~my~~ paranoia. Furthermore I'll admit for the word Narcissism to throw me into such a state that I certainly must have a touch of it. And I certainly must have some desire to control the world! Take the letter as snarl... in both senses of the word, and throw it away or something.

Teaching brings me right to the edge: *The birds are alive but I designed already.*

There are no lions -- or if so the lions are hiding.

CAN LIONS BE MADE?

Can the contents of the plasm be molded into the possibility?

Yeah!

IS THIS MY BUSINESS?

Okay, let's do it big with words becoming actions and actions ~~with~~ worth words.

The students are like little seventeen year old falcons already wearing armour of repression and only the eyes gleam. I get a little crazy sometimes. It's part of sanity. None of the preceding tells you how happy it will make me to see your book and the intro to it and the new book with the dedication to me. Perhaps I am so touched ~~by it~~ that I do not throw this letter away and send a note. Letters are like traps to me. All I can do is pick the trap up and carry or mail it! And remember I love Charles... as well as yourself and your family.

The play I mention on the first page is no good but I have learned enough from it to write a great play --- time, time, time,

*Michael*

YOUR MIMED LETTER  
OF CHARLES IS RIGHT  
GOOD AND TRUE

*Phil's MOTH LIGHT stup is a BOY QUT !*

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

[RIGHT MARGIN: Phil's MOTH LIGHT strip is a BOUQUET!]

Dear Stan, I won't even try to cover up or clean up the preceding raving attack of paranoia. Furthermore I'll admit for the *Narcissism* to throw me into such a state that I certainly must have a touch of it. And I certainly must have some desire to control the world! Take the letter as snarls...in both senses of the word, and throw it away or something.

Teaching brings me right to the edge: The bids are alive but dealigned already.

There are no lions – or if so the lions are hiding.

CAN LIONS BE MADE?

Can the contents of the plasm be molded  
into the possibility?

Yeah!

IS THIS MY BUSINESS?

Let's do it big with words becoming actions  
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Michael      YOUR MIMED LETTER  
OF CHARLES IS RIGHT  
GOOD AND TRUE

if it were not it would not have  
made me small Aquinas. Praise  
Truth! Praise Beauty!

---

I'll send you a copy of the Ginsberg  
McCune "part" it'll be out in a  
small magazine in a few weeks

I feel relieved & beautiful  
to carry this through,  
to ~~the~~ the end

&  
mail  
it

I hope it carries some pleasure  
like Beauty & the Beast

if it were not it would not have made me snarl and grimace. Praise Truth! Praise Beauty!

---

---

I'll send you a copy of the Ginsberg-McClure "pact", it'll be out in a small magazine in a few weeks.

I feel relieved & beautiful  
to carry this through  
to the end  
&  
mail  
it

I hope it carries *some* pleasure  
like Beauty & the Beast

Dear Michael —

I've been trying to type a letter to you — but can't, am giving up... — somehow I can be sloppier in handwriting and (hopefully) feelings will come thru easier this way — or something. I dunno... I'm so damn tired from driving all over the state of S.D. taking pictures of linemen on telephone poles and power plants and So God Damn it Forth! But I just must answer you somehow to let you **IMMEDIATELY KNOW** that no insult was intended... which, I guess you already do know — as af end of your letter... And then, too, I want to ask you if your name should be cut from that letter because, you see, its going to be the end chapter of Metaphors on Vision and is going



**[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – undated]**

Dear Michael –

I've been trying to type a letter to you – but can't, I'm giving up . . . somehow I can be sloppier in handwriting and (hopefully) feelings will come thru easier this way – or something. I dunno. . . . I'm so damn tired from driving all over the state of SD taking pictures of linemen on telephone poles and power plants and So God Dammit forth! But I just must answer you somehow to let you IMMEDIATELY KNOW that no insult was intended . . . which, I guess, you already do know – as of end your letter. . . . And then, too, I want to ask you if your name should be cut from that letter because, you see, it's going to be the end chapter of *Metaphors On Vision* and is going

to the printer almost immediately. The concept you got trapped into there (and forgive all fault, please, of mine in not asking you sooner) is very important one to me — does pick up earlier thread in chapter My Eye when I define artist as Narcissus after he's jumped in ... to reflection, et — and I do, there, emphasize that he for the leap, the artist's realization is an increasing awareness that art "unmirrors" etc. But then, WHO knows how it will be READ, understood by others; and I can certainly drop your name there and take that whole Olson burden on myself, which is where it properly belongs — and would do so, without asking, except for the end of your letter. Please answer and take me off the hook one way or the other... I'm too pressured and cooked (tired) to even know what's quite happening.

to the printer almost immediately. The concept you got trapped into there (and forgive all fault, please, of mine, in not asking sooner) is very important one to me – does pick up earlier thread in chapter “My Eye” where I define artist as Narcissus *after he’s jumped in . . .* to reflection, etc. – and I do, there, emphasize that before the leap, the artist’s realization is an increasing awareness that art “*unmirrors*” etc. But then, WHO knows how it will be *READ*, understood by others; and I can certainly drop your name there and take that whole Olson burden on myself, which is where it properly belongs – and would do so, without asking, except for the end of your letter. Please answer and take me off the hook one way or the other. . . . I’m too pressured and cooked (tired) to ever know what’s quite happening.

Damn't — all the other page is  
unimportant beside what really  
concerns me — I too, now, feel  
like a little kid who's done some  
thing which may be deeply wrong  
... and then again maybe... charac-  
teristic, that is of my own being,  
maybe me, maybe. And confused  
I've never been able to keep things  
to myself, tell everything always  
as it seemed to me to have happened.  
But then I don't relate what's uninter-  
esting or ugly to me (at least,  
don't usually)... but then I remember  
I told you once I wanted to make a  
film portrait of Willard Maas and  
you said: "Why do you want to im-  
mortalize such ugliness?"... and I  
couldn't answer because I knew  
"ugliness" was a proper term for that  
whole N.Y.-Fairyland-Black-Magic  
scene; but then I just never saw  
it that way. And this, I'm admitting

Dammit – all the other page is unimportant beside what really concerns me – I too, now, feel like a little kid who's *done* something which may be deeply *wrong* . . . and then again maybe . . . characteristic, that is *of* my own being, may be me, maybe. And confused. I've never been able to keep things to myself, tell everything always as it seemed to me to have happened. But then I don't relate what's uninteresting or ugly to me (at least, don't usually) . . . but then I remember I told you once I wanted to make a film portrait of Willard Maas,<sup>1</sup> and you said: "Why do you want to immortalize such ugliness?" . . . and I couldn't answer because I *knew* "ugliness" was a proper term for that whole N.Y.-Fairyland-Black-Magic scene: but then I just never *saw* it that way. And this, I'm admitting

To, is what most properly would be called  
"Lack of Discrimination" I think I have  
been guilty of that with respect to quoting  
Alson's comment and using both our names  
without asking you. I'm sorry.

Your letter was beautiful to read  
in the lonely streets of Custer, dust blow-  
ing all around me, real cowboys and  
indians passing me on both sides of  
the sidewalks, myself rooted to that same  
spot (I'd opened it just to see your fami-  
liar handwriting, then couldn't stop read-  
ing until end) passing thru the greatest  
variety of feelings I've ever had reading  
a letter. Thank you for sending me all of  
your anger, your wings-on-holes-where-  
curses-were, your pictures (which are  
up on our walls here now) your joy:  
"Long Live Life", your praise (and I will  
finish The Making Picture Giving & Taking Books  
now and dedicate as you think best) and  
your love.

Now toss out those scribbles — they're  
just wrapping paper for the enclosed  
— except to say — Love to you and Jo Ann  
and Janey. We miss you Sta.

to is what most properly would be called “Lack of Discrimination {-cretion}.” I think I have been guilty of that with respect to quoting Olson’s comment and using both our names without asking you. I’m sorry.

Your letter was beautiful to read in the lonely streets of Custer, dust blowing all around me, real cowboys and indians passing me on both sides of the sidewalk, myself rooted to that same spot (I’d opened it just to see your familiar handwriting, then couldn’t stop reading until end) passing thru the greatest variety of feelings I’ve ever had reading a letter. Thank you for sending me all of your anger, your wings-on-holes-where-curses-were, your pictures (which are up on our walls here now) your joy: “Long Live Life”, your praise (and I *will* finish *The Moving Picture Giving & Taking Book* and dedicate as you think lost) and your love.

Now toss out these scribbles – they’re just wrapping paper for the enclosed – except to say – “Love to you and Jo Ann and Janey. We miss you.” Stan



Ginsberg, McClure, and Conner chant at Ginsberg's apartment in San Francisco, 1965 by Larry Keenan

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

Dear Stan, you're the most innocent and finest person I've ever known – no sweat – I had to send that letter so it wouldn't be a box or a trap for me to have had all those feelings and not let them flow . . . Yes, by all means print that letter with my name in it and now you can put it in CAPITALS for all I care. I had to come up against it and finally fight and (or) admit that I am a narcissist. What happened was that I did both. The letter stimulated me to fight – and I fought Allen G[insberg] about it and anyone who showed around me for the next couple of days. Then after that was over I could admit FINALLY that certainly part of the implication, or all of the implications, of narcissism affliction and desire for absolute control were there and true. What else could make me so mad? Obviously true when I do come finally and uncaringly against it! O.K. Don't ever stop, or shut up or care about what you say! Don't ever stop being and speaking or repeating what sounds of interest – and I believe in particular that all laws against misrepresentation or libel or what have you (along with every other law) ought to be abolished. You see what I thought was that the statement by O and repeated by you was a lie – but it is not. It was not the *saving* but what I imagined to be a lie with no foundation in reality

that set me off. Now I'm happier for it happening. And that little mag with the pact by Allen and I ought to be out this week and I'll send you a copy – you can see directly the good you promoted. WRONG? How can the universe be wrong? As long as we're straight we're a good part of the universe. Of course being straight has a lot of loops in it and I sent you ten pages of loops.



[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 11/8/63]

November 8, 1963

Dear Michael,

The children are right now saying one of their favorite “good-night poems” (i.e. one they say before going to bed):

“And now let all the ships come in  
Pity & love. The Return, The Flower  
The Gift and the alligator catches  
and the mind go forth to the end of the world.”:<sup>1</sup>

by Charles Olson (and have also in the meantime said their way through Gertrude Stein’s “Blue Mountain.” I’m going to find one of yours to teach them; and I will tell them it is by the man who made the blue faces in their room<sup>2</sup> (the two little parts we tore off the large work of yours to take with us when we left SF, now almost a year ago – God, how we miss you and Jo Ann, especially these days approaching Thanksgiving . . . which does tend to remind me more, somehow, of New Year’s Eve we spent together – one of the most wondrously memorable nights of my life.)

All my thoughts will be wandering, all words rattling out rather willy-nilly, tonight as I am completely exhausted by the job here (many, too, too many, 12-hour work-days this last couple weeks and all under pressure) and one hell of a head-cold (the complaint of all my sensibilities against the impossibility of getting any of my own work done, or any deep-reading, or hardly any letter-writing even, or even thinking, job imposing on all life, as always with me, warping the woof even, or rather *un*-even – NO, no more bitching, which did start simply to let you know the state of mind from which this ramble proceeds in fits and sneezes. BUT, I just have to write you something immediately in reply to the beauty of the hour you gave us as we re-read your letters and the essay on Jayne Mansfield<sup>3</sup> – and it will be of the greatest pleasure to me to see to it that it gets printed in FC [*Film Culture*]. I only wish they could afford to pay you; as I remember you swore you weren’t going to publish it unless you were paid . . . and angry as I am at the moment over the whole idiocy money-need has pulled me into right NOW I couldn’t possibly disagree with the former attitude EITHER; but, as I’ve thot for almost two years now, *Film Culture* would be a wonderful place for that essay to appear . . . thank you.

I can’t tell you where the bones of Crazy Horse are buried; but I guess David Meltzer<sup>4</sup> must have shown you (or I must have written you) that an entire mountain, which will be the world’s largest monument, is being carved in his honor (I sent clippings to David thinking of his “Book of Heros”) by Korczak Ziolkowski WORKING SINGLE\* HANDEDLY for about 20 years now, making all expenses off tourists (and other madly-American schemes) and that we know

him, now, and find him artist-turned-magician ( in Olson's sense of "demonstrator of nature" eschewing both black and white magic to be "he-who-will-move-the-mountain-one-shovel-full-at-a-time – but also, alas (and as might be expected of someone with so much to DO) a kind of a BORE of a man and of no real deep company for even the mad-lonesomeness of us these days.

I will enclose little booklet on Crazy Horse Monument, etc., for your pleasure.

*Mothlight* has been sent to Canyon Cinema who will give it its world premiere in San Francisco at a special experimental film festival to be held about a week (as I understand it) after the Puffy F.S. Film Fest collapses under its own weight of phoney VERY filmy nonsense. I was not going to premiere *Mothlight* for awhile yet; but your repeated requests convinced me that it was the best thing to do to get it your way without encumbering you with digging up a projector, etcetera . . . I sent it c/o Paul & Chickie Strand, 2201 Ward Street, Berkeley 5, Calif; and they can give you exact details of showings, etc.; but (and you should read or show them the following, if you choose) they are to see to it that you get a private screening, and run *Mothlight* as many times as you want, if you want such a private screening; and I trust you will, if you do, extend this to any mutual friends of ours whom you may want to share the occasion with . . . okay? But please don't expect too much out of this little film. I think it is the most formally perfect of all my work; but it is very VERY short in length and developmental complexity. Anyway, I hope it is of great joy to you.

HOW WONDERFUL that *The Beast Sound* is coming out.

I'm tired now.

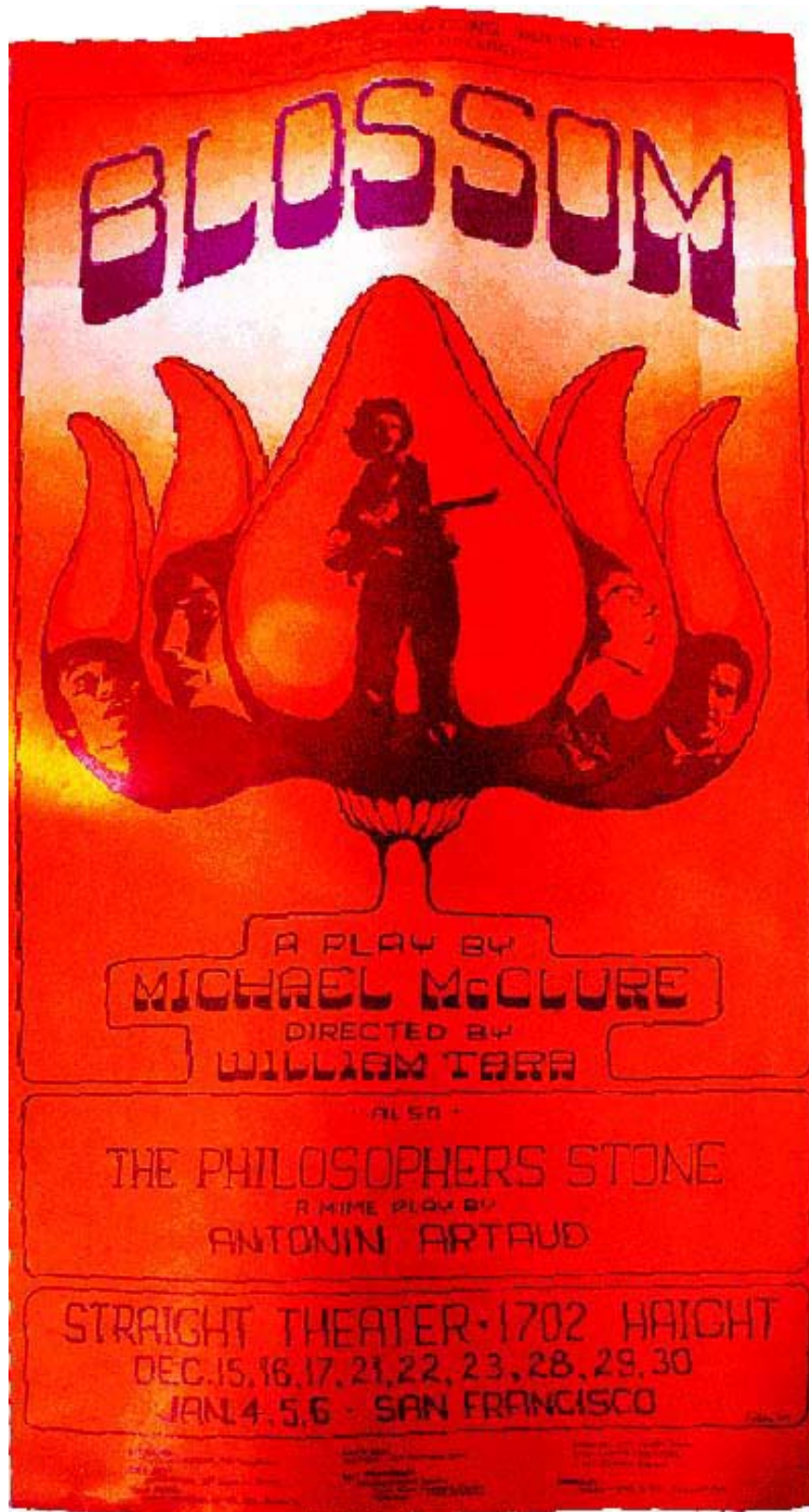
Blessings,  
Stan

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 2/27/64]**

**back in Annandale, 27 Feb '64**

Dear Stan,

*Mothlight Mothlight Mothlight Mothlight Mothlight* Jonas [Mekas]<sup>1</sup> showed it to us two times & I walked away ran away to my own reading uptown I was late for saying Supreme master piece over & over without any particular sense of the relevance of my words to that incredible stimulus wch is beyond anything I have ever seen as total & supreme Trust in the visual & hence in the visual apparatus of an audience which is itself *thereby* magically restored & made-new by the fecundity power & controlled-music of that which it SEES, so that even the strange before-and-after nervous jittering commenting people at FC [Filmmaker's Co-Op] that night were silenced in the act of seeing this wch defied the possibility of any commentary, as much 'beyond' orchestral response as it is 'beyond' photography, a wonder of wonders after all these years of our own private personal endless irrelevant but shaping childhood wishes & hopes & tears that single thing we longed to see, the thing you see in the dark.



Blossom A Play by Michael McClure, poster by Randy Salas

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage]**

[Dear Stan, I just found this in a journal – early 1964

All best, Michael 2/11/95]


I just wrote Stan that I believe DSM will be in the shape of a Man like Swedenborg's universe being in the shape of a man. But DSM will be in the shape of a new man – an "Absurdist" man. Comparing a non-sculptural art to sculpture is cold but I feel that in a sense DSM seen in toto will hang in space (in the body's space – what we call the mind?) and will be a new structure. A representation of outer and inner nature and memory and experience in a near simultaneous viewing. The quick sharp brevity of scene flash of image is an attempt to make a work of art that happens all at once . . . then this balance through the length of it in time as a piece of music or the eye travelling over a poem down and across the page. I think at the end a man will be standing there. I am not sure where THERE is – if it is within my own body or if it will be an afterimage of what happened in the room and on the screen. That is too metaphysical anyway and of no concern. The essence is that from a viewing of the separate sections over a period of time I believe I can already put together the Woodsman-Christ-Fool-Faust who is either fleeing to or from an atomic holocaust and is either dying or being reborn or experiencing thoughts and acts of birth and death within his body that HAS BECOME NATURE IN THE HEIGHTH OF HIS STRESS.<sup>1</sup> He is the dog and the star and the sun and the mountains crack about him and the seasons and memories of seasons flash by – as birth flashes by and repeats. Prelude is the aura – the nimbus the flailing hair – Part One is the HEAD – a big head like Stan's. The other parts are the mis-shapen body segments of memory and of nature forming what is a real body image of a man who recreates the living feeling of the body upon a table as the thin tape of light slides by. It is totally honest. A new man. A man that has not been seen before. It is silent because silence is necessary to the shape that is being created – any sound other than a natural or organic sound will detract from the attention on the being of this new creature. Man is being defined as a universe in the way the body knows that it IS the universe. Or as POE says at the end of Eureka<sup>2</sup> Page 152 – 154 [Stan, wish I had a copy of Eureka to fill in the quote (2/11/95)]

#### Journal of Man

Except that here it is not the diffused atoms of the universe that pull together to the original globe of matter before disappearing in a vacuum of non-existence – it's a lesser process – but not a lesser process for us. It is the elaborate structurings of matter in helixes of protein and water and energy that have created the shape of a living individual who will gradually disappear in death and who will reappear in birth as a continuing man who is not less than a star or a sun and not more than a dog. For who knows that souls of men go up and the spirits of beasts go down under the earth. Surely there is but one place for the bright life to live. Boehme

said that we live in this world that exists between the black flame world and the celestial world – i.e. that this world is a creation of the friction of the two others. Constantly then we must find our head in our hands in the dark world or the blissful one – this then would constantly change our shapes to unexpected shapes – to find ourselves elsewhere.

NEW YORK POST, MONDAY, MARCH 1, 1965 16



## Rag Words and Music

By Harriett Johnson

### Out A Triple Benefit by Leontyne Price

By ARCHER WINSTEN

The measure of a singer exists in mind and emotion the CARNEGIE CINEMA.

Like the bandaged hand of the poor burnt fool, this dept. goes wobbling back to the avant-garde as exemplified by Stan Brakhage, Colorado's gift to far-out cinematic sleight-of-eye. Mr. Brakhage, not content to let the Messrs. Stevens and Brooks, dominate with giant economy size films so long they require an intermission for audience relief, has weighed in with "The Art of Vision" (4 hrs. 38 min.). Of course this is nothing compared to Andy Warhol's 6 hr. "Sleep" or 8 hr. "Empire," but Warhol's are both pictures to die by rather than look at.

In Brakhage the life pulse is strong. He challenges you to look, putting in everything, then masking it so effectively with multiple exposures, fast subliminal cutting, and weird effects from fire-sale, film stock that you aren't sure of what you saw.

\* \* \*

This, and similar films, are the unique attraction, and repulsion of Film-Makers Cinematheque at 83 E. 4th St. (Gr. 3-2026). It is here that Crick Jonas Mekas puts outrageous theory into practise and practise into nocuous desuetude for all but the indomitable few.

Viewing a 40-minute portion of "The Art of Vision" one was immediately struck by the plain fact that subliminally fast cuts produce eyestrain, unsatisfied curiosity mounting to irritation, and a recurrent suspicion either that one is being had by a

joker or entertained by a lunatic. Reappearance of identical shots did make identification possible: a snow-covered mountain (Mt. Hood); a snowless mountain of sagging pyramidal shape (identified by Brakhage as a magnified anthill); a bearded, writhing, nude man; a house; stars; a baby being born; painted film; flickering, tinted light on blank film; forest; microscopic views of protoplasm; astronomical views of monstrous flames arcing across the sun's rim; fire; etc., etc. Very rapidly most of the time, but not always.

\* \* \*

Since it is impossible to make head or tail of this—or perhaps one should say, only head or tail, and nothing else—Mr. Brakhage was queried.

He is a black-haired, Tartar-mustached, 32, married, father of 5, bizarre in dress, very serious. Struggling with the difficulty of verbalizing his film concepts, he likened its multiple levels to "Finnegan's Wake." At one point he noted a sequence in which "a male body attempts to shape itself". At another "a

female body attempts to shape itself." Then, the heart. He remarked that a qualified medical man, viewing that footage, could diagnose accurately the physical condition of those bodies, so explicit is the cellular structure and circulatory system.

He said, "I try to make the flesh malleable. My concern is—well—transformation."

One more hint: he thinks of his film as a kind of music, in form like a fugue. That's where his A, B, C, and D rolls of multiply exposed film come in and where this dept. has a tendency to go out.

\* \* \*

There are a few who claim they can not only stand it but find value in it. This happy few, this band of tireless bottoms, sat through "The Art of Vision" last week, in number estimated variously from 200 to 500. It was noted with gratification that only 100 to 150 left before the end, apparently kerflummoxed by what they had seen. This is considered a splendid showing by the happy, angry Jonas Mekas.

This reviewer, seeking one certitude among the questions, must consider the whole work

Review of Brakhage's "The Art of Vision" by Archer Winsten, New York Post, March 1965.



[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/17/64]

May 17, 1964

Dear Michael,

Since I last wrote to you, from a motel in Lexington, Kentucky (as I recall), we've moved on to New York City to face the most difficult set of circumstances even *that* city ever hatched for us, lived there one month (six flights up in an east side tenement – 90 steps up, to be exact), moved to Buffalo, New York, moved on to Chicago, returned to Lexington, and finally back here.

I once almost wrote you from New York, as Diane di Prima & husband encouraged me to encourage you to appear there for opening of *Billy the Kid*;<sup>1</sup> but I tore up the letter as, much as we wanted to see you, I couldn't be party to bringing you into the New York scene at *any* time, let alone that particular time. During our stay there over 1000 artists were thrown out of their lofts (on very trumped-up looking technical grounds), Ginsberg & friends were fighting it out in the courts to permit poets to read in coffee houses (a fight Allen won regarding Metro; but at last sight it looked like The City had the whole thing rigged so it would have to be fought over & over again) – and even A. G. was worn out with the struggle . . . “months since I've been able to *think OF* writing a poem,” . . . and Jonas Mekas was facing penalty of 1 to 7 years imprisonment for showing *Flaming Creatures*<sup>2</sup> and *Un Chant D'Amour* (the latter the Genet film) in such a losing battle that lawyer London wouldn't even take the case, all equipment of Film Co-Op seized, padlock on film theatre, all Co-Op funds tied up in bail, etc. And I could go on into details, like when I attended Diane di Prima's play there were two cop cars in front of the place obviously there to scare away prospective customers, as they never did raid the place . . . such-like tactics being common everywhere in Manhattan. We spent most of the time there trying to keep people out of jail, etc., etc., and (on the positive side) trying to re-direct the energies of those we were concerned with *away from* public appearances, theatrical ventures, advertisements, etc. *and into* The Living Room, 8mm home movies, private printing of books, correspondences, etc. sort of all under the old Pound saying: “Don't kick against the pricks.”<sup>3</sup> Finally, we took off for Buffalo where it looked as if there would be a gathering of consequence scheduled for the summer; but The House of Un American Activities had just opened up there and had everyone running around as distracted as those in New York, Olson too overcome with grief (Betty's death)<sup>4</sup> to dig in or even be seen, etc. Then we went to Chicago where I had teaching offer for next year at Institute of Design, learned there (after, as usual, impossibilities of renting house allowing 4 children) week later that we had better offer (10,000.00 dollars) to be artist-in-residence in Lexington at U. of Kentucky. We arrived there to discover the apropos paper hadn't been signed (hasn't yet) by new college president, spent whole week trying to find house ANYway, were finally driven out by rising prices of Kentucky Derby.

Now YOU read between the lines; and if that's too tedious, just take it that we're right back where we started from, where we always start from and return to, on NOW we're firmly determined to STAY *PUT* awhile – *have* to, anyway . . . aside from mumps, loss of editing equipment stolen in New York, and fits of social despondency, none the worse for what will, in six months or so, be referred to as “that battling World's Fair ground where the good guys lost and took to the sewers and undergrounds again”\* and, in a year, as “that adventure.”

We're getting some financial support out of New York, and thus are making it. I'm once again working on [*Dog Star Man*] *Part IV* which is beautifully, but slowly, making itself thru me as never before. Jane's parents are helping us all make it as always before, bless them.

How are you?

Where are *Ghost Tantras*?<sup>5</sup>

Blessings to Janey and Jo Ann.

Stan

\* “and The Brakhages to The Hills!”



# GHOST TANTRAS



Michael McClure

Ghost Tantras paperback cover with photo by Wallace Berman,  
Four Seasons Foundation, 1969

Late May '64

Dear Michael,

How can I honor you ENOUGH or in pro-to-the-importation of this wonderful book except to write out of feeling it gave me that the shape of the universe HAS been altogether changed and surely since these sounds first dawned thru you, certainly cutting all static back a billion-billion miles to GROUND of white noise all sounds seem to me searching for (that sense which first came to me when boy-soprano in church hearing voices, especially on empty weekdays, drawn into organ sounds, when say the organist was practicing alone in the cathedral and speakers entered from the street carrying over street chatter).

But I lack language (or I might from now on, since reading *Ghost Tantras*, say tone) with which to properly praise you, dear friend; and I call on our friendship to beg boon of you: please read between these lines, where surely sounds must rise from white spaces so, otherwise, constricted by lines of language not tense in themselves, as yours are, but creating a tension like rows of broken bottles upended and too ordered thru which, I beg pardon, your eyes are asked to pass – but this glass is lovingly offered, lacks only a Simon Rodia<sup>1</sup> to build towers therefrom.

What shall I say that is not too wor(l)dly a gesture – but in that context I would like to return something to its rightful master (remembering a phrase you sent me on receiving *Metaphors On Vision*, a phrase which gave me much joy receiving) and extend: *YOU* have written THE *FIRST* BIG NEW ROMANTIC BOOK (my underline). This occurred to me in midst of reading “Tantra 2”<sup>2</sup> which came especially home IN WHOLE TONE to me who search so much for home these days; and your “pleased with it” and all thereafter rang clear through Gertrude Stein’s sense “of it” (as threads its way through *Stanzas in Meditation* most significantly to me) to dwell in the “it” visions of George McDonald’s sense of home as in *Lilith*, calling forth clear sights to my mind’s eye of rose bush growing up thru piano and giving forth scents whenever it was played – ah how the memory does VIBRATE when reading *Ghost Tantras* aloud, as is only way we’ve read them so far . . . “Tantra 49,” “SILENCE THE EYES! BECALM THE SENSES!” did certainly almost turn me into a cat – that is, my inside out – and would that I had had that sound sense of it that day in the zoo when the tiger did always hiss gently at me as he paced his rounds, and how well I remembered his eyeing me and thus hissing each time no matter where I moved outside the bars on his circle, bless him. And there’ll be more to all THAT in our future; for we’ve found that it is precisely CAT which causes asthma in me, and found it to the certainty of meticulous trial-and-error & distillation of deductive reasoning and all that . . . and a tracing of all my past showed only periods, since childhood, in which I was completely free of the dis ease were those in which I had no cat nor contact with one . . . and on our return here, Pasht (the cat we’ve had since first

year marriage and which we had left during N.Y. etc. trip) left and hasn't returned – AND, on reading purrs of "Tantra 49," I was filled with sense that if I broke down and didn't sustain a certain tone in the reading I would certainly begin to wheeze . . . and I know now once again, and for certain sure, that drama IS all inside me.

Outsides tend to seem removing (and, as with cat, removing themselves) these days, my only general-eyezd sense of *The Times* (that is, take this following no more, *nor no less*, seriously than you would a newspaper) these days being THAT: The society-psyche has breathed IN such a way as to permit a taking inTO itself, thru five or six years' opening, some airy-AHS of its time, allowing living creators to publish their paper backs and little bits, to a-peer, to play out upon the stage, to "bake a cake" (G. Stein) or two in a model *kitchen*, to Tee Vee in front of everybody and roll "in prank" (C. Smart) back of everybody, to be SOMEbody and/or "not to be" (Shakespeare ((("Happy Birthday")))) to lec-tour, etceterature. NOW, psy xs' – che turns in the lock – hale will fell the wings of lungs for the next four/or/score years . . . creators will prep air withOUT regard, tower their living rooms OF roots, work OH! . . . awhile . . . and/or/else: Dis, particularly – traction.

Blessings,  
Stan

P.S. If you have review copy of *Ghost Tantras* to spare, send one to:

GUY DAVENPORT

303 East Franklin St.

Anderson, South Carolina

IMMEDIATELY – as he leaves for Europe soon to see Ezra Pound and finish book on *Cantos*! He's only one to review *Metaphors* – very good man – he talked much about you!

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/64]

Near end May, '64

Dear Michael,

Our correspondence has brought me MORE joy AND shattering sadness than all the rest of my letterings put together – a testimony to the aliveness between us . . . and a bless YOU! I actually passed out on reading the account of Kenneth Anger's black magic triumph<sup>1</sup> – I mean, the ground came up to meet me (fortunately, I was half reclining on the grass beside the house); and it was several hours before I could bring myself to finish your letter . . . but all the same, it was a crucial piece of information for me to have, HAS changed my whole life (that is: scattering unholy bits of it I'd toyed with, especially Craaaawly<sup>2</sup> ones, out to aVOID) and now today I receive from you the very paper Anger stamped upon, with its HAZEL FLYNN DIES IN HER SLEEP<sup>3</sup> banner, as if you understood it was mine to deal with, take curse off, or at least balance out of, etc. . . . "out of" ONLY in sense of inTO my work – your description of Anger's action, as this paper stamped with his scene, driving me to the four-fold threading of *Dog Star Man: Part 4* as nothing else these days, myself almost needing such powerfully frightening signs to take up those strands because every interweaving of that material does tend to start a terrible trembling in me and of a complexity (just in there being 4 inter-related AND independent superimpositions going almost constantly, not to mention the crucial complexity the overall form of the work itself arrived at) I've never experienced before . . . I sometimes feel as if my blood was carrying sharp-edged, mobile-like, thoughts and as if my brains had jiggled out of my head altogether. It is beautifully strange how the working procedures of part 4 have been engendered OUT of reaction AGAINST black magic, every kick-off into beginning working being rejection of something directly tangent to Craaawly (and how I did search, in the east, to find correct pronunciation of that name, Anger having insisted on Crow- (as the bird) –ly, poet Kelly<sup>4</sup> (perhaps out of respect for his totem) arguing effectively for Cr'-owl-ly, myself finally settling for [Charles] Boultenhouse's concept that "the correct *English* pronunciation would be *Crawly*", myself stretching out what I feel, expressing my feeling, keeping myself reminded. It was after a conversation with Cameron<sup>5</sup>, with whom Kenneth was then living, that I went to John Fles' mother's apt., took a bath (my first L.A. lec-tour bath) and, watching all the dirt go down the drain, picking a piece of dead skin off my heel, came to know that *Part 2* and *Part 3* were finished as printed AND almost exactly what remained to be done (enough so that when I returned here I was able to select about 1200 feet and burn the 5000 to 6000 feet of material discards) (even this last action was begun on instant I sent the Craaawly book Kenneth had given me back to him.) Even rejection of that which makes stacked deck of [Malcolm] Lowry's *Under The Volcano*, just read, levers me into working on *Dog Star Man: Part 4*: but it is as if I HAVE TO GO THROUGH THESE THINGS AND REJECT 'EM before work can proceed apace and to completion . . . beautifully strange; and I am much clearer about it than ever before – thank you.

Now when I get to the rest of your letter (aside from the “pleasure of speaking across space”, as you put it) I was up (notice how that “up” slipped down) against THE other of *my* life temptations, which might best be characterized by your question (in the letter received this morning): “Are we not the ones who will finally take over this Society and Culture?” After struggling with similar whisperings (thank heavens they are muted these days) since receiving your first letter, I am prepared to answer with a firm *sound* (not even needing *resounding*): NO! . . . at least, I am kicking off from *any* such intention; and, to balance my recent L.A. experiences with black magic, I have a whole battery of New York, etcetera, experiences which have clarified the second temptation for *me* as solidly as the first temptation was originally known, as such, some 9 or 10 years ago when I consciously stopped manipulation of other’s lives, even in the name of Drama, finally gave up drama, as that kind of manipulation, etc., etc. Give me five more years (at the rate I’m now growing) and a Career will sound to me like something a car does when going too fast on a sharp turn – which is what I thought the word meant when I was a child. This does not mean (apropo your question context) that I am giving up 16mm OR 35mm (as a matter of fact I just wrote Stan Vanderbeek<sup>6</sup> and asked him to send me some of the 35mm leader he’d promised me in N.Y.) or giving up ANYthing needed for my work. What I AM giving up are directions, and all powers thereof, which experience has proven to be distracting from that work in the very simple sense of bitching up the work process. The work itself, as you know better than many another, is becoming charged with, and containing, more diversity; and it is TO THE EXTENT that the working procedures are less distracted, less open to forces clearly malevolent to creation.

Now, I have wanted to do a film inspired by *The Feast* since I first read it. And I have wanted to have that visual work contain ALL of *The Feast* as read and as imagined in play. AND I have kept myself open to this possibility almost continually since that first reading; so that the concept fairly trembles inside me these days (and has for almost a year now – so I think there’s a good chance of it coming off). I have also wanted to collaborate with you since we came to know each other again in San Francisco (or really, I should say, since we came to know each other for the first time.) Also, new concepts of drama, and all collaboration thus engendered, have trembled inside me since *Blue Moses*<sup>7</sup> beginnings; and fibres of this feeling are forming as surely as molecules a’tremble link into larger shapes, IF OF THE KIND THAT DO, AND IF THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE NATURALLY ENGENDERING CONNECTION INTO SOME INTEGRALITY.

Let’s put it this way: I can’t have ANYthing to do with the circumstances of your present offer, with “\$30,000” (which you *haven’t* got) with “recoup at art theaters” (which any art theater owner ((which Fles isn’t, isn’t even manager of)) will tell you is nonsense or possible ONLY in the sense almost anything is ((which I also believe))) with “estimate to within a thousand dollars of the cost” (which I’m totally incapable of unless you want a commercial job estimate on it ((more like \$100,000))), IN PERIL OF LOSING WHAT COULD BE THE FIRST REALLY NEW DRAMA-FILM OF THIS, or any other, TIME . . . or in

peril of just losing time . . . The only thing I could offer is that IF I had a plane ticket in my hand and a chance to come and see a production of it, camera then in hand, I might begin something that might end somewhere – or, and safer, under the circumstances, IF I had a commercially photographed competently sound recorded and EXPENDABLE print of a recording of the whole stage play and were left alone with it long enough something involving super-impositions and hand-painting and etcetera might come out of it . . . something like a TRANSLATION, only imagine VISUAL translation – danger being it might just end up ILLUSTRATION after all.

Nothing means anything to me unless I SEE it – (I mean, I don't know why I bat back and forth and back across this country) – and that includes \$30,000-or-whatever-dollars or plane-tickets or stacks of raw-stock or whatever is offered (and I find it very hard to SEE my way thru attached strings no matter how few and far between) . . . and I KNOW that's a damned unreasonable thing to deal with – and so I've finally stopped trying to DEAL with myself in that respect, thus depend (however unreasonably) upon things (REAL THINGS) happening to make something in me possible, possibly thru me and (once upon a magical time) into being of its own.

Please don't be angry.

Blessings,  
Stan

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 6/27/64]

June 27 [1964]

Dear Stan, Ah, Stan, Oh Stan,<sup>1</sup>

Before going to New Mexico I wrote you a letter and on returning I tore up all outgoing mail I found on my desk. Naturally I agree with you on *The Feast*. I wrote you five replies regarding Black Magic. . . all of which revolve around the fact of my atheism. Here's a passage from my second novel. It is written in the form of a letter to an old friend. A friend who just involved me in a magazine that I (dismayingly) find to be a "magic" magazine from North Africa. Anyway here is a page from the novel and I think you can imagine who I'm speaking of without much trouble. . . or if not it does not matter. . . it is one of the poorest sections of the novel but in its defense I must say that it ties with many other sections on rats, falcons, spiritual alchemy, Billy the Kid, Jean Harlow. . .

Shit magic has many forms. A bunch of faggots can practice shit magic on a young queen – they have to be malicious and believe in shit magic and in bad spirits and evil of course. . . I don't mean they ever consciously think of it that way. . . They don't call it shit magic. . . The old faggots become a kind of coven – a witches nest – and they start operating on the young queen. . . They encourage the young guy to be more and more far-out. If he has any delusions of grandeur, or of personal beauty, or affected mannerisms, they giggle and admire that side of the young queen who proceeds to do what they admire more and more to get attention. . . Gradually day by day and month by month the old faggots begin to remake the young queen into an image of their own that they know secretly they can change him into. . . they bring out all the most decadent aspects of the young queen. . . They get him to fall all over himself and become dopey and giggly and haughty all at once till he is no longer himself. . . If he drinks they encourage his drinking – if he takes dope they encourage that. . . They drain off the most degenerate and far-out beauties that they can get from the young queen and they vampire his life energy out of him in that way till he is out on a limb and the limb breaks and he flips out and goes to the nut house or he is exhausted and worn and all beauty drained from him. In that case he becomes an old queen and starts practicing shit magic himself and joins the coven and they drain a new young lovely faggot. . .

There are other kinds of shit magic too. . . Leaving fetishes on people's doorsteps or hidden in iceboxes. . . Even staring people into submission. . . The whole thing depends on how organized the will behind it is. . . Even moving little objects around on a tabletop in front of somebody can be shit magic. . . A lot of people believe in shit magic or practice it. with happy people doing it it's only a funny game. . . but. . .



[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 7/4/64]

Brakhage  
Box # 554  
Rollinsville, Colorado

July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1964

Dear Michael,

I am sitting in the single upstairs room of the part of our cabin built in 1890's, round log walls, split log ceiling; and, I am overlooking a forest of pine and aspen, blue mountain range in background. I am tired today, my body expressing its adjustment to 8500 feet elevation, we being so high here we can pick up Denver's FM stations without aials. We were listening to some Japanese folk music on the radio this morning; and the children all began imitations of sound and then went on to dancing. I hear them downstairs still expressing themselves in Kabuki-like dance-thumps and nasal-thrill fashions of voice sound – Imagine! . . . they've managed a foreign people's style simply inspired by a few sounds of their culture. Everything else is Silence, such as I've never before experienced steadily, as far as the ear can hear – there are no other people near us . . . a storm is coming, hushing all the birds and animals of the forest. There! . . . some thunder, in the present setting of the children's voices, coming to me like a piece of sheet metal rattling backstage. Drama FLATTENS life – must, thus, be for cultures most SURE of themselves.

My film equipment, all work materials, are around me here; and, for the first time in my life, I have a work room all to myself, large space (abt 16'X16') for hanging film. Jane and I sleep in the room beneath, a living room with plenty windows & a beautiful rock fireplace. Just beyond that is a newer (1913) addition to the cabin, a large (30'X20') kitchen-dining area with modern plumbing, gas stove, old wood-&-coal burning stove call Alcazar, again plenty windows, long log walls, & space wherein we intend to put a long table such as described for *The Feast*. Beyond this, thru a tiny (four foot tall) door are two small rooms for the children, a bathroom, and a utility room. The whole house is BEAUTIFUL. It is as if it were built for us. An incredible series of the most FORTUNATE circumstances have made it possible for us to buy this place for the same amount of money we had intended to pay for rent – that is, our rent payments go directly toward the purchase of it . . . about \$8,000.00 in all, or about 7-8 years of "rent". All your statements on "luck" in the marvelous essay on "Reason"<sup>1</sup> in *Kulchur 14* occur to me – your hypothesis' check out in most areas of our living these days . . . even aside from this, the essay is to us your very best yet, of such precise balance in midst of (usually opposite in philosophysing) such flow of feeling.

Your letter, as usual with your letters, was TIMELY in the extreme – it being THE FIRST letter to be read in our home – its content being of IMMEDIATELY PRACTICAL value in helping us deal with telegram from black magician which



had arrived the day of our leaving Jane's parent's house, the issues therein clustering in our minds around concept of "shit magic" and illuminating for us even the straw-sucking sound of the word "issue" all accomplished by the lips pressing out, forcing upon "you", so to speak, reminding us of all those who had at other periods in our living seemed to drop in upon us just to "stick straws into us & suck", as we used to joke (albeit rather hysterically in our loneliness). Really, is there much difference between one who would suck your blood and/or joy-in-living, thoughts, etc. OR a modern vamp who would force some of him-or-herself UPON YOU with the blood of Causssssssssssssse" whistling between teeth, etcetera: and, to the extent that there IS difference, which process is the more horrible? . . . I mean, it would take a much greater actor than Bela Lugosi to illustrate the horror of the IT which creeps in upon us to give-infect us with some of ITS blood.

We also got *Two for Bruce Conner*<sup>2</sup> which hangs here in my workroom beside the Duncan ("Unkinged by affections")<sup>3</sup> – Jess piece.

I wonder if you can have any idea how much you inspire us – from thoughts we often have of you, Joanee, Janey, treasured memories sustaining us often, to every single piece you send us of your writing.

BELIEVE IN *The Feast* FILM . . . and have great patience.

Blessings,  
Stan



Bruce Conner at Michael McClure's place in San Francisco, 1965 by Larry Keenan



Frames from *Text of Light* by Stan Brakhage  
Courtesy of the Estate of Stan Brakhage and Fred Camper  
(<http://www.fredcamper.com>)

saw a lion fight at the zoo. ABSOLUTE PROOF THAT MEAT IS SPIRIT!  
 Blake would have thrilled. I have made a small movie-flicker poem  
 with cards, titled ~~THE LION FIGHT~~ LION FIGHT. (Also another deck of cards  
 titled DREAM TABLE and two more decks titled MAN and WOMAN.) The  
 lion fight ~~was~~ happened three feet from our faces and Bruce got it  
 on tape. The lion-keeper recognized me ~~and~~ and brought in the lions  
 for us early in the morn before the zoo opened and I read them  
 the Tantras while Bruce taped. ((Keeper tells me somebody has already  
 been to the lion-house three weeks earlier and read Tantras to the  
 lions!))

#### LION FIGHT

THUD  
 SLIDB  
 LCVB  
 BROWN-SILVER  
 CLAW  
 MUSCLE  
 SLIP  
 CLAW  
 CLOUD  
 BODY  
 HAUNCH  
 BLOOD  
 BODY  
 SILK  
 SOLID  
 CLANG  
 PAW  
 ROLL  
 ROAR  
 ROAR  
 MEAT  
 BLANK  
 SPIRIT  
 TEAR

SMASH PUR SING CRASH POINT FLASH PLACK  
 ROAR TOOTH BODY ROAR HUGB BODY EYE MUSCLE TENDON RUSH  
 ROAR POOL DRIPPING BODY BODY SPARK ROLL... There is no  
 other way I can describe it except with the cards. It is the greatest  
 dramatic experience of my life except for enactions of Lear or  
 The Duchess of Malfi inside my head. No, this was greater for it  
 was in FRONT of my eyes! One lion, dripping blood, wept!

MM

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated, from Jane Brakhage's scrapbook.]

saw a lion fight at the zoo ABSOLUTE PROOF THAT MEAT IS SPIRIT!  
[William] Blake would have been thrilled. I have made a small movie-flicker poem with cards titled LION FIGHT. (Also another deck of cards titled DREAM TABLE<sup>1</sup> and two more decks, titled MAN and WOMAN.) The lion fight happened three feet from our faces and Bruce got it on tape. The lion-keeper recognized me and brought in the lions for us early in the morn before the zoo opened and I read them the Tantras while Bruce taped.<sup>2</sup> ((Keeper tells me somebody has already been to the lion-house three weeks earlier and read Tantras to the lions!!))

#### LION FIGHT

THUD  
SLIDE  
LOVE  
BROWN-SILVER  
CLAW  
MUSCLE  
SLIP  
CLAW  
CLOUD  
BODY  
HAUNCH  
BLOOD  
BODY  
SILK  
SOLID  
CLANG  
PAW  
ROLL  
ROAR  
ROAR  
MEAT  
BLANK  
SPIRIT  
TEAR

SMASH FUR SING CRASH  
POINT FLESH BLACK ROAR TOOTH BODY ROAR HUGE BODY  
EYE MUSCLE TENDON RUSH ROAR POOL DRIPPING BODY  
BODY SPARK ROLL. . . There is no other way I can describe it except with the cards. It is the greatest dramatic experience of my life except for enactions of Lear or the Duchess of Malfi inside my head. No, this was greater for it was in FRONT of my eyes! One lion, dripping blood, wept!

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 8/19/64]

August 19, 1964

[TOP MARGIN: Ah, the magic of your letter – best yet to us. I MUST see something of your cards. HOW WONDERFUL about the lions; but how easily accepted knowing the *Ghost Tantras* as I do!!]

Ah Michael –

Your letter BEAUTIFUL – but more of that later . . .

FOR YOU MUST KNOW RIGHT AWAY: we've just have, have had, are HAVING a new BEAUTIFUL baby BOY, born Aug 15 at 3:15 in the LOVELY morning DAWNING just after his birth, after his emerging as gently as the moon from clouds, flowing long (2inch) black hair, looking on the world from GRAY-GREEN eyes, intense centered expression flowing into lines of incredible sensitivity, limbs very masculine, VERY much in control, body covered with a fine down and of some 7 lbs. 12oz at birth. And he was born to the music of Bach harpsichord pieces played on the portable phonograph we smuggled into the hospital and to the sound of my 8mm camera making a "song" of the occasion. And later, as I drove home thru the early morning light (Jane insisted on leaving the hospital hours after the birth and, tho' astonished, they agreed because she had been in such marvelous control throughout and of such incredible health and beauty) I began to want his name to contain the sense of sun's light taking shape (as it was on the rocks the trees making me think: "YES, the trees give shape to the sun and the sun nourishes them": and of all exchanges in the dance of the universe) and that, as his birth, it should be in honor of the sun's light taking shape on the moon, sensing the sun as woman and the moon as man (as poet Kelly finds sun as source as woman, moon being male light in reflection) and thus: Rarc Brakhage, with reference to sun's arc and/or also, for me, ark, Arcadia, Arcanum, Arcturus ("bear watcher") even Arthur. And the name sounds him well these several days we've had him.

Blessings,  
Stan

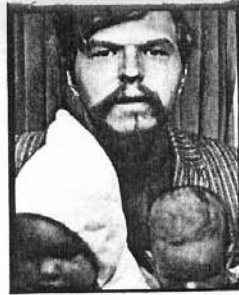
Brakke  
Box #554  
Rollinsville, Colorado



AIR  
MAIL

The McClure  
264 Downey Street  
San Francisco, California

Dear Mr. Clure's



Old Man Brakhage & His Boys



Meanwhile, Back At The Ranch, Etc.



Later, She Lets Her Hair Down Some  
(Note how Bearthm gets around already)

Yone,  
Stam



**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated.] The following three entries were recovered from Jane’s scrapbook and accompanied by a picture of a horse inside a horseshoe and a snapshot of the Brakhage family.]**

*PART TWO* LEAVES PERMANENT MIND IMAGES AS DOES *ANTICIPATION OF THE NIGHT*<sup>1</sup> – TORN BABES UPON BABES BY CLIMBING MEN. LOOKING FORWARD TO THREE! Play finally typed. Did not do “Broadway” version. Too much. Play titled *MUSIC PEACE*.<sup>2</sup> I am indentured to Society for two more days!!! Sent two *Dream Tables* to Trocchi. Will send soon. Love Rarc, Bearthm, Girls, Jane, Stan,

Michael

Dear Stan, WITH *PART THREE* I WAIT FOR THE whole to take shape. . . What you are doing is outrageous. No one will face the colors and shapes of meat and its origin. . . the opening is gigantic. Even I am held-back at times. Your invention of techniques will hold the audience to face your creation and they will see that it is not unface-able. Showed the two songs before *DSM*.<sup>3</sup> Thank you. Please throw away my note regarding 8mm. There is a quickness and delicacy to 8 that I did not know of. They are beautiful – and thank you again. Seeing *DSM* each week is building the image of the formal structure firmly. . . best and love to all.

Michael

Dear Stan, very hungry now to see all of *Dog Star Man*. I think *DSM* is in the shape of a man, like Swedenborg’s<sup>4</sup> universe. But of course *DSM* will be an Absurdist *New* man. I began to sense the scale/the achievement and absolutely must see the whole film within next months. I spoke about my film being finished when I saw Mel Naziko of Surf Theater<sup>5</sup> – also told him about Kenneth A’s 3 screen *Inaug* [*Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*]. Fantastic showing could be given here! Night after your films saw *Scorpio* [*Rising*]<sup>6</sup> again, also *Chant of Cenat* Hah, by the way Kenneth – he’s angry regarding Smith’s *Marin County Award* and withdrew from Co-Op. “Yes, all invite to tell you is of local big film excitement – first *ANTICIPATION* and now *SHAPE – THE MAN*, am I right? of *Dog Star Man*. How about late January or February for premiere of *D.S.M.* It should be well timed & touted – any ideas?

Thank you, Michael



Frames from *Two Creeley McClure* by Stan Brakhage  
Courtesy of the Estate of Stan Brakhage and Fred Camper  
(<http://www.fredcamper.com>)

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 8/65]

Sometime August, 1965

Dear Michael,

I too, wish we could be there with you. We DID very much consider coming down to Tucson on our “honeymoon” – Jane’s parents babysat for five days so that Jane and I could go off alone/together for the first time since our marriage nearly 8 years ago!

. . . and we were called “kids” by the first waitress serving us: and the porter on the train told us, in a nice/jolly way, that he could always spot “honeymooners”: and that’s the way it went for five full days. We took the train to Albuquerque where Creeley picked us up to take us to his home in Placitas where John Chamberlain<sup>1</sup> and family were waiting with Bobbie and the Creeley children to surprise us with a chile party. Then we stayed on there a couple days and so, then, forth to Taos to visit friends (particularly GREAT photographer Walter Chapell)<sup>2</sup> and, thence, back to Denver on the bus. – Well, we did talk often of taking trip down to Tucson to be with you and Jo Ann and Janey but we just didn’t have either the money, or really, the time for making double the trip we did make . . . and we talked about you with the Creeleys (and all others) more than anyone else, saw the “home movies” Bobbie took of you on your visit there last summer, heard the tape Bob took of you and he reading *Ghost Tantras*, etcetera. I think Creeley really begins to reallyTRULY see/hear/READ you. Then, too, I showed them the just completed filmtrait (to be part of *15 Song Traits*<sup>3</sup> – the 15<sup>th</sup> song) of you/he, called *TWO: Creeley/McClure* – WHICH reminds me: I mailed you a package of new “Songs” yesterday . . . #’s 1, 4, and 5 – I believe – which should fill out your set thru *Song 8* . . . right? – mailed ‘em to Tucson to help you in your good work there.

Okay, so – all is well here . . . tho’ I suffer much at times from the complexities of a simply/awful contemporary mistake: “the young” on pilgrimages – writing letters too, insisting on visiting, etcetera, the man thru whom a work has passed . . . seeking shortcut, really, to SENSE by involvement with “The Man” (as they might cap it) and/or “THE Man” or even “THE MAN” rather than devote their energies to the work . . . I’ve kicked a few out now – but then I’m also concerned about my own proclivity in that direction – HOW difficult it is for me to discipline myself to put as much energy into reading a poem, over and over gain, as went into making it . . . & yet that does seem to me the only great/growing possibility – all possible coming beauties (in a world where, next year, over half the World population will be 25 years old or younger – wow) could wash out in the distract (non traction) of person-worship, that old time religion/laziness. It looks to me (in my mind” eye -/- from what I hear) as if The Berkeley Poetry Conference catered to this drain – as if that’s inevitable in such a thing – so much so that those of real clarity about it flipped into warning signals, as for instance did Olson especially.

Forgive me, Michael, if I've ever *taken* YOU as any God: because, of course (naturally) you ARE; and any *TAKE* on my part of that would *off* course (*of* friendship) be a'miss.

I know you'll like these songs as you've seen 'em, said so: but any new perceptions of yours on them would be welcome.

Joy To You –  
Stan

P.S. Look! I'm going to stop fooling around about this matter of Songs GOING to send you, RIGHT now, ALL the rest of them thru *Song 14*.

It would help me if you could have people chip in a little something to help pay for them when, say you have a more-than-private showing – I mean: they're a gift to you: but if they could occasionally sing for their own supper . . . it would help – okay?



Philip Whalen holding Michael McClure's drip portrait of Whalen  
San Francisco, 1965 by Larry Keenan

Stan,

Saving new installment  
for the pleasures of quiet weekend  
bliss relief away from it all & back  
to old friends joy silence evening.  
Sarah Bernhardt says friends are  
like stars - glimmering & always there!

Tonite reading with A.G. &  
R.D. & etc for Viet Nam Day Committee  
- or rather playing liars tape. I'm  
tired of Communists! UGH! PHEW! No,  
it is all O.K. I cannot remember  
ever seeing the footage of M.M. but  
I remember clearly shooting it that  
sunny day. I'm learning tambourine  
& bell. Had an exorcism last night  
with white djouai, francine, & much  
crystals. The air here is 4 square & clear  
Love & best, much.

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

Stan,

Saving new installment for the pleasures of quiet weekend bliss relief away-from-it-all & back to old friends joy silence evening. Sarah Bernhardt<sup>1</sup> says friends are like stars – glimmering and always there!

Tonite reading with A. G. [Allen Ginsberg] & R. D. [Robert Duncan] &etc. for Vietnam Day Committee<sup>2</sup> – or rather playing lion tape. I'm tired of Communists! UGH! PHEW! No, it is all O.K. I cannot ever remember seeing the footage of *MM* but I remember clearly shooting it that sunny day. I'm learning tambourine & bell. Had an exorcism last night with white dijonai, frankincense, & musk crystals. The air here is 4 square & clear.

Love & best, Michael

**[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 9/65]**

**Snow beyond belief here for mid-Sept.  
Ice-gusts prisms all air – 1965**

Dear Michael,

Working like – *sane* – these days. . . completed all *15 Song Traits* – 13 films to the cycle – 16 persons (including yourself) portrayed in all along with Durin, other dog, canary, horses, strangers, etc. in exactly 15 personae in inter-relationship . . .

Thank you with most especial JOY for *Unto Caesar*<sup>1</sup> which Jane says is surely a rendering religion in only form possible unto even polis – it is surely, to me, spiritual in sense of being a breath experience making the stomach itself seem prayerful as these are being read aloud . . . some soft loving everything as only a breathing creature making sounds is able.

Haven't heard from Tucson. Don't see any way to get *A. of V.* [*The Art of Vision*]<sup>2</sup> shown in S.F. with its usual lacks. Just sitting here working. Joy to you, Stan

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated, from Jane Brakhage’s scrapbook]**

[. . . ] Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, R. D. [Robert Duncan] & McClure all stood up & read for Vietnam Day. The speakers were so bad that we may have saved the day. Yes, I believe it is communist or Marxist inspired like the papers say. I don’t like them more than Capitalists. Tweedle dum & Tweedle dee. Decided if they were against the senseless murder that I’d read for the K.K.K. or D.A.R. or Y.A.F. R. D. read a good [. . . ]

**[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 11/65]**

**Early Nov., 1965**

Dear Michael,<sup>1</sup>

Here’s the rest of your *Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book*.

Thank you for your *good* letter – your language moves out of clearest sense of *any I know* in relation to what comes T.V.ing onto us as “these days” . . . your “Tweedle Dum and “Tweedle Dee,” *where you put it*, is PERSPECTIVE, adding DEPTH to all my sight on polis-ticking.

I leave for The East Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> and thence (Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>) to Berlin (back by Xmas) – then, gratefully, back to work again . . . I’m up to *Song 20* but no money for copies, alas . . . will get some to you later – (you’ve seen your part of *TWO: CREELEY/McCLURE*: it’s that I took of you in S.F. just before we left.)

Okay – back to last-several-day things to do before leaving (in a week, actually) . . . all well here.

And you, too, sound (re: depth of your letter) in good shape.

Joy to you,  
Stan



Stan, you're burying me in beauties.  
 Everything is reviewed. I'm sending you  
 a tape as gracias for Song\*. Child  
 book is perfect. I may be in L.A. in  
 July & will be in Tucson in August.  
 So much is happening it would take me ten  
 thousand pages to write. We must see each  
 other this summer. My imagination is being  
 reborn & you are part of it. Kenneth A  
 brought me huge Hells Angels Harlow poster.  
 Jo Ann & I spent 3 days in L.A. - flew down  
 to give a benefit reading for George Herms over  
 the Santa Monica merrygoround by candlelight.  
 All is free & beautiful. - Write & Love, Michael

\* Maybe 2 weeks yet - or will ask Willard to mail now. (all mail will be forwarded)

((LOVE TO ALL))  
 Haselwood & I working on a tiny new post  
 Mallarme poem book this noon. Hope to have it done in a few weeks.

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

[RIGHT MARGIN: ((LOVE TO ALL)) Haselwood & I working on a tiny new post Mallarme poem book this noon. Hope to have it done in a few weeks.]

Stan, you're burying me in beauties. I'm sending you a tape as gracias for Song\*.  
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 Santa Monica merrygoround by candlelight. All is free & beautiful. - Write &  
 Love, Michael

\* Maybe 2 weeks yet - or will ask Willard to mail now . . . (all mail will be forwarded)

Bowie brings good cheer of you from Berlin

Dear Stan,

Joann phoned C.B.S. channel, they said no they did not know of any such thing happening. I got home flicked on little set we have on loan. Presto! Andy Warhol, Edie Sedgwick, then the news. I missed it! Just heard from someone who saw it! They say it was most cool.

Dave S.S. Schaff and I are going to work on getting A of V here - also Stan Brakhage. What I would like is something relaxed, not an S.B. Tour but S.B. comes to S.F. shows A. of V. and relaxes & sees old friends.

All the good barefoot, junky angel fairies are working overtime for me. I just read 'THE FEAST' to the Hells angels. They like me & most of them dig me & the play. We will have a trial rehearsal next week. Meanwhile I'm working with a producer next week regarding doing THE BEARD & I think I have a theater lined up if it is practical to do BEARD. If not I have some stills of the one performance & Eternity can be satisfied with that. Bob Dylan

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

[LEFT MARGIN: Bruce brings good cheer of you from Berlin]

Dear Stan,

Jo Ann phoned CBS channel, they said No they did not know of any such thing happening. I got home flicked on little set we have on loan. Presto! Andy Warhol, Edie Sedgwick, then the news. I missed it! Just heard from someone who saw it! They say it was most cool.

Dave S.S. Schaff and I are going to work on getting *A of V* [*Art of Vision*] here – also Stan Brakhage. What I would like is something relaxed not an S. B. Tour but S. B. comes to S.F. shows *A. of V.* and relaxes & sees old friends.

All the good barefoot, junky angel fairies are working overtime for me. I just read *The Feast!* to the Hells Angels. They like me & most of them dig me & the play. We will have a *trial* rehearsal next week. Meanwhile I'm working with a producer next week regarding doing *The Beard* & I *think* I have a theater lined up if it is practical to do *BEARD*. If not I have some stills of the one performance & Eternity can be satisfied with that. Bob Dylan



Bob Dylan at the piano, Berkeley, CA 1965 by Larry Keenan

bought me an autoharp & he wants  
me to sing & sing my new (unwritten)  
poem-songs. He is beautiful - a Marilyn  
Monroe of a man - and you would  
dig him. Ginsberg & I went to 5  
of his concerts & sat up all night  
talking with him several nites.

And I got to meet Joan Baez. Baez  
is your spiritual female double  
- though I did not tell her so. I felt  
so natural & relaxed with her because  
she reminds me of you. I was able  
to pat her foot & smile at her. She is  
all balanced love. Jesus I hope the

U.S. does not hit China - Boom! Boom! Then  
it is the concentration camp for me, us, whoever.  
When I read "History" I realize such an act  
is not at all "out of line." I hope History  
has ended!!! We have put our queer shoulders  
to the wheel & there is not much left to do!  
Shall we become HUMAN Gods? With the human in  
caps.

Regarding your fainting when you opened  
BLUE VELVET WIPEOUT - Casey a chick here - friend of  
mine & Kenneths - she fainted first time she saw Fireworks  
& woke up with Ken reviving her. Claims it was Kenneth  
made her faint. Though Kenneth denies it she says. Could  
that be a secret talent of Kenneths? ~~back to~~ Swiss Family Brakhs.

bought me an autoharp & he wants me to sing & sing my new (unwritten) poem-songs. He is beautiful – a Marilyn Monroe of a man – and you would dig him. Ginsberg & I went to 5 of his concerts & sat up all nite talking with him several nites. And I got to meet Joan Baez. Baez is your spiritual female double – though I did not tell her so. I felt so natural & relaxed with her because she reminds me of you. I was able to pat her foot & smile at her. She is all balanced love. Jesus I hope the U.S. does not hit China – Boom! Boom! Then it is the concentration camp for me, us, whoever. When I read “History” I realize such an act is not at all “out of line.” I hope History has ended!!! We have put our queer shoulders to the wheel & there is not much left to do! Shall we become HUMAN Gods? With the human in caps.

Regarding your fainting when you opened [Kenneth Anger’s] *Blue Velvet Wipeout* – Casey a chick here – friend of mine and Kenneth’s – she fainted first time she saw *Fireworks* and woke up with Ken reviving her. Claims it was Kenneth made her faint. Though Kenneth denies it she says. Could that be a secret talent of Kenneth’s?

Love to Swiss Family Brakhage



Michael McClure with autoharp, San Francisco, 1965 by Larry Keenan

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 1/16/66]

January 16, 1966

Dear Stan,

WOW AND I AM FOGGY and zonked by sorrow this sweet morn. Made a vow not to go on radio or any mass media for a while this being a period of incubation – doing nothing except hoping the Muse will not come rap-rap-rapping on my horseshoed head. I ended up in a position where I felt I had to let myself be interviewed. I had a psychological regression, right on the spot, during the interview. I had to go into one of those scenes where you demand the tape back. The interviewer thought I was censoring – THEN I HAD TO EXPLAIN MYSELF --- AND THEN. . . . AND BLAH. . . AND BLAH. . . And I just ended up heartsick and drunk and not a lot happier this morn. When I returned after the interview there was a phone call waiting for me when I got home. *Channel Nine Educational TV* is doing films of a dozen American poets. They want to do it in a week or so. ((((((I WISH YOU WERE DOING IT.))))) I could say “No” to them but I need the money badly.

I’m working with my autoharp – been practicing for two weeks now. For a month i[t] sat on the mantle while I ran around seeing to *The Beard*. *Beard* is now in the hands of a professional producer – or the closest thing San Fran has to such a person. Good intelligent fellow named Zev Putterman who directed that showing of *The Connection* that we saw together in NYC years ago. So that is where that is and I cannot do more. (((((although the groaningly miserable thing there is that if I did not have to teach four courses I could handle the play myself and get backing and have it on in two or three weeks --- WHY DO PEOPLE ALWAYS WRITE LETTERS TO FRIENDS WHEN THEY ARE SAD?))) Reason I’m writing this is that there’s a rumor that *Art Of Vision* is being done here in the next few months. If this is true will you tell me who is doing it? — And where? I will lend any help if they need or want. —And also would you like to come out here for the premiere? I can get the CCAC student body to invite you for a lecture – would pay 75 or 100 \$. How much would you need to come to San Fran for a few days to visit old friends?

((((My idea is a totally selfish one – that we get enough lectures so that you can come out for a few days, have the minimum number of engagements and spend the rest of the time talking with me and sitting up in front of the fireplace late into the night speaking and thinking.)))))

The idea of HELLS ANGELS doing *The Feast* fell through. Enough of them wanted to do it to make up a cast – but they blackballed it in a private meeting. Fellow from Oakland HELLS ANGELS was there and he surreptitiously took a copy of *Feast* back to his chapter. I may hear from them.

I've written a couple of ROCK AND ROLL songs. One of them I wrote when I was seventeen and the other just a few months ago -- or more truly have been working on it with back of my mind for about a year. I'm beginning to learn bits and scraps about music and when I know enough I suppose it will all come together. It is a whole new world for me. In a month or two I hope to be able to play melodies. My hair will be about

shoulder length by then. Till then LOVE to all you BRAKHAGES, Michael

**[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – undated]**

<sup>1</sup> Yes I do very much want to sit quietly with you and Jo Ann and Janey and talk and talk and. . .

I wish you could visit us *here* sometime – is that possible? . . some summer time?

Ah, well – as to San Francisco. . . it all seems so difficult. Viz: as to the rumoured show of *Art of Vision*: Bruce Baillie<sup>2</sup> had arranged for some theatre to show it – expecting that I wouldn't mind if they could only pay about one-fourth the rental cost (and they even advertised it somewhat, I hear) . . . and then I DID VERY MUCH MIND (as *A of V's* rental is absurdly-low-for-length-of-film/dangerously-low-from standpoint-of-expenses-to-replace-it . . . my too much graciousness already) – tho' I told Bruce that he, personally, *could* (thus) have it, he should consider that I manage to raise full rentals (ask no such favors) from *Boulder* audiences . . . and what-the-hell's-the-matter-with-SF-that-it's-always-begging-free-culture/ can't-support-even (apparently) its-own-arts. . . etc. – and Bruce (natch) cancelled the prospective show in a flurry (to me) of confused “agreements” and sincere apologies. And then there's [David] Schaff's request: and, who knows? maybe there's someone else (I haven't yet heard from) who intends some-such show . . . SHIT, Michael, I haven't yet had ONE FULLY PAID-FOR SHOW IN SF: and I work in a medium necessitating the meeting of costs, at least. SF, apparently, just can't/won't afford good films.

I've *got* to have full rental prices for films shown (as I barely make enough off rentals, thus, to replace worn prints, etc.) and that, alas, runs about a-dollar-a-minute for short films about seventy-five-cents-a-min. for 30 min/or longer films up to the, believe me, *graciousness* of \$250.00 *per show* of *Art of Vision's* almost five hours. Then I've got to have a couple hundred *above rentals* just to break even on travel expenses, if I'm to come and visit. I just can't afford such a trip as luxury.

And so, as Jo Ann once beautifully put it: “Let's Pretend” and let it go at that: and/or I'll send you a *Song* or two in money/time.

Blessings, Stan



[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 1/31/66]

Last day of Jan., '66

Dear Michael,

The *Dream Table* is GRAND – I mean that it has/IN/herent that quality of elegance which I take to signify: assurance of a *made* “place in the sun.” . . . an entirely new formal possibility in the language – that the poem can *appear* at the borderline between consciousness and sub thereof rather than, as always, work *thru* the conch-shell in to its inner whirls/structure – WOW!/BEAUTIFUL! And Dave did a magnificent job of printing it – that there are *obviously* no two ink tones alike . . . the lion and the tree, thus, flame into the possibilities of the full spectrum of color. Circles and squares, then, enter into the total experience. . . and the face in the upside-down lion – the micro-(cosm-suggesting) – physiology of the tree, etc. You have given me MUCH with this deck – I amazed, for instance, that “FLOATING” really DOES so (its expanse, after short-word-flash making super-retention of it over next 3-4 flips until “FL” – “NG” fade lost finally – I’ll shuffle soon – now and see how much of this float has to do with expanse – viz. and how much is inherent in word-sense-suggestability, etc.) . . . this work of yours MOST active treasure in this very full house right now.

I’ve begun feature-length, 16mm, sound thru to lip-sync (with all implications of drama thereby) film-in-progress – 3000 ft so far . . . so good! . . . to be called:

“*The stars are beautiful.*”<sup>1</sup>

Joy to you, Jo  
Ann, Janey –  
Stan

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 3/66]**

**March 1966 [?]**

Dear Stan, Everything here is lovely. Hooray for Bear poem by G.D! Was going to make a tape for you today but have pulled muscle in my back & didn't feel like singing. Am strapped to the bed here – practicing autoharp a little. Will be on TV again – March 31st – it is an educational TV channel shot. They're doing films of a dozen U.S. poets. Two per each ½ hour program. I'm splitting The Bill with Brer Antoninus.<sup>1</sup> Hope you can see it – I read to the lions. What is your new feature length? JoAnn & I went dancing last nite. When I got there nobody was dancing – I went up and did a solo stomp in front of bandstand then everybody started. San Fran is starting to breathe again like it did in the '50s. Come & visit & bring your camera – maybe make a fast documentary on R & R scene here. Maybe get a backer for it. You will like what is happening. I can't keep my hands off the autoharp & it is hell not to be able to sing today. I'll try to make you a tape in next few days. I can feel where the fibers pulled rite out of the insert. – Did it yesterday carrying amplifier upstairs. How about doing a film on the sense of smell? Smell is center of memory – Goethe & Schiller<sup>2</sup> knew all about it. Thought it stirred center of imagination (of course, yes) – but via memory/synthesis.

Till then here's a "poem."

Love to all  
Brakhages

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 3/66]

Late March, 1966

Dear Michael,

What a marvelous picture of you – wish I could be there tomorrow night (I guess it is . . . and at the S.F. Museum, yet – wow! . . . well, anyway, my friend, you look in that picture like you're for all time, i.e. – in some center of it, i.e. – beyond it.

All is very simply lovely here. We have our sad days (this is one of them) and the glad ones: but the loom keeps turning steadily. I'm now very much editing the 16mm *Scenes From Under Childhood*:<sup>1</sup> and a whole new world of involvements moves (today) like young taffy in the brain-down-the-backbone. I'll soon reach (hopefully this afternoon) the fingertips as fine threads of possibilities I've been working on for six or seven years: some actuality of memory's workings taking shape as rhythms'-tones – not making science of same but rather working within the physiological possibilities of the act of remembering, a simple putting-together that extends (rather than reflects) the mind's instinctual working process as I've heard/hear it hinted at in the whole history of western music . . . but then now: to make a picture ! – the shore of that possibility Satie/Debussy/French-turn-of-the-century-etc. broke so beautifully a-against . . . the in-land rush of same – ah, those Viennese – thru to Boulez, Barraque, Messiaen (this incredibly beautiful *Catalogue of Birds*), etc., inspiring me much these days.

I see Jane deepening all her own processes these days as naturally as water finding earth hollow pools: and the children go on growing thru ever more extensive play – we have a donkey, did I tell you? . . . a beautiful very cat-like creature, much given to meditation and an insistence on GIVING whatever service is wanted of him (much maligned in the world's symbology because of these attributes) – a great joy in our lives.

And how are you? – magnificent, by the looks of your picture . . . but what of the particulars of your living?, how're Jo Ann and Janey?, and how're the words in your keeping? – any new books forthcoming?, plays?, , , which reminds me: please, could you send me about five copies of *Poisoned Wheat*?<sup>2</sup> – there are so many visiting who have, somehow mysteriously, come to that book and later written us asking for copies (which they can't seem to find in bookstores anywhere) – and they're all willing to pay for it (desperate, really, to have it), so let me know how much each is: and I'll send you a check.

Did you get to see *The Art of Vision* when it was shown in its entirety in S.F.? An awful lot of questions, I know, but then I really would much like to hear from you – wish I could come a visiting; but then too I'm so finally involved in the long 16mm film these days I've no impulse whatsoever to move down off this rock, even tho' we're getting rather desperately short of money what with all the damnable expenditures of 16mm draining every cent made on the last lec-tour . . . ah, well.

Joy to you,  
Stan

P.S.

A few more words about *Scenes From Under Childhood* - -

Viz, say, the sense of some particular power remembered, I'm after the rhythm blinking of:

“A black rainbow in 3D  
curved and solid blinking  
black neon  
in a chrome box”:

and after the particular colors this black pulse takes upon itself – for the colors are INdrawn, one more than another at each pulse, while all of such a mix as to engender the sense of black OR white (why you call the box “chrome”, natch): and in this working, I have had black and white positive and negative prints made of much of the color films so that these can mix in exact superimpositions, pulsing according to need, in the editing. It is that the work itself, the finished film, should be source only for what occurs in the mind of the viewer . . . as is always the case, natch, but never before (or hardly ever) promised so clearly in the making, taken as such exact assumption in the creative process. But, to be clearer yet, this process is actually opposite of the PREsumptions of OP ART (where I find the intention is to affect the viewer, his affectation necessary to pull off, so to speak, the effect the work is – that he must be optically bugged, as it were, for the work to exist) because I am simply here involved with a process so naturally always existent its workings have been over-looked: that the light takes shape in the nerve endings and IS shaped, in some accordance we call communication, thru physiological relationship.



Handbill by Linda Nimmer for Michael McClure reading at the Avalon Ballroom presented by the Straight Theater May 19, 1966. Courtesy of Reg Williams



[Stan Brakhage to Bruce Conner and Michael McClure – 5/66]

Almost June, 1966

Dear Bruce<sup>1</sup> and Michael,

The mandal[a]-like images<sup>2</sup> and singular-word songs of them are magnificent – as grand, for all their size, as cathedrals . . . and the words, that seem to live truly within them, take unto themselves, each onto itself, the proportions of epic.

And they arrive here at a most necessary time for me: I've been being plagued by asthma again – a particularly hard trial, as it is the first such affliction at this our home here – growing out of exhaustion of several months working on *Scenes From Under Childhood*, easily the most difficult and most perfected work I've ever done, coupled with lack-a-money and all the old daisy-chain of associations I'd thought would never take root in our life again: and I'd begun to carry a small round mirror with the Aztec calendar on its back, round and round with me and searching first scenes circled and then my own features thus and then the minute details of the calendar: and yesterday the mail yielded two envelopes . . . one containing a check for \$250.00, which will carry us at least through this month . . . the other containing your beautiful gift, which has been my constant companion since then. I am feeling much better this morning – sat on rocks in the sun this morning, bare of clothes, worries, any time sense whatsoever, and shuffling your visions and language in the deepest concentration I've known for some time now.

It seems to me that closed-eye vision has never been so completely a source of inspiration as in these: and, Michael, you have seen them with an accuracy of vision that gives the eyes deep in-roads to ears . . . precise SIGNS, in the deepest sense of the word. What you have done is *clearest* where it comes to color. The whirling shape makers of the dot-plane, the grain, of closed-eye vision configure specifically with relation to color: and you have named these tracks with scientific accuracy in at least two cases (“BLUE” and “SILVER”, as distinct from white/gray, etc., – and likewise “CHROME”, in the effect it causes on the grain-field in any blink – as far as I can determine so far: and I am searching out the rest slowly, carefully, knowing you've undoubtedly intuited so much more than that mere accuracy – as, for instance, that “ROSE” refers to so much more than color, etcetera –): but the most exciting philosophical aspect of the cards is contained in such turns as that from “DREAM” to “REALITY” and/or the distinction between “SUN” and “MOON” on two different cards. about the visions themselves there is surely no more I can say than Michael has already, except to tell you, Bruce, that they are of a necessary beauty here and are, thus, being put to the deepest possible work immediately . . . and thank you.

And now I'm taking up “BROWN” and “VIOLET”: and I'll keep you in touch with any of my findings. Please write when you've the time. I very much wish I could be seeing you – some lecture-tour later, perhaps . . . tho' I wish sometimes I could just come and talk to *you* and other good friends in-stead of all that razzle-dazzle/distract, or *better yet have you here* – ah, well,

Joy to you,  
Stan

P.S. Michael – could you send me 5 copies of *Poisoned Wheat* . . . or at least 1!



Poster by Jacob for Michael McClure and the Grateful Dead presented by The Straight Theater at the Avalon Ballroom May 19, 1966. Courtesy of Reg Williams

June 6

Stan,

A fast morning letter to you. Thanks for your gracious letter regarding the mandalas! I FEEL OUT OF PRISON! Two more half days of school and I'm free! I've been working five days a week. It has been too mucho and I can never teach four classes again. Actually I would never teach again *period* if I could escape it. This next year is the last year I can do it at all. I could not do it, if they had not fixed up a schedule for me wherein I work only two afternoons a week. I've picked up autoharp again – have not even touched it for two or three months and my finger calluses had disappeared completely. I've started filing all papers and manuscripts into filing cabinets. I've got a lot of Stan Brakhage letters to reread sometime. I can't see anything left to do except sing! I'm beginning to feel like it may take two years learn what I want and to get my voice under control. Meantime I'll write a play or two but the page does not interest me much any longer. The poems I'm putting on the page are ultra-personal. Dave Haselwood is printing my last long poem in a book with five mandalas of Bruce's. Don Allen is at last (I think) bringing out *Love Lion Book*. He's so slow to work with that I can't stand it. He thinks he's doing me a favor. I could have printed the book months ago. Oh well – I say.

Meantime – I've got an agent named Gartenberg<sup>1</sup> dealing with *The Mad Cub*. BUT last week I received a note from Sterling Lord who just learned about my work from a lawyer who deals in top pornography cases and is beautifully enthusiastic about *Beard* and *Dark Brown*. Lord is one of the top ten agents in the country. I wrote him when I first finished *Cub* three years ago and his secretary or surrogate sent me the most insulting letter of bile and hatred saying she knew me and my work and despised both – or something to that effect. Ironical. . . No? So now – with an agent already – I'm sending the same back to LORD. Plus *The Beard*. I'm not so sure that Gartenberg is a very great agent. I'd like to make the switch. I'll see what Lord says. An English publisher warns me that *Mad Cub* is unprintable – or that I don't want it printed. Meanwhile Norman Mailer has offered to write an intro and Allen Ginsberg has offered to do the jacket note or a preface [for *The Beard*]. Norman's wife Beverly wants to do *Harlow*<sup>2</sup> so I sent two copies to Mailer and they plan to do a private front-room production for a few friends in Provincetown. –I wrote a wedding ceremony for James and Judy Elliott and the wedding was performed in Malibu Beach with 400 guests and champagne and rock&roll and harpsichord. [Claes] Oldenburg<sup>3</sup> made slices of plaster wedding cake – and I met [Robert] Rauschenberg<sup>4</sup> again who was unfriendly as years ago. (I think Frank O'Hara<sup>5</sup> – or Duncan spoiled that friendship with some gossip about how I hate homosexuals) – Anyway the rift between Rauschenberg was always a soft spot since 1961. —Man, this is terrible. This is like a journal but I want you to get some idea of what's been happening here. And it has been happening on top of what amounts to a full time



exhausting job! This is about the first letter I've written in months except sheer business of one kind or another. –Anyway the wedding was perhaps one of the most beautiful since the Renaissance – with Wallace [Berman]<sup>6</sup> and Dean [Stockwell]<sup>7</sup> and Dennis Hopper<sup>8</sup> in attendance. Dennis and I trapped a lot of women in the john and hurraed them Kansas style while angry husbands milled around cursing us.

The scenes from this last six months have been like flashes from a rat overpopulation experiment. No time for any sane or beautiful thought – just actions and commitments. I gave three poetry readings. One at LA STATE. Dean [Stockwell] and I walked across the campus and into all of the cafeterias and attracted the largest crowd they've ever had for a reading. My hair is shoulder length now and I was wearing a blue and white striped coat and vest and black boots. Dean is growing his hair out and had on a striped velvet pullover and sun glasses. I gave a reading at CHABOT COLLEGE and took Bill Fritsch<sup>9</sup> with me who read also and turned everyone on with his tigerish sincerity. Then lastly I read with a light show at a rock and roll and poetry concert. It was successful. (((I did not read with the R&R))) The new music is the biggest thing happening here and I usually go to one dance a week at least. It is greatest exercise since wrestling or swimming. There's a group here called *THE WILDFLOWER* doing two songs of mine. After Robert Lowell<sup>10</sup> read here – he is really a drag – old and sour and pretentious – I thought I could help him so I argued everyone into going to hear *THE WILDFLOWER* at a club in the Marina. Lowell asked what I thought of Dylan and I said “A cross between Marilyn Monroe and Lord Byron. . .” Lowell walked out shortly after. I gave him a *Dream Table* earlier and he did not even look at it. I'm sick of luxurious old bastards like that that think they are really something because of their family connections. . . And people who think they're great because they (Poets like Lowell) indulge themselves in the luxury of being a liberal and spending some time in a nice pleasant nut house when things get tough. WOW! But I'm being sour because I expected to like Lowell and did like one book of his poems.

Meanwhile [Andy] Warhol has caused me a lot of grief.<sup>11</sup> He wrote via his apprentice [Gerard] Malanga asking permission to do *The Beard* as a seventy-minute sound film. We exchanged several letters. At first it sounded good and then finally I said NO! Then I got a card from LA with no return address saying they had gone ahead and done *Beard* anyway. Then there were telephone calls. And Warhol surrogates showed up in town making rumors about the film being shown in LA. I jumped on a plane and flew to LA and picked up four beautiful girls and nailed Andy at the TRIP CLUB where he was doing his Velvet Underground shot. He showed us the film in a castle in the Hollywood Hills and the girls and I walked out afterwards without saying a word. It was bad! Next day I phoned and told him never to show the film. Then I had three more meetings with Andy here and gave a showing of the film for Jo Anna and a few mutual friends. –It looked even worse than the first time. Warhol has promised to neither show the film nor sell prints and I have a print of it. Though God knows I don't

want it. It was a whole miniature scene and cost me a lot of grey hairs and anxiety pain. I'll tell you all about it some time. Meantime I'm hoping for a large-scale production of *The Beard* here this summer. I want a light show for a set and I want the actors to use hand held microphones and I want a constant background of near sub-audible music. Plus I want two suspended screens showing simultaneously an old Jean Harlow film and an old cowboy movie – both shown silently. There are several halls in town already set up for dances that could be adapted for the play in about one day. The actress who played Harlow is returning to town in about a week or so. She's good!

I had both strains of Asian flu and just got rid of a new third mutant strain that's beginning to go around here. Jo Anna spent a terrible week in the hospital with an extremely painful uterine infection. That was before my earlier reading for the POETRY CENTER<sup>12</sup> here. –The reading came off beautifully with many people and I sang (not very well – but I did it) and a lovely party for me afterwards. Wish Brakhage family had been there to make it completo!

I've been teaching Shakespeare – and that's a sham since I have no business teaching it and no time to prepare for it. Also another class Great Works of Lit which has become like a nite club act. So many people signed up for the class that I could barely stand to walk in the room and spent the whole semester on *Faust*! Then I've been teaching two freshmen English classes but had to grade all the papers myself and have spent Saturdays and Sundays for the last eight weeks doing just that!

Bob Creeley was here and he looks good and it was more of a pleasure to see him than ever before and I spent a lot of time with him at a party after his reading. He wrote wanting me to come teach at New Mexico and it was an intriguing idea but I'm not likely to move and I think the job did not come through.

Phil Whalen<sup>13</sup> has gone to Japan and is teaching English for the Japanese YMCA. He sounds ecstatic. Haselwood is going there in the fall to teach also.

Bruce is about three blocks from here now. He's learning electric piano and working on a couple of films. It's great to have him around again. He just taught a film making class at the school where I'm teaching.

[. . . .]

The Psychology Dept at UC demanded Allen Ginsberg be taken off the panel for the LSD conference middle of this month – and that the conference be moved from Berkeley to San Francisco. I phoned Allen to tell him I could raise his fare out here if he wanted to set up an ad hoc conference. But he was planning to come anyway.

MEANTIME despite the cross section of my life I'm beginning to bounce back up again already. Just to be almost rid of that fucking school seems like the beginning of freedom and sanity again. I don't know why I'm loading you with the above. Partly to get it straight in my mind and partly because I want you to know here I've been for six months.

Here's a little section of the new long personal untitled poem that Haselwood is printing with five mandalas by Bruce. The poem is two or three hundred lines long and ultra-personal. A kind of religious self-involvement and close to my thought. I realized after writing it that I wrote most of it while I was high. I think it's the first time I've done that. But it looks no different to me. Except different because I'm somewhere else now. Somewhere else than when I wrote *Love Lion Book*. It is an obsessional poem. Still on LIONS! I'm writing a new song with the beautiful line of KEATS<sup>14</sup>..."What weapon has the lion but himself. . .?" I've got one melody but need a bridge for alternate stanzas. -- All I want to do now is sing. And I feel free to learn now. Or will be free in two days.



McClure, Dylan, and Ginsberg, San Francisco, 1965 by Larry Keenan

THE SCREEN IS RED AND GOLD AND WHITE AND PINK [from *Mandala Book*]<sup>15</sup>

AND LIES UPON MY CHEST WITH METAL STRINGS

I beat upon – not wings  
but PAWS – NOT PAWS BUT HANDS.

And from my chest pour strands  
of white plastic ribbon  
like the decoration  
of a dimension

OF DR. STRANGE  
who saves the blond chick  
but never gets her in the end  
though she waits with smile  
and lips that are  
a screen I play upon.

While white plastic ribbon pours  
a multitude of ways  
from out my chest  
and pull till

I am somewhere else  
I AM SOMEWHERE ELSE  
I do not know myself  
and do not care.

AND I KNOW THE TOUCH OF THE BEGINNING OF MUSIC

Paw stroke and claw turning to finger  
I'm wild-eyed and I rave

I'm beginning to talk in slang  
I AM BEGINNING TO SEE AND HEAR

My obsessions are as real  
as living them.

This is really beauty  
and I may grow wings on my feet  
and I feel the lightness of spring  
in walking. The foot on the black  
night pavement in the neon glow  
in the roaring heard in the distance

And the creatures under the bed have  
come alive again. And dreams invade  
the morning with real faces  
arguing and buried beneath feathers  
that the wind through the window  
blows while I rage at the lions  
through an electronic box  
and my hair has grown  
to my shoulders

[Separate poem read at Human Be-In]<sup>16</sup>

THE LION'S IN THE LIGHTNINGS OUT

the dream is still  
within the throat.

The Heart's a knife thrown  
to the floor.

The foot used the window and not the door

AND I KNOW THE TOUCH OF THE BEGINNING OF MUSIC.

Web trap/ heart gnash

NOTHING NOTHING NOTHING

til

I

NEON CHROME AND THE VOICES

    speak into the microphones above at table  
of furs and the huge sounds fill space with  
    the music quiet behind them,  
    the walls are a movie of colors  
    and they move in a half-circle  
of light – there is a Thirties romantic..

AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT<sup>17</sup>

AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT

AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT

AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT

AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT

AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT!

AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT!

AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT!

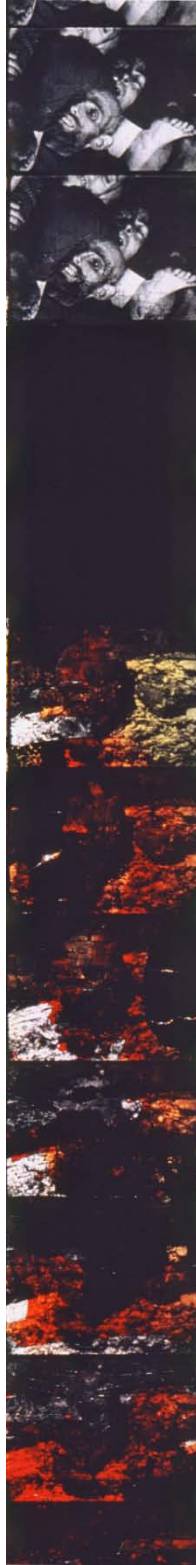
Didn't mean to type so much. But there are the last two of the seven stanzas. The poem was finished the day before Easter. Like *Dark Brown* I'm not changing any part of it. So it's spontaneous poem. I spent two years working on *Love Lion Book*. Changed fifty or a hundred words. But Bob Dylan's beauty inspired me to finish a perfect *Love Lion*.<sup>18</sup> This one should be flashed out the way it is. I would probably never print again if Dave and Bruce had not suggested and asked for the poem. I think *The Mammals*<sup>19</sup> may be out Summer or Fall. *Oyez* is doing it. That's *The Feast*, *The Blossom*, and *Pillow*. I think I shall write purely for myself now and not for publication – aside from that I want to learn music. NO – not learn – *discover*. I took a month's lessons learning to play traditional autoharp and I DO NOT like it! Yeah, I guess I still love the page the way I'm filling these pages to you. But Poetry will probably be singly and solely for me now. Or when I show or read to friends. When I put school aside I may write a comic novel about teaching. (((Whitman stewed over education. I have the solution in a nutshell – one day each week teacher must go to classes stark naked.)))

Try this on for a fantasy. Stan Brakhage wants to do something else for a year or perhaps a year and a half. (*Else* meaning besides the Brakhage type beauty creation he is obsessed with. Since he's prolific and could lay off for a year. . . ) Michael wants to make plays but is willing to shake off his predispositions about what they should be like and would dig to work with another person – and shake off his ideas of perfection and anti-perfection. Michael and Stan get several thousand dollars and rent a huge studio for a year. They buy used cameras (several) and used sound equipment. They sit around in the studio and gather friends and associates to help them. Gradually they begin making films not worrying too much about the quality of the first sound films. Maybe doing *Beard* and *Feast* and little spontaneous comedies. Then they open a theater to show the films and begin pushing a distribution set-up. They have a corporation and they try to get subsidies and patrons. Very much like a Warhol shot. *The Beard* as Warhol did it is SO bad. We could do one a thousand times better in a week. Ditto *The Feast*. And ditto *anything*. It would not be related to your other work in film and would give me a chance to work with someone and to direct. BOTH OF US MAY BE TENDING TO GO THIS DIRECTION and I'm proposing it as a fantasy. Also part of the fantasy would be the absolute absence of pressure – and working with anyone with any talent or ideas. Start at the smallest most ingenuous and naïve level and see if it will go.

LOVE TO ALL BRAKHAGES – forgive a dumb stupid ugly letter and accept any love between the lines,

Michael

Enclosed are 2 *battered*  
*Poisoned Wheats*.



Frames from *23rd Psalm Branch* by Stan Brakhage  
Courtesy of the Estate of Stan Brakhage and Fred Camper  
(<http://www.fredcamper.com>)

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 6/66]

Early June, 1966

[TOP MARGIN The new poems are BEAUTIFUL/BEAUTIFUL – like that: each line reflecting on each other, and word for word then. . . like making a laser beam of language.]

Ah, dear Michael,

What a beautiful letter you write that you do call “dumb stupid ugly”: and how you do call me back into some contemporaneous sense of self, that you write thus freely of your troubles, sharing them generously with me, giving me thereby much needed sense I am not alone in having my often similar difficulties these days. Ah, my ! (sigh !) me-Oh, my-OH! (ego’s rock & roll !) – it is The War, the damned and damning WAR, that roots all of us out of our otherwise deeply growing composure . . . I’m sure of it, that The War is at heart’s source of artist’s current discontents: and yet perhaps we’d find some other grief for shared crisis, if it were not for WAR. But I think NOT: I think we were all coming, and are still all working, to some sense of life freed from the super-societal-impositions of over-ripened drama, working for newnesses premised on some more personal birth rather than these cultural emergencies, some sense that (as Olson puts it) :

The likeness is to nature’s  
NOT to these tempestuous events.<sup>1</sup>

Well, my *Scenes From Under Childhood* is fully interrupted now – in coughing fits and starts and great soulful upheavals of sadness now and again, and somewhat lack of money: and so, I have decided to ride full tilt at the damned windmill and am, therefore, in midst of editing images from the Nazi concentration camps into rock flashes and color-orders of closed-eye vision and inter-cutting World War II newsreel footage with pictures of my trip to Europe, impounding every nebulous war haunt of my childhood into some immediately available clarity . . . all into a long *Song 23* called *23rd Psalm Branch*: and I am working hard at it – for sanity’s sake . . . tho’ its own sake’s self takes over in the working process: and I grow daily freer of the mistaking a picture as being other than a picture and of thinking a memory is anything other than as being immediately available / a present / a reality.

And all this talk of war reminds me to thank you for the copies of *Poisoned Wheat* wherein you did surely come to some clear terms with the temptation of events. It is good to have those copies to send those couple places where they will be most needed – and the receiving of them did lead me to read it again and rediscover my own grown desperate need for your insight in that area. What a time its been, IS – friends in sanitariums (and *not* of the kind you describe the ven[ul]erable Lowell relaxing into), nebulous hysteria in letters from both coasts and most of the mid-country making my Rollinsville mail box a loaded bomb practically every time I



open it: and only you and David Meltzer (and Creeley on the phone) being humanly clear enough to write/(speak) of *personal* troubles AND joys . . . what a relief to know, at least from you three, that there are humans being individual – rather than, as from most, that the whole country has turned its people into twitching end products of a war force.

And I do write too much of “war” herein also: for outside that easy “catch-all” and, thereby, out-side-in-me/I’ve come to find it almost impossible to sustain a life *without* crisis, have arrived here *in* my living at an unbearableness of happiness, am at the point where all the previous stories end – at some “living happily ever after” . . . some going-onness without *the friction, the friction*, I’m trained to gear against: and so I create the crisis, poison myself, and dwell (despite ideals) upon the world’s wars, etcetera.

And the mellow-to-rotten drama drops down upon me sure as gravity’s prayer: and what a dreadful western muddle I’ve made of it, all the blessings of this good place, because I’ve somehow lacked the psychological means, perhaps the courage even, to live in the peace of this geographical location, the joy of this home, in harmony with the natural environment -- instead, I’ve fallen back on my training which prepares me to anticipate crisis, live thru it dramatically, and remember it above all else . . . damnation’s three dictums and the particular curse of the western world!

And I do not think the solvent, for either of us, is for me to come to S.F. and set up a “scene” with you: for while I’ve no doubt we could do better than Warhole, could make a more grounded scene and much better use of velvet, etc., it would be bound to be of-a-kind with his in being a “scene” rather than seeing, in being of the nature of “fun” not naturally given in living being, etc. – anyway I’ve told you the only way I could work on a film of one of your plays as anything *other* than an arty photo-drama . . . have it photographed by commercially competent photographers in lip-sync and send me the footage and forget it, wait how-some-ever long to see what I might be able to do with it (come to think of it – maybe the Warhole footage is good for THAT – maybe ten years of Brakhage handpainting and editing could retrieve it from “scene’s” hell . . . I dunno – probably not!): and anyway, you *know* that’s the only way possible to birth a play into a filmic work of art – so really you are just saying: “come and let’s have a good-time-party spree together”: and that I might take you up on if the going gets too rough here . . . and that I can, anyway, thank you for – ah, how MUCH I would like to have a big looooooong party with you – something to outdo the 20’s Hollywood champagne-in-swimming-pool utterly decadent and wildly fuck-filled parties: but then, I don’t think I can afford it / don’t imagine I could attend it, either / don’t think the angels have it planned as an even irregular part of my (or your) living . . . I mean: that’s what our whole life is, actually, and we splash around in air more drunkenly than anyone ever did in a champagne swimming pool or the wildest Warhole shindig – so how in the world would we make some special event out of it that was anything but embarrassing to both of us? You tell me. I mean: even at a time in my life like this, I’m just vomiting from too much of the world’s hard

liquor, exhausted from being fucked-out, sick at the sight/sound of suckling pig and Viennese violin. And I think you've been too much hosting your party – what a relief to hear you now know you can't go on teaching, teaching, etc. . . ah, Michael, you are the clearest consciousness I've come across – I mean: you really do *know* what YOU are up to.

Well, I'm going back to work on my dead jews – “all my jews”, as [Louis] Zukofsky once wrote, to [Ezra] Pound, I think . . . and on my scratching of words coming into this work: ““Take back Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup>, then', he said.” . . . and “Song, my song, raise grief to music,” from Zukofsky's *A*,<sup>2</sup> to intercut with images of him taken this last trip to New York. There's sure to be something from *Poisoned Wheat*, carved therein, like “I AM NOT GUILTY,” for a start.

Joy to you, Jo Ann, Janey  
Stan



Straight Theater marquee featuring Michael McClure and the Grateful Dead, with Larry Keenan's car in foreground, San Francisco, 1966 by Larry Keenan

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – Summer 66]

[Summer 1966]

[TOP MARGIN: Later P.S./ we got fine reviews and big newspaper article. But we're not making \$ & may be "busted" by police on Monday while I'm in V.B.C.]

Dear Stan,

It's early in the morn – Monday – I want to tell you first of anyone that your prediction about *The Beard*<sup>1</sup> being a popular play may well be true! I wish you could have been here to share it with me. The actors are sharp and clean as pistols. . . or beautiful soft wasps. The Kid is intense and Harlow<sup>2</sup> is perfect. The only thing they could do now is learn to play it directly to the audience and pause for laughs. The audience was very serious and seriously listening – they took it as a comedy – but even more as a poem. The audience will have to learn to hear in a new way if there's to be any more drama on stage. Anyway it was a huge and beautiful audience. By the middle of the play the actors were playing for the audience and beginning to pause. There's a beautiful crackling fire beside me and the sun is up.

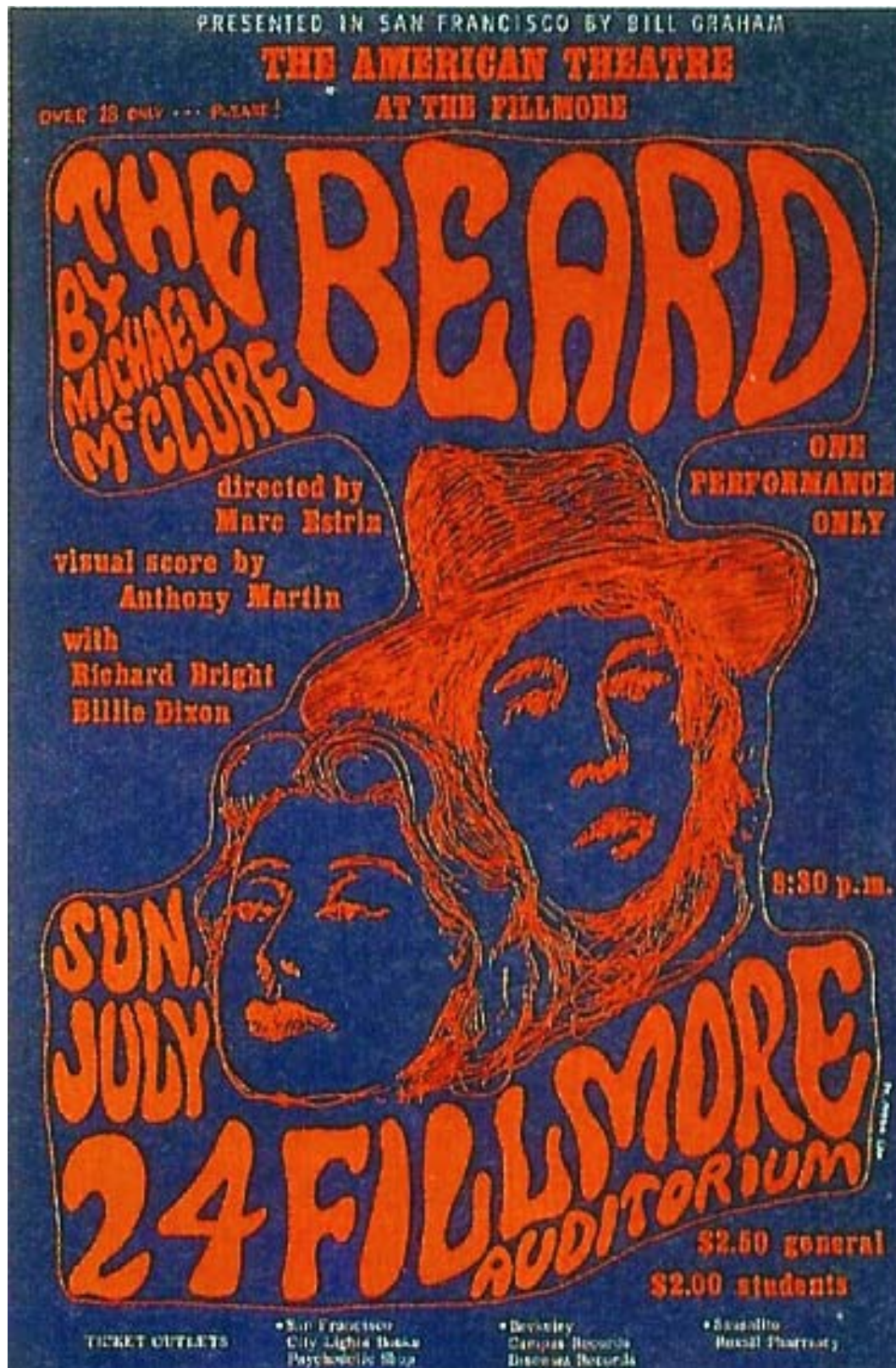
Tony Martin's<sup>3</sup> light show was beautiful a huge panorama of stars and transparencies of Harlow fading in and out ever so lightly and out of focus. Then one or two seconds of a film loop of a gigantic little plump blond girl skipping rope over the actors heads. . . There was a two or three minute ovation. Also there was no police interference!<sup>4</sup> We're giving the play again at the Committee<sup>5</sup> (a spontaneous theater nite club in N. Beach) on Monday. Though I don't know how I'll get the strength to work on publicity. Where should I go from here? I'm a poet and I feel like singing and my voice isn't here yet. I guess I'll write another play. But my feeling is that it is time to sing and to dance – the play is like a warm-up. I don't know what function it has except to free and it has already freed me as much as it will.

Creeley says you think I did not see MMFILM on tv because I did not think it would be on. Not so! Jo Anna called all the tv stations and they denied that any such film or section on "underground films" would be on. Jo Anna told me about it when I came home and we went to Janie's room and turned on the t.v. anyway to see, and caught the end of the program – in time to see Andy Warhol and realize I'd missed your film. So there was no disbelief involved – but Bob has a tendency to say things in an odd way, and I remember writing you at the time. I have Cinema Theater announcement of five days of Stan Brakhage – it makes me very happy for you. I do not know of any other such vast scale occurrence in your art! I'd like to see *Pasht*.<sup>6</sup>

I was hoping to fly to Boulder to see you on way back from Vancouver. Jo Anna's father is dying and may well be dead by then. Jane may be in Seattle and I

must return to San Francisco before the director of *Beard* leaves town. . . There is still a chance though that I may get to see you. . . If so, I'll phone from Vancouver. And, if not, money is getting better now and I will be able to get to see you sometime soon.

Creeley says you said to come to Rollinsville, and You and I can get a barn and make films! –Would that I could. Besides *The Beard* there is one other film I want to do.



Poster by Wes Wilson for The American Theater Presents the Beard at the Fillmore West July 24, 1966



It would be a political bloodcurdler (probably my ticket to an internment camp – but somebody should say what I want to say in it) – and a comedy. It might run fifteen minutes. I'd do it improvised theater style. Might take a week of work with actors before I could use camera. That's another dream – I've no access to such funds now.

Also the dresses alone for the film would be a week's work. Four white satin dresses! People have turned up all over and worked like hounds for *The Beard*. Tony Martin put in a week's work. Louise Foss spent more than a week on Harlow's gown and finished up by sewing a shirt for The Kid. People have passed out handbills and put up posters. . . It goes on and on. I did not do this by myself. I think a nucleus will spring up around you here if there's real art to be done. Productionwise and actingwise it is the best play I've seen. The Fillmore Auditorium is a huge Rock n roll auditorium. Oh, the Kid and Harlow used handheld microphones. . . They made beautiful stage action. Between the paper beards and the mike cords it became very Greek-like. A rite between Mars and Venus, or Shakti and Siva. The gown was blue satin – period Thirties, with back cut out like an Marilyn M dress. The result was perfect and timeless/ The Kid had lace shirt and cuffs over black vest.

Besides beautiful and good friends there are wicked people in this city. Usually after a reading I am weak and exhausted. Last night the actors did the work and I got the wicked people coming up as they do after an event, BUT I WAS NOT TIRED, AND I GOT TO WATCH THEM DOING TO ME WHAT THEY ALWAYS DO WHEN I AM TIRED AND WEAK. . . They are sick jealous motherfuckers! Ugh. It was an education. IN a negative way of speaking it was a side benefit of the play to have someone else do my poem so I could get the shit thrown at me when I was strong enough to take a good look at it. Also old "friends" are lollygagging over me now. I'll be the new ten day wonder. I think you know you're a man when you know who your friends are and remember them, and smile at the others.

Theater is a cunt art – I hope I can sing soon. Allen G and I played finger chimes and autoharp for Larry Ferlinghetti – who was taking his first lsd – in Bixby Canyon Big Sur and then went to the Big Sur Folk Music Festival and heard Baez and others. It was lovely day. Don Allen is supposed to bring out *Love Lion Book* but he's so busy being lordly and boozy that I dunno. I saw proofs about four months ago. Dave Haselwood may get an untitled book by Bruce and I out, before the Don A[llen] book. Both books are pamphlets. 300 to 400 line poems. Publication of *The Mammals*<sup>7</sup> stalled and finally collapsed. I'm learning the a-harp better and better but snagging at actually singing – fear of error, fear of change. So I'm practicing chakric breathing and writing – wrote a long personal non-publishable poem all in one afternoon. Creeley says you are buried in footage of jews in ovens and agonies of war. Remember it is not your war, and take a vacation and go on a picnic, and write me a letter. After writing *Poisoned Wheat* to free guilt I became obsessed with guilt for awhile – so watch out. Blame is a trap. Acceptance of blame is a very high level game society plays with the artist. It is not significant in Universe terms. I mean it is all on one ecstatic level – and we try to reach out for a higher shot. Anyway *The Beard* is beautiful and share my happiness with me,

Love,  
Michael

P.S. Woody from Straight Theater does have something going. But, significantly, the Straight Theater is not yet open. If, and when it does open -- and it may likely happen -- then that would be a GREAT place to show your films and lecture. But right now his setup would not net you any five hundred and he's not yet experienced enough to make such guarantees. To do it, he'd have to milk you for lectures, and he'd never get the whole five hundred. You'd end up not only earning it, but rounding it up.

But, if the Straight Theater comes off it will be one of the best places in the country to show.

I offered to give any lectures with you if you wanted company. Woody wanted poetry & film combos I think. That sounds like a miss. But the ~~last~~ lecture due still sounds good. I think ~~together~~ together we could make an enlightend lecture-conversation and it would be ten times easier than a solo-lecture. That's a thought.

RD was at the play last night. ~~XXX~~ Also went to see him with Billy Gray a month ago. Jess even came into the front room and spoke to me. (Wheeeeeee!) )

*Michael*

---

Wednesday - still haven't gotten this mailed.  
I'm feeling like the center of a whirlwind. Tomorrow  
morn I'm hitchhiking to Vancouver with a guitarist  
friend that I practice with. Never hitchhiked before!  
Starting ~~off~~ a ten day "Wanderjahr". Joanna & Jane  
flying to Tucson for death of Joanna's father. Everything  
is O.K. Maybe THE FEAST & THE FOX going to be done in  
N.Y.C. *Loann*



P.S. Woody from Straight Theater<sup>8</sup> *does* have something going. But, significantly, the Straight Theater is not yet open. If, and when it does open – and it may likely happen – then that would be a GREAT place to show your films and lecture. But right now his setup would not net you any five hundred and he's not yet experienced enough to make such guarantees. To do it, he'd have to milk you for lectures, and he'd never get the whole five hundred. You'd end up not only earning it, but rounding it up.

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RD [Robert Duncan] was at the play last night. Also went to see him with Billy Gray<sup>9</sup> a month ago. Jess even came into the front row and spoke to me. (Wheeeeeeeee!)

Michael

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- Loovah

Dear Michael —

No time now for  
more than a wild  
note to you — Kenneth  
anger is visiting — BUT

Bless You

for

The Beard

a beautiful  
book!

Dear Michael —

No time now for more than a wild note to you — Kenneth Anger is waiting — BUT  
BLESS YOU for THE BEARD a beautiful book !

I'm going to mail  
you "Song 8" —  
tomorrow, probably;  
and I will write at  
length when there's  
time.

Hello! to Jo Ann and  
Janey. I still<sup>\*</sup> wear  
my wool scarf wher-  
ever I go! Blessings,  
Stan

\* It still snows here  
almost every night!

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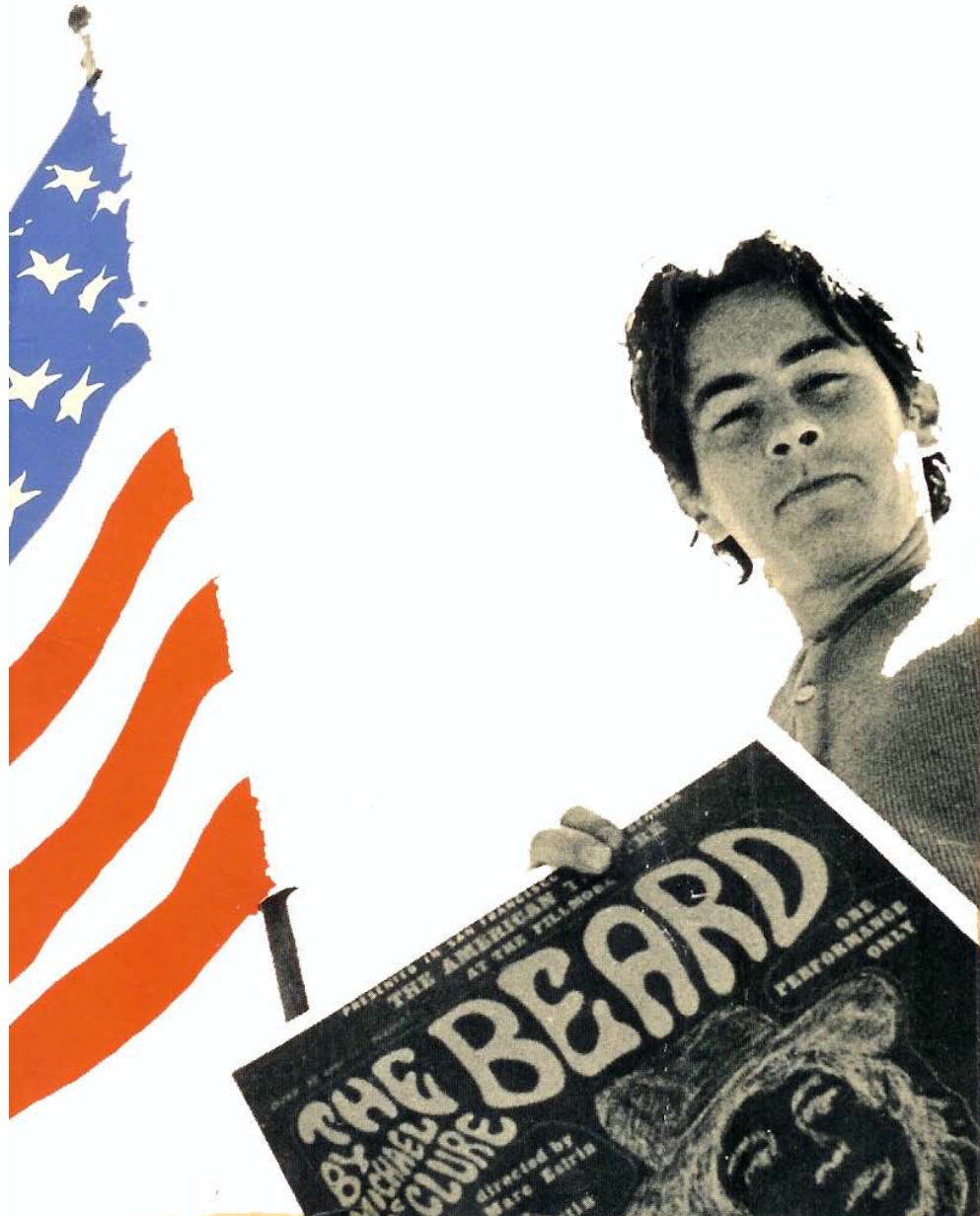
Hello! to Jo Ann and Janey. I still\* wear my wool scarf wherever I go !

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Stan

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# The Beard

a play by  
**Michael McClure**



The Beard, paperback cover, Grove Press, 1967

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 8/66]

Mid August, 1966

Dear Michael,

Sitting here in sun through window all rain-and-dust streaked into mountain crystal patterns – tired – tired . . . must talk to someone: hello, Michael . . . oh, god, how phoney this reads . . . I can't seem to do anything these days straight off – can't stop criticizing myself either. I need about a hundred year holy day – that is: a hundred years worth of space to tunnel around in . . . I'm so fucking sick of patterns / all that shit in the head: I must have piled up one hell of a lot of unconscious material: there's so many things I want that I must have the biggest repressed nature going, despite all the wild freedoms I've managed for myself. It's like: everything is GREAT here: but I'm not making it. To give you the BIGGEST example: we've just been granted a Rockefeller of \$14,400.00 to be paid out at the rate of \$400.00 per month for three years beginning next Jan. . . no strings attached except for the simple “for living expenses” – I didn't even have to fill out a form for it . . . as a matter of fact, I probably got it because I told them I couldn't fill out another one of those forms and that they could just forget it . . . foundations are like virgins or something – “No, don't go away,” they say, when the hand is on the door's knob: but I think Rockefeller Foundation is going to turn into a real swinger because they do seem, finally, to be acting on their/it's wildest notions of spreading the money around and do seem to be giving a lot of it to some very good people, including us – okay/so: we're financed for three and a half years (as we've got enough off rentals to last us, if careful, thru to Jan.): and, all the same, dead jews keep falling out of the closets – I keep asthmatically running them, bombs of the 2nd World War, Hitler nightmares, etcetera, thru the brain-movie projector, keep “plugging away”, as the saying goes: and the first half-hour of *23rd Psalm Branch* is tediously great / greatly tedious – the rhythms plodding as the “subject matter”, etc., “piff-paff-puff” (as Peter Kubelka<sup>1</sup> says in translated Austrian for our “POW, BAM-BOOM” or something) – and the wit has sunk to the socks of the thing: and yet I MUST go on with it, am “obsessed” or some-such . . . and when I talked the whole thing thru to Jane last night she said: “Well, then, you *know* what Michael would say – that you must go all the way thru it . . . stop judging the film and just get all the way thru it and out on the other side”: but I'm not sure nor sure she's sure even of what you would say – it's been so long since we've seen you. And, Michael, I did so *want* that this film would make *war* clear, unwarp the mummified attitude to-ward war (which hasn't appreciably changed since 3,500 B.C. – I found the ‘earliest’ “movie” I've yet come across, earliest example of picture material premised on movement: a ‘before-and-after’ set of two pictures to be looked at back & forth from the walls of upper Egypt: *to be* a ‘war’ “movie” and a racial combat to boot in which the white man wins . . . the feeling rising right up off that 5,500 year old Egyptian wall *to be* the latest T.V. report on Viet Nam, per se ex-act . . . and/or see Homer, etcetera): and I did think my child's attitude could transform all that for ALL time and agh'that, that the boy's view remembered from the newsreels, dredged up at

some considerably cost to me, could make visible the natch' phenomenon of war with some exactitude never before; and perhaps I *have* accomplished that (who'll know 'till the work's done and run a thousand times) BUT, so what? I mean, that I've come to work-of-art on WAR will (can ONLY be) made by the artist who LOVES war and is all *for* it, etcetera: I'm in the godawful position of being, in making this work, like John Bunyan on sex.

It's enough to make a man wheeze alright: but, these days, the asthma has transformed to coughing fits – piff, paff, puff . . . and I am *bored*! The major offset blessing is that we have Peter Kubelka here with us at the moment and thru to the end of this month. I must write you something of him, as he will be coming to S.F. (I've managed to set up several programs for him there in Sept.) – he's from Vienna, has made about an hour's worth of the most *perfect* films ever (editing always to the frame) and is the film-maker I feel closest to, most contemporary with, in the entire world . . . I had, perhaps, more ideals about him, and the perfection of his work, than were true-to-life (because he lives such a distance and his works were so unavailable they took on that patina of the imagination such-said works do): but now that he's run the full gamut of sharing our daily living, and his works being seen again and again, I *still* feel closer to him than any other film maker and his works still hold to their mysteries with absolute coherence -- albeit I see the price of narrowness such perfection exacts and reject it for myself . . . I mean, I've come to see the "blindness" he must wear and the "earphones" in order to concentrate with such absolute thoroughness on that 'corner' he "corners" – I see him now as a cross between [Anton] Webern<sup>2</sup> and [Samuel] Beckett,<sup>3</sup> in the above sense... but, more importantly, I see him as the Peter Kubelka he IS (all analogies falling by the wayside): and he is a lovely man.

Ah, well . . . JOY to you – for the long letter which did such joy engender here: and what a blessing to hear that *The Beard* did have good public showing – and especially good that you had clarity of "who your friends are" at end, that you got good clear sight to jealousies' center in encounters with people afterward . . . I, too, suffer much these days from the 'respect' of those who hate me: but *The Beard*, if any play written in this time, will lodge itself even in the turmoil of your 'enemies' subconscious: and you must come to look at them knowing the 'friend to you' even in them is blossoming in response to your play beyond their knowing more of it than that they feel "jealousy"/"hatred" to-ward NOT you, really, but rather that nudge their own subs have given their egos because of your work. You cannot, with that of all plays, have done other than reach the best of any person: but all those who can't seem to live fully in the skin of each him and her self will only show it to you in an X-hibit of the worst of each... call it the personae's sonality – and collect all those bad snakes, with thanks, at the door.

Hey Michael, I will (shortly) send you a copy of *Two: Creeley/McClure* in 8mm. I told Creeley it was, that you missed it, your angels protecting you from T.V. encounter – he must have heard "angle's" or something . . . one gets thru to angels when one makes the best out of the worst-seeming of anything.

God!—BLESS it! . . . I DO need to talk with you. I'm just going to *have* to take the bus to S.F. one of these (any) days. Joy to Jo Ann and Janey and

Blessings,  
Stan

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 10/66]

End-Oct., 1966

Dear Michael,

The new book (whose secret title is *I It*<sup>1</sup>) centers the occasion of itself, more truly than ever before in your writing, on the Mask as ego-manifestation, only does thus to *such* an extent that the Personae (as of the Greek sense of it: he-whom-fate-falls-upon / he-whom-The Mask-falls-upon) and all of Western character (in the sense [Oswald] Spengler<sup>2</sup> finds it the West's alternative to Greek personae) – *both* these manifestations *fall away* and leave only some utterly *new* sense. . . as sense of self working its/your way *thru* ego to a beingness that, I think, has had no terms before your writing. The mandalas are crucial to this occasion because they offer the reader/viewer a centering on his own closed-eye thought: and the whole book is certainly one of *the most* important books *now* published for *any* possible future time – like a-minute-from-now, tomorrow, in-a-century . . . for we are otherwise (other-than-the-wisdom-of-this-book) damned to stereotypes that have become for each-and-every-one-of-this-culture stageable *only* in the act of remembering *to the exclusion* of any real living in the present. It is a wondrous magnificent thing – that book – and I'm reading it over and over.

I have a head cold today and perhaps write as stuffily as I feel in the nose: but I just had to get some immediate praise off to you for this book . . . and then, too, I have *good news* – needing rather immediate reply from you:

The students of the Experimental Cinema Group here in Boulder, Colo. are at last able and *most* willing to pay your transportation from San Francisco and whatever would be a fair lecture-and-reading fee – say, the average you get these days – and would like to have you here soon as possible.

So – what fee would you require? . . . and when can you come?

How's *that* for joy?

How are you all?

Blessings, Stan





Freewheelin' Frank at Michael McClure's place in San Francisco, 1966 by Larry Keenan

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage 11/66]**

**[October/November 1966]**

Dear Stan,

Gracias for your beautiful letter! I've just finished typing a new book: *Freewheelin' Frank Secretary of the Angels – As told to Michael McClure*.<sup>1</sup> It is a 150 page "autobiography" of a Hells Angel friend of mine who's taking L.S.D. & having religious visions – and is possibly the sweetest person I've met in years! We just played together at Jabberwock Folk Music Night club. We performed with décor of fur rugs, antique chair, velvet, pillows, incense, & a live boa constrictor. And we played sitting Indian style as on the card in clouds of incense & with only one small gooseneck lamp with a yellow bulb. The audience was dumbfounded & we had a great time playing "Babylonian" music & singing William Blake. But the book has exhausted me & almost pushed me beyond the limits of my energy. I've been learning more autoharp, writing a new poem, *Beard* trials & hearings, & teaching also [...] Twice I began shaking with exhaustion & fear and then I was saved by a bladder infection & stomach flu – that knocked me out long enough to get my balance. Life here is hard & tough & it is easy to forget an angelic smile amidst the woodenness of a pained or false one.



Coming to Boulder will be very much what I need & want. [...] Also I find I'm broke so the money will be a great help. I've had to let everything slide while working on Frank's book. If you can arrange another reading or lecture for me in Denver or Boulder it would help a lot. The minimum for a reading or lecture would be \$150.00 & \$200 or \$250.00 would be normal enough. Let me know if the film group can afford that plus the plane fare. I'll take whatever can be offered from the film society – the trip is to see you & family. Another reading or lecture for a college there or somewhere in the neighborhood would be of much help.

Kenneth Anger is here & in beautiful shape with green velvet coat & orange velvet pants – his return to S.F. was like Christmas.

About 7 weeks from now is the end of the semester – my reading there should be either before or after that time.

Attorney Melvin Belli sent an injunctive letter to Warhol warning him never to show his film of *The Beard* or toy with my property again. Then, Jack Smith<sup>2</sup> & Jerry Lieber<sup>3</sup> started after me to get the right to do it. This adds to my general state of exhaustion – if this letter sounds strained – it is – that is my state.

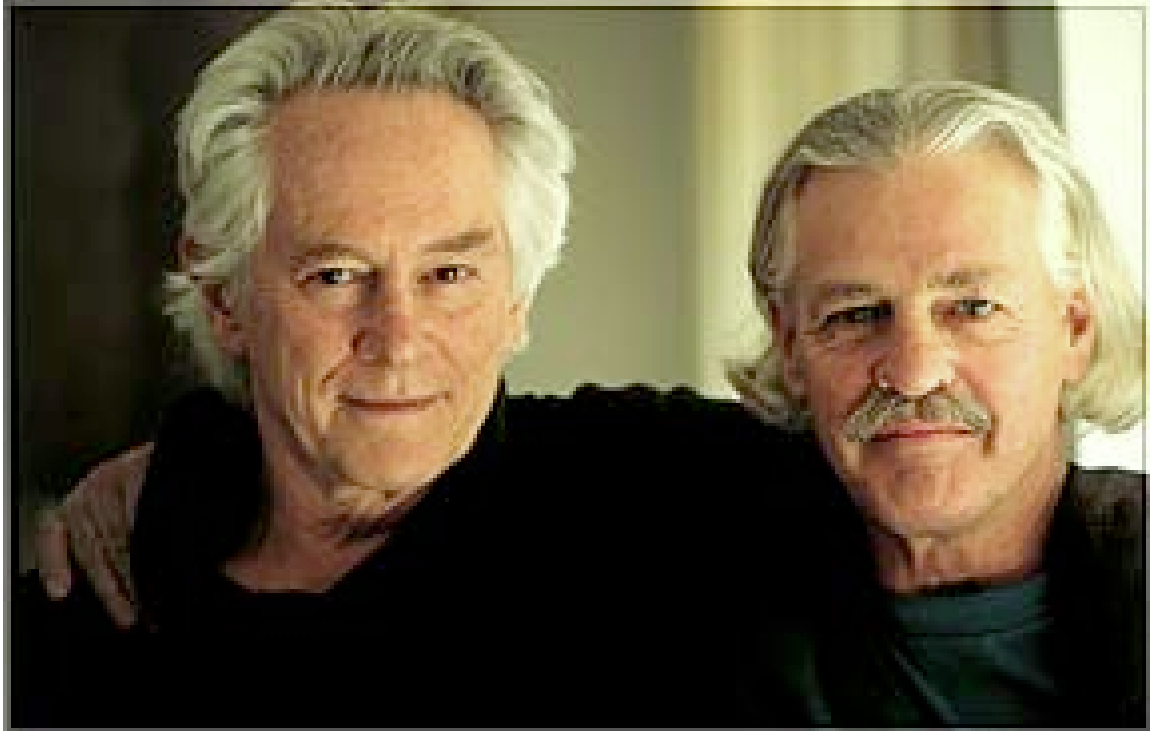
The D.A. in San Fran is determined to prevent *The Beard* & the Berkeley D.A. is watching & there's a third trial date set there. It is getting more ugly & more cruel, I think we'll win.

Don Allen is bringing out the little *Love Lion Book* – perhaps in time to bring you a copy.

Perhaps Dave Haselwood will reprint *Dark Brown &/OR Hymns [to St. Geryon]*. I'm having *Ghost Tantras* reprinted. I may skip GROVE & print *Beard* myself & Larry F. [Lawrence Ferlinghetti] is bringing out a longer & complete *Meat Science [Essays]*<sup>4</sup> & I've finished a new poem called "The Curses of Billy the Kid & The Sermons of Jean Harlow."<sup>5</sup> – So all is well & swinging in that direction.

And it is also beautiful to walk down to Haight Street for a cup of coffee or shopping & see STAN BRAKHAGE in HUGE letters on the marquee of the Straight Theater.<sup>6</sup> Next time I'll get a photo to send you for your scrap book.

Love to all Brakhages,  
see you soon, I'll  
love the Mountain air &  
Quiet,  
Michael



Michael McClure and Freewheelin' Frank at McClure's house in Oakland, CA, 2000 by Larry Keenan



Freewheelin' Frank manuscript on Michael McClure's bed, San Francisco, 1966 by Larry Keenan

Stan,

Mucho happening here! I'll ask guy to get me to Boulder on Dec 12 in the eve & I'll try to leave on Dec 16th in the eve. That will give us 4 days & we can speak & sing mucho.

Lenore Kandels "LOVE BOOK" was just busted here. Wire in all the papers almost every day. On next Wednesday wire going to go on T.V. to denounce the ~~the~~ police & D.A. Rallies were held for us at San Francisco State College. Lenore & I plan to give a public reading together. I suppose will be arrested - but I'll be out on bail.

2nd edition of The Poisoned Wheat may be out on Dec 14th in time for the reading there. Here's new LOVE BOOK with Brakhage blessings.

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public shot. I see little ~~to~~ or no  
time to practise between now &  
then. James Koller, Coyote Books,  
is bringing out THE BEARD & THE  
MAMMALS in matching volumes with  
covers by Wes Wilson who is a famous  
R & R. poster artist on West Coast.  
It is neo-art nouveau style - beautiful.

Ken went crazy and ~~was~~ was in the  
psycho ward here for 2 days. His  
explanation is more magical & Crowleyan.  
I'd call it paranoia induced by acute  
methedrine poisoning - do not quote  
me. I see him whenever possible & slow  
him down as I can. His gentle nature  
has & is regaining the upper hand. I believe  
it is a pre-film catharsis - but it was beyond  
the bounds. You're right the cities are getting  
really crazy - I'm plenty stable - just exhausted  
by psychic fumes & doings around me  
sometimes. (over)

Will you introduce me at the reading & show Creeley/McClure film as Greg suggests? I don't think I'll be playing A-harp or singing at any public shot. I see little or no time to practice between now and then. James Koller, Coyote Books,<sup>2</sup> is bringing out *The Beard & The Mammals* in matching volumes with covers by Wes Wilson<sup>3</sup> who is a famous R&R poster artist on West coast. It is neo-art nouveau style – beautiful.

Ken [Anger] went crazy and was in the psycho ward here for 2 days. His explanation is more magical & Crowleyan. I'd call it paranoia induced by acute methedrine poisoning – *do not* quote me. I see him whenever possible, & slow him down as I can. His gentle nature has & is regaining the upper hand. I believe it is a pre-film catharsis – but it was beyond the bounds. You're right the cities are getting *really* crazy – I'm plenty stable – just exhausted by psychic fumes & doings around me sometimes but this is still my "nature" here. Right now we're in the middle of a Revolution & war here. I see a 6 month battle.

Love to all you beautiful  
Brakhages,  
Michael

but this is still right  
my "nature" here. I see a  
now we're in the middle of a  
revolution & war here. I see a  
6 month battle.  
Love to all you beautiful  
Brakhages,  
Michael

[Michael McClure to Stan and Jane Brakhage – 12/22/66]

Dec. 22 [1966]

[TOP MARGIN: I've cut down on cigarettes & this letter is typed with fanaticism not nicotine.]

[LEFT MARGIN: I decided to beat Xmas gluttony & noggishness by making dinner myself – abalone curry with brown rice stark & plain]

Dear Stan & Jane,

A fast note! – I've been meaning to call you and all the lovely Brakhages. Matter of fact you've persuaded me that I must use telephone. – I mean you've persuaded me by your example. I've come down with a cold that is groaning and crawling around in my chest. I'll telephone maybe tonight or tomorrow night when I am not so worn. First day back I realized how lovely it is there in the Rockies in Brakhageville – and found myself back in San Francisco. Saturday I woke up and decided to get drunk. [Richard] Brautigan<sup>1</sup> came by and we started drinking. Freewheelin Frank came by next and we started playing music. Frank said we should go to a street event on Haight St., where other Angels would be appearing. We took our instruments and made a parade to Haight St. The Mime Troupe<sup>2</sup> and the "Diggers"<sup>3</sup> were having an event with streets lined with cheering hippies with high hats and turbans. We stood around in the throng. Then Pete [Knell],<sup>4</sup> the president of the SF Hells Angels, came by and said two Angels had been arrested unjustly. I said we should march on the Police Station, and offered to go with Pete. A little more talk, then Pete, Brautigan, Freewheelin, and myself began the march. Pete was playing kazoo, Brautigan on tambourine, Freewheelin on harmonica and myself on autoharp. We didn't look back – just started marching down the middle of Haight St. towards the police station four or five blocks away. It was like the paintings of the fifer, and drummer, with the bandaged head, and the gimpy step. Away we went with about five hundred people behind us. Not knowing whether we were going to be tear-gassed and riot-gunned, or laughed at.

At the police station we yelled, sheered, sang Christmas carols, and dumbfounded police who took it with pretty fair humor and did not blow their cool headedness. They would not let the Angels out – demanding three hundred dollars bail. We began passing hats around and collected almost two hundred dollars. Then led the march back to Haight Street and did street singing till we raised three hundred dollars. (Which is kind of a miracle considering the relative poverty of hippies, but we had even kind old ladies giving dimes and quarters). The local papers missed the whole event but there was a *Look* photog there. I hope it appears somewhere. It was the beginning of a revolution. And about five hundred people knew it. It is the most exciting thing that's happened "politically".

We had a nice song going to the tune of a modified "Babylonian Necrophilia":<sup>5</sup>



Angels in Jail  
Money for bail  
Angels in Jail  
Resisting Arrest  
Angels in Jail  
Money for Bail...

Sounded (and looked) like the streets of London in the 1800s.

Since that scene I've been buried in getting the tail ends of those three classes caught up and tied together. –And bit by bit coming down with this cold. My autoharp got partially broken on the plane on the way back. People were packed into the plane like chickens in a coop.

Those four days with you look like Heaven in retrospect and I'd like nothing more at this moment for another four – maybe with Jo Anna. That is the first real rest and time for pleasure I've had for quite a while. I'LL BE BACK. Your kids are beautiful! –All the Brakhages.

Keep hanging onto those literary magazines and I'll send you Peter Howard's<sup>6</sup> address next letter.

Please get John Chick<sup>7</sup> to send me the clippings from Boulder papers so I can write a letter of defense for Clancy's bust. I volunteered to do so but cannot do it unless I know a few details and the charge that Clancy was gotten for.

Steve Riley has sent both a postcard and a letter. I think he made errands. His letter is most well meaning.

How's this for a fast note?

Will you send me a statement to use for advertising *The Beard* – any length.

I gave you no idea here how beautiful it was to be with you. But that is because I'm so busy telling everyone here how great it is there. You are liable to have an influx of San Francisco into Boulder.

Love to all Brakhages,  
Michael

P.S. Hope you and Jane have got Brakhage Blues Band Bars<sup>8</sup> now. Tralala

P.P.S. Have just been looking for extra copy of *Highgrade* by Phil Whalen<sup>9</sup> – can't find it. Maybe I can find one later.

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 1/67]

Mid. Jan. 67

[TOP MARGIN: P.S. Let me know if OK to give John Chick and Greg Sharits<sup>1</sup> copies of tape of your reading here? “Brakhage Blues Band” is on the way to you!]

Dear Michael –

And in *much* hurry – *could* you arrange *any* showings for me in S.F. the 1<sup>st</sup> week of Feb.? . . . *if* so *be* there to *see THE BEARD*, etc. (Jo Ann did suggest that possibility and inspire me very much to make it) . . . *if not* (not Feb 1<sup>st</sup> thru 6<sup>th</sup>) then, alas, I’ll probably *not* be able to make it west before summer.

Just spent couple *lovely* days with Allen Ginsberg and Peter [Orlovsky],<sup>2</sup> brother, and Maretta Greer,<sup>3</sup> *here* (they stopped by on way to you): and I really got to know Allen *very much* better than ever before.

Let me know immediately as possible, please – like, call (‘collect’ if you need that encouragement to use the blessing of L.D. phone) – ‘cause I’m, natch, rushed time-wise for lining it all up as a possibility and very dependent on S.F. for that week. I’ll write or phone Carmen Vigil<sup>4</sup> apropos the ‘Straight-Ashbury’ situation: but I *don’t* have any connections with S.F. College, Berkeley, etc: actually, I’d only need three shows to swing it (tho’ I must clear *some* money – as our car is completely breaking down) . . . if you could cinch your school and sound out S.F. State, I could probably swing the rest . . . okay? – let me know: but don’t sweat over it: magic will prevail . . .

Joy to you,  
Stan

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 2/68]

mid Feb., '68

Dear Michael,

Don't know why! – But I *DO* feel like writing you, 'handwritten,' in some lazy scrawl this evening . . . nothing, really, to say – just a few facts maybe:

I'm rather happier with sense of myself as 'fool' . . . am, thus/now, taking-it-easy again;

I've put my films back in Co-Op<sup>1</sup> and all of 'em in Grove/C16<sup>2</sup> as well;

I've finished section #1 of *Scenes From Under Childhood*, beautiful film, whole new break-thru in Sound;

I have a few splice shifts, a cut here and there, and one of the best *Songs* – *Song 26* – is completed;

I'm reading a lot of history (particularly Henry Adams)<sup>3</sup> *The Letters of Madame De Sevigne*, *The Letters of Ezra Pound*, Netter's<sup>4</sup> book on *The Reproductive System* – and other assorted medical books – and Confucius.

Almost everyone I know is sick, fled-the-country, both, or dead: I note that asylums don't seem to catch the sensitive of our generation . . . (divorce *IS* still fashionable – suicide less-so: and those who go abroad usually come back dragging tales, etc.)

How are you? JoAnn? Janey? – (in some simple sense for I haven't the wits to deal with rhetoric, psychology, etc.)

The Meltzers are due to move here within the month: I'm to secure a house for them as soon as they send definite date.

Couple weeks ago I spent 4 days in Omaha motel drunk as hell – staggered out to a Hollywood movie every now and again . . . it did me a lot of good; I went, then, on to N.Y., got news there of "commerz" branch of Co-Op finally lopped OFF – found it good an excuse as any to re-join; I also finally talked Grove [Press] into taking ALL my films and distributing 8mm to their book-club subscribers, starting with *Window Water Baby Moving*: . . . came home with no real sense of accomplishment – just a lot of shit shat (I mean it was/IS a relief: and I'm happier than I've been in a year or so – working well again . . . able, even, to suffer now with some grace).

I'm still lacking some sense of society; but I don't really expect to live to see it; , , and I will settle, gratefully, for the Meltzer's cabin 'down the road' and letters to and from friends.

[....]

Blessings, Stan

Ahh Stan,

Sept 7, 68

What a hairy emptiness!

This has been a year, & I fear the beginning of another... It's all been O.K. except for some silencio between us - which is cool! I mean O.K. too. <sup>Silence between friends is all right.</sup> I hope you'll see some way to be here this Fall. Let me know if you plan a tour & I'll set up C.C.A.C. for the appropriate date - and in 40 days or so they'll have a good & appropriate hall to show your work - they are putting in a media center. Clayton Espleman was just ~~of~~ here & he hopes to see you on his return to N.Y.C.

I've been sitting here drinking wine & listening to Nico's ~~album~~ album (she's beautiful - hear it) and Monty's Silver Apples album - and reading DOUBLE HELIX by Watson & putting up Sir Francis Crick's picture on my wall.

My summer has been 2 weeks in East Hampton & N.Y.C. - being in Mailer's latest film & then a romantic month in L.A.

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 9/7/68]

Sept. 7, 68

Ahh Stan,

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---

I've been sitting here drinking wine & listening to Nico's<sup>2</sup> album (she's beautiful – hear it) and Mort [Subotnick]'s *Silver Apples* album – and reading *Double Helix* by Watson & putting up Sir Francis Crick's<sup>3</sup> picture on my wall. My summer has been 2 weeks in East Hampton & N.Y.C. – being in Mailer's latest film<sup>4</sup> & then a romantic month in L.A.

the energy in opposite by proposing Gaiety  
& Yellow Submarines, speckled clothes, mirrors,  
flutes, babies, flags & Mantra Chanting, Great  
mountain humms, finger Cymbals, guitars,  
Poetic Signs (Johnson + Mao as in some boat of Mao)  
etc. The first large March evoked out in the  
Sunlight & I would have been curious to see what  
it appeared to be, seen visually, if it had  
been cut into a series of Vietnam Society 1968's  
News Clips.

Artand → Spectacle/Manifestation: is this  
possible in mass public meet? — But a  
huge Mantra-Chanting Tender Mob?

<sup>Mob</sup> All is by Nature great beast only if  
there's Fear in the air. ~~etc~~ Otherwise it's  
Great family Picnic in Sunlight on planet, a  
possible vision for all to have simultaneously.

the energy [runs or was] opposite by proposing gaiety & Yellow Submarines, speckled clothes, mirrors, flutes, babies, flags & mantra chanting, giant monotonic hums, finger cymbals, guitars, poetic signs ([Lyndon] Johnson & Mao [Tse Tung] and all in same boat of Meat) etc. The first large March worked out in the sunlight & I would have been curious to see what it appeared to be, visually, if it had been Cut into a series of Vietnam Society 1960's News Clips.

[Antonin] Artaud > Spectacle/manifestation: is that possible in mass public meet? – But a huge Mantra-Chanting tender Mob?

Mob is by nature great beast only if there's fear in the air. Otherwise it's giant family picnic in sunlight on planet, a possible vision for all to have simultaneously

with Jo Anna & later with addition of  
daughter Jane. We stayed at an eccentric  
chateau originally built for Zsa Zsa  
Gabor - camped out in it - with pools,  
& tunnels, & electric waterfalls.

I'll have to return to L.A. for opening of  
the trial of Beard which starts Sept 16.  
Meanwhile teaching & dreaming. I wrote  
a new novel & found a publisher (Bantam)  
for ancient first novel. ~~from the past~~

How beautiful it would be to go to Mongolia,  
or Iceland. Be sure to see Danish  
film Hagbard & Signe.

Aeris my first perfect poem:

Stark Reality # 3

Let our heart be as imagined birds are...

- On the shoulder, a scar  
that seeks to hide & dive beneath the flesh.  
The world & all its scalding rivers  
are a mesh

of gray green & silver scales  
that roll in musk & scent of fir.  
The dandelion hurls



with JoAnna & later with addition of daughter Jane. We stayed at an eccentric chateau originally built for Zsa Zsa Gabor<sup>5</sup> – camped out in it – with pools, & tunnels, & electric waterfalls.

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How beautiful it would be to go to Mongolia, or Ireland. Be sure to see Danish film *Hagberd & Signe*.<sup>7</sup>

Here's my first perfect poem:

Stark Reality # 3

Let our heart be as imagined birds are...  
– On the shoulder, a scar  
that seeks to hide & dive beneath the flesh.  
The world & all its scalding rivers  
are a mesh  
of grey-green & silver scales  
that roll in musk & scent of fir.  
The dandelion hurls

an elfin castle of itself.

Within our muscle pads  
we stir

and churn the coiling ladders  
of our genes  
serene

as queens

or fools or gentlemen

or furry beasts with trembling chins  
dancing on a candleflame  
declaiming the Infernal!

Love to all Brakhares,



an elfin castle of itself.  
    Within our muscle pads  
    we stir  
and churn the coiling ladders  
    of our genes  
    serene  
    as queens  
    or fools or gentlemen  
or furry beasts with trembling chins  
    dancing on a candleflame  
    declaiming the Infernal!

Love to all Brakhages,  
Michael



Freewheelin' Frank, McClure, and George Montana at Moe's Books, Berkeley 1966 by Larry Keenan

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/69]

mid May, 1969

Dear Michael,

Some crazy/changing year for me: I've sown utterly new film seed possibilities (*that* tender -- not quite seeds-of-the-imagination yet) and sworn OFF Editing (in the Eisensteinian sense), sound (utterly, now . . . actually sold all sound equipment), Lecture Tours, etc. (including even answering the telephone) and letter writing; but I'm making exception to the last oath, here, so that I can write you brief introduction to Ken Kelman<sup>1</sup> and include the enclosed letter from him.

Suffice it to say: I thought it important *enough* he read some of your unpublished plays (particularly those referred to in his letter) that I trusted the precious manuscripts to the U.S. mail, and of course (easily) him: Kelman has an extremely fine sensibility (among the very few) and his plays, sense of theatre, is close to *one* aspect of yours: I have the manuscripts back, now, and the enclosed letter: the "book" he refers to he will write you abt. himself – in short, it would be anthology of 3 playwrights (as he mentioned in May conversation), yours, his, [Richard] Foreman's<sup>2</sup> (I do not know Foreman at all but would very much take Kelman's word for his worth) . . . and, as I understand it, fairly good royalties would be paid with no restrictions on yr. publication rights otherwise, etc.

[. . . .]

Okay . . . (and only, of course, if it's of use to you): but I wanted to let you know my respect for Kelman, after 6 or 7 years, and that his plays sit next to yours in my library.

I finally ended this last lecture tour (Wichita, Cincinnati, Boston, New Hampshire, Omaha, N.Y., Yale, N.Y., Philadelphia, N.Y., Iowa City – in that order – ) in the Iowa City hospital: I will now shut my trap (including this typewriter case) for at least half-a-decade *no matter what*: and if such works, as I hope, maybe the rest of my life.

OH – how I wish you could see the hour and 10 min. beginning of *Scenes From Under Childhood*, now that Sec. # 2 is completed . . . first effort clearly (many times over) beyond *Dog Star Man/The Art of Vision*.

Joy to you, Joanne, Janey: WHY don't you become tourist family someday and drop by Brakhage heaven for hamburgers, flicks, fun and so forth?

Blessings,  
Stan

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

Dear Stan,

I think you have the only copy of “The Preacher’s Dream Tale.” Patrick Gleason is putting together an antho of fiction for schools. Could you, would you, send a Xerox of the story to give to Pat? Thanks, if you can do it. If not, no sweat & love to you all.

“The Surge” is coming out in a small book dedicated to you. And also in my forthcoming Grove collection *Star*.

Solstice Merriness,  
Michael



Stan Brakhage's editing bench in Lump Gulch Cabin, c. 1972 by Michael Chikiris

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 12/69]

mid-Dec., 1969

Dear Michael,

First of all! – I'm very pleased you dedicated "The Surge" to me . . . "pleased" seems a weak word, for the occasion: but I use it here because the feeling is personal and of that simplicity – that poem is, and has been since I first read it, very simply a part of my daily living . . . it tracks the creative process itself and yet is rooted in the reality of doodling – that magnificent drawing you once showed me (and which, I confess, I cannot now remember whether it was Joanne's or Janey's . . . have only vaguest memory of its overall shape – seen briefly in a darkened hallway when you pulled it from, as I remember it, a wood trunk remembered as a 'treasure chest' . . . the drawing done, as I remember it, on lined 'school' paper, with a ball-point pen – ((WISH, were it not asking too much, you could send me a xerox of THAT)) . . . but, then, the POEM is the main thing – inasmuch as it contained ALL the energies of this, its source, its *find* of the creative source in the simplest daily nervous action prompted by a dream . . . drawn as any child would, whether with a marker on the end of a dreaming hand or the making-of-words ((what you, as a poet, always do with the foundry language is to you . . . all dictionary simply your quarry, my friend – tho' you mine words so naturally that you do not often consciously think-of-it/this-process that way)): ((I'm sure, as I think more abt. it, that the drawing must have been Joanne's because my memory of the intersticing marks seems to recall it as of that complexity-of-play only an adult can manage . . . and perhaps only a woman – one who's carried a child within her so that the whole process, child-to-adult, is REAL with dreaming . . . i.e. one physically in touch with the dreaming energies)): perhaps you should give some thought to reproducing the drawing itself in the book-in-question – particularly as it is to be . . . ah, but then – NO!: the poem contains it all: the drawing would only distract most folks from any sense of that! . . . : the drawing is too tenderly personal, anyway, to parade it where people would be more-like-to make a flag of it than any clear recognition of source.)

I'm grateful: it makes me smile, again and again, that so-close-a friend, as this poem has, these many years, been, is to be dedicated to me . . . wonderful.

[ . . . ]

Been meaning to write you for a long time: but, then, I've been off writing, letters or anything, quite a while now: it has been a very bad year for me – betrayed by almost the whole board-of-directors of the Anthology Cinema . . . most especially P. Adams [Sitney], clutching after power in that way young people have – of even tearing up friendship so raggedly that its difficult to repair – very difficult to forgive or get-over either . . . [James] Broughton, too, finally had his chance to do-me-in and took it, as I always knew he would: &, in short, I got myself very

torn apart by N.Y. politics, and the like, early summer, and came back filled with a bitterness I've been hard-put to rid myself of: the other side of the question is an equally bitter pill – i.e., that I was too difficult for *them*. . . my stature, in the film-world, is too large, my influence too heavy-a-weight, etc., i.e. I have simply, as social force, become that too-large-a BLOCK, to the liberal minds of the times, any master is sure to become . . . MUST, thus, be rejected – (trouble is . . . I don't live in my skin as a social force or any such – thus become, as I did over and over again in my childhood, that too-fat and bossy kid in the neighborhood that gets kicked out of the club.)

Not surprisingly, all this fuss has been attended by a hell-of-a-lot of sickness these last several months . . . just lots of funks and coughing fits and starts of asthma, etcetera –

BUT, things these days are finally on the up and UP again: I decided to start all over at the beginning once more: and it is high-time for *that*, inasmuch as all abuse, thus popular movements, of any possibility of art has reduced aesthetic consideration to a low (one might say 'normalcy') equal to my memories of about a decade ago: certainly that's the case in Boulder, anyway – except that (and I count this our only 'gain' socially from these movements and attention) there's a MUCH greater number of people at least *trying* to develop an interest: that' of course, makes for just that much more confusion: the tactic, as I see it now, is to transform *confusion* (rather than attack *indifference*, as we once all did) . . . yes, there's a gain: the grounds of the game have shifted (in Hippie earthquake): the field, is perhaps, more open . . .

Anyway, I agreed to teach a class: "The History of Motion Picture Art": at the Univ. of Colo. next semester – sponsored by the students (as the faculty is still very MUCH where it was a decade ago . . . no gain there, I can see): to everyone's surprise (including mine) 250 students signed up for the class, paid in advance, etc . . . amazing! Disgusted, as I have become, with my spontaneous talk – and with ALL talk about my own work – I'm writing my lectures entirely and intend to 'deliver' them in the grand 19<sup>th</sup> century manner; and I'm writing only about other film-makers, starting with [Georges] Méliès,<sup>1</sup> going to [D.W.] Griffith,<sup>2</sup> etc.: it's very exciting for me . . . tho' God Knows how 250 C.U. students are going to react to being read-to – it's a scary situation! The lectures will be combined with classic music (as introduction) and, of course, many films . . . most of the time to be spent viewing.

And, meanwhile back at the ranch, I'm working again upon Sec. # 5 of *Scenes From Under Childhood* (which is now more than 2½ hours long): Jane is building a green-house on the roof of this cabin – looks like a diamond as big as the ritz atop a log cabin half buried in snow . . . can you imagine what it'll be like when filled with greenery mid this, the whitest winter in the world, ?

[. . . ] Wish I could play "Let's Pretend" with you and Joanne and Janey awhile!

Blessings,  
Stan



BOULDER


1632 Broadway, Boulder, Colorado 80302

**TRAVELODGE**

442-3830, Area Code 303

mid Feb, 1970

Dear Michael,

I just had to get out of  
my house and come into  
Boulder and sit in a/thi  
motel for awhile: and  
I took "The Mad Cub"  
with me: and now/then  
I just have to write  
you and tell you how  
beautiful-a-book it IS  
— how immediately  
helpful to me...   
I, you see, am going thru

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 2/70]

mid Feb, 1970 <sup>1</sup>

Dear Michael, <sup>1</sup>

I just had to get out of my house and come into Boulder and sit in a/thi motel for awhile: and I took *The Mad Cub* with me: and now/then I just have to write you and tell you how beautiful-a-book it IS – how *immediately* helpful to me . . . I, you see, am going thru

something very like the<sup>2.</sup>  
states you describe in  
the latter half of this  
book: it is amazing! -  
I seem always to come  
to some area-of-living  
later than my friends  
... come to certain real-  
izations at a very be-  
lated time of my living  
- and get easily confused  
and especially lonely in  
my feelings. . . . (I re-  
member I was at  
Dartmouth, 18 years old,

something very like the states you describe in the latter half of this book: it is amazing! – I seem *always* to come to some areas-of-living *later* than my friends . . . come to certain realizations at a very belated time of my living – and get easily confused and especially lonely in my feelings . . . (I remember I was at Dartmouth, 18 years old, before I masturbated – Imagine! . . . I was reading a chemistry book – which I hated – and playing with myself, without any thinking, when suddenly I *came* - come all over my hand . . . 18 years old – poised at Dartmouth on the edge of a nervous breakdown.)

Ah, well – maybe I already told you that story! But, anyway, I have always moved through my living at some slower rate (it seems to me) than my friends – all of which is to say . . . your book is immediately helpful – terribly thus, it inspires me: you have inspired me, again and again, my friend, these many years: I do not often *enough* tell you about it.

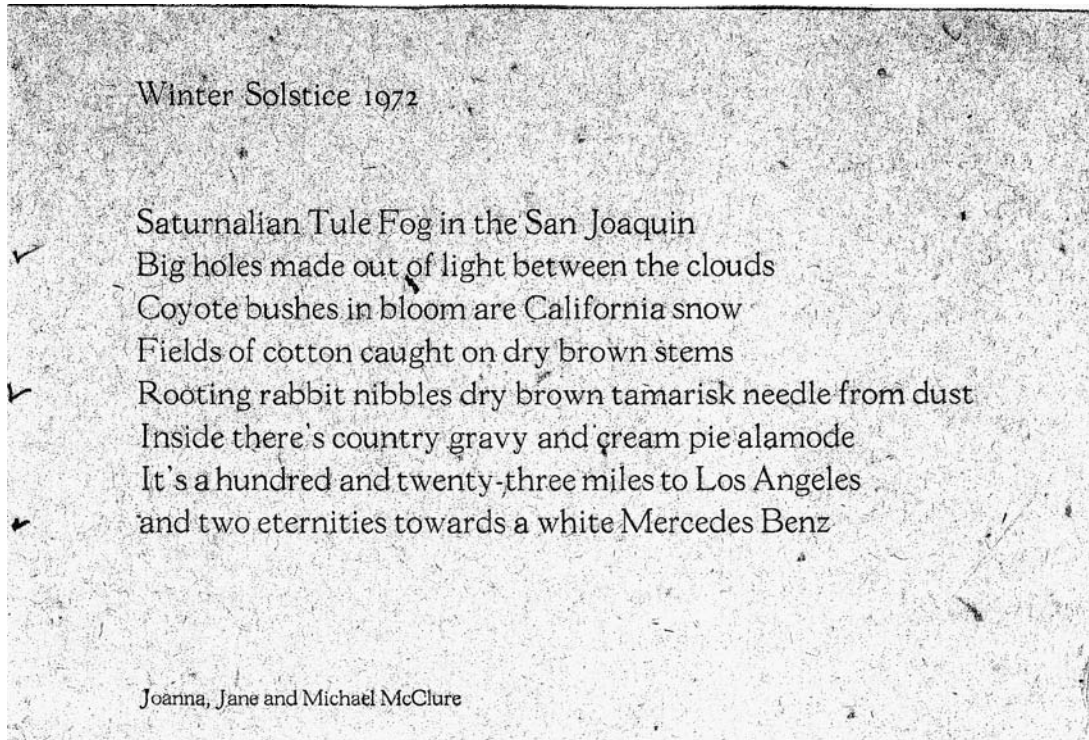
I just called Jane to tell her about the book and she said – “oh yes . . . Michael – isn’t it wonderful how Michael can *always* be counted-upon!”

Yesterday I had, for sanity’s sake, to sign *Scenes From Under Childhood* and, thus, call it “finished” – to keep it from pulling at my guts any further: it is the first time I’ve really been defeated, in completing a work, by lack of money: I am too bitter about it . . . it had, anyway, become too much of an obsession, as any expensive thing *will*: but it *has* been a terrible year for me . . . the most terrible year of my life: but I *am* (since signing that work) *on the way up* – yet up thru just such a numbness, in relation to All my life, as you describe yourself, earlier in your living . . . and with the same senses of dissolution – as if I would drift apart in some ‘spread’ of myself – and accompanied by such pleas of love, *for* love, in impossible screamings at Jane . . . very much as you have described in your book: you are a *great* man, Michael: and you have, once again, helped *me* to have some sense of place in the world – all thanks and praise to you for that!

It was great pleasure to be in your company again, there in your expanded kitchen, with Jo Ann and Janey and all of nostalgia as well as immediacy-of-living – only *I* was not as completely there as I would have liked to have been . . . all these pressures creating distances in me, these last several months – ah, well . . . no matter – next time I will, I’m sure, rise more gloriously to such a great occasion: this time I was, simply, so much intent upon keeping the problems-of-myself TO myself . . . not to ‘bring you down’ – as you all seemed in the midst of a fully happy time.

You, your whole family, your works are a banner, heraldic and lovely, my imagination holds before me now, as I *MOVE*!

Blessings,  
Stan

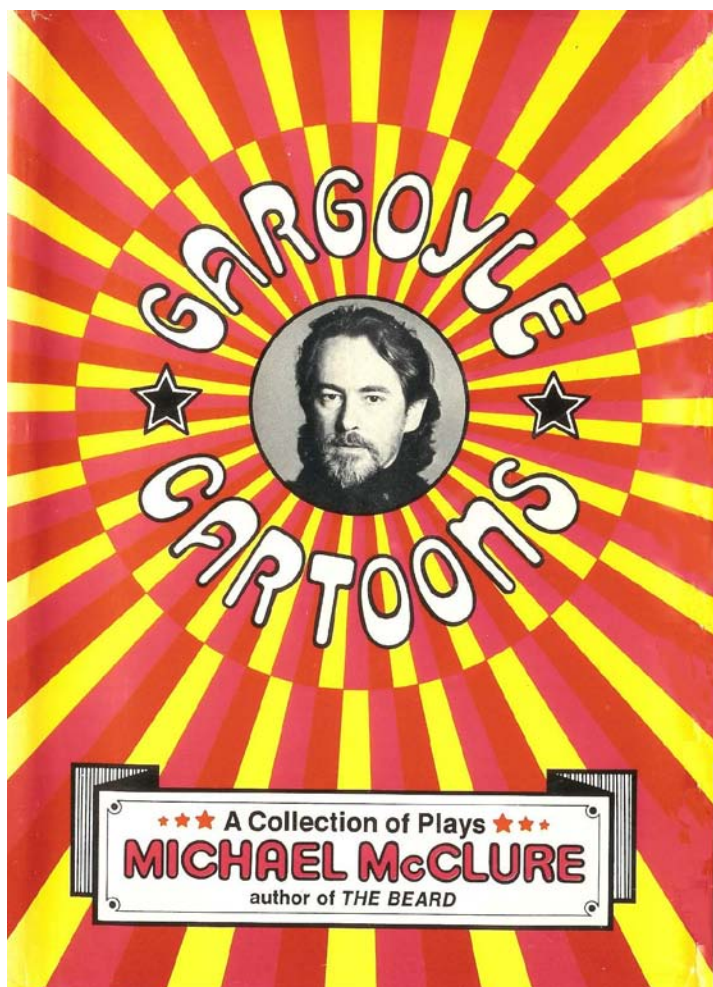


**[Michael McClure to the Brakhage family, card – 12/21/72]**

Winter Solstice 1972

Saturnalian Tule Fog in the San Joaquin  
Big holes made out of light between the clouds  
Coyote bushes in bloom are California snow  
Fields of cotton caught on dry brown stems  
Rooting rabbit nibbles dry brown tamarisk needle from dust  
Inside there's country gravy and cream pie alamode  
It's a hundred and twenty-three miles to Los Angeles  
and two eternities towards a white Mercedes Benz

Joanna, Jane, and Michael McClure



Gargoyle Cartoons, hardcover book jacket, Delacorte Press, 1971



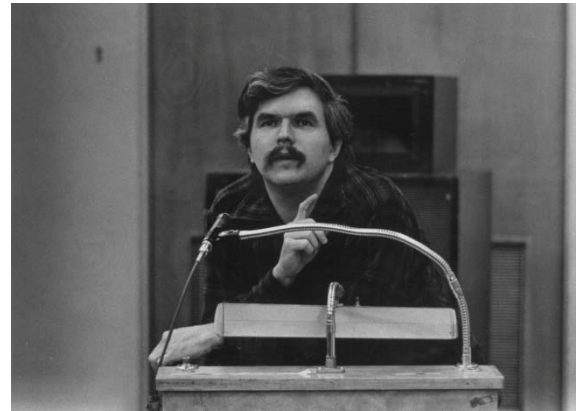
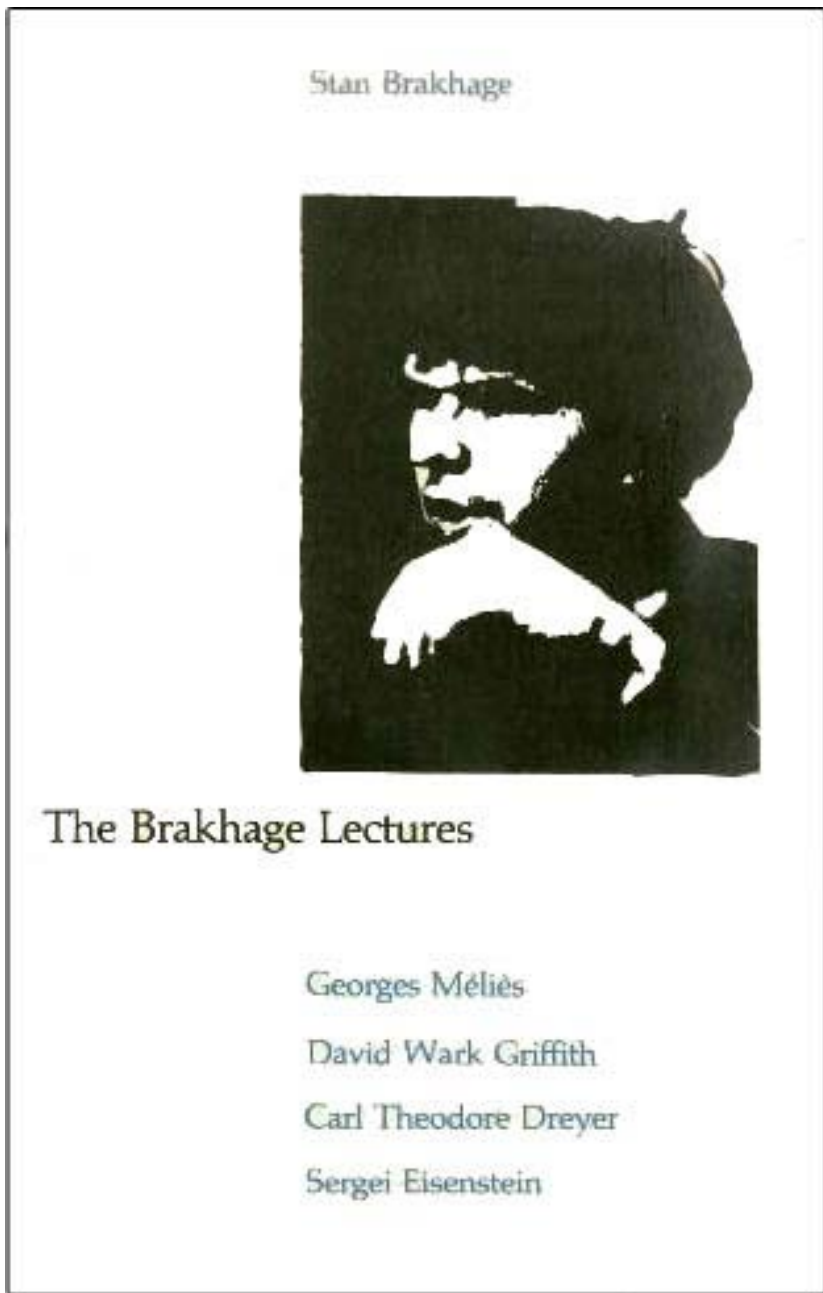
Michael McClure, San Francisco poet, novelist and playwright, has created a new form, the "Gargoyle Cartoon"—a short, mad, whimsical, funny, incisive one-act play. This series of eleven plays includes *Spider Rabbit*, *The Meatball*, *Apple Glove*, *The Cherub*, *The Authentic Radio Life of Bruce Conner and Snout-burbler*, and six others. John Wasserman, in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, says McClure is "doing to words what avant-garde musicians are doing to melody." The characters are creatures: ogres, trolls, worms, giant snails, and meatballs. The hybrid comic-monster illustrates McClure's biological view of man's major problem—acting in contradiction to his true animal nature.

GARGOYLE CARTOONS has been performed in Berkeley and in Philadelphia. Martin Gottfried, reviewing the plays in *Women's Wear Daily*, wrote: "While kidding hippie and pop culture McClure also reflects it—writes from the inside of it—and there is no other writer who does it so well, so delightfully, so poetically or, for that matter, at all. His grasp of American pop myths and an American abstraction is extraordinary. He is a poet of the visual as well as of the verbal, funny and terribly serious, and in these plays in superb form."



JACKET DESIGN BY Mike McIver





Left: The Brakhage Lectures: Georges Méliès, David Wark Griffith, Carl Theodore Dreyer, Sergei Eisenstein, cover, The GoodLion, 1972  
 Right: Photos by Robert Haller from SUNY Buffalo Autobiography Conference, 1973 Top to bottom: Stan Brakhage speaking; Brakhage conferring with VeVe Clark about Maya Deren; Brakhage lecturing

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 1/4/73]

Jan. 4, 1973

Dear Michael,

Enclosed you'll find a copy of *The Brakhage Lectures*,<sup>1</sup> natch; and the rest of the lectures will be arriving from Xerox machine in Denver. Thus you'll have, shortly, the whole book for your agent. The book would be divided into three parts: (1) the enclosed book, (2) "Comedy Tragi-comedy," and (3) "Narrative As Religion." Section #1 would, then, be Méliès, Griffith, Dreyer, Eisenstein; Section #2 would be Chaplin, Laurel & Hardy, Keaton, Vigo; and Section #3 would be "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau, and Dovzhenko. And there ain't gonna be any more, 'cause I'm exhausted with it! I thought I'd just send another copy of "The Brakhage lectures," rather than Xerox of that first section, because it gives a clear idea of the use of pictures I'd like to make throughout the 'anthology' of all these texts. Okay, let me know what you think, what yr. agent thinks, etc.

Hope JoAnne got "Window Suite of Children's Songs" okay – (don't trust these mails at ANY time, let alone Xmas); and anyway it WAS a pleasure, wasn't it?, to be able to really SEE and sit in the same room with and altogether BE with all of you, TALK to and WITH you, all THREE of you the clearest center of any meaning for me in those environs. So many others seemed such partial ghosts (victims of various coddlings) . . . as if pieces of these otherwise very solid people were flaking at the edges (and [James] Broughton just all one FLUFF these days). Well, you spoiled us (coming there first, as we did); and we loved it! I have much more to write you; but I'll have to do it later. Off to P.O. Love to JoAnne and Janey – and . . .

Blessings, Stan

Stan,

The package of Lectures arrived.  
I read here & there - and liked  
them a lot. - And wrapped them  
with the Chicago book & sent  
them directly to my agent.  
I asked her to evaluate them  
for me. Keeping all pressure off her  
that way. ~~as agents~~ Agents are sensitive  
in their own way. Meantime Mr  
Moss from M. Millan called me. He  
was scouting for valuable books. I  
referred him to your book via my  
agent. Well, who knows. Anyway  
it is all done & sent.

I am waiting dirty plays  
& beautiful

poems  
& taking Stalings  
seminar in biochem  
& having dinner w/ the French  
Ambassador & I bought a black  
formal elf doublet with square tails & silver buttons  
& black silk loped & matching vest & it is being made in  
Scotland - Micking Molecho

Best to Brookings of all singers genders etc.  
Hi John.



**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

[LEFT MARGIN: Best to all Brakhages of all sizes genders etc. Hi Jane!]

Stan,

The package of *Lectures* arrived. I read here and there – and *liked them a lot* – And wrapped them with the Chicago Book & sent them directly to my agent. I asked her to evaluate them for me. Keeping all pressure off her that way. Meantime Mr. Moss from McMillan called me. He was scouting for valuable books. I referred him to your book via my agent. Well, who knows. Anyway it is all done and sent.

I am writing dirty plays  
    & beautiful  
        poems  
    & taking Sterling's  
        seminar in biochem<sup>1</sup>  
    & having dinner with the French  
Ambassador & I bought a black

formal elf doublet with square tails & silver buttons & black silk lapels & matching vest & it is being made in Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

- Miching Malecho<sup>3</sup>

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 4/7/74]

April 7, 1974

Dear Michael, <sup>1</sup>

Reports of you visiting School of Art Inst. Chicago (wishing it had been when I was there), then “Hail Thee Who Play” sent me by Jack, and finally then news of big new NEW Directions book out<sup>2</sup> (not yet reached Colo., but surely in my hands by next week); and you’re more-than-usually in mind, tho’ always there within each week’s life, as I read you abt. once in five/six days as always, several hours with Michael . . .

“Hail Thee Who Play” is a beauty of the orders I love best in your work – those which signify light, catch its/your reflection in language wheresomEVER . . . i.e. that you refer to the significance of chrome in our time, and all other particularizations of the antique dance of lumen as it finds you/us. Because you *know* your singularity, there is an unusual sense of ‘the many’ hovering round the occasion of reading your poem. I almost always feel in-company reading you, as if I and many *specific* others were hovering around the pages, as if they were a fire we’d gathered round. *Thus* you’re able to claim (as in “Hail. . .”) Plato’s whole cave as yourself . . . fire and shadows within, the opening, and the mystery beyond. I think Charles Olson must have cared for you especially inasmuch as I know none who have more naturally the “negative capability” of Keats which Charles loved, that ability to attend confusion and mystery “without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”; for you do find reason in each thing, withIN reach . . . or with out-reach as natural as soft-balls pitch and catch. Of course, I realize it does not probably feel this easy to *you*: you’ll dramatize yourself as much (or sometimes *more*, I remember) as the rest of us; but still the poem does make that use of you (of which you must lend yourself) which makes it seem that simply solid-a-world as ANY every could imagine itself. And it is a pleasure!

How are you, Joanne; and Jane, how’s it going? We miss you. Why can’t you just take a normal American vacation sometime and come visit us?: (a rhetorical question, but then . . . ?) I’m enclosing a pile of kids school pictures just to graph for you how much meat we’re making here. In addition, we have now two goats, a donkey, two ducks, a guinea fowl, two dogs, and a raccoon. And there must be about 15 or 20 films which you’ve not yet seen – tho’ ’73 was a very bad year for me, only managing one 2½min completed work; yet I did spend the summer photographing what promises to be the VERY most wondrous film yet: *The Text of Light* – to be composed of thousands of feet of film photographed, *a frame at a time*, in an ash tray, days of hours and hours waiting for the sun to move to minutely change the light of that world between each click of camera. The work destroyed my back, which is still giving me trouble; but it will surely be worth it.

The pressures of this last year were indeed terrible [. . .] In retrospect, most troubles engender laughter. Isn't it typical of people that the truest sense of humor is called "black"? I find it *at least* Kodachromed, myself.

Blessings,  
Stan

**[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 8/19/74]**

**August 19, 1974**

Dear Michael,

The enclosed couple of pages is writ in response to some kid who said he/"they" were planning a special DO for you somewhere and asked that I contribute something. I lost his letter and don't remember his name or whereabouts; so maybe you could forward the reply to him. As it IS rather personal, I think you should 'pass on it' first anyway.

As you might guess from the above, things are hectic here; and I'm sinking (not unhappily) into disorganization. I don't write much anymore either; and the enclosed was a rarely accepted (and finally happy) chore. A set of X-rays now finally prove that I ruptured one (maybe two) discs last summer. They want to operate. I said "nope" (remembering [Kenneth] Patchen,<sup>1</sup> and others), even tho' there's then absolutely nothing to be done and I'm in pain for maybe a decade (very rarely life, they said). Worst thing that can happen is that the sciatic nerve gets permanently damaged, by pressure of disc goop; and then I'm partially crippled. I'm somewhat that now – i.e. on a cane whenever I have to stand for any length of time. Worst part is that I can't any longer hand-hold the 16mm camera with any worthy grace: so, it is back to tripod and/or 8mm. I finally got myself off the codeine I've been imbibing one whole year now; and that WAS rough. My nose ran, my muscles knotted, my head split, and my leg turned into one enormous tooth ache.

[. . .] Ah well, all ELSE is wondrous here. Very happy summer. Children an absolute blessing now they're old enough to control their own pee and engage in conversation. I've completed most major work yet – the one I broke my back over last summer . . . photographing the movement of the sun one frame at a time in a crystal ashtray – called *The Text of Light*. It might be called THE demonstration of Dun Scotus Erigena's "All that is light" or [William] Blake's "To find a world in a grain of sand" or Grosseteste's "By its essential nature, light shines in all directions so that a point of light will at once become a sphere of light of any size unless curbed . . . " etectera (De Luce). I've, of course, curbed it to show its MAKE of object. Wish you could see it . . . you Jo Ann Janey. Soon, maybe

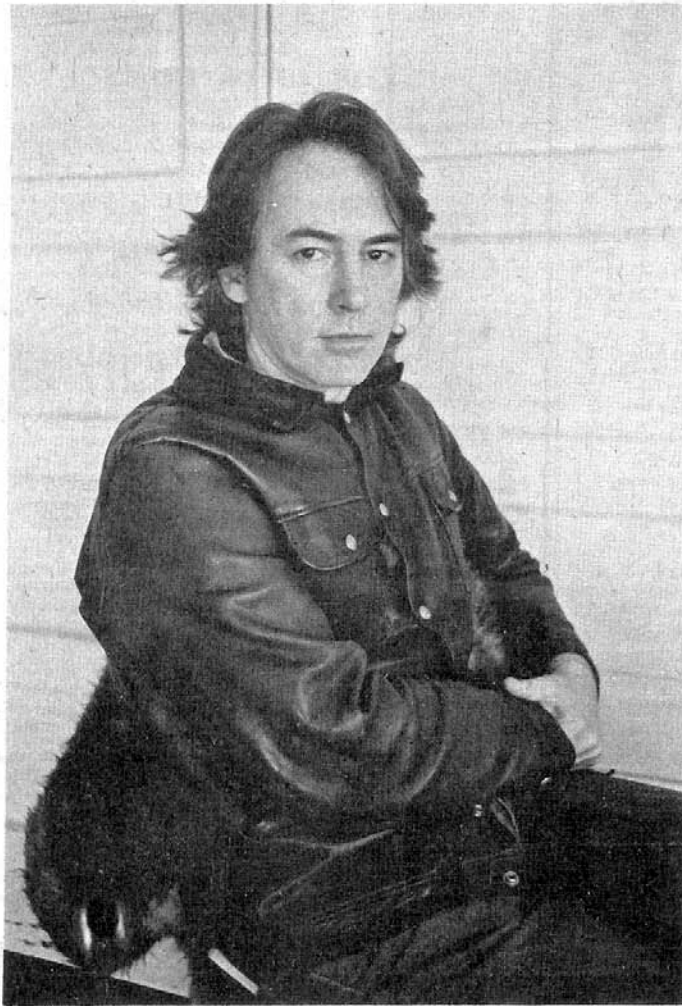
Stan

# MARGINS

NUMBER EIGHTEEN

3/1975

\$1.00



## SYMPOSIUM ON MICHAEL McCLURE

edited by John Jacob

CONTRIBUTORS: Al Arnowitz, Stan Brakhage, Stewart Brand, Sterling Bunnell, Gordon C.A. Craig, Francis Crick, Robert Creeley, David Gitin, Al Glover, John Jacob, Rich Mangelsdorf, Mick McAllister, Eric Mottram, Charles Olson, Robert Peters, K. C. Power, John Pyros, Steve Sanfield, David Southern, Allen Van Newkirk, Anne Waldman, Robert Wilson.

*Michael McClure*  
*Photo by Gerard Malanga*

## A REVIEW OF LITTLE MAGS AND SMALL PRESS BOOKS

MARGINS 1975 Symposium on Michael McClure cover with photo by Gerard Malanga

**[Stan Brakhage's statement for Symposium on Michael McClure]**

<sup>1</sup>The memories of Michael McClure which come most easily to mind have to do with natural postures which are probably those most necessary to his SPEECH, as we all do very specifically come to know his WRIT most absolutely to BE. Jo Ann and Janey are also remembered as very often, and actually always, the necessities of this consideration.

While I was living in S.F. and one day sick, Michael walked one day downhill to the Mission District to visit me. Health came to his mind; and he spoke at length about the conditioning he received at his job in Vic Tanney's Gym; but then bitterness ran ahead of his thought and led him to: "Here I am, in my thirties and internationally famous and I spent all yesterday on hands and knees scrubbing shower stalls with brillo pads!" Then he told me of a dream he'd had the night before: "There was a thick fog; and we were in a small clearing – the middle, the very eye, of this fog. I knew there was money all around us, blowing through the fog; but I couldn't even SEE any of it!" When he left, Jane (Brakhage) gave him a large white flower from the table bouquet; and I could see him from my front box-window bed walking down the slum street with this flower held directly before his face, his movements so graceful that the flower barely bobbed upon its long green stem as he walked along drawn to full height, stately (walking on the balls of his feet) and oblivious to all else, as if that flower were guide through Hell.

I remember him thus first sight, almost a decade earlier, when he showed himself at Robert Duncan's poetry class in S.F. State, carrying a rolled sheaf of poems before him. One of all those he read that night still haunts me with its image of ship masts hung from the sky.

Michael was raised in Wichita, Kansas – about 60 miles from Windfield where I grew into the earliest years remembered. Wichita was the "big city" I visited as a child, where I first saw movies in company with my uncle Herbert Dubberstein, used car salesman. I have strong feelings, and an aversion, for the town – as it then was: a 'main street' of brick buildings with a cross street or two, its residential district huddled close against the surrounding flats of farmland . . . perhaps only one 'palatial' movie-house for relief of tedium. Michael and I may have passed each other, finger or lollypop in my mouth, him maybe holding some cone aloft and saving/savoring it. He tells me he was, as I certainly was, "a fat boy". Past age 8 I never saw Wichita again as a child. My parents divorced; and my mother moved to Denver. Michael went thru Wichita High with Bruce Conner and Bob Branaman. All of us were to sit in a room in S.F. many years later<sup>2</sup> discussing the mystery of this 100-square-mile's Kansas mid-30s hatch of such as us, and some few youngers: Ken Irby and Ronald Johnson and . . . And Wichita knows nothing of us. There are never any film rentals from Kansas; and several years ago I passed through Wichita, checked bookstores and college libraries, even lectured on poetry only to find they'd not yet quite heard of Stein, Pound, Joyce.

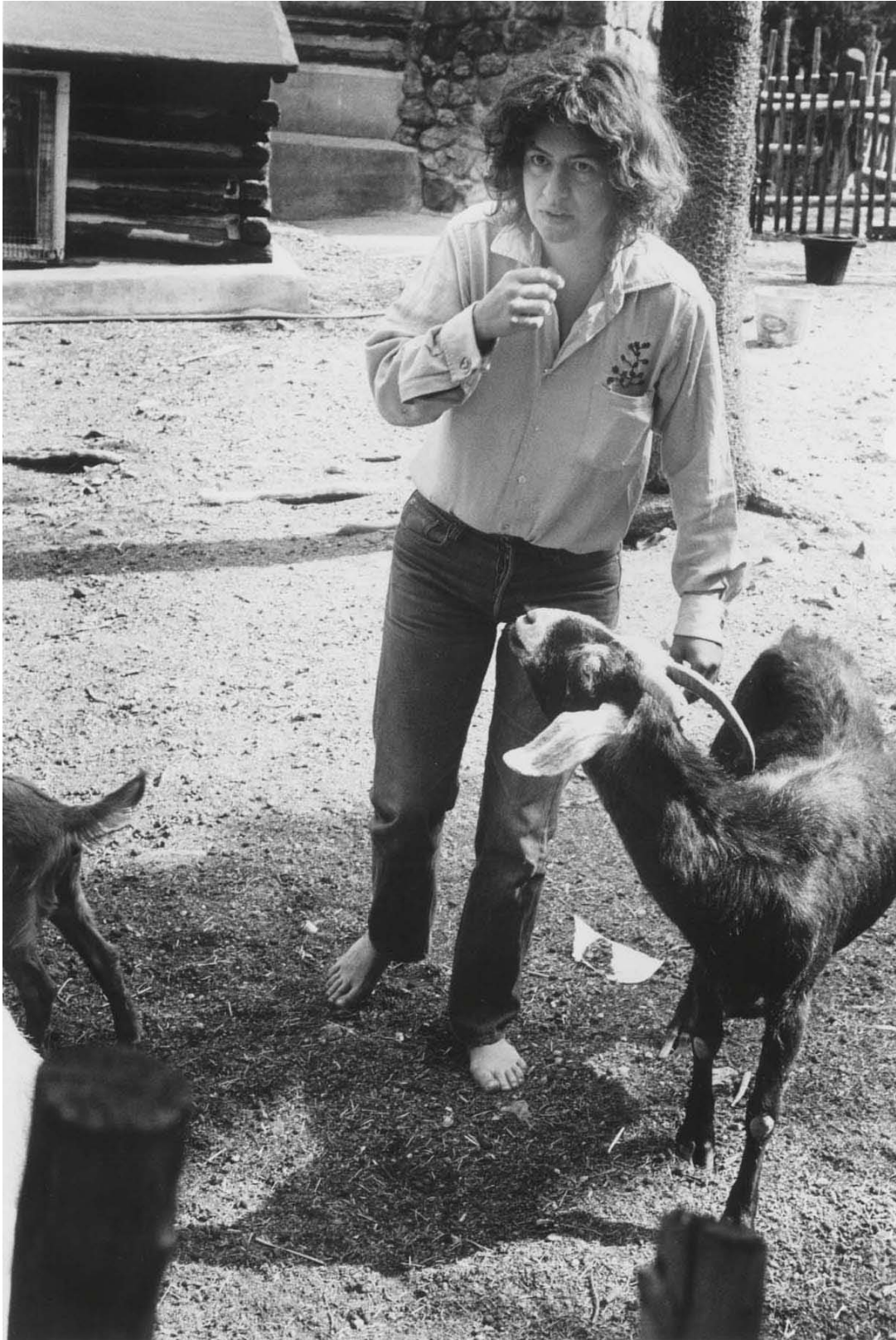
One night I asked Michael if I could come up the hill to visit. He hesitated but then said it was okay but that he and Jo Ann were reading and didn't want to be interrupted, so that if I would like to simply join them . . . Jo Ann was reading; and Michael was sitting in his overstuffed chair reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* aloud to her. When the ironing was done, we moved to the kitchen (always the room for talking) and, with no more mention of Milton, exchanged stories of our daily events – that which is mistakenly called “small talk”. When Jo Ann then read her newest translation of Nerval, it was in *that* context . . . as had been Milton. I often heard them both say they could not tolerate “art-talk”, the “art crowd” etc. . . all that which would intrude probity upon the simple complexity of experience.

The Brakhage family spent a mid-60s New Year's Eve at the McClures. Michael greeted us from his arm chair draped with a snake, a large black boa-type<sup>3</sup> which was tentatively winding itself about his neck. “He's beginning to like me,” said Michael. Janey showed me her enormous black rabbit, which had stomped its babies to death three days previous. The household supported a variety of life (and death) as an adventurous accommodation . . . no simple “pet” in consideration. Michael's scientist friend Sterling [Bunnell] offered them many exotic creatures, most of whom were accepted – black boa the latest, a Xmas gift. When Janey and the three Brakhage kids were put to bed, Jo Ann, Michael, and Jane all went out briefly to celebrate midnight with Morton Subotnick & family. I was left to babysit. Swish swishing sounds from the back bedroom drew my attention. I'd been told the snake was harmless, but . . . Eight sets of pink toes along the edge of the bed, the boas head passing back and forth in contemplation: I hurled the book at it, and sent it coiling off to a far corner. When Michael returned he assured me there was no harm, the snake was just curious. He always tended to this trust, assuring me of Hell's Angel harmlessness similarly later – most of his paranoia reserved for only those creatures who *appeared* harmless . . . politicians, businessmen, and the like. Anyway, the next night he was sitting alone with Jo Ann and suddenly said: “This snake is really beginning to like me: he's kissing my hand”. Before she could reply (“kiss of death” running thru her mind) the snake had swallow[ed] Michael half-way to the wrist; and he was whirling his arm slapping the full length of snake against the walls. I'd awakened New Year's morn with a cock-roach in my ear, and had spent most of the day in the Mission District hospital having it removed. We talked on the phone late that nite, after his return from the hospital for snake-bite treatment. I said, “Well Michael, if you'd written a play in which these events occurred to your two major characters, WHAT would you have happen to them next to balance the act?” He replied: “I'd give them an apotheosis and a diamond mine.”

Late one night, saying goodbye, Michael took firm affectionate hold of my arm, and I his. I realized suddenly how seldom he'd permitted me, or anyone, to touch him. Under smooth skin his arm was as if composed of molten metal . . . like “a solid moving thru an inferno” – as he had written.

Stan Brakhage





Jane Brakhage with goat at Lump Gulch, c. 1972 by Michael Chikiris



Stan,

discs between  
I have two semi-squashed vertebrae ~~(xxxxxx)~~ and  
bone spurs growing out of the ~~xxxxxx~~ vertebrae. I had been  
in pain -- a constant headache like ~~that~~ of a violent toothache  
-- it lasted two years without a single let-up. I was taking  
as many as 24 aspirin a day. Fortunately as long as I took  
the aspirin the pain was ~~bearable~~. <sup>bearable. (Earlier I had your codeine problem too.)</sup> I had to get up to take  
them in the night because the pain woke me up when the  
aspirin finished their course. I won't go into the moronic  
medical ins and outs and ~~xxxx~~ various treatments. ~~xxxxxx~~ Suffice  
it to say that it was horrible and ~~xxxxx~~ often scary

I had been  
told about the Alexander Method and I did not pay any attention.  
Finally I read <sup>of</sup> Tinbergen's Nobel essay in a recent SCIENCE. There  
is NO metaphysics, NO worship, NO ~~xxx~~ manipulation, it ~~xxxx~~ cannot  
be explained verbally because it is NOT verbal and it COMPLETELY  
works. It is not to cure symptoms (like discs) though it does <sup>release</sup> cure  
-- it is to ~~alter~~ <sup>release</sup> the psycho-physical organism into more satisfactory  
relationships. <sup>^</sup> It lengthens the spine for nothing.

I'm including a xerox for you.

My suggestion:

if none there  
check Denver for an Alexander teacher -- then maybe fly to the  
Alexander Institute in NYC -- or better, phone them and ask what  
to do. It is completely physical, completely rational, and no one  
can do it for themselves a teacher is necessary. It is not

<sup>expensive</sup> That's a wonderful piece for the symposium  
I'm sending it right on. Let me know  
what happens  
re Alexander - m.



[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage, undated]

Stan,<sup>1</sup>

I have two semi-squashed discs between vertebrae and bone spurs growing out of the vertebrae. I had been in pain – a constant headache like a violent toothache – it lasted two years without a single let-up. I was taking as many as 24 aspirin a day. Fortunately as long as I took the aspirin the pain was bearable. (Earlier I had your codeine problem too.) I had to get up to take them in the night because the pain woke me up when the aspirin finished their course. I won't go into the moronic medical ins and outs and various treatments. Suffice it to say that it was horrible and often scary.

I had been told about the Alexander Method and I did not pay any attention. Finally I read Tinbergen's Nobel essay in a recent *Science*. There is NO metaphysics, NO worship, NO manipulation, it cannot be explained verbally because it is NOT verbal and it COMPLETELY works. It is not to cure symptoms (like discs) though it does cure – it is to release the psycho-physical organism into more satisfactory relationships. It lengthens the spine for one thing.

I'm including a xerox for you.

My suggestion:

check Denver for an Alexander teacher – if none there then maybe fly to the Alexander Institute in NYC – or better, phone them and ask what to do. It is completely physical, completely rational, and no one can do it for themselves, a teacher is necessary. It is not expensive.

That's a *wonderful* piece for the symposium. I'm sending it right on. Let me know what happens re Alexander

- M

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 9/13/74]

Stan Brakhage  
Box # 170  
Rollinsville, Colo.  
80474  
Sept. 13, 1974

Dear Michael,

Don't know why I did the formal address above, except I'm in midst biz. letters and get the habit . . . sure a sad answer to your salmon flower – sorry!

Okay, starting over: MUCH thanks for the letter and Tinbergen article which impresses me favorably – tho' I don't think it's likely I'll find an Alex[ander] Meth[od] Dr. in Denver. I'm anyway adjusting to back pain and even beginning to make USE of it for changing my whole SIRface: it informs me instantly I slide into nervousness or petty anger, BOTH of which I'm trying to get rid of these days. Interestingly, a good holy rage doesn't cause pain – at least not while I'm having it. Only the petty fits rack my back. I start Chicago 3 days from now; and I have whole new lecture intentions, disciplines prompted by my back . . . for example NOT to answer a question until I've taken at least ten seconds thought. The cane is a drag; but it does really help me move about painLESSly (i.e. with less pain) and more calmly altogether – a whole new walking experience about like having a third leg. But IF the back pain continues beyond such usefulness of change, then I'll certainly see if there isn't an Alex[ander] Dr. in Chi[cago]., maybe, or even elsewhere. The [Tinbergen] article is VERY convincing.

As to *Two: Creeley/McClure*, I'll be glad to send you an 8mm print of it for gift; but it really ought to be 16mm for your archives (because the quality of 8mm is cheap in comparison and the photo definition much less clear). If the 8mm will do, just write me so and I'll order one (take abt. two to three week, as it has to be lifted out of *15 Song Traits* If you want 16mm, it'll cost you \$30.00, \* with me pitching in the other \$10.00 that the 8mm would cost me. Then you might want to consider the other portrait of you playing your autoharp in last reel of *23rd Psalm Branch* (which is ONLY in 8mm) . . . section called "CODA".

Very happy you like the writ for symposium: it was a nostalgic pleasure to write. Wish you still lived down the road. Miss you. WHICH reminds me that Jimmy Broughton is importing his "snow leopard of the Rockies"<sup>1</sup> again to come to S.F. for 5 days beginning Nov 18th, and I, of course, get to come along, too. S. F. State'll supply a room for that whole week; and we will be down-road and around-corner (of official duties) from each other. Leave some free space for talk that week; and prepare yourselves for *The Text of Light*, the latest epic/news of the film world – first epic since *Dog Star Man* . . . as Jane sees it. It IS indeed something else!

Blessings,  
Stan

\* and take a week to 10 days.

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 9/18/74]

Sept. 18<sup>th</sup>

Dear Little Snow Leopard of the Rockies,

Enclosed is a check for forty dollars American for a 16mm print of *Two: C & M.*<sup>1</sup> I don't see why you should pay any part of it since I expect to be fully reimbursed by the archive. Thanks, Boss.

I'm looking forward to *The Text of Light*. I'll be gone November 18, 19, 20 – so please save time to see me at the end – the last few days – of your trip.

ALEXANDER SHAMANS are called  
*teachers*

– they are not drs. The whole thing is paramedical and is nonremedial in the sense that it does not go for goals like specific symptoms. My teacher is not impressed one way or the other that my headache went away. But he did say the other day that he was “distressed” about the middle part of my back – that I bunch it up. I've had two major obvious learning experiences in my life – learning to read and learning what I am learning now. It is a lot like learning to read – there's a whole beautiful world that I had imagined was there and I move around in it some times now – nothing “high” or “*mysterieuse*” – just learning to walk, stand up, sit down – and without treating my body like an object as I do it. I'd like to have you seriously listen to me – this is not acupuncture or Roling or Esalen. The advocates of Alexander were John Dewey, G.B. Shaw, Sherrington . . . If you have a serious back problem and you walk around with a cane you are going to get more fucked up from accommodating to the cane and then you will have new symptoms eventually and find another crutch which will in turn lead to another symptom. And all the holy rages in the world won't lift you out of the world of 40 years of habits for more than a few moments and then you pop back in.

Here's an offer: you make a phonecall to the Alexander Institute in N.Y.C. and find if there's a teacher in Chicago. I will pay for a six-minute phone call to N.Y.C. and for two Alexander treatments in Chicago. And I promise there will be no pain – no “adjustments”, no rolting, no acupuncture, and no thumping . . . Go ahead.

Let me know how all is,  
See you in November,  
Michael

Have you seen my NEW DIRECTIONS book *September Blackberries*?

am editing a new book now *Jaguar Sky* (Poems) also for N.D.

STAN + JANE BRAXHAGE  
BOX #170  
ROLLINSVILLE  
COLORADO

MICHAEL MCCLURE  
264 DOWNEY ST.  
SAN FRANCISCO  
CALIFORNIA

Sept 25, 1974

Dear, dear Michael,

Yes, YES, I promise I'll call N. Y. abt Alexander (they maybe even have one in Denver); and I will, yes, try it for at least two sessions; and I am very grateful for your insistence; and yr hero-status has gone up (from a pretty high level already) with Jane, who is DELIGHTED that you've effected this promise from me. And you don't have to pay for it, good friend. All you have to do is set aside those few nights left, of my week there, so that I can show you and Joann# "The Text of Light" and whatnot else we've time-for. and Jane, too!

The print of "Two: Creeley/McClure" is ordered. I'll get it to you soon's possible.

The schedule of lec-tours next several months is MURDER, ranging from El Paso Texas to No. Dak. and back&forth Chi and Pitts and, and . . . There MUST be an easier way to make a living.

But ALL THE SAME I've made 10 (TEN!) films this year. . . the year of our I.R.S. and back shadow: could it be then that angst actually does effect Art (something I've never really wanted to UNCoddle myself with)... that this is all just some cosmic squeezing-of-the-lemon?: I've always preached (nice pun) aGAINST such a 19th cent. ideology, saying that what we really NEEDED was an art made in perfect health by a human being so socially supported he/she did NOT have to play the fool or the cripple in order to survive. So much for rhetoric!: fine words from a former asthmatic fat boy with hernia, hives, earaches, sinus trouble, etc.

Well, there'll be time to talk of all this when we see eachother.

Till then . . .

Blessings,  
Yes! I've Stan  
read "Sept. Blackberries"  
3 times already, - Beautiful Book!

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 9/25/74]

Sept 25, 1974

Dear, dear Michael,

Yes, YES, I promise I'll call N.Y. abt Alexander (they maybe even have one in Denver); and I will, yes, try it for at least two sessions; and I am very grateful for your insistence; and yr hero-status has gone up (from a pretty high level already) with Jane, who is DELIGHTED that you've effected this promise from me. And you don't have to pay for it., good friend. All you have to do is set aside those few nights left, of my week there, so that I can show you and Joann and Jane, too! *The Text of Light* and whatnot else we've time for.

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The schedule of lec-tours next several months is MURDER, ranging from El Paso Texas to No. Dak. and back&forth Chi and Pitts and, and . . . There MUST be an easier way to make a living.

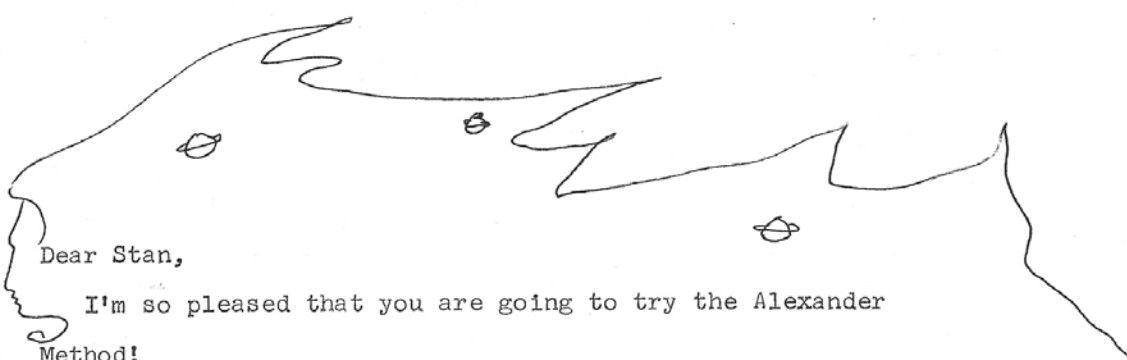
But ALL THE SAME I've made 10 (TEN!) films this year [. . . ] Could it be then that angst actually does effect Art (something I've never really wanted to UNCoddle myself with) . . . that this is all just some cosmic squeezing-of-the-lemon?: I've always spreached (nice pun) aGAINST such a 19th cent. ideology, saying that what we really NEEDED was an art made in perfect health by a human being so socially supported he/she did NOT have to play the fool or the cripple in order to survive. So much for rhetoric!: fine words from a former asthmatic fat boy with hernia, hives, earaches, sinus trouble, etc.

Well, there'll be time to talk of all this when we see each other.

Till then . . .

Blessings,  
Stan

Yes! I've  
read *Sept. Blackberries*  
3 times already – Beautiful Book!



Dear Stan,

I'm so pleased that you are going to try the Alexander Method!

I'm taking all the work I can get also. My two San Diego readings are the 19th and 20th ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ of November. That makes them tuesday and wednesday. I was thinking of staying part of the 21st to see Herbert Marcuse (if he's there) and the zoo. ~~But~~ I'd rather see you. If you will send me a ~~rough~~ idea of your ~~in~~ schedule then I can work around it. Just let me know if you'll be here monday through saturday -- or what. ( And what nights are blocked in with lectures. *Well work it out.* Also, if you're showing *Text & Light* anywhere any night,

Brazos Bookstore in Texas is doing a show of my posters & books -- they might write you to purchase a print of TWO.

Hope that TWO has been made available for purchase through Serendipity or Sand Dollar books -- there might be a fair number of modern lit archives and English Departments that are interested.

I can feel some real deep level changes in myself. A lot of integration <sup>by means of</sup> ~~through~~ the physical example of the Alexander Method. Found that I had done all my necessary errands and urgent business and asking myself -- what do ~~you~~ want to do next?

I am still editing JAGUAR SKIES -- next book for New Directions.

Best to you and Jane and all,

just put the above info on a card when you know it... Thanks,

*old friend, M. Schulz*

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

Dear Stan,

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I *am* still editing *Jaguar Skies* – next book for New Directions.

Best to you and Jane and all,  
just put the above info on a card when  
you know it . . . Thanks,  
Old friend, Michael

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 10/4/74]

October 4, 1974

Dear Michael,

They're fucking the whole thing over, as usual, in S. F. I haven't yet been officially informed the Art Inst. grant is certain – seems the terms of the grant HAVE to include at least one appearance at another affiliated school (such as Oakland) which has to be arranged to ask FOR me. Then Berkeley is TRYing to do something, tho' “ . . . well, Brakhage, you're NOT as commercial as Goddard,<sup>1</sup> y'know!” I expect it'll be Nov. before anybody'll have all this shit together enough so I can reply clearly to your letter. I'M intending to be there the night of Nov. 17th thru the night of the 23rd, but when where howsomever I'll have programs I simply don't know. I'm beginning to think I could easier get a film into Radio City Music Hall than manage an ordinary lecture tour to S.F. . . . i.e. one where I clear a coupla bucks to take home. Three eastern film-makers I talked to recently said they'd NEVER go to S.F. again under ANY circumstances. Isn't that sad? Anyway, the city's got the reputation of “lotus eater city” back east. Well, given choice I'd certainly “go west” over N.Y.C. ANYtime; but Normal Ill. (and the ilk) turns out to be the easiest to visit-with-pay, alas.

Blessings, Stan



[Stan Brakhage to Michael and Joanna McClure – 12/14/74]

Dec 14, 1974

Dear Michael and Joanna,

Last night I dreamed most convincingly of your presence. First you, Michael, were showing me your new home. It was a house in 19th century China, a small house alongside the great wall of a huge pagoda. "This wall protects our house, and the houses of our neighbors", you said. The inside (only) of your house also looked somewhat oriental (outside being more like white wood frame); and you, Joanna, showed me the central room of it, with ceilings sloping to a point above us. "This is the room where the famous Leftbetter learned philosophy from the old master," you said: "and everytime I call someone to the Leftbetter room for lessons, I think of him being called here when he was young." Then I woke and lay there thinking about both of you, and about Janey, for some time. Our dinner together haunts me most happily . . . the high view, the lights of city mixed with candle, all steaming over occasionally, then clearing – a recognizable weather about our table. What haunts most is that we just talked about this and that, whatever drifted in thru one or another of us. Yes, and that's why I kept thinking of *The Conversation of the Gods*,<sup>1</sup> Michael. When younger there always seemed some thematic order to our conversation – or else I made one up in minding it later! I suppose I must have thought a "conversation of the gods" would surely arrive at some solution or other, some new evolution to be tried, or at least have stated stasis most magnificently (as was often our want); but this was truly that conversation which comes and goes like clouds: the ocean's ebb and flow won't even do to describe it – too dramatic! – unless you take the WHOLE of it, as a giant puddle breathing out and sucking on the sky, slowly, trembling at its edges. You and I, Michael, had previously had one of the problem-solving conversations – as usual, you mostly trying to solve my problems; and I then (for balance) answering explicit questions appropo the writing of *The Brakhage Lectures* . . . you, as always, making real USE of a particularity of being human – survival tactic. That was then the being-human-conversation: and I always particularly treasure the form you especially give to this form of conversation because your specificity creates an exact lattice for remembering almost every interstice of it. I can tell the story more FINALLY to you than anyone I know except Jane: (and my telling to Jane is, of course, much different than "story" – it is more a continuing epic which finalizes itself over the years by a Gertrude-Stein-like exhaustion of the means). But I'd never felt, Joanna, that you were much involved in these no-bullshit-brief-list-practical exchanges between Michael and I (except, and sometimes crucially, as overseer or even referee). While these exchanges have almost always been memorable, they did not haunt me as does the trio of voices threading points of life and steam and tastes in the French restaurant. Very little is specifically remembered; and that which is (something of the sexual habits of fishes, for example) is recalled as mixed with taste and fragments of light. That was, yes, the god-like conversation . . . moves thru my mind as the natural ways of the world, feeding upon itself, breathing, mixing and disentangling its shapes *at*

*play* (as distant from drama). It was beautiful and I thank you both for it, which I'm sure will more shape and unshape me than all the aesthetics or science or survival tacts we've ever traded with each other. It was of that quality-of-play you, Michael, strive to bring to the stage again (for I'm sure all drama was born in *THIS*: the instant's mood which cannot be expressed in, but only obliquely shaped by, words: Duncan falls back on the "old drama" here – or middle-drama – because he canNOT accept that there is anything "beyond language" . . . i.e. anything which only uses words as subsidiary prop or prompt). And JoAnna, now that I've read *Wolf Eyes*<sup>2</sup> I see something of the thread you made that night – a language which just naturally avoids all consideration of having to arrive at something – even Poem – yet plays continually in the field of philosophy. The critics'll eventually stick you with the term "old wives tales", kindly or unkindly – NO MATTER!; for there's no "tale" to it either, except perhaps the memory of tongue wagging: I would call these thanks givings in recognition . . . as I would much of your conversation that night – that these personal utterances prompt MOST naturally to mood which haunts, fragrances which do not even have to be unique to haunt. Now then, Michael, I haven't even begun to read that astonishingly HUGE pile of writ you've given me. Since seeing you I had a trip to Chicago, then one whole week teaching kindergarten film in Grand Forks, North Dakota (where I was often reminded of all three of you, often remembered by the locals from your visit last year – especially by Laurel Reuter, the Sioux woman who sparks all Kulch they're scratching together for themselves, centered on her gallery), and then back to Chicago. First Chicago trip I tried to locate Goddard Binkley the Alexander teacher; but the phone number has been disconnected: he's possibly moved to another suburb (and I had no eyes wherewith to search the various suburb books) or perhaps he gave up on the windy city. Anyway, I'd determined to make another attempt next Chi. trip; but Kenneth Anger arrived, calling from downstairs hotel lobby, asking if he could sleep on my hotel floor, as he had no money. Then he arrives down the long hotel hall, followed by porter helping him haul three HUGE pieces of luggage, including a guitar which he was bringing to Chicago to leave with the mother and brothers of the boy who almost pitched him suicidally off Golden Gate – still, alas, pursuing his Manon. The boy was due to show up in Chi.; but as the hours passed without call, Kenneth began staring morosely out the 23rd floor window; and I took to sitting in the chair nearest that window . . . old pretend-Rock-a-Gibraltar-Brakhage quietly adding moral lesion to the drama, subtly (or not-so-subtly, as I was very TIRED from No. Dak.) attempting to MAKE SENSE. A mad late-night taxi ride to the suburb home of Kenneth's lover, leading to nothing more than getting rid of the guitar (tho' for Kenneth it was all charged with fascination for the childhood neighborhood of his love and the stories he got from his brothers and mother – while I waited it out in a Chicago bar down the street). A strange trip to the Field Museum where Kenneth and I wandered among stuffed animals, as if attempting to drift into final place ourselves. Finally Kenneth pulled himself together and decided to leave, go on to N.Y., go on to other things. He seemed in good shape, having slept almost continually on mattress on floor when he wasn't pacing the tiny room. And I, who'd been sleeping on springs (literally and metaphorically)

was relieved to have this part of the drama over. He'd excused himself in the most perfectly clear way ever: "I *have* to act these things OUT – act OUT these dramas – or I'd go crazy!" That's the other side of the god-conversation-coin, isn't it?

And I am now having my month's rest. And the back is VERY much better, has been all along, even midst these No. Dak. and Anger tensions. And . . . I'll be reading you, Michael – much of this month. Take care of yourselves. A special hello to Janey, whom I didn't really get to talk with much this trip. See you . . . where? . . . in Chinese dreams, at least.

Blessings,  
Stan

**[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 2/ 9/75]**

[TOP MARGIN: Hello Joanna – Hello Janey.]

**Feb. 9, 1975**

Dear Michael,

I didn't get as much reading done over Xmas as wished; and then the GREEEAAAAAAAAAAT icy slogging thru Canada began, like a time-trek back into the U.S.ence 15 years ago (apropo institutes and profs. there) or 5 years ago (apropo students -- i.e. in willingness stumped by lack of visual material); and then NOW I'm back home again, eXhausted by all this kindergarten teaching and by the godAWFUL burden of being, at this time, an Amurrikan in Kanaday – where they take Ford's "Oil or War" threat quite personally directed at THEM as well as Ahrads. MUST say that I canNOT stand contented-SEEMing people whose drift is really premised 'pon much Ignorance . . . (Leonard Cohen, the 2nd rate Dylan, AS Canada's TOPS, in prof. and stu. estimate, seems to me the perfect metaphor for their condition: as to movies, they're ALL hung up on the dilemony horns of John Ford and [Jean-Luc] Godard, PERIOD; tho' I suspect I budged that iceing berg a whole lot with my sabring lectongue finally infuriated into bile-driven wit. But just the transportation wore me down – midst train strike, myself shipped about midst worst rudeness I've seen THIS side of the South on one bus after a (continuous transfer) other, etc.: on the 7 hour milk-train ride to Montreal, cars unheated, 20 below outside, lights too dim to read by, jammed among squalling babies and a couple real squaws, I found myself mutter (from under my wet raincoat) THAT I WOULD not do The South – enough/ENOUGH!

Still, I'm home; and betwixt all this I've managed to read *Wolf Net* TWICE; and have been spreading some of its words from Chicago to London (Ontario) and all whistle stops in between. This, yr TIME travel, reads like journal of very straight explorer coming back from ICE CAP with THE NEWS. I'm especially humbled by your picture of the teacher faced with the students WHO DO KNOW . . . (tho'

I'd add that they do not know they know): more and more, these days, I keep giving it/quest-shun back to 'em, with remarkable results!

And then there's *Rare Angel*<sup>1</sup> which Jane and I are halfway thru reading aloud. Oh, Michael! THIS is as that poem "The Surge" I love so well you dedicated it to me, only yr *Angel* extends that earlier push to further reaches and staples its fanning opt most formally to the earth of yr experience, what you've SEEN, so that in Herodotus fashion you've shown a formalism herein which (I'm guessing) you always felt "The Surge" lacked (at least you did always hesitate midst my praise of it). Also I felt the great strengths of *Fleas*<sup>2</sup> studding it throughout . . . only hidden, or only delicately sparkling (as distinct from the more obvious FLASHING of your technical brilliance in *Fleas*: but then, I'm a happy vulgarian, too, and shall love such as *Fleas*/ "Surge" too forever, as they first caught this dull ear and brought it too attention in these matters now more formally and delicately stated, more RAREly as befits ANGELical: we do keep reading and re-reading the first swath of its reach – thus only half-thru so far; but it seems so far to be one of the longest singularly singing STEADY poems, pouring out in close form like a slow motion egg of water blood or milk exploding into specificity of shapes as simply as you have it "shoulders/from a neck" in (what is to me) one of the most delicate metaphors for "Wings" I've yet read.

I'm writing this now, before finishing the poem, because I've NO idea WHEN I'll have time to write again. (And please don't worry: I'll get to *Odum*<sup>3</sup> eventually) You should know that my back is okay now: midst fuss of trying to connect with the difficult Chi. doctor, the whole syndrome just stopped itself.

Blessings, Stan

Stan, your letter fills me with such pleasure  
 that you like Rare Angel & Wolf Net. I do  
 hope that you & Jane rec'd copies of The World  
 magazine that had The Cloud "for Stan &  
 Jane" in it - a little lyric. It will be  
 in JAGUAR SKIES to be published October 1975  
 by New Directions. You were in Canada &  
 I'll be doing the same on the Rochester/Buffalo/  
 Brockport circuit in 2 weeks. - Lots of ~~dread~~  
 about it. Meantime I'm writing a new <sup>fashioned</sup>  
 comedy in the style of Schiller for ACT here.  
 Next year I'll write a ~~new~~ post-Wolf Net  
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 He's worth it all - all the charts & what not.  
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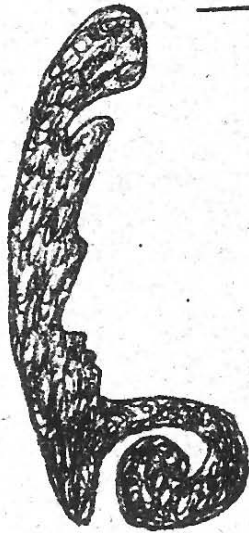
[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage - undated]

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 Odum soon. He's worth it all - all the charts & what not. The [Margins]  
 symposium will be wonderful - pieces by Brakhage, Francis Crick, Robert  
 Creeley, Bob Peters, Anne Waldman, and some others. The Next Time we ate at  
 LE VIVOIR was with Gary Snyder<sup>3</sup> & Dan Ellsberg.<sup>4</sup> Love to all of you - GOOD  
 NEWS ABOUT YOUR BACK!

Michael



## THE RAINS OF FEBRUARY



THERE'S CRUELTY IN  
EVERY JEWEL  
and ~~each~~ each black lump  
of coal  
was once a multitude  
of lives.

Within his skin  
each gurn  
holds ~~holds~~ a fool

but  
more  
like

me

who secretly contrives  
a liberation  
filled with buttercups  
and blue-eyed grass  
and golden tracks of spring  
upon the hills  
and air that's filled  
with scent of rose  
and dill.

Brakhage, Francis Crick, ~~Alfred~~  
Robert Creeley, Bob Peters, Anne Waldman,  
and some others. The next time ~~we~~ we ate at  
Le Vivoir was with Gary Snyder & Dan Ellsberg.  
Love to all of you — Michael  
GOOD NEWS ABOUT YOUR BACK!

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

THE RAINS OF FEBRUARY<sup>1</sup>

THERE'S CRUELTY IN  
EVERY JEWEL  
and each black lump  
of coal  
was once a multitude  
of lives  
Within his skin  
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filled with buttercups  
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and golden tracks of spring  
upon the hills  
and air that's filled  
with scent of rose  
and dill.

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 6/3/75]

June 3, 1975

Well, Stan,

It is one of those days when you ought to be here. A real Frisco day.

FRISCO

CLIFFS SEND SMILES

to the sunset sea.

Pigeons dive – sliding,

wings up

and back –

like the ghost

of Mercury.

Ahh,

the gloaming!

Of course this is morning and not the gloaming. I've found a French restaurant even better than Le Vivoir. You'll like it. Visit. Thanks for telling J R Morris<sup>1</sup> about *Rare Angel*. He bought a copy and sent me a poem in my honor. He's a pleasant fellow. There is a lot to be said for the Beat expatriates who have gone up into the mountains, or country, and preserve their dignity and literary freedom.

Gary Snyder, Anne Waldman,<sup>2</sup> Joanne Kyger<sup>3</sup> and I are giving a benefit for the Indian newspaper *Indigena* on Thursday. Robert Duncan and I are giving a reading at a Jr. College here in two weeks. It is all very literary. I maintain myself by going places like Ano Nuevo Island to look at the sea lions and sea elephants and go on wildflower walks. I'm starting the 4th draft of the comedy I told you about – *General Gorgeous*.

Love to all Brakhages,

M



[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 7/2/75]

July 2, 1975

Dear Michael,

And this is a typically un-type-castable summer day in the Colorado Rockies. Everything is wildly multi-tonally GREEN . . . all of it sopping up the last couple of feet of snow which fell two weeks ago and melted overnight. Even looking at the mtns., its hard to believe an ice-age ever . . . etcetera: harder to believe, as a couple articles Jane showed me purport, that a new ice age could begin in one year (rather than gradually, as was the older theory) simply by there being, one year, no end to winter. One lack-o'-summer here would (as said in July-August International Wildlife) do it . . . i.e. do us IN – ah, well, THAT'S not too hard to believe; but the quest, which I'd as soon shun, IS, is that how it previously happened?

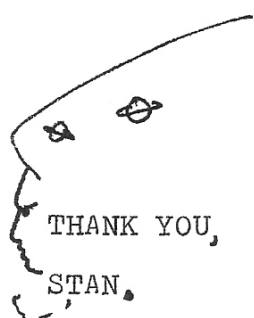
I'm very much enjoying reading *Margins* issue on you. The Lit. gets thick at times, tho' less-so than this-usual because most of the essays serve to light up puns of yours which have passed my attention AND to give clear frame for some overalls of thought-process you've managed – NOT, thank heavens, 19th cent. sense of prog. but rather that spiral you've been managing as you hawk it for overview. It is an issue I'd definitely like to save among those things I'm keeping for the children to inherit: thus I could use one more copy if you can manage that.

I missed the last snow, in fact the last three snows here, because I was sweating-it-out THREE WEEKS in the dredknets of New Yawk Cit. I was teaching a cram course at N.Y.U. And it all just about killed me. I haven't tried to live in that city mor'n 3 days in row for 17 years. Now I know why . . . tho' I'm damned if I try to dip into that mess to explain why – rumbleRUMBLE(shout) BANGyellRUMBLERUMBLERUMBLE, etc: plus raw nerve endings sparking very air with smogs human heat-light conTINually. (And that brief explit has caused sweat to break out all over my body - - eNUFF!) I survived . . . I hope . . . [ . . . ]

It has been an extraordinarily tough year for me (nice pun((t)) on “tough”) AND for all film: Sally Dixon<sup>1</sup> forced to resign from Carnegie Inst., Annette Michelson<sup>2</sup> fired as Film Editor of *Artforum* and Film Dept. dissolved, Anthology Film Archives cut off from money, Jonas Mekas forced to resign from *Village Voice*, myself under fire at Sch. Art Inst., Annette similarly at N.Y.U. and on . . . and on . . . ) I can't any longer believe in the co-incidence of these happenings; and paranoia frets my thought.

But the view is good from here my home; and I'm working on films now totally untitled and NOT to be released for at least three to seven years (sworn oath) . . . several little totally new beauties . . . a couple of extraordinarily comic blent – wit's beg, or end, I suppose.

Blessings, Stan



THANK YOU,  
STAN.

It was really wonderful  
to have you here.

YOU

came

at a perfect

and beautiful moment.

I've

gotten

into the habit

of seeing myself

(pretending)

as an Anarchist Idealist Prince

AND

I

FORGET

I'm from Kansas --

a little boy growing up

as a fairy scared among

ogres --

and that

I'm

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage, poem that begins with song from  
*Grabbing of the Fairy.*]

*All of nothingness dives through  
space  
And leaves fat care behind.  
The innocence born on a face  
Is the substitute for mind.*

THANK YOU,

STAN.

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to have you here.

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I'm from Kansas –

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and that

I'm

born  
out of  
that  
righteous middle class...

I love the way  
you've dropped  
the colored glasses  
about  
where  
we

come from

AND

I think

finally,  
in truth,  
we can be Idealist Princes  
and Mammal Gentlemen  
if we love  
and remember  
the truth.

Hi Jane,

Love to all Brinkhages,  
Michael

born  
out of  
that  
righteous middle class . . .  
I love the way  
you've dropped  
the colored glasses  
about  
where  
we  
come from  
AND  
I think  
                    finally,  
in truth,  
we can be Idealist Princes  
and Mammal Gentlemen  
if we love  
and remember  
the truth.

Hi Jane,  
Love to all Brakhages,  
Michael

**[Joanna McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]**

Stan –

You talk good.

The film was a real treat.

Would I could have managed a goodbye hug and thank you.

But your sense of duty? sharing? whatever threatens to last beyond my time.

Love,  
Joanna

Will look forward to the other 3 sections; as an expert I applaud your treatment of the subject!

¡ EL CERRO ES NUESTRO !

THE FLAME IS OURS!

We are the candle  
that holds itself  
aloft.

We are the Andes  
among creatures  
and our hands are soft  
and our cortex  
is a beacon  
as are our toes  
you and I  
are a river of light  
that pours  
and gleams  
in  
the  
blue-black  
snows.

We are perfect  
as the tooth  
of a squirrel!

Pern - 1974

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/5/76]

May 5, 1976

Dear Michael,

Your poem letter unfolding like a Chinese scroll or a SUPER market grocery tick tape did light up all MY memories of that day – the finest golden glow ANY day's memory has ever prompted. And then I went upstairs (airs) and looked at all the footage (feats) of film I'd exposed this last month and found three wondrous short yields-of-light graphed PURRRRR-fectly from our visit to Goethe and Schiller,<sup>1</sup> our flower, and then you Joanna and Janey couched together in full grace of illumination. I'll be sending them to you when they've found their place in whatever 'book' of other shorts I put together . . . (that's how I find myself working these days: composing sets of briefs interspersed with black leader, altogether each film lending to every other as very much inspired by the way YOU do make a BOOK, yes!)

I too keep thinking the ogres'll get me [. . . ]; and then I come home also to find myself attacked (well, *slighted*, at least . . . in a way that I know an attack will follow) in a New Yawk crit. mag. by someone I took to be a friend on that grounds that (coupled with Malevich,<sup>2</sup> of all people) I'm an idealist . . . to be dealt with, albeit not overlooked. Next they'll go for the animal (mammal) throat, no doubt. Ah, well . . . OVERLOOK me, OVERLOOK me, I scream inside. Still, I ALWAYS (even in Windfield – my "d" – Kansas)<sup>3</sup> KNEW I was a Prince; and I've learned (the hard way) to be someWHAT gentle man. You too, my friend, tho' I think t'other way round and earlier than I. Truth IS, most of my childhood was clearly LOWER class; so you see!, I've always just been (from my position) praising your hierarchitectitipitoplofticals (to be Jamesian and enJOYCEing abt it).

I've ordered the two books and am reveling in your *Jaguar Skies*. I have the absolute proof on film that "THE FLAME IS OURS,"<sup>4</sup> that "We are the candle". I mean, I got it graphed for re-run even before the ogre jury . . . if I can but find some way to make them LOOK at it – ah, well, always SOME problem . . . (pep in the sun, like *they* say – WHICH reminds me that I also put white pepper on Jane's grocery list; and everyone here is VERY anxious to try it).

Well, Jane's waking up (cough, cough, rustle). She too loved the poem – told me abt it three times on the long distance phone before I even got home.

Dear Joanna,

I did get your note and was made happy (distracted from all current fuss) by it. I somehow hadn't seen you midst that curious Larry Jordan arranged series of fuck-ups which we did somehow triumph-over. I'd thought maybe you hadn't been able to make it; then, showing SOMETHing had gone right, I got your note. Much thanks. As to the rest of the SCENES, I'll see to it you see it all someday. Count



this as a happy teaser. Jane is very excited you'll be in Boulder mid-June, says you can stay in our trailer (very modern with its own chemical toilet, etc.) much as you like, natch, whatever you might need to escape the Naropahoochie reservation.<sup>5</sup> Only wish I was going to be here; but I'll not be greedy, for I've had a golden day with you I'll EVER remember.

Blessings, Stan

[Enclosed: Jane's instructions to a house-sitter regarding care of the family's animals.]

**[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage –7/29/77]**

**July 29 – 77**

Stan,

Page 33 of *The Dragons of Eden* by Carl Sagan:<sup>1</sup>

“Daniel Hubel of Harvard Med School discovered the existence of networks of particular brain cells that respond selectively to lines perceived by the eye in different orientation. There are cells for horizontal, and cells for diagonal, each of which is stimulated only if lines of the appropriate orientation are perceived.”

So, my little Snow Leopard, this might be it, and perhaps your intense labors tend to fractionate the appropriate perceptual combinations. What you think?

Turning to Sagan's bibliography, I find: Hubel, DH & Wiesel, T.N. “Receptive Fields of Single Neurons in the Cat's Striate Cortex”, *Journal of Physiology* Vol. 150 pp 91-104, 1960.

I'm flapping back to sacred Frisco right now via United.

Love to you & Jane,  
Michael

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 9/19/77]

September 19, 1977

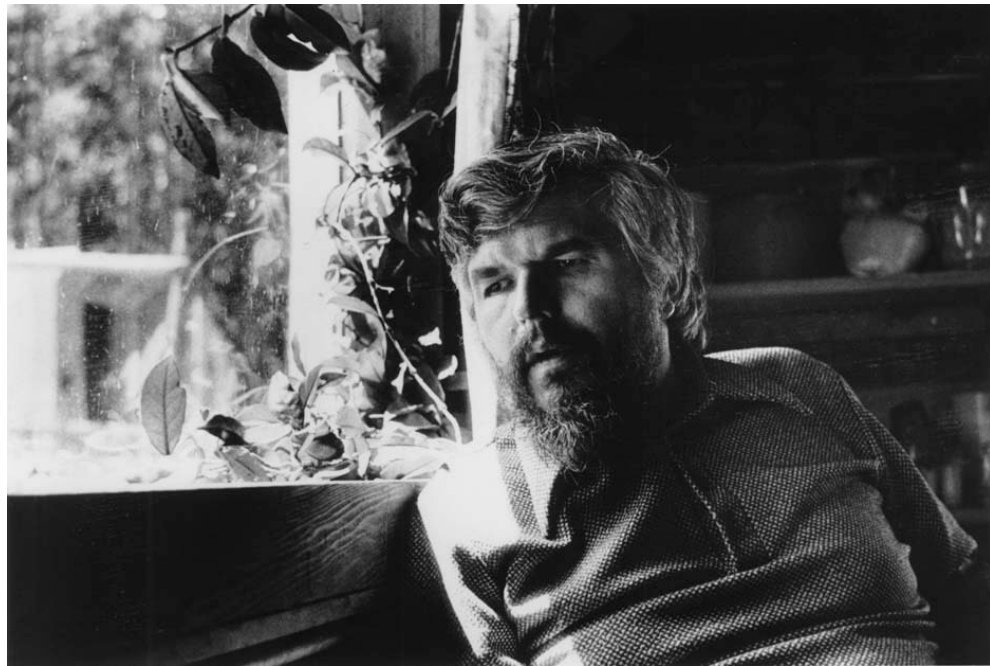
[TOP MARGIN: Jane says “add a ‘P.S.’ to Michael that they now have snow leopards at the Denver Zoo” – *all* comes in good time,]

Dear Michael,

Your timing, Sir! is uncanny. *Fleas* were waiting for me here this return trip from Chicago lectures, JUST as I was at last enabled to begin editing on *Sincerity III* – 3<sup>rd</sup> section of my autobiographical film, which I’d intended to shift away from pictures, as such (as, in two different senses, the earlier two reels) and try to TRUST the most personal, and totally unsymbolic, ASSOCIATIONS in expressing all those years of our living in this house to now; for, SINCE we have had these environs and stopped shifting all over the nation (and since we’ve been steadily a family of 7) the memory of all this time has been a mix SO KIN TO *Fleas*, I have no other way to describe it – NO other reference to involk . . . BRAVO!, BRAVO!, BRAVO! to and on you for this great accomplishment; and I, trembling in terror at my own intentions in *Sincerity III* (which are actually quite different but MUST come from some similar trust of and ability to respond to, be responsible FOR, free association) can truly appreciate the courage it took for you to write these, can understand full well your hesitancy to publish them (tho’ not agree with that) and can fully appreciate what an act of GREAT friendship it was for you to send them to us. Be assured we have received them with a tenderness and a love beyond anything I’d imagined when I asked for them. I had thought to wait until I’d read them all before writing you; but now at the half-way point, and with my readings so integral with the work I’m doing upstairs on *Sincerity III*, and what with reading and re-reading, going slowly ever so slowly as enables me to converse with them in depth, think thru my own meditations upon the last 12 years, read them aloud to Jane, hear her deep promptings thereby into her childhood, exchange mine, listen to the processes of each of us coming to thought in prompt of your memories, and knowing I’ll be working, thus, with this manuscript for MONTHS, I’ve decided I must write you some response of the very start of this quest, let you fully into it as I am able – for I feel assured there’ll be further writs, hopefully a FULL set of reports, hopefully pleasuring you. I haven’t much more to offer at this time but over-spill from the beginning work process and the resultant blather of this letter . . . (for when I work, you know, I sweat and dribble from the nose and sometimes even wet my pants and stumble about knocking over chairs and sometimes self and oft cannot even remember my name and in general look like the idiot I am (“idiot” fr. “private person”); but there are moments when, as you quote (Pound, I think) “it all coheres”;<sup>1</sup> and I trust at least some of my letters will get writ to you midst such a moment (one of those moments Robert Duncan SAYS he distrusts; tho’ fortunately for the rest of us he appears to have ‘em too quite often). Jane says hearing *Fleas* is like having a rake pulled up through her innards, that it just rips open one memory after another EACH of which spark at least a dozen others.

That is very much my first experience too, tho' these mems seem occurrences in the very air around me; but then re-reading causes this first 'whirl' to move more like a river, myself still the cork upon it . . . tho' I've sense of depths coming in further re-reads: what's MOST secondarily amazing IS that these *Fleas* are not at all like the kin to "automatic writing" they first seem to be; and it is certainly more than the rhymes or rhythms which remove them from that – it is more like the SOUNDINGS of 'em . . . which, I think, will save 'em from any datedness or dependence upon knowledge of the times in which we all grew up (I've, for instance, tried some of 'em on Crystal – who has no memory association with most of the pop products of the 40s – and found she was similarly affected as Jane and I first reading). Your "Bible" now has its "begats"; and they are a wondrous newness upon the face of literature and the tired old earth. Bless you! I'm sending you a new film called *Highs* 'cause you'll find yourself, JoAnn and Janey therein.

Blessings, Stan



Stan Brakhage at Lump Gulch cabin, 1980 by Robert Haller

[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 6/14/78]

June 14, 1978

Dear Michael,

This haste note necessary BOTH cause I'm packing for our trip (Jane and I) to Juneau, Alaska, \* and also pulled as usual six-(or more)-ways-side-(wise and up/down around)-ways (a veritable ball of frets – as in music) as *Sincerity* Reel 4 completes itself AND because I just must respond immediately to what I (already) feel is your greatest book of poems to date: *Antechamber & other poems*. I thought the following account might mean the most to you – to send back some small pleasure in return for the GREAT one you've sent to us:

I've been visiting Donald Sutherland (not the actor but the REAL Donald Sutherland) several times a week now because he is rapidly dying of cancer of the lung. As his body burns itself to thinnest imaginable skin stretched over the collapse of bones, in his weakness looking already as if buried in foetal position, his eyes burn more fiercely conscious than ever; and his needs are for only the *purity* of whatever he's loved and remembers (for example, of all the Spanish poetry he's translated, critiqued, and otherwise cared for, only Marti<sup>1</sup> seems to move him deeply, and always to tears, these days). I brought your book to his bedside and read him poems from it (fully expecting he might stop me, as we rarely share ANY interest in living english-speaking poets, and thinking maybe he'd begin his rage against William's "red wheel barrow" – "WHAT depends upon it?", etc. – ; but instead, he wept at your poems at "the sweetness and purity" of them, and was so deeply moved that you, Michael, are now included in one of the most precious 'anthologies' of poets on earth – those dear Donald Sutherland cares for as he collects his small bundle of poems facing death.

Blessings,  
Stan

\* We'll be back June 27<sup>th</sup> and looking forward to seeing both of you.

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 6/19/78]

June 19, 1978

Dear Stan,

Jesus Christ, I don't know what to say regarding your reading *Antechamber* to Donald Sutherland. *Thank you* for telling me about it. I just read in *OLSON*<sup>1</sup> about R.D. spending the day with dying Charles. Of course I've heard it before from Robert but my neurosis dissolves all pasts and everything is eternally reborn. I live in a weird *panta rhei* between Hades and Eternity.

I guess that condition is the babyness in my poems that allows them to be sweet and pure. It is a very sweet and pure and evil and loving and warring world.

I arrive in Boulder June 24th – Joanna arrives there (after finishing her course in sensorimotor development in children) on July first. Naturally, I want to see *Sincerity*.

I wish there was some way to catch you up on the McClure-ian oeuvre. I might have sent you *Josephine*,<sup>2</sup> but not the new version of *Minnie Mouse and the Tap-Dancing Buddha*<sup>3</sup> (so many new songs that it is a new play) and I don't imagine I sent you *GOETHE: EIN FRAGMENT*.<sup>4</sup> (?) Also, most of all, I'd like you to see *GRABBING OF THE FAIRY*<sup>5</sup> in its final version. It is my little pearl set in rubies with big fairy eyes staring out.

All of my best to you & yours, old  
friend. & to Donald Sutherland,  
Michael



# Notes





## [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 **Bruce:** Artist and filmmaker Bruce Conner (1933-2008) was perhaps best known for found footage films such as *A Movie* (1958) and *Report* (1963-1967). According to Michael McClure:

I met Bruce Conner at Wichita High School East in 1949. I did not know Bruce well, other than to say hello or nod, but in college, the next semester, I discovered that we were both profoundly interested in the arts, particularly Abstract Expressionism, and we began playing and working and creating together. Soon after, Bruce and I went to New York to see Abstract Expressionist Art, which was not, in 1951, visible in many places in the United States, particularly Kansas. So we spent the summer in New York and I made the acquaintance by phone of Robert Motherwell, and suggested that as two seventeen- or eighteen-year-old kids who were deeply and profoundly interested in his painting [we should] come by and visit him. He invited us over and gave us a great start.” (December 12, 2010) <sup>^</sup>

2 **Robert Duncan (1919-1988):** San Francisco poet Robert Duncan was a friend of both Stan Brakhage and Michael McClure. He was also an important figure in the San Francisco Renaissance, an instructor at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and one of the earliest public figures to openly acknowledge his homosexuality. <sup>^</sup>

3 **Jess Collins (1923-2004):** Collage artist Jess Collins was Robert Duncan’s life partner and a mutual friend of Stan Brakhage and Michael McClure. Robert Duncan and Jess Collins lived together from 1951 until Robert Duncan’s death in 1988. <sup>^</sup>

4 **Larry Jordan:** Experimental filmmaker and animator who has been working since the mid-50s. He is currently the chairman of the film department at San Francisco Art Institute. According to Michael McClure, at the time of this writing Jordan was building a theater to show films in North Beach. <sup>^</sup>

5 **Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997):** Poet Allen Ginsberg’s reading at San Francisco’s Six Gallery in late 1955, with Michael McClure, Philip Lamantia, and Philip Whalen, and Gary Snyder instantly brought these writers fame. See Michael McClure’s *Scratching the Beat Surface* (North Point Press, 1982) for a firsthand account of this pivotal event. <sup>^</sup>

6 **St. Luce:** Luce Publications (Time-Life Publications). <sup>^</sup>

7 **Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982):** Kenneth Rexroth was an influential West Coast poet and critic whose weekly salons were attended by many of those who became key figures in postwar American poetry. He was also the organizer and emcee of the legendary Six Gallery Reading in San Francisco. <sup>^</sup>

8 **Lawrence Ferlinghetti (b. 1919)** Poet, painter, and co-founder (with Peter D. Martin in 1953) of City Lights Books in San Francisco, the nation’s first all-paperback bookstore, first made famous during the obscenity trial over Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl and other Poems* in 1957. City Lights is also the publisher of many of the most important voices in American poetry. <sup>^</sup>

9 **“Toujours perdrix!”** Joke in French. “Always partridge! Must we have partridge again?” <sup>^</sup>

10 **Boobus and Bunnyduck:** *The Boobus and the Bunnyduck*, by Michael McClure with art by Jess Collins, was published by Arion Press in a deluxe limited edition with facsimiles of the original artwork in 2007, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of its writing. For more information, visit: <http://www.arionpress.com/catalog/080.htm>. According to McClure:

My wife at the time and I had a deep relationship with Robert and Jess, and their household. We learned the rules of what a household is, we learned courtesy, and the meaning of having art on your walls. We were deeply impressed by them, in ways that are almost inexpressible today. *The Boobus and the Bunnyduck* came about after we’d known them for about a year. My daughter, Jane, was born, and they were crazy about Jane, as we all were. Fairy tales were always in the air with Robert and Jess—from George McDonald to the Oz books, and it was natural when they re-interested me in the Oz books and George McDonald, that I would write some children’s stories. *The Boobus and the Bunnyduck* was one of them. It escaped all of Robert and Jess’s attempts to get it published until . . . Arion published it.” (December 12, 2010) <sup>^</sup>

11 **Evergreen:** *Evergreen Review*, Issue 4. <sup>^</sup>

## [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 11/16/61]

1 **Our New York encounter:** According to Michael McClure, he first met Stan Brakhage:

when he was acting as Robert and Jess's houseboy. . . . He was living above the Unicorn Press on Baker Street – the property was essentially Jimmy Broughton's. And then I met him [SB] when he came to Robert Duncan's poetry workshop. In the meantime, I was getting to know Larry Jordan." (July 21, 2004)

[^](#)

2 **"In Cold Hell, In Thicket:"** The title of a poem by Charles Olson. [^](#)

3 **Morton Subotnick (b. 1933):** American composer of electronic music whose works include *Silver Apples of the Moon* (1967) and *Two Life Histories* (1977). According to Stan Brakhage, he met Subotnick after high school, while Subotnick was playing clarinet with the Denver Symphony. [^](#)

4 **Larry Jordan's long film, etc:** According to Michael McClure, the entirety of Jordan's *Visions of the City* consists of reflections of the poet viewed: [^](#)

in everything from windows of stores to chrome bumpers" as he walks around the city. "It's kind of an inspired idea of a way to do a portrait of someone and the city spontaneously, without looking at either one of them." (July 21, 2004) [^](#)

5 **Experimental Cinema Group:** An organization dedicated to personal cinema, founded in 1953 and later influenced by Stan Brakhage, especially from 1976-2000, when he was its principal visiting filmmaker/host. The group is now known as First Person Cinema ([http://www.internationalfilmseries.com/first\\_person\\_cinema/index.php](http://www.internationalfilmseries.com/first_person_cinema/index.php)), and takes place on the campus of University of Colorado at Boulder. Stan Brakhage taught at CU Boulder from 1981 until 2003, when he retired as a Distinguished Professor shortly before his death. [^](#)

6 **James Broughton (1913-1999):** Influential California poet and filmmaker whose films include *Mother's Day* (1948), *The Pleasure Garden* (1953), and *The Bed* (1968). Books include *The Androgyne Journal* (Scrimshaw Press, 1977), *Seeing the Light* (City Lights, 1977), and *ALL: A James Broughton Reader* (White Crane Books, 2006), edited by Jack Foley. [^](#)

## [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 3/14/62]

1 **John Cage (1912-1992):** Influential American experimental composer. [^](#)

2 **David Tudor (1926-1996):** American pianist who collaborated with John Cage. [^](#)

3 **Jim Tenney (1934-2006):** American composer and friend of Stan Brakhage. Tenney and Brakhage collaborated throughout their lives, beginning with Brakhage's first film, *Interim*, in 1952, a black and white film for which Tenney composed the music. [^](#)

4 **Edgard Varese (1883-1965):** French American avant-garde composer. [^](#)

5 **Chance operation:** Refers to John Cage's willingness to allow chance to be utilized as a method of composing music. [^](#)

6 **Kenneth Patchen (1911-1972):** Poet, artist, and activist who often illustrated his work and was one of the first poets to read with jazz musicians. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 **“THE SURGE”** was published as a chapbook dedicated to Stan Brakhage, by Frontier Press in 1969 and was included in Michael McClure’s *Star* (Grove Press, 1970) *Selected Poems* (New Directions, 1986) and *Huge Dreams* (Penguin Books, 1999). [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 3/62]

1 **Donald Sutherland:** A Classics scholar and Colorado University faculty member. Sutherland was a friend of Stein’s who wrote what Brakhage viewed as the best book on her work. [^](#)

2 **Antonio Machado (1875-1936):** Early twentieth-century Spanish poet. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/3/62]

1 **Robert Creeley (1926-2005):** Poet and author of more than 60 books, Black Mountain College rector, Poet Laureate of New York (1989-1991), and Samuel P. Capen Professor of poetry and humanities at the State University of New York, Buffalo. [^](#)

2 **Bobbie Louise Hawkins:** Fiction writer, monologist and poet. Currently an instructor in fiction and literature at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. [^](#)

3 **The Feast:** Michael McClure’s play written entirely in “beast language,” an invented language employed in *the Ghost Tantras*. The play features thirteen people seated at a long table as in the Last Supper. It was published in *The Mammals* (Cranium Press, 1972), and produced at the Batman Gallery in San Francisco on December 22, 1960 with a cast that included composer Morton Subotnick, painter Robert LaVigne, and the poets David Meltzer, Philip Whalen, and Joanna McClure. [^](#)

4 **Knickerbocker:** Paine Knickerbocker, drama critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 6/3/63]

1 **Villiers of the Isle of Adam:** Villiers de l’Isle-Adam is the late 19<sup>th</sup>-Century poet and author of the play *Axel*, which Michael McClure describes as “the most extreme dramatic piece” in the genre of “tragic romance.” For further reading, McClure suggests *Axel’s Castle*, by Edmund Wilson, first published in 1931. [^](#)

2 **Branamans:** Refers to the family of Robert Branaman, a poet and artist from Wichita, Kansas. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 **Bottom:** *Bottom: On Shakespeare*, poet Louis Zukofsky’s book about William Shakespeare. Stan Brakhage gave Michael McClure a copy of this book. [^](#)

2 **Tamburlaine:** A play by Christopher Marlowe. [^](#)

3 **Fles Theater:** According to McClure, John Fles is a filmmaker and poet who:

was about the same age as Stan and I. He was an artist, poet, and intellectual in Los Angeles who was particularly interested in experimental film and ran a series of experimental films at the Coronet Theater, (where they had the Los Angeles International Film Festival, for which I was a judge). John Fles also edited a one shot magazine that had left a mark on the literary community of both Coasts, Trembling Lamb [(New York: Phoenix Bookshop, 1959)].” (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

4 **Alan Marlow:** Alan Marlowe of the New York Poets Theater. According to Michael McClure,

I had a mingling with the New York scene, for the poetry, the theater, Frank O'Hara, Diane di Prima, Robert Rauschenberg, for the Castelli Gallery's openings, for Amiri Baraka—all of that was thrilling to me, and I was part of it for a brief while. The thing I did not like was the city of New York which—with its great overpopulation density—was not the place for me to be.” (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 8/4/63]

1 ***Mothlight*:** A four-minute film (1963) created by taping moth wings and flowers to clear leader. [^](#)

2 ***Meat Science Essays*:** Michael McClure's seminal book of essays (City Lights, 1963) includes essays on language, science, psychedelics, Antonin Artaud, Albert Camus, and Jayne Mansfield. [^](#)

3 **P. Adams Sitney:** A film critic who specializes in avant-garde cinema. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 9/63]

1 This letter was accompanied by part one of Brakhage's *Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book* (published in *Brakhage Scrapbook: Collected Writings 1964-1980*, edited by Robert Haller for Documentext, 1982) and a mimeographed copy of a letter to Jane Brakhage about Stan Brakhage's visit with Charles Olson (published in Stan Brakhage's *Metaphors on Vision, Film Culture* #30, 1963).] Refer to Appendix A for *Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book* and the Olson letter.

Brakhage wrote *Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book* for McClure. In a conversation with Christopher Luna on July 21, 2004, Michael McClure explained the origins of this project:

I was working with Dr. Frank Barron and Sterling Bunnell, giving psilocybin to artists and dancers, and the films were to be shown to the American Psychological Association. My job was to do the filming. So I wrote to Stan, [asking] 'How do you work the camera?' The fellow I was working with was the fellow who turned Leary on. We were doing this in 1962. '61 and '62. We ran out of psilocybin and we were using the money – Frank Behrens, who's a legitimate psychologist, who worked for the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research at the University of California. We were using up the tail end of a Rockefeller grant he had received to study creativity in twins, and/or creativity in creative writers. . . .

Frank was a noted psychologist, writing articles for Scientific American and so forth, and he phoned the Argyle Laboratories in San Francisco and asked them for more psilocybin. This would be early in '62, might have been late in '61. They said, 'We can't do that, we can't send you anymore,' and the reason they couldn't send him anymore, they told him, was they had sold all the psilocybin they had made to the United States Army. It took six months before they were out of it.

So it was then decided that I would take the camera and go with Sterling to bring back cultures of the mushrooms from Hautla de Jimenez in the mountains of Oaxaca, which is where it grows, where the mushroom cults were. . . . And we did bring back the mushrooms.

Some of it [the footage] was actually shown at the American Psychological Association, as was the intention. You gotta remember that . . . psychedelic drugs were not illegal until 1966 or '67, so we were happily spending Rockefeller money, which was actually intended for other purposes but was left over from the grant, to go down to bring back these mushrooms, which we did. . . . And I'm still writing a little memoir, about a 20-page memoir of that trip, which is one of the more fabulous things that ever happened in my life. Unfortunately, when we went to the mushroom ceremonies, the camera broke.

“[Stan] wasn't a drug person. I probably did [offer it to him], just to see if he wanted to. I was only offering [drugs to] people, for that experiment, who were around the Bay Area. . . . I wasn't a Johnny Appleseed of drugs. We were doing a meat science experiment, a legitimate act of psychological investigation of the psychology of the human brain, and a legitimate act of poetic meat science for me. If you told me at the time I was being like a *curandero*, I [would not have agreed]. So I got up on the mountain and watched the *curandero*, and I didn't think she was doing it the right way. And her road was just as self-invented as mine was.” (July 21, 2004) [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 **Love Lion Book:** A long poem by Michael McClure that was later published in by Four Seasons Foundation (1966), then in *Star* (Grove Press, 1970), and *Huge Dreams: San Francisco and Beat Poems* (Penguin, 1999). [^](#)

2 **Gerd:** According to Michael McClure, Gerd Stern was a San Francisco poet and plastic artist. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 This letter refers to Brakhage's mimeographed copy of his letter to Jane Brakhage, dated May 17, 1963, about his visit to Charles Olson. The Olson letter was previously published in *Brakhage Scrapbook: Collected Writings 1964-1980*, edited by Robert A. Haller for Documentext, 1982, and is included in Appendix A. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 **The students are like little seventeen-year-old falcons already wearing armour of repressions and only the eyes gleam:** According to McClure, he was teaching American Lit and Freshman English at California College of the Arts (CCAC) at the time. Established in 1907, in the 1980s CCAC expanded to include a campus in San Francisco. In 2003 the college shortened its name to the California College of the Arts. As McClure recalls:

I started teaching in 1964 and I taught until about five years ago. I quit and was made Professor Emeritus, with an honorary PhD [in 2005]. In 1973, I took off a year with a Guggenheim grant and went around the world. Later I made two other trips to Africa, traveled in South America, gave thousands of poetry readings. I was Poet-In-Residence for the Magic Theater in San Francisco and Berkeley for 11 years. I had plays produced by theaters all over the world. I went through the multiple arrests of the actors for my play's defiance of censorship and finally rewardings of my play *The Beard*. I wrote songs, and wrote two novels. I kept the teaching work because it was at a small art college which respected me. I had my own theory of teaching, based on Feldenkrais and F. M. Alexander's philosophy, which was quite different from the usual. It was fun. It was very hard work. Lots of time I would go out on weekends and give two or three poetry readings anyplace in the country, or anywhere I could reach by an airplane, and fly back on Tuesday to teach a class and just go right on with it. It was a busy, full life. I was asked to teach at different colleges, and I did not do it, because while I was paid a trifling amount of money, I also had my freedom to do as I wished." [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – undated]

1 **Willard Maas:** Filmmaker and spouse of the filmmaker Marie Menken, with whom he collaborated. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 11/8/63]

1 **And now let all the ships come in, etc:** From Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* (presently collected in an edition edited by George F. Butterick for University of California Press, 1983). [^](#)

2 **I will tell them it is by the man who made the blue faces in their room:** Refers to a painting Michael McClure made for the Brakhage children. According to Michael McClure:

In the late '50s, when I was living in a huge painter's atelier-type flat in San Francisco, above Jay DeFeo, and next door to Joan Brown, and other painters, I began painting semi-seriously—seriously in the sense that I was serious about doing it, and semi-seriously because I did not consider myself a painter—I was experimenting with Abstract Expressionism to bring the principles of Abstract Expressionism into my poetry, and I turned to the period in Jackson Pollock's career, in 1951, toward the end of his life, when he began to allow figurative heads of women into his work, as if he were searching for the picture of the divine or the beloved. I was deeply moved by that period of Jackson Pollock's work, which is ignored by many critics, though it's one of the most crucial modes of his entire work.

I decided to employ Pollock's style, and my extension of it, to experiment with Abstract Expressionism. Or post-Abstract Expressionism; I worked figuratively and began painting giant heads, and faces with Ripolin enamel, on pieces of engineering paper, 8, 10 feet square, which I made by taping together smaller rolls with medical tape, and hanging them on my walls.

Then the Batman Gallery [located at 2222 Fillmore Street, San Francisco] opened, and I was associated with the Batman Gallery, as were Bruce, and Jay DeFeo, and Wallace Berman, and George Herms, and many others. Billy Jahrmarkt assembled a show called 'Gang Bang,' for which I painted a nine by eleven foot square painting on engineering paper with faces all around the edge of the canvas—the faces being a couple of times the size of a human head, and done as a child would do them, almost Blob-like, with a big figure in the center.

I gave that painting to Stan when the show came down. He had it for a long time, and then when he went back to Colorado, he couldn't take it. He came up with the idea of tearing off some of the heads from around the edge of the painting, and that way at least keeping part of it, and I thought that was a good idea. (December 12, 2010)

Regarding his decision to allow Brakhage permission to tear the painting, McClure comments:

We believed in our art, we might have even thought that our art was divinely imaginative, but we didn't think it was untouchable. Nobody was buying painting, nobody even had money to buy frames, unless they bought them from the Goodwill. You thumbtacked things up on the wall, and you lived with them there because they were beautiful, and they were art, and they were by your friends. They were by the geniuses you knew. (December 12, 2010)

Asked whether he traded work with other artists during this time period, McClure replies:

Bruce [Conner] gave me paintings, I gave Bruce many poems. I gave Bruce a show at my flat. We had a large empty room at the flat, large enough for a show. By the way, the rent was \$60. Another time we had a show of George Herms pieces, and there was always art up, by everyone we knew." (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

**3 Essay on Jayne Mansfield:** Michael McClure's essay entitled "Defense of Jayne Mansfield, later published in *Meat Science Essays* (City Lights, 1963). [^](#)

**4 David Meltzer:** Poet, musician, and jazz critic and author and editor of books on the Beat Generation including *San Francisco Beats: Talking with the Poets* (City Lights, 2001), and *Beat Thing* (La Alameda Press, 2004). [^](#)

## [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 2/27/64]

**1 Jonas Mekas:** Lithuanian born New York City filmmaker who founded *Film Culture* magazine, the Film-Makers' Cooperative, and the Film-Makers' Cinematheque, which became Anthology Film Archives, "one of the world's largest and most important repositories of avante-garde cinema, and a screening venue" (<http://jonasmekasfilms.com/bio.php>). [^](#)

## [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/17/64]

**1 Opening of *Billy the Kid*:** Michael McClure's play *The Blossom, or Billy the Kid* was first produced by Alan Marlowe in New York in the summer of 1963. Marlowe himself played The Kid in this production, which also featured a 1947 recording of Antonin Artaud entitled "Pour En Fenir Avec Le Jugement De Dieu." [^](#)

**2 *Flaming Creatures*:** Controversial and celebrated 1963 film by Jack Smith (1932-1989). [^](#)

**3 Don't kick against the pricks:** A line from Ezra Pound's poem "H. S. Mauberley (Life and Contacts) [Part I]." [^](#)



4 **Betty's Death:** Charles Olson's second wife, Elizabeth (known to friends and family as Betty) died in a car accident in March 1964. [^](#)

5 **Ghost Tantras:** Poems by Michael McClure, written in English and beast language, were later published by Four Seasons *Foundation* (1963). [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/64]

1 **Simon Rodia:** Italian architect who designed and built the Watts towers in Los Angeles, California, a project which stretched from 1921 to 1955. [^](#)

2 **Ghost Tantras 2, 49, and 99:** Refer to Appendix B for the text of these three Ghost Tantras. As Michael McClure told Christopher Luna on July 21, 2004:

I was writing *Ghost Tantras* before and during that trip to Mexico that I needed the book on filmmaking for. It was always curious to me that Stan and I had the kind of connection that. . . It must have been September of '62. I'd just gotten back. Could have been October. Stan phoned me just as I was finishing the 99<sup>th</sup> Ghost Tantra, and I said, 'Wait a minute, Stan. I'm doing something.' Five minutes and I finished writing the Ghost Tantra, and so he was the first person ever to hear one, and he heard the last one. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/64]

1 **Kenneth Anger's Black magic triumph:** Stan Brakhage believed that Kenneth Anger had used black magic to curse him and others. According to Michael McClure:

I wrote, in one of the many missing letters to Stan, a description of seeing Kenneth Anger for the first time. I was walking down the street with John Fles after a show at the Coronet Theater in Los Angeles, and saw a man on the corner jumping up and down and pulling newspapers out of the newspaper rack, stamping on them.

As I got closer, I could hear him saying, 'I killed her, I killed her, I killed the dirty bitch, I killed her, ha, I killed the bitch and I'm glad, I killed her I killed her I cursed her, I murdered her.' That newspaper announced the death of Hazel Flynn, who was a film critic who was much hated by Kenneth, and had been cursed by Kenneth, and had at last died. That was my first meeting with Anger. He was ecstatically distraught, [had] much color in his face, and [was] shouting." (December 12, 2010)

When asked whether Anger had ever cursed him or his family, McClure replied:

Kenneth was a Satanist, and a man of enormous psychic power; he did not ever curse me or my family. On the other hand, I felt apprehension when he informed me that my wife, my daughter and I were 'The Sacred Family.' I did not want to be 'The Sacred Family' for a Satanist, although I loved Kenneth personally, including the things I've seen him do. . . . I'm not in contact with him now." (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

2 **Craaawly:** Occult icon Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) was a writer, magician, and leader of the American version of the German Freemason cult Order Templi Orinetus (OTO). [^](#)

3 **HAZEL FLYNN DIES IN HER SLEEP:** Headline on newspaper that Anger was throwing around. [^](#)

4 **Poet Kelly:** Poet Robert Kelly (b. 1935) is best known as a member of the poetic movement known as "deep image." [^](#)

5 **Cameron:** May refer to occult artist Marjorie Cameron Parsons Kimmell, commonly referred to as "Cameron," who appears as "The Scarlet Woman" in Kenneth Anger's film *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*. [^](#)

6 **Stan Vanderbeek** Filmmaker who, according to P. Adams Sitney, coined the phrase "underground film." [^](#)

7 **Blue Moses:** A 1962 film by Stan Brakhage that features an actor addressing the audience in a rare use of synch-sound. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 6/27/64]

1 This letter included an excerpt from pages 161-163 of Michael McClure's novel *The Mad Cub*, published in 1970 by Bantam. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 7/4/64]

1 **Reason:** An essay by Michael McClure published in *Meat Science Essays* (City Lights, 1963). [^](#)

2 **Two for Bruce Conner:** A broadside of Michael McClure's poems "Centaur" and "Short Song" printed by David Haselwood's Auerhahn Press and published by Oyez in San Francisco in 1964. [^](#)

3 **Unkinged by affections:** The title of a broadside published by Haselwood. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 **HAS BECOME NATURE IN THE HEIGHTH OF HIS STRESS:** According to Michael McClure, this is a quote from Jackson Pollock. [^](#)

2 **Eureka:** A book-length prose poem by Edgar Allan Poe that was out-of-print for many years. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage, recovered from Jane Brakhage's scrapbook. – undated]

1 **LION FIGHT, DREAM TABLE:** Refers to a set of 30 cards created By Michael McClure and published by Pierrepont Press (*Lion Fight*, 1969) and Dave Haselwood (*Dream Table*, 1965). According to Michael McClure:

I was making decks of words that I called Personal Universe Decks, in which there were words on each end of the card, on one side of the card. I used these, in some cases, to represent a state of mind, or a state of consciousness, to describe a series of actions – [for example,] *Lion Fight* was a deck that described a fight between three lions – and other decks expand and intensify awareness of one's own personal sensory universe. I was teaching people to make those decks. Young people would come and ask me how to write poetry, and my answer often, particularly for songwriters, was that I would show them how to make decks. So I made many of these decks, which were a combination of stochastic ideas coming from a multitude of directions, everybody from Paul Beattie's young daughter's first deck of cards that I saw, to later, Burroughs cut-ups. These were all part of the mise-en-scene. I can't even remember what came first. In the *Dream Table*, I was describing a state of consciousness with a small deck. Most of my decks were larger—50 cards." [^](#)

2 **I read them the Tantras while Bruce taped:** Later, in 1966, McClure was filmed reading "Ghost Tantra 49" to a lion, footage of which was used in the film *U.S.A. Poetry*. As McClure recalls:

In 1964, *The Ghost Tantras*, my poems in beast language, had just been published. I had the book in my back pocket, and Bruce Conner and I were going to the San Francisco Zoo to record the hisses, and purrs, and growls of snow leopards, which I wanted for a music concrete sound piece. I also wanted lion roars for the induction of a sound play I was writing.

Bruce and I walked to the lion house, and ran into the lion keeper, who it turns out is a poet, [and he] invited us into the lion house at a time when no one else was allowed. So I had the lion house all to myself, with cages full of lions. There were four lions there, and I read Ghost Tantra 49 – 'SILENCE THE EYES, BECALM THE SENSES' – to the lions. Bruce audiotaped it. When I began reading the lions almost immediately joined in and it was a



behemoth singing, challenge- unification with the universe experience . . . about as high as I could get outside of peyote or some other natural high.

The recording is available [on] Fantasy Records in an album called *Howls, Raps, and Roars*. You can hear the original Bruce Conner audiotope. Wallace Berman and I made 50 copies of the lion tape, and distributed them to friends, and they began drifting around, a lot of people listening to the tapes, and somebody at National Public Radio heard them. They were doing films of poets, and they asked if I read to the lions [whether they] would they indeed roar again, and I said, 'I don't know.' They got permission from the zoo and we went in and did it and indeed, it was just like when Bruce and I were there. I saw part of that film of the reading on BBC recently.

I was asked to come over later and teach lion cubs to roar when the older males had been killed by a tiger. Unfortunately, I was suffering from bronchitis at the time and couldn't do it. I may be one of the few people who has ever been asked to teach lion cubs to roar." (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

**[The following three entries, from Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage, were recovered from Jane's scrapbook and accompanied by a picture of a horse inside a horseshoe and a snapshot of the Brakhage family.]**

1 **Anticipation of the Night:** A lyric film by Stan Brakhage from 1958. [^](#)

2 **Music Peace:** A radio play by Michael McClure. [^](#)

3 **DSM:** Refers to Stan Brakhage's epic lyric film, *Dog Star Man* (1961-1964), in which the filmmaker uses himself as an allegory for universal themes of life, death, and human suffering. [^](#)

4 **Swedenborg:** Swedish scientist, philosopher, and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). [^](#)

5 **Surf Theater:** A theater in San Francisco. [^](#)

6 **Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome, Scorpio Rising:** The titles of two films by Kenneth Anger. *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954) recreates a Crowleyan ritual with a cast that includes Cameron and Anais Nin. *Scorpio Rising* (1964) celebrates motorcycle culture and iconography and its soundtrack features early rock and roll such as the Bobby Vinton, Ray Charles, and Elvis Presley. [^](#)

**[Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 8/65]**

1 **John Chamberlain (b. 1927):** American sculptor and filmmaker who studied at legendary Black Mountain College in North Carolina and the Art Institute of Chicago. Chamberlain was a friend of both Charles Olson and Robert Creeley. [^](#)

2 **Walter Chappell (1925-2000):** A photographer and friend of Stan Brakhage who studied in New York under Minor White. [^](#)

3 **15 Song Traits:** Refers to a series of portrait films by Stan Brakhage which includes *TWO: Creeley/McClure*, a 1965 8mm portrait of poets Robert Creeley and Michael McClure. McClure comments:

"I'm pleased that Stan picked a hero of mine, Robert Creeley, and I to be in the same film" (December 26, 2010).

The "*Songs*" were a series of short 8mm films made at around the same time. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

- 1 **Sarah Bernhardt:** French actress (1844-1923). [^](#)
- 2 **Vietnam Day Committee reading:** Event that took place on the University of California campus. Jerry Rubin and Norman Mailer were also in attendance. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 9/65]

- 1 **Unto Caesar:** A book by Michael McClure that was published by David Haselwood in 1965. [^](#)
- 2 **Art of Vision:** Stan Brakhage's four-hour version of his film *Dog Star Man*. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 11/65]

- 1 This letter was accompanied by Brakhage's *Making Light Of Nature Of Light*, a portion of the book that Brakhage wrote to assist McClure in his efforts to film the subjects of a psilocybin research project. This was later published in *Brakhage Scrapbook: Collected Writings 1964-1980*, edited by Robert A. Haller for Documentext, 1982, and is included in Appendix A. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

- 1 **Child book:** In November 1965 Brakhage sent McClure "LETTERS FROM/ON HIGH!" containing words spoken by the Brakhage children and typed by Jane. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – undated]

- 1 Handwritten letter that begins with two pages of photos of the Brakhage children. [^](#)
- 2 **Bruce Baillie (b. 1931):** Influential San Francisco avant-garde filmmaker. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 1/31/66]

- 1 **The stars are beautiful:** A rare sync-sound film made by Stan Brakhage and dedicated to James Broughton. Brakhage completed the film in 1974. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 3/66]

- 1 **Brer Antoninus:** Poet and printer also known as William Everson (1912-1994). [^](#)
- 2 **Goethe & Schiller:** The poets Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805) maintained a close friendship and literary correspondence. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 3/66]

- 1 **Scenes from Under Childhood:** A four-part film exploration (1967-1970) of the world as seen by Brakhage's children. [^](#)
- 2 **Poisoned Wheat:** Michael McClure's poem condemning America's role in the Vietnam conflict. Published privately in 1965, it was later included in *Star* (New York: Grove Press, 1970). [^](#)

## [Stan Brakhage to Bruce Conner and Michael McClure. – 5/66]

1 **Bruce:** Artist Bruce Conner. [^](#)

2 **mandal[a]-like images:** According to Michael McClure:

There is a little box of mandala cards, which are like one of my decks of cards. Bruce did mandalas for the backs of a set of my cards, and we produced them. Bruce was making his mandalas, and I was making the words, and we came together on that, like a mutual epiphany that we could bring his mandalas and my cards together. Also, those cards formed the front of a book that Bruce and I did together, with Bruce's mandalas being the visual text and mine being the word text, a book which is usually referred to as *Mandala Book*, published by Dave Haselwood of Auerhahn Books. It was from that book, which is dedicated to Bob Dylan, that I read one poem, and sang one poem, at the Human Be-In." (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

## [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 6/6/66]

[Separate poem read at Human Be-In.]

1 **Gartenberg:** Literary agent for Michael McClure's novel *The Mad Cub*. [^](#)

2 **Norman's wife Beverly wants to do Harlow:** According to Michael McClure, Norman and Beverly Mailer did indeed put on a production of *The Beard*:

"I remember Buzz Farber saying he liked the show, that he was there. I was not around at the time. I was back in Frisco." (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

3 **Claes Oldenburg:** Swedish-American Pop Art sculptor, b. 1929. [^](#)

4 **Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008):** Painter and creator of three-dimensional collages he termed "combines." A student of Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, Robert Rauschenberg was a friend and collaborator with John Cage and Merce Cunningham. [^](#)

5 **Frank O'Hara (1926-1966):** New York School poet, art critic and curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. [^](#)

6 **Wallace Berman (1926-1976):** West Coast assemblage artist and publisher of the legendary underground art journal *Semina*. [^](#)

7 **Dean Stockwell** (b. 1936): According to Michael McClure, in addition to being a successful film actor:

Dean Stockwell [is] an accomplished and dedicated experimental filmmaker. It would be a valuable project for someone to get a hold of Dean, and see if they could pry these films from him, unless he's already had someone doing something with them. In addition to being a Hollywood film actor in demand, his artistic interest was in making experimental films, and his inspiration was Wallace Berman. Presently, Dean is making brilliant collages sort of in a post-Jess Collins manner, and showing his work in Taos." (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

8 **Dennis Hopper (1936-2010):** Film actor, director, and photographer who, like McClure, came from Kansas. [^](#)

9 **Bill Fritsch:** A counterculture legend and Hells Angel also known as "Sweet William." According to Michael McClure:

I first met Bill Fritsch the first summer after I began teaching college, and I had to work to make money for the summer in the docks in San Francisco. Bill was working on the docks. Later he lived with Lenore Kandel, and the two of them made a beautiful couple. Bill was a gentle, intelligent, profound, thoughtful person who had earlier in his life been a bandit, and had spent time in jail. When he got out, he got himself straight with this job on the docks, and

moved in with Lenore, and then discovered the life of the bohemian intellectual and poet. I don't know any of his poems, but I have some visual work of his which is extraordinary.

One could pledge for the Hells Angels, but to get in the Angels, somebody in the group had to fight you. Nobody would fight Bill. He was a powerful and strong human being. Nobody would fight him. So they finally let him in without a fight, and they called him The Hippie. Everybody had a nickname in the Hells Angels. Everybody who knew Bill personally called him Sweet Willie, or Sweet William, just because he was so sweet.” (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

10 **Robert Lowell (1917-1977):** Pulitzer Prize-winning poet from Boston, Massachusetts. [^](#)

11 **Meanwhile [Andy] Warhol has caused me a lot of grief:** According to Michael McClure:

As far as I know, Warhol never showed the film publicly. He had my permission to keep a copy of the film, and to show it privately, but no prints. He played it straight. He had a serious injunction letter from Melvin Belli's office. It was honored. . . . Warhol was an interesting artist, when he kept his nose out of your business.” (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

12 **Poetry Center:** San Francisco Poetry Center at San Francisco State University, founded in 1954 under the direction of Ruth Witt-Diamant. [^](#)

13 **Phil Whalen (1923-2002):** Zen Buddhist monk, poet, and calligrapher, who attended Reed College in Portland, OR with fellow poets Gary Snyder and Lew Welch. Asked about his friendship with Whalen, McClure recalls:

Sometimes I felt like I had to take care of Phil because he was much older than me. Sometimes I felt like I had to take care of Phil because he was like a big wonderful Zen boobie, and somebody had to make sure he had enough money to eat. Sometimes I felt like he was my teacher. He taught me poetry haiku and the practice of Zen sitting.” (December 12, 2010). [^](#)

14 **KEATS:** “What weapon has the lion but himself?” is a line from John Keats' play *King Stephen: A Fragment of a Tragedy*. [^](#)

15 **THE SCREEN IS RED AND GOLD AND WHITE AND PINK:** Version of poem that appears in *Mandala Book*. [^](#)

16 **Human Be-In:** Michael McClure participated in and performed at the Human Be-In, a huge and historic happening that took place in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park on January 14, 1967. Others in attendance included Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Lenore Kandel, and Timothy Leary. As McClure recalls:

The Human Be-In was planned in my front room, looking down on Golden Gate Park, and the ocean, and the Golden Gate Bridge. We planned what was going to occur on the stage, and who was going to be there.

At the event I read a poem, and I sang a poem, with the autoharp that Dylan gave me. It was a high spiritual occasion, and everybody was living the high. The reception was excellent.

Another memorable thing was it was Lenore Kandel's birthday, and 20 to 30,000 people sang happy birthday to her as she stood there. It was lovely.

If anyone wants to see more about that period, the documentary that I did about Haight-Ashbury just a month or two before the Human Be-In, with KPIX TV cameraman and producers, is called *The Maze*. It has been rediscovered after 37 years of disappearance. It shows clearly what the young people of Haight-Ashbury were like before methedrine got there and set fire to the edges of everything. It's on the web at <https://diva.sfsu.edu/bundles/189371>]. (December 12, 2010)

According to Michael McClure, he regards *The Maze* as:

one of my finest works, an historical work. It had two showings, and it disappeared [until recently]. I had the sound restored, so that not only are the visuals almost perfect, but the sound was pretty good as well.” (December 26, 2010)

McClure has also been involved in other films over the years, including a documentary for KQED television in the mid-Seventies called *September Blackberries*:

which is based on the poetry in my book [of the same name], with astonishingly beautiful images of animals and other wonders of nature, and some spontaneous poetry, which had a successful showing in San Francisco.” (December 26, 2010)

KQED also produced a studio production of two plays contained in McClure’s *Gargoyle Cartoons*. [^](#)

**17 AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT:”** Asked to comment on this line from the poem that McClure read at the Human Be-In (and at the conclusion of *The Maze*), McClure responds:

AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT” means “AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT” which means “AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT” which means “AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT. [^](#)

**18 Bob Dylan’s beauty inspired me to finish a perfect *Love Lion*:** According to McClure:

I don’t know if Dylan read it or not. I stood there watching while Bob read my long political poem against the war, and against the environmental crisis, ‘Poisoned Wheat.’ I watched him read the entire pamphlet of 12 pages, and close it up, and hand it back to me, no comment. He didn’t comment on things. He understood it deeply, and it was bound to have been a source for him, because at the time he was looking for sources, Allen and I included.” (December 12, 2010)

Asked whether Dylan was willing to respond to a direct question, McClure remembers:

He would give his own answer. Sometimes his answers have more than one meaning--often have more than one meaning, as do his poems and songs.” (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

**19 *The Mammals* (Cranium Press, 1972):** collects the plays *The Feast*, *The Blossom*, or *Billy the Kid*, and *Pillow*. [^](#)

## [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 6/66]

**1 The likeness is to nature’s/NOT to these tempestuous events:** From “Letter 9” of *The Maximus Poems*, by Charles Olson. [^](#)

**2 All my jews . . . Louis Zukofsky’s A:** Refers to the long poem by Objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky (1904-1978), and Zukofsky’s correspondence with poet Ezra Pound (1885-1972). [^](#)

## [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – summer 66]

**1 *The Beard*:** On Sunday, July 24, 1966, Michael McClure’s play was given a lavish presentation at Bill Graham’s Fillmore West in San Francisco. Asked whether there was any connection between *The Mandala Book* and *The Beard*, McClure comments:

The last section in *The Mandala Book*, “AND IT IS ALL PERFECT THIS IS REALLY IT,” is a reflection of the intensity of the vision created in my consciousness by the performance of *The Beard* at Bill Graham’s Fillmore Auditorium, when it was presented with a huge light

show by Tony Martin while the two actors, Billy Dixon and Richie Bright, performed the play with handheld microphones. It seemed to be a divine experience of no time or place, both very ancient and postmodern, with little girls dancing on jump ropes in the midst of the light show, and Billy the Kid Jean Harlow carrying on with the play, and horses crashing across the stage in the light show. I was deeply moved by it and an abstract description of it reiterated itself in the last stanza of *The Mandala Book*.” (December 26, 2010) [^](#)

**2 The Kid . . . Harlow:** Billy the Kid and Jean Harlow are the principal characters in *The Beard*. [^](#)

**3 Tony Martin:** Lighting designer who designed shows throughout California at venues including the Fillmore West (for bands such as the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Paul Butterfield Blues Band, and others) as well as the Whiskey-A-Go-Go in Los Angeles in the 1960s. A few years earlier, Martin had also collaborated with composer Morton Subotnick. [^](#)

**4 Also there was no police interference!”** According to Michael McClure, despite the controversy over the sexual frankness of the play:

The police did not arrest the play at the Fillmore. They warned Bill Graham, because they did not want to bust the booming rock and roll hall, [and] they feared massive public reaction from young people and those who were interested in dancing and rock. The police did not bust *The Beard* at that performance, but they told Graham that they would the next time. Originally two performances had been scheduled. Bill had to cancel the second one in order to stay open.

After that *The Beard* went to The Committee Theater in San Francisco, which was an experimental theater and comedy group. It was performed once on their off night, Monday, and it had a good audience. One of the members of the audience was a detective, actually wearing a massive overcoat. Under the overcoat was a movie camera, and the last part of the play was interrupted by the movie camera clicking, as they did in those days, as it filmed the finale of *The Beard*. The two brave young actors [who played] Billy and Jean were hauled off to jail overnight, let out on bail, and charged with obscenity, which was serious at the time. One can't realize today how serious these charges were then.

The three of us, the two actors and myself, formed a theater group, and we called ourselves Rare Angel Productions. Richie Bright is a fine character actor, and you can see him in many Hollywood films, including *The Godfather*, and especially *Godfather III* [as Al Neri]. He decided that despite the bust, he wanted to go on. The arrest in San Francisco didn't scare him or Billy Dixon. He was an actor of powerful convictions, strongly anti-censorship. He asked us if it would be alright to set up readings outside of the city. We talked about it, and said, 'Sure. The San Francisco arrest is ridiculous. Surely they wouldn't do it anywhere else.'

Richie, The Kid, set up a performance at the Flora Shwimley Little Theater in Berkeley. None of us realized it was the theater of the Berkeley Board of Education. We printed posters and got ready, then the sheriff and the DA sent us letters saying that we would be arrested on sight if we stepped inside the theater. We invited a large crowd, and I won't give you the details, but we did a piece of defiance to the forces of law and order. Present were authorities on our side, from religion to law to literature. It was clearly visible who they were—professors, pastors, and philosophers—so the police cleared out after the play but then arrested Billie Dixon and Richie Bright the next day.

The police threatened to arrest me, too, which was nervous-making, until later a lawyer pointed out, 'Hey, you want to be arrested, Michael. Then it becomes a First Amendment issue, and we'll get this thrown out of court.' There was one bust after another. They threatened me but arrested these fearless, incredibly beautiful young actors. We decided at that point that we'd best lay back, and we waited until the play was tried in San Francisco, [where] it was protected by the ACLU and found not guilty. Then we did a big benefit for the ACLU in downtown San Francisco. Then we opened a performance production of the play in San Francisco.

Then the play went to New York, where it was given an Off-Broadway production in the Evergreen Theater, put together by Barney Rossett, who was the leading fighter of literary



censorship in this country. [It was Rossett] who first published D.H. Lawrence, when Lawrence was illegal, and William S. Burroughs, and Henry Miller, and many of the greats who had previously been out of print. He decided to build the theater, to do *The Beard*. It was a handsome production, with lights by USCO.

Later, at the end of the year, we received two Obie Awards, quite a change, but in the meantime, we went to Los Angeles, where we lost Billie Dixon from the cast and worked with a young woman named Alexandra Hay, as Harlow. We had Dennis Hopper in it but there was a lot of hassle keeping Dennis because of his confrontations with the producer. At last, we got Richie Bright again as The Kid, and had Alexandra Hay, a young starlet, as Harlow.

But in the meantime *The Beard* had been done without my permission in Orange County. There must have been twenty newspapers in Orange County at that time, all extremely right wing, [which] ran banner headlines against the ‘filthy’ play that had been produced at Fullerton State College. The students had done an unauthorized production without my permission or knowledge.

Then the *LA Times* took it up, running two editorials against the play, while it was in rehearsal, while we were preparing for opening—two editorials against the play and other actions and threats from the FLO, the Forces of Law and Order. We knew we were going to have major trouble, and when the play opened it was arrested 14 performances in a row. The police would come in at the end of the play, walk backstage, arrest Jean Harlow and Billy the Kid, after they’d had a standing ovation from the audience, lead them out back onstage to the police car again, and the audience gave them a second standing ovation before they went off overnight to the jail, where we were being bailed out by a liberal, moneyed person.

Then the theater was burned down by vandalism and we went to another theater. Eventually the play was found not guilty of obscenity, but in the meantime we had brought the play to London, where it was kind of a hit, and everybody from the Beatles to great Shakespearean film actors like Ralph Richardson went to see it, and gave good reports. It had wonderful reviews.

This followed a soul-tearing time for us, to face so many arrests, so many threats, and so much condemnation. To be on the front page of the newspaper is alright, but not when they’re saying terrible things. . . . Apparently all the letters to Stan dealing with this got lost.” (December 26, 2010)

In an earlier conversation with Christopher Luna on July 21, 2004, McClure commented:

Part of our correspondence was a phone correspondence, of course. I probably never wrote him any long letters about the travail I was having with *The Beard*. It’s something you just don’t put in a letter, a five-page description of your last bust or something.” <sup>^</sup>

**5 The Committee:** An improvisational cabaret theater founded in 1963 by Alan and Jessica Myerson, both of whom had previously performed with the Second City comedy group in Chicago. <sup>^</sup>

**6 Pasht:** Stan Brakhage’s 1965 film about cats. <sup>^</sup>

**7 The Mammals:** *The Mammals* was not published until 1972. <sup>^</sup>

**8 Woody from Straight Theater:** A venue for music, poetry, and the arts on Haight Street in San Francisco from 1966-1969. According to the Straight Theater’s website (<http://www.thestraight.com/wall.html>):

The Straight Ashbury Viewing Society coupled Albert Neiman and Woody Haut to the Straight Theater Enterprises family in order to show movies each Friday in the Armenian Hall on Page Street while we brought the theater up to code. This viewing club presented underground experimental and cinema banned from standard movie theaters to a “private” yet open to the public membership. . . . One and two color handbills printed on colored stock by various artists, ranging from fine art to very primitive, appeared weekly under the Straight Ashbury

Viewing Society single eye logo, to advertise the underground experimental cine. The first were announcements for the [premiere] screening Friday July 22, 1966 listing [Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage], Kenneth Anger, Warhol, [Bruce Baillie] and many more.” [^](#)

9 **Billy Gray (b. 1938):** Actor who appeared in films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and the television program *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960). [^](#)

10 **Jo Anna and Jane:** Refers to Michael McClure’s wife and daughter. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 8/66]

1 **Peter Kubelka (b. 1934):** Austrian filmmaker, co-founder of the Austrian Film Museum and Anthology Film Archives, and friend of Stan Brakhage. [^](#)

2 **Anton Webern (1883-1945):** An Austrian composer and conductor. [^](#)

3 **Samuel Beckett (1906-1989):** Nobel Prize-winning poet and playwright best known for his play *Waiting for Godot* (1952). [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 10/66]

1 ***I It*:** This refers to the first and last mandala book. [^](#)

2 **Oswald Spengler (1880-1936):** German historian and philosopher best known for *Decline of the West* (1918). [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 11/66]

1 *Freewheelin’ Frank Secretary of the Angels* by Frank Reynolds, as told to Michael McClure (Grove Press, 1967). Asked to recount the history of his friendship with Freewheelin’ Frank and the Hells Angels, Michael McClure had the following to say:

Allen Ginsberg had made some contact with the Hells Angels through Ken Kesey. Later, Dylan asked Allen to invite some poets and some Hells Angels, and we all sat in the front row of the Masonic Auditorium and listened to his singing.

It was at the break, when went into the restroom, that I started talking to Freewheelin’ Frank, who was the Secretary of the SF chapter of the Hells Angels, and realized what an interesting mind he had, and what an unusual way of speaking he had, something that was almost like both Country and Elizabethan in his speech.

Frank and I became close friends, and brothers. I determined that he should write his autobiography, but he claimed he couldn’t write. So he dictated it to me—I wrote it down—and it was published by Grove Press. It’s titled *Freewheelin’ Frank, Secretary of the Angels, As Told to Michael McClure*.

We split the royalties from Frank’s book half and half, and I used my half to have a motorcycle built by Pete Knell, the President of the San Francisco chapter of the Hells Angels. The chopper was the twin, except for a different color, of Frank’s motorcycle. I rode around a bit with the Angels, and went to some of their meetings, and tried to persuade them to do my play *The Feast*, and almost succeeded in persuading them.

I’m [not in] contact with any of the Angels anymore. Matter of fact, when I see them riding around, I don’t recognize any of them as the people I knew.



One should be careful about using the [phrase] ‘Hells Angels.’ Each Hells Angels club is an entirely different group of people. The Oakland Hells Angels are criminals. The San Francisco chapter are men living the experimental life of intoxication, and pleasure, and challenge, and violent or drunken craziness. But they’re all different. It’s a mistake to talk about ‘Hells Angels.’

My dealings were with the San Francisco chapter of the Angels, and I liked them. But I had my life threatened by the president of the Oakland Hells Angels.” (December 12, 2010) [^](#)

2 **Jack Smith (1932-1989):** Filmmaker best known for his Hollywood parody *Flaming Creatures* (1963), which was banned and derided as pornographic by Senator Strom Thurmond. [^](#)

3 **Jerry Lieber:** One half of the renowned composing duo Lieber/Stoller. [^](#)

4 **Longer & complete *Meat Science*...**: City Lights published an expanded edition of *Meat Science Essays* in 1966 which featured three new essays (“Phi Upsilon Kappa,” “Defense of Jayne Mansfield,” and “Reason”) as well as a new preface. [^](#)

5 **The Curses of Billy the Kid & The Sermons of Jean Harlow:** Poem by Michael McClure published in 1968 by the Four Seasons Foundation with Dave Haselwood Books. Later appears in *Star* (Grove Press, 1970) and *Huge Dreams* (Penguin Poets, 1999), which collects and reprints *The New Book/A Book of Torture* and *Star*. [^](#)

6 **STAN BRAKHAGE in HUGE letters on the marquis of the Straight Theater:** Stan Brakhage’s films were presented at the Straight Theater on July 22, 1966. The Straight Theater regularly sponsored programs including work by filmmakers including Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Kenneth Anger, Bruce Baillie, and Andy Warhol. According to Michael McClure, “all the art at the Straight Theater was loved and received in a way that things don’t seem to be received now. They were received with open eyes, and mind, and wonder, and Stan was part of that.” (December 26, 2010) [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 11/66]

1 **Lenore Kandel (1932-2009):** Poet and Digger activist Lenore Kandel’s *The Love Book* was the cause of one of San Francisco’s longest obscenity battles after it was seized by police in a raid on City Lights Books and the Psychedelic Shop in November 1966. The California Supreme Court agreed with San Francisco that the book was obscene. This ruling was not overturned by a federal court until 1974. Kandel was permanently disabled in a 1970 motorcycle crash with her then-husband, poet and Hell’s Angel Bill Fritsch. [^](#)

2 **James Koller, Coyote Books:** Poet James Koller founded Coyote Books and *Coyote’s Journal* (1967-2004) in 1964. Coyote Books remains in business and has published titles by authors including Joanne Kyger, Allen Ginsberg, Phillip Whalen, and Michael McClure (*Poisoned Wheat*, 1966; *The Beard*, 1967). [^](#)

3 **Wes Wilson:** Born Robert Wesley Wilson in 1937, Wes Wilson is a poster artist who created many psychedelic rock posters in the 1960s for Chet Helms, Bill Graham’s Fillmore Auditorium, and the Family Dog collective. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan and Jane Brakhage – 12/22/66]

1 **Richard Brautigan (1935-1984):** Popular novelist and poet of the 1960s counterculture in San Francisco. Please refer to the essay “Ninety-one Things about Richard Brautigan” in *Lighting the Corners* for more information about Michael McClure’s opinion on Brautigan and his work.

Among the remembrances in the essay is the following, Number 11, which appears on page 39:

One of the things I liked most about Richard was that he was the real poet of the Diggers. He was often on Haight Street passing out papers from the Digger Communications Company. I liked that activism. Richard was doing it because he believed in it. I got so I'd go down there and do it too. And I was a lot more self-conscious on the street than he was. Richard would pass out papers from the Digger Communication Company urging all the 'Seeker' youngsters at the Summer of Love to go immediately to the VD Clinic. Richard has a poem about clap in [*The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine Disaster*]. It might have been a Communications Company broadside. It was his example that got me involved with the Communications Company, and I wrote a poem—"War Is Décor"—and helped pass it out, then read it later on Walter Cronkite's national television report on the Haight Ashbury. [^](#)

2 **The Mime Troupe:** Founded in 1959 by R.G. Davis, the San Francisco Mime Troupe (<http://www.sfmt.org/index.php>) was active in the peace movement during the Vietnam War. [^](#)

3 **The Diggers:** A group of actors who grew out of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and gave many free performances in the city during the late 1960s. [^](#)

4 **Pete Knell:** President of the SF chapter of the Hells Angels, when Freewheelin' was the secretary. [^](#)

5 **Babylonian Necrophilia:** Song by Freewheelin' McClure Montana band with McClure, Freewheelin' and George Montana. [^](#)

6 **Peter Howard:** Proprietor of Serendipity, an enormous literary and manuscript store in Berkeley. [^](#)

7 **John Chick:** Promoter. [^](#)

8 **Brakhage Blues Band Bars:** According to Michael McClure, "During one of my trips to visit the Brakhages, I taught the family to play blues riffs on various Household instruments. I'm asking them how the band is doing." [^](#)

9 **Highgrade by Phil Whalen:** *Highgrade: Doodles, Poems* (Coyote Books, 1966). [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 1/67]

1 **Greg Sharits:** Filmmaker and brother of Paul Sharits. [^](#)

2 **Peter Orlovsky (1933-2010):** Poet and life partner of Allen Ginsberg. [^](#)

3 **Maretta Greer:** Singer and companion of Allen Ginsberg who appears on The Fugs' 1968 album *Tenderness Junction*. [^](#)

4 **Carmen Vigil:** According to Stan Brakhage, Vigil "ran the San Francisco Co-Op for years." [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 2/68]

1 **Co-Op:** The Filmmakers Cooperative was founded in New York City in 1962 by Jonas Mekas and other avant-garde filmmakers. In the opinion of the cooperative's founders "The official cinema all over the world is running out of breath. It is morally corrupt, esthetically obsolete, thematically superficial, temperamentally boring" ("The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," September 30, 1962, quoted in "The Film-Maker's Cooperative: A Brief History" by Jonas Mekas <http://www.film-makerscoop.com/history.htm>). [^](#)

2 **Grove/C16:** Cinema 16 was a film society run by Amos Vogel and his wife Marcia from 1947-1963 that had 7,000 members at the height of its popularity. Barney Rossett's Grove Press (notorious for publishing D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*) later acquired Cinema 16's film collection and created Grove Press Film Division. [^](#)

3 **Henry Adams (1838-1918):** American author and historian whose memoir *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918) earned him a posthumous Pulitzer prize in 1919. [^](#)

4 **Frank H. Netter (1906-1991):** Dr. Frank H. Netter was a well-regarded and influential medical illustrator whose images of the human anatomy are still used today. His 1989 *Atlas of Human Anatomy* is a text upon which students studying human anatomy rely. [^](#)

## [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 9/7/68]

1 **Clayton Eshelman:** Poet and translator and friend of Gary Snyder and Jack Hirschman. [^](#)

2 **Nico (1938-1988):** Born Christa Paffgen, Nico was a singer who collaborated with the Velvet Underground and appeared in films by Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey. [^](#)

3 **Francis Crick (1916-2004):** Nobel Prize winning scientist who discovered the DNA double helix in 1953. [^](#)

4 **Mailer's Latest film:** Michael McClure played a Hells Angel in novelist Norman Mailer's second film *Beyond the Law*, released in 1967. About Mailer, McClure comments:

Norman was straightforward, and manly, and powerfully energetic. He was brilliant, both with words and physical energy. It was always thrilling to work with him. I did have serious conflicts with him, however. But finally we got past those, and we were friends again. With Jack Kerouac, Norman is my favorite 20<sup>th</sup> Century novelist." (December 26, 2010) [^](#)

5 **We stayed at an eccentric chateau originally built for Zsa Zsa Gabor:** According to Michael McClure:

While Dennis Hopper was editing *Easy Rider*, he was staying in one of the buildings in the compound that we called Chateau Zsa Zsa. It was a castle, an enormous compound of eccentric buildings, reportedly built by a Mafioso cement contractor lover of Zsa Zsa Gabor's. Several films were shot in it. It is one of the amazing pieces of eccentric LA architecture.

A bunch of us were staying there. Chateau Zsa Zsa had been given to Leo Garen, if he would take care of the place, because it was deserted, and somebody needed to live there to keep it in shape. It was equipped with electric waterfalls, and wall-to-wall carpets, no furniture or anything. It had little Tahitian huts built above it on the concrete cliff, with concrete beds for streams to run between them. It even had a concrete-lined cave that ran from the basement of the building to the back of the hill-like cliff that it was built upon.

Across the street lived Bob Rafelson, who directed *Five Easy Pieces*. He and his wife, Toby, lived over there, and Jack Nicholson often visited. Leo Garen had been doing casting for [Italian film director Michelangelo] Antonioni, and Antonioni was a visitor. Jim Morrison was in and out. He loved to use the electric waterfall to dive about 20 feet into the pool below. Nico, the singer for Warhol's group, was there, too. Walter Chappell, the photographer from New Mexico who is mentioned in Stan's correspondence, also lived in one of the outer buildings.

We all slept in sleeping bags on the floor. It was a time of enormous fun and psychic exploration. Dennis would do the storm scene from *Lear* in beast language, and somebody else would come in and do [the play] *The Customs Inspector In Baggy Pants* by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. It was just a handful of us that lived there and the people who were guested with us. It was clean and organized, and completely empty building, with statues in the courtyard of gladiators hurling winged skulls in the air. That one really got me. And huge Buddhas made of bronze. I've never seen anything like it. (December 26, 2010) [^](#)

6 **Ancient first novel:** *The Mad Cub* (New York: Bantam, 1970). [^](#)

7 **Danish film *Hagberd & Signe*:** 1967 film directed by Gabriel Axel (director of 1987's Academy Award winner *Babette's Feast*), also known as *The Red Mantle*, based on Scandinavian folklore and shot on location in Iceland. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/69]

1 **Ken Kelman:** A playwright and film critic who was a founding member of Anthology Film Archives, a group which included Jonas Mekas, Peter Kubelka, James Broughton, and P. Adams Sitney. [^](#)

2 **Foreman:** Richard Foreman, founder of the theatre of Ontological Hysteria in New York. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 12/69]

1 **Georges Méliès (1861-1938):** Early French filmmaker and special effects pioneer best known for *A Trip to the Moon* (1902). [^](#)

2 **D.W. Griffith (1875-1948):** Early American filmmaker best known for *Birth of A Nation* (1915). [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 2/70]

1 This letter was handwritten by Brakhage on Boulder Travelodge stationery. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 1/4/73]

1 **The Brakhage Lectures:** These pieces were later collected and published as *Film Biographies* (Turtle Island, 1977). [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 **Sterling's/ seminar in biochem:** According to Michael McClure, "Sterling Bunnell, for a number of semesters, taught a seminar in what can only be called visionary biochemistry, at California College of Arts and Crafts." [^](#)

2 **& it is being made in Scotland:** McClure ordered a former kilt jacket that was being made in Scotland for him. [^](#)

3 **Miching Malecho:** An expression from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* which the text of the play defines as meaning "mischief." [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 4/7/74]

1 This letter was accompanied by photographs of the Brakhage children. [^](#)

2 **news of big new NEW Directions book out:** Refers to either *September Blackberries* (New Directions, 1974) or *Jaguar Skies* (New Directions, 1975). [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 8/19/74]

1 **They want to operate. I said ‘nope’ (remembering [Kenneth] Patchen...:** The poet Kenneth Patchen experienced lifelong chronic pain following a spinal injury he suffered in 1937. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage’s statement for Symposium on Michael McClure]

1 Brakhage’s comments were compiled by John Jacob for Margins 18, and published in March 1975. [^](#)

2 **All of us were to sit in a room in S.F. many years later discussing the mystery of this 100-square-mile’s Kansas mid-30s hatch of such as us, and some few youngers: Ken Irby and Ronald Johnson and. . .** Asked to address the significant number of great artists of the period (Bruce Conner, Dennis Hopper, Stan Brakhage, and Michael McClure among them) who hailed from Kansas, Michael McClure replied:

The windswept plain states Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas, Eastern Colorado, were power generators in the sense that the wind swept across them and turned over and over and over the biological products in the deep, rich soil that had accumulated there. The soil was noted for producing powerful herd animals. The farmers—in the days before petrochemical farming, when I was young, when all this work was done by hand, or horse-drawn machinery—were a powerful group, like people Walt Whitman wrote about. The soil of Kansas, and the violence of the impetuous power of the seasons of wind, hail storms, blizzards, and tornadoes, and summers so hot you could cook eggs on pavement, made for hardy people. We were lucky to have been from stock that grew there, and even more blessed to have gotten out, because it also produces a raw crudeness in many. We decided to leave it behind us and pursue the spiritual occasions that did not fit into Kansas. (December 26, 2010) [^](#)

3 **A snake, a large black boa-type:** A Mexican indigo snake. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 This letter features a drawing in the upper right hand corner of a flower with a fish in the middle of it. The drawing is entitled “a salmon flower.” The letter also included an article by Nikolaas Tinbergen entitled “Ethology and Stress Diseases,” from Science Vol. 185, 5 July 1974. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 9/13/74]

1 **Snow Leopard of the Rockies:** According to Michael McClure, filmmaker and poet James Broughton: was as out-of-the-closet lavender, and always spoke about bringing Stan to the Coast for showings. His expression “little snow leopard of the Rockies” was simply a lighthearted designation for [Stan], one of his favorite brother artists. We all loved James and his humor. (December 26, 2010) [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 9/18/74]

1 **Two: C & M:** Refers to *Two: Creeley/McClure*, a 1965 film portrait by Stan Brakhage of Robert Creeley and Michael McClure. [^](#)

### [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 **Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979):** German philosopher whose critique of capitalism influenced 1960s leftists. [^](#)

2 **Serendipity or Sand Dollar Books:** Serendipity Books is a Berkeley, CA bookstore and small press founded by Peter B. Howard. Sand Dollar Books were published by Jack Shoemaker, who now runs Counterpoint Press. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 10/4/74]

1 **Goddard:** Refers to the French-Swiss filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard (b. 1930) whose 1960 film *Breathless* helped usher in the movement known as the French New Wave. [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael and Joanna McClure – 12/14/74]

1 ***The Conversation of the Gods:*** A lost writing of Michael McClure's of which both men were fond. [^](#)

2 ***Wolf Eyes:*** Joanna McClure's first book of poetry (Bearthm Press, 1974). [^](#)

### [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 2/9/75]

1 ***Rare Angel:*** Los Angeles, Black Sparrow Press, 1974. [^](#)

2 ***Fleas:*** According to Michael McClure, *Fleas* was "a poem that Stan Brakhage loved, and he is one of the few people who read it. Stan is one of the few people that I felt right about having a copy of *Fleas*. It was my secret work. I vowed never to publish it, because I feared that if I ever published it, that would interfere with the absolute forthrightness with which I hoped to write. Since then I've decided that it would be alright to publish.

I wrote it in 1968, typing on an electric typewriter as fast as I could type. I wrote it in about two weeks. It has 250 stanzas. Each stanza's a page. Stan was crazy about *Fleas*, which pleased me, because he's a person with big enough skull and brain—we both have large skulls—that he could understand the whole work and enjoy it. In a way Stan is kind of a secret hero of *Fleas*. Here's the introduction to it:

*There are 250 stanzas of Fleas. They're rhymed, and spontaneous, and written as fast as I could type them on an electric typewriter. Fleas is a Sistine doodle, a cross between the worst of Lord Byron and the best of Terry Toons. Fleas is biological proof that childhood is a vision. Fleas are baby flesh. They are soft, tingling, smiling, biting, nuzzling, laughing, screaming, making art from songs and flashlights, and grandma's yard. One childhood memory lights up another, it flares up several more that were almost hidden, they set off more, and those hurl flaming brands as flaming brands hurl brands—in childhood, all souls are equal.* (December 26, 2010) [^](#)

3 ***Odum:*** According to Michael McClure, this refers to "H.T. Odum, one of the most important early writers on ecology and environment," McClure and Gary Snyder read Odum's *Environment, Power, and Society* (Wiley-Interscience, 1971). [^](#)

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 “The Cloud” “for Stan & Jane:” Appears in Michael McClure’s *Jaguar Skies* (New Directions, 1975).

THE CLOUD  
For Stan and Jane  
WHAT I KNOW IS LIKE  
A CLOUD.  
I am rushing into  
it  
as it swells out  
behind me  
in expanding billows of information  
like a green sweater  
embroidered with red roses  
floating  
on blue waves  
lapping  
in the surf  
from  
reflected  
star  
to  
star  
while motorcycles roar  
and I smell  
the leather bindings  
of old books. [^](#)

2 **Meantime I’m writing a new fashioned comedy in the style of Schiller for ACT here:** Michael McClure’s *General Gorgeous*, performed at ACT, and later at Yale. [^](#)

3 **Gary Snyder:** Award-winning California poet associated with the environmental movement. [^](#)

4 **Dan Ellsberg:** The Pentagon analyst who leaked the Pentagon Papers which brought down the Nixon administration. [^](#)

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – undated]

1 **THE RAINS OF FEBRUARY:** The first poem in Michael McClure’s *Antechamber & other Poems* (New Directions, 1978), “THE RAINS OF FEBRUARY” was also published as a broadside and illustrated by Bob Giorgio in 1979. [^](#)

[Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 6/3/75]

1 **JR Morris:** According to Michael McClure, J.R. Morris was a poet living in Rollinsville, Colorado. [^](#)

2 **Anne Waldman (b. 1945):** Performance poet, founder of the St. Marks Poetry Project in New York, and co-founder, with Allen Ginsberg, of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Naropa Institute (known today as Naropa University) in Boulder, Colorado. [^](#)

3 **Joanne Kyger (b. 1934):** Poet and longtime resident of Bolinas, California. [^](#)



## [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 7/2/75]

- 1 **Sally Dixon:** Carnegie Museum programmer. [^](#)
- 2 **Annette Michelson:** Film critic for *October* magazine. [^](#)

## [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 5/5/76]

May 5, 1976

- 1 **Goethe & Schiller:** According to Michael McClure: “I took Stan to Golden Gate Park and showed him the huge statue of Goethe handing Schiller the laurel crown.” [^](#)
- 2 **Malevich:** Russian painter. [^](#)
- 3 **(even in Winfield – my “d” – Kansas):** Stan was born in Winfield, KS, without a “D.” [^](#)
- 4 **THE FLAME IS OURS:** The first line from Michael McClure’s poem “EL CERRO ES NUESTRO,” which appears in *Jaguar Skies* (New Directions, 1975). [^](#)
- 5 **Naropahoochie reservation:** Joking reference to the Naropa Institute (now known as Naropa University), the Buddhist college in Boulder, CO established in 1974 by Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, Diane di Prima, and Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. [^](#)

## [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 7/2/77]

- 1 ***The Dragons of Eden: Speculations on the Evolution of Human Intelligence:*** A Pulitzer Prize-winning book (Random House, 1977) by astronomer Carl Sagan (1934-1996). [^](#)

## [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 9/19/77]

- 1 **It all coheres:** A line from Ezra Pound’s translation of Sophocles’s play *Women of Trachis* (“Come at it that way, what SPLENDOR, IT ALL COHERES”), published in London by Faber in 1969, that Pound later referenced at the conclusion of the *Cantos*: “It coheres all right/even if my notes do not cohere” (Canto CXVI, page 817, New Directions, 1969). [^](#)

## [Stan Brakhage to Michael McClure – 6/1/78]

- 1 **Martí:** José Julián Martí Pérez (1853-1895) was a Cuban poet and revolutionary who became a national hero and was killed in combat against the Spanish in the Battle of Dos Rios. [^](#)

## [Michael McClure to Stan Brakhage – 6/19/78]

- 1 **OLSON:** According to Michael McClure, a literary journal devoted to criticism regarding Charles Olson and his writings. [^](#)
- 2 ***Josephine the Mouse Singer:*** A play by Michael McClure and an adaptation of a parable by Franz Kafka which won the Obie for Best Play in 1972. [^](#)
- 3 ***Minnie Mouse and the Tap-Dancing Buddha:*** A comic masque by Michael McClure presented at the Magic Theater in San Francisco. [^](#)
- 4 **GOETHE: EIN FRAGMENT:** A play about an imaginary life of Goethe presented by the Eureka Theater in San Francisco. [^](#)
- 5 **GRABBING OF THE FAIRY:** A masque dance drama presented by the Magic Theater at the Rose and Thistle in San Francisco. [^](#)



# Appendices



**Appendix A**  
***A Moving Picture***  
***Giving and Taking Book***  
by Stan Brakhage



Stan Brakhage's letter to Michael McClure dated mid-September, 1963 included part one of *A Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book* and Brakhage's mimeograph of his letter to Jane Brakhage about meeting with Charles Olson. Both were later published in *Brakhage Scrapbook: Collected Writings 1964-1980*, edited by Robert A. Haller for Documentext, 1982.

## A Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book

by Stan Brakhage

This book is dedicated to the poet

Michael McClure

who once asked me to write a book on film technique which would not be *too technical* nor too long. I believe his exact words were: ". . . just an 18 page pamphlet which will give me the best of your experience, give me a chance to make films as beautifully *and as inexpensively* as you do."

This is a moving picture giving and taking book. It will begin with those areas of moving pictures where the gift of the maker is most easily accomplished and move toward those areas where taking is predominant – but always with the view in my mind of encouraging giving . . . my sense of accomplishment being determined to the extent to which the moving picture maker can continue to *give* when increased technical knowledge permits him to *take* more and more from moving pictures, bless him. \*

I begin with very few assumptions about you, reader; but I must presume some interest on your part in becoming a moving picture maker; and I'll refer to you as maker, for short, and for the long view of your historical origin (as instrument of giving yourself) in the poet. I'll thank you not to presume on this title – I invoke it to help inspire the writing of this book . . . I leave it to the powers of your being to determine whether or not you have and/or will have earned it. Thank you.

I assume that you have no tools for moving picture making; and I must begin, now, to ask of you. Provide yourself with a strip of sixteen millimeter (16mm) film; and we may begin. The film may be either:

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\* Common grammatical usage tends to make me assume that you are male, in addressing you, while I do actually have more than the usual belief in the female maker; therefore, I apologize for the language.

- (Unexposed and developed film -- opacity: the result of retained emulsion.)
- (1) Black Leader -- note whatever other color the black is tinged with:  
brown, usually, or if color-film-black-leader: blue, green, etc.  
(Sometimes referred to as Opaque Leader)  
note it is not opaque, how much light passes thru it, how it can be seen thru.
- (Exposed and developed film -- clarity: the result of the removal of emulsion.)
- (2) Clear Leader -- note whatever color its clarity is tinged with:  
blue, purple, yellow, etc.  
(Sometimes referred to as Blank Leader)  
note it is not blank, how many dust motes, scratches, imperfections dot its surface and interfere with the transmission of light.
- (Unexposed and undeveloped film -- it has been fixed: hypoed.)
- (3) White Leader -- note whatever other color the white is tinged with:  
yellow, usually, etc.  
(Sometimes referred to simply as Leader)  
this is the material most often used at the beginning of a film to be projected
- (Unexposed and undeveloped and unhypoed film.)
- (4) Gray Leader -- note whatever other color its grayness is tinged with:  
usually deep purple, etc.  
-- note also its possible color changes as it sits exposed to the light day after day.
- (Exposed and developed and hypoed interest film.)
- (5) Moving Pics -- which, I assume, you didn't take but take an in, perhaps only to the extent that they were given you free of event he small cost of the above mentioned leaders.

Your strip of film will, in all cases, have a dull side and a shiny side (tho' you will find it difficult to tell the difference if using clear leader.) The shiny side will be referred to as *the base side*; and the dull side will be referred to as *the emulsion side* (which accounts for your difficulty with clear leader from which almost all emulsion has been removed – tho' the emulsion side still remains stickier when moistened than the base side.) I will now ask you to make some marks on the emulsion side of the strip: (if you have either black leader or gray leader, I suggest you scratch the emulsion side of the film with some sharp instrument of your own choice) – (if you have clear leader I suggest you use india ink applied with some point suitable for making small dots and fairly even lines) – (if you have any of the other types of strips of film listed above, I encourage either scratching or inking and/or both if you choose) . . . please do not be inhibited by my suggestions as they are only offered with specific reference to forthcoming text – that is, if you are excited enough, at this time, lay aside this book and go to work. And good luck to you if this is our parting point (period).

Your strip of film will have a series of evenly spaced rectangular holes punched along either one or both sides of it: these will be referred to as *sprocket holes*. Film with sprocket holes on both sides will be referred to as *double-sprocketed* – film sprocketed on only one side: *single-sprocketed*. Hold the strip so that it dangles, vertically, down. With double sprocketed film, the space between each set of double sprockets (or, in single-sprocketed film, that space you can define if you imagine an identical set of sprocket holes on the side opposite of those you have) is *the picture area* – that is, each set of sprocket holes defines the area of an individual, unmoving, transparent picture . . . and when you hold the strip vertically, with its emulsion side facing you, it is in position for the correct projection of a series of individual, unmoving, images of exactly what you see on the film when looking through each window defined by sprocket holes (except that, in order to project the image you see, to enlarge it brightly and sharply on some distant plane, you would have to concentrate bright light thru it and focus it sharply thru some lens which would, given an average lens, reverse left to right and vice versa, but not, ordinarily, top to bottom.) If you focus your own eyes sharply upon it, you will notice irregularities in whatever kind of strip you hold, even in the most so-called opaque or black; and these nicks or scratches in black, dust motes and hairs in clear, etc., are, given controlled light and a lens, eminently projectionable (tho' usually considered objectionable) pictures. Similarly, any mark you make, whether scratched, inked, or both, can be projected (*and* objective – dependent on your thoughtfulness, the precision of your mark, and your precise knowledge of the picture area which will be projected – so to be both more precise and, of necessity, general about it: the top and bottom lines of your *frame*, as picture-area is also called, can be imagined as equally dividing the sprocket-holes on either side, the right and left framing as continuing the inside vertical line established by the sprocket-holes . . . tho', generally, this picture area is dependent upon the projector, etc., so that all edges of your frame are somewhat indeterminate.) Now you, the maker, are qualified to make still images for projection; and all those interested in making black and white, hand-drawn, slide films can discontinue reading this book.

And now it is time for a story. I do not know whether it is a true story, in the sense of fact; but it is certainly true in a mythic sense . . . and it is wonderful that so young a medium as motion picture making already has its myths. It is said that Pathé, great 19<sup>th</sup>

century inventor and photographer, invited his friend Méliès , a famous stage magician, over to his house to show him a new gadget he'd created. He projected onto the wall a picture of a beach scene with incoming waves. Méliès must have fidgeted, as image-projection, or transparencies, were nothing new to him (did, in fact, date back centuries to the undetermined origin of shadow-plays); but suddenly the waves in that image began to move, were actually seen coming in to splash dramatically on the beach (and these moving projections were not mere shadow silhouettes in movement but composed of photographic detail.) Méliès' astonishment must have been a joy for Pathé to see, for must immediately have taken the phenomenon as magic, and then as "magic" in his business sense of the word; for, so the story goes, he at once tried to buy whatever gadget produced this effect, and then he asked how it worked, etc. But Pathé would neither sell his marvelous gadget nor would he reveal the secret of its workings; for he said that, to his way of thinking, moving pictures were not entertainment but for serious scientific purposes and to be used only as a recording device, etc. So, Méliès went home and, simply out of his knowledge of transparencies, and his realization that they were capable of moving picture transformations, created a motion picture projector of his own. As I find the origin, or at least the mythological origin, of all moving picture making, other than as defined by Pathé's way of thinking, in this stage magician Méliès, I will refer to him often – of which this is an introduction . . . to be engineering a: how did he do?

As I am assuming that you have no moving picture camera, I suggest you draw, by ink or by scratch, some representation of Pathé's beach scene as you imagine it; and as you are probably finding the finger-nail size picture area somewhat restrictive, I further suggest that you draw, however sketchily, a single in-coming wave. Move down the strip of film one frame and re-draw your wave exactly like the one in the frame above as you are able, only make it a little, a very little, more in-coming – very slightly closer to whichever edge of the frame its crest is pointing. Move down to the third frame and repeat this process, drawing-in your wave a little further. Etcetera. If you choose to become elaborate, you might attempt to draw, in each succeeding frame, some simulation of the increasing collapse of your wave upon some beach or other of your imagination; but this would probably require a more careful study of ocean waves, if you have an ocean available, than you have ever before imagined. In any case, you have now begun the creation of a potentially movable picture universe of your giving. It is a simpler matter for you to set your universe in motion than it was for either God or Méliès, for there are a number of machines ready-made to engage with your basic material, the strip of film, and to automatically project the gift of your incoming wave to a distant enlargement, *and* to project the whole series of waves in such a way as to give them the appearance of being a single wave in movement. These machines can be divided into two types: *moving picture projectors* and *moving picture viewers*. But before I introduce you to these two types, and the various kinds of machines within each category, I would like to make you familiar with the essential process which is common to all so that no matter which kind or type of machine you encounter you will always be able to engage it with whatever film strip you have for the most successful marriage of the two in operation and the simplest possible birth of moving pictures.

If you were drawing on paper, as indeed Méliès must first have done, rather than a strip of moving picture film, as instructed, I would have asked you to make each drawing of



your wave on a different sheet of paper and then to have flipped rapidly through the whole sequence to produce a moving picture. This is, indeed an adequate method with which to practice sequential drawing and serves to illustrate three aspects of the moving picture process:

- (1) What you can most readily notice from thumbing thru flip-pics is that the success of the illusion of movement depends most critically upon the flips: those split-second interruptions between pictures, when one picture has vanished in the blur of the page turning and the next picture has not yet become fully visible – were it not for those interruptions between pictures the pics. themselves would blur into an unintelligible mass of lines . . .
- (2) You can also note that the timing of the flipping, or flip-rhythm, is crucial -- when flipped too slowly, the series reveals itself to be exactly what it is; a series of still pictures . . . when flipped too rapidly, the potential movements blur into one another . . .
- (3) You can further note that the tempo, rate of flip, is dependent upon the number of pictures involved in the production of each movement – too few pictures (with too great a jump between each extension of the lines of movement pic. to pic.) require a slow flip page to page . . . and too many pictures (with too little extension of lines of movement) require fast flipping for a move to be mentionable at all.

If you prefer this thumb-in-hand method of motion-picture making, take your pick, your paper-pics, and be off; but as the movable picturing obtained by this method is not easily projectionable, I'm returning my considerations to the strip of celluloid and moving picture machinery.

(1)

The flippist part, of the above mentioned process (in the moving picture projector, and in some viewers) is called: *the shutter*. It is (in most projectors) a thin piece of metal cut approximately to a half-circle (cut so it looks like a metal pie almost half-eaten.) It is located in the machine somewhere between the light source (the place where the light from the bulb is most concentrated by a condenser lens) and the place where the film strip passes, called: *the gate*. The shutter whirls around a number of times a second, allowing light to pass thru a single frame of the strip of film in place at a rectangular window in the gate called *the shutter opening* (when the cut-out, or eaten, part of the pie, is passing) and then blocking all light (when the metal, uneaten piece, is having its revolution past the shutter-opening.) The actual picture-mover is of course not a thumb but a relatedly named instrument called: *the claw*. This is a movable metal part which, when the machine is in operation, jerks out beside the top of the shutter-opening, zips down along the outer side of the shutter-opening, and disappears at the bottom only to appear again at the top to repeat the process a number of times a second. When a film strip is loaded in the gate (that is, between the two plates of smooth metal designed for film passage) the claw will engage with each sprocket hole on the outside edge of the film, pull the strip down a frame at a time, and repeat this process with regularity for the length of the film. It essentially controls the stop-and-start movements of the strip of film; but its actions are dependent upon two wheels, one on each side of the gate, whose outer edges are spoked

by a number of little claws which, during revolution of the wheels, convert the continuous unrolling and rolling-up movement of the film into a stop-start movement for precise control by the claw in the gate. These wheels, so crucial to moving pictures, have remained essentially un-named, but I call them: *sprocket-wheels*, bless them. Where you have a continuous movement converted into a dis-continuous, stop-and-start, movement and back again, you need two areas of slack in a strip of film. When threading a strip of film into a projector, a loop is left on either side of the gate, between the gate and the sprocket-wheels, for this purpose.

(2)

The timing of the flipping, flip-rhythm, is dependent upon inter-action between the shutter, the claw, and the sprocket-wheels. The shutter and the claw are synchronized so that the shutter is only open when the claw is disengaged from the sprocket hole and the frame is held perfectly still in the gate, so that the light passing thru the shutter opening and the film frame projects only one picture, held absolutely still, at a time and not the movement of the strip of film. When the shutter closes, cutting off all light, the claw engages the next sprocket hole and moves the film strip down one frame and disengages again before the next revolution of the shutter allows light to pass. The sprocket wheels, on either side of this process, keep unraveling and rolling up the film in time to the shuffle of the claw and the whirl of the shutter, insuring space enough of top and bottom loop for the stop-start dance of the film through the gate.

(3)

Flip-tempo, the speed with which a film strip passes thru the gate, is determined by the speed of the motor controlling all synchronous movements; and (in most projectors but only a very few kinds of viewers) this speed can be set at either 16 frames per second, called *silent speed*: or 24 frames per second, called: *sound speed*. (Some silent projectors only run at 16 frames per second; and a few silent projectors run at a variety of speeds which are essentially undeterminable – the latter being also true of most viewers, which have no motor and are dependent upon the speed with which the film is pulled thru by hand; but a few, very expensive, viewers are motor driven and are both variable as to speed and also able to run at silent and sound speeds.) The determination of proper speed is dependent upon the film strip. For instance, if there is a great leap between each movement of your in-coming wave, you will find the illusion of continuous movement, and speed of movement, more believable if the film strip is projected at 16 (or even less) frames per second. If you have taken a long time, and many frames, to draw your wave in, then 24 (or even more) frames per second may be required to speed your movement up to believability. Naturally, this is also a question of taste, a determination of style, and ultimately an altogether individual which I leave up to you.

((Viewers are also called *editors*; and, as that name implies, they are principally used while editing film strips into a larger continuity. As they do not project the image across much space (and are essentially for identification purposes rather than show) they approximate the motion picture effect much more simply, and less effectively, than the projector. The film is threaded between two metal plates, *the viewer gate*, but usually only engages with one sprocketed wheel, on either side of the gate, which completely

replaces the claw of the projector. No loop is needed because *the claw wheel*, as I call this viewer wheel, turns a cylinder (under a window in the viewer gate) which contains a prism that scans the frame of the film strip (as it continually moves) in a way which gives each frame the appearance of remaining still (while light is passing thru) and reflects these seeming-still pictures thru a series of internal mirrors and onto a frosted glass called: *the viewing plate*. Thus the film strip passes, from left to right or vice versa, emulsion side up or down, depending on the kind of viewer, in as straight a line as possible thru a gate and over, or under, a clawed wheel. Motor controlled viewers, usually called: *Movieolas*: thread much the same as a projector.))

If you are more inclined to *take* machine for granted, and have thus *given* very little attention to the foregoing, admittedly difficult, description – I offer the following simple, push-button, instructions to permit you to thread your film by rote, by hook or by crook, or whatever:

- (1) Place the emulsion side down, usually.
- (2) Engage outer sprocket holes with the spokes of the upper sprocket wheel.
- (3) Make a small loop above the polished metal plates.
- (4) Slip the film, emulsion side out, usually, between the two polished metal plates, or into what is called the gate.
- (5) Make sure your film is in a position where the little claw beside the window on the inner gate will be able to engage with your sprocket holes.
- (6) Find the lever which presses the outer gate firmly against the inner gate.
- (7) Make a small loop under the gate.
- (8) Thread your film around the sprocket wheel under the gate.
- (9) Find the shortest route around whatever wheels are left to get the head end of your film onto the wheel for winding it up. (We'll come to instructions for threading film around the sound producing apparatus, in sound projectors, later because, in most sound projectors, you can by-pass this set of wheels, etc., and save wear on your film when projecting silent pictures.)

## Letter to Jane Brakhage About Visit to Olson

(Mimeographed copy of letter to Jane written from Gloucester, Mass.:)

Friday, May 17, 1963

(Prefaced with quote from the torn-out page, of an unknown paperback book, as found by Charles Olson on the streets of Gloucester as we were parting after our 12-hour talk):

### “‘EASTERN CONFERENCE

---

Conditions are much more complicated in the Eastern sphere of influence. Advance information indicates a run to the wire which may develop into a three-way photo, a bit of jokeying not viewed unkindly by the higher echelon around the league of fans. Anyway, let's watch the Eastern Conference public-relations advisors carry the ball for their teams.'

Enclosed find "First report of 'Eastern Conference'", as Olson said of the page of a book found on the street at 4:00 this morning, as he walked me back to Gerrit Lansing's apt. after more than twelve hours together. We took note, laughing together in the deserted Gloucester streets, agreeing it should be sent on to you, he saying: "Ah, yes, send it on to Jane, just by itself as 'First report'"; but I do feel the need, this morning to write as much as I can of the entire 12 hour experience, to share with you as much of what can this morning be remembered as possible – and also to have some record available to conscious mind even tho' I'm sure the deep-working centers of our conversation will already be moving subconscious, taking direction away from what I might throw up or put down.

I arrived, with bags full of groceries and beer, in company of Gerrit Lansing and Harry Martin at 4:00 in the afternoon, was immediately overwhelmed by the SIZE of the man and the electric look of the face, his grizzley beard, up-standing hair, all white, the reflections of lights in his glasses, thru which his eyes pierce with a look that would terrify were it not for the amazingly immediate look of the man, the love out-going as clearly as if, and being, blessings. I began taking stills almost immediately, filling the air with flashes of light (having now an entire roll of still photos of the Olsons), keeping myself on that sight plain until the others had left – at which point, Olson and I moved out for a walk along the bay front to 'the bridge', then up around Gloucester streets, turning back along 'Angel' street, into his favorite bar, then on home late at night for waiting supper with Betty (Charles Peter being then in bed, beautifully asleep, 8 year old boy turned into himself in sleep making me wonder so much about Bearthm), and so on talking in the kitchen, drinking 'Old Crow' until 3:30. And of that whole talking time, the range was so extensive I cannot really believe even the small fragments I remember could have been packed into 12 hours.

The money problem came up almost immediately, Olson being clear in confirmation of 'this last year' being most difficult ever – but quick to follow with: "That's changing, changing so fast . . . I see that change – yes, I HEAR you." And "How it takes form in terms of money: but then remember, this IS America – in 3 weeks this whole picture could be changed for all of us . . . I mean that quickly the money can move, when the time's right. When Robert Duncan was last here he asked me was I interested in 'A College', having himself some source. I said, 'Awww, come on, Robert, you know it isn't going to work this way. What's needed is 12 men each independently supported, backed, in such a way that they form flanges of hierarchy – given that support, you'll HAVE that which attracts everyone of importance TO-gether, won't need land, won't need buildings, won't need ad-ministration . . . will HAVE it, what's needed." First clear statement I've had, after listening to stories and stories of hierarchitectitoptopticals re: college, like Branaman's mad dream or The Kelly's 'Blue Yak' dream college. Then: "In the meantime, get to the center, quickly – don't fuck around with small colleges . . . get to the BIG centers, use them, you CAN, you know – I mean, even the MEDIUM, film, having that possibility built in, IN, to it . . . the power there, thru the eye, I mean: how anyone will go in to look at a movie, you hear?, are you hearing me?" . . . myself wondering all the time if this wasn't another version of Duncan's old belief that I was going to make it in Hollywood, beCAUSE of my medium, and be able to support everybody while actually 'making it', or Michael's recent insistence that my fate, as an artist, would be, at least economically, easier than his just because of the medium, etc.

Then, in all this time, Olson did show me how Gloucester is, really, an island, how he was raised on the first point of "the mainland – or, that point geographically furthest out, I mean where I could be most easterly-westerly . . . how I was, as my father before me, letter-carrier: my first job as a boy – right here, where we're standing." And he showed me the place where, unknown to everyone, a battleship's hull is buried, one wall of it backed by shit from the sewers of the town, the apparatus, wheels, tubes, being that which pumps the shit out from Gloucester into the bay, the whole thing buried under a monument centered in an innocuous plot of grass – "I mean, what goes on underground." He showed me the house which was his focal point for reconstructing history in 'Maximus' – now lived in by the president of the John Birch Society of Gloucester. We began talking of schools, he clarifying for me that all my worries about the girls and Bearthm going to school must be centered where the complete concern is: with the total system, of which school is just one small aspect. What a relief – and how wonderful that I could think of coming to terms with the total system easier than particularized 'school', etc. He showed me the house where a man who 'actually studied with Ruskin' lives, now growing the most beautiful flowers. He showed me the house where he had left his mother that awful night written of as St. Valentine's Day Storm, wandered down to the bay to be bombarded by sheets of ice blown in from the sea – . In the bar we began talking of Eisenstein, the wide-screen concept ("Do you really have anything to add to that?" – which I thought best left unanswered until he had seen my films . . . the following night) and then on into "vision" and "drugs". "You must take psilocybin – all the rest very dangerous. Nuts to that whole science scene – completely right to keep free of it, as you have . . . all spreading bullshit to hide the one drug of value IF taken in company, a simple occasion – no bullshit . . . just a way of seeing." I then threw up "One ring to bind 'em". This seemed to raise some doubt, then very specific concern with

respect to myself – “Yes, okay, I’ll wait and see . . . you may be right there.” Then we shifted quickly to drama, began talking deeply of how-why it doesn’t work, with complete agreement from him on my tracing the breakdown to drama into ‘ring to bind ‘em’ with the loss of the ‘mask’, drama now making flesh masks for people to wear out each other against, etc. . . . he adding “the introduction of the female onto the stage” (“misplaced cunt dominating all else”) and the “star system” (“cult of personality rather than creation of Person”). But we did start with Robert’s “Adams Way”, and onto why the greatest living dramatist cannot finish a play, the social scene impinging, as it did in S.F. in a way to make finish in life, not on stage, etc. Olson: “Yes, we must, must, must get rid of drama, at all costs – I mean, even get rid of narrative – the temptation . . . you hear?”

Then, after supper, the question of magic: here, dear Jane, for all of my trying to remember, the deep substance of this matter is too deep in me for any kind of transcription; but I will put down what does come to the surface as best I can. It begins with reference directly to ‘the eyes’, Olson’s wonderful re-spect: that he had said to me much earlier, within five minutes after meeting him, to be precise: “With you, Brakhage, it is at this point a question of focus – is it not?” Then, later, after supper, stomach pulling at my brains, I shifted to superficial level of defending black magic of [Willard] Maas and [Maya] Deren, as filmmakers, by way of “After all, film is at the Lascaux Cave-painting level.” Then quickly, sternly back from him: “Don’t give me that! I’m an authority on cave painting, as you surely know. Stop trying to defend the fact that you ARE, are you not?, myopic, that is: NEAR-sighted: and wall eyed . . . as am I . . . as is Robert Duncan . . . Right?” After immediate relief of: “Yes, yes, of course,” from me, Olson went right on: “I have, even tho’ I suffer from claustrophobia, crawled around IN these tunnels, seen how, very often, the Pleistocene man HAD, that is chose, to paint where he couldn’t have been more than six inches from where he was painting, eyes THAT close. And the point is, after all, that Pleistocene man WAS that close to us, where we are – that is: he was living in a world where all predators, that is everything that COULD EAT HIM, was so MUCH larger than he was! . . . and then how he did choose to paint where he did, in that most difficult position, rather than just anywhere, per chance. I love that sense of that fisty little creature being, maybe, FIRST to say: ‘Fuck you’ to all of it which didn’t arise from HIM self, in the sense of: ‘ I will have it my way’ . . . I mean, his knowing that he must be given instruction or be eaten by nature, one way or the other (Hero being, to me, later, being only ‘He who demonstrates Nature’ – that is, being memorable biographically ONLY . . . you hear? . . . only – Hero still being just that except for interference with Nature – that is: specifically THAT which threatens us all with annihilation . . . that is, HOW the Hero has been possessed, is no longer relevant, BECAUSE nature is being so possessed . . . how in Dogtown even, that area which, since the beginning has certainly been the most beautiful natural spot of these surroundings, NOT dependent on any man’s concept, not quote natural unquote, IS now being made center of reservoir, place where trees are being cut down other trees planted, paced, whole basin filled with water, dust of their blasting settling over the whole eastern seaboard. And now, how YOU Brakhage must get clear about focus – right? . . . I mean, do you hear me? . . . that is: Hold your hand in front of your face and find OUT just how far away you can take it, and how close, without throwing all the lines of that hand out of focus.” I tried it, found FOCUS somewhere between 4 and 6 inches, that is: “How

wonderful I can teach you that, you with all concerns of vision so wonderful – that I am permitted to teach you where your TRUE focus IS . . . and believe me, it is somewhere there for all men – RIGHT THERE. And you DID know it at 18 when you threw away those glasses . . . I mean, the TRUTH of it which you just hadn't YET come to think of, make reference to, in your BRAIN.” Then, Olson leaning over closely, winking, holding his hands that close to his face, saying: “And, Brakhage, what is all the rest beyond that point – I mean what IS all that out there which we CALL focus? . . . What IS focus, Brakhage? Hey?”

(I am now writing almost 24 hours later than when I ended the last paragraph – much more of the conversation has, natch, been forgotten; but there's some advantage in that yesterday I went again over to Olson's and the conversation did tend to take off from the end point of the above paragraph . . . so, rather than try to stick to narrative, I'll just write what I've understood of all this talking these last two days, as it comes to me as a total picture.)

(It should be understood that if my memory ear was that correct, I could put most of the following in quotes, after the name of Olson, except that I will make crucial mistakes, probably, out of my problems, and that it did all arise out of conversation between us):

There is a, probably precisely determinable, diamond line which could be drawn so that one point would be crucial outer focus, another crucial inner focus, the other two points of the four available for a drawing of a line which would bisect the diamond into two triangles – TAKE that line as LOCUS, in a view-plate sense: that is: out of the understanding that there are three rings which bind men (a departure from Tolkien's number): “thought”, “consciousness” and “sense-perception”, the latter really meaning: the eye, how it dominates all other senses in men. Referring to Michael McClure there was a loooooong name relating him, per example, specifically to me, by way of affliction, which did break down to another triangle, rings of ring true, the three corners of which could be viewed as corresponding to a type having: “Narcissism”, “shyness”, and “desire to have absolute power over the world” . . . characteristics. But then there is all that which men CALL focus, a flexible diamond, that is: subject to squeeze-play in the mind, it's bisecting line being most clear as horizon line (calling up in my mind the quest shun: what point beyond the horizon line must I be focused upon, in order to see horizon line as that line which bisects that diamond: i.e. fixes it . . . to which Olson immediately answered: “You must have Hopi”, being playful with what he later referred to as: “The Hopi Indian having the only language which was constructed to make speech in terms of ‘definition’ possible . . . that is that the Hopi would only speak in terms of where he was, would have to walk over there, locomotion, to speak of what was there, then being where he was, a - gain (( in fairness to Olson's speech, he was throwing back at me a lot of puns here, and laughingly, in reference to the puns he had just read in some of my newer writing – he being specifically clear that I should stop using ‘em, that dispersal, in my writing))). (P.S., pisssss – “But given 4 to 6 inches as my ‘True Focus’, I said, ‘You, Olson, are already ‘over there’” . . . He replied ((present not, foot, how impossible type-wise it is to change a capital H to a small h)) . . . he replied: “You know nothing of Aurora? – I mean, to keep it simple: don't you know about your Aurora . . . that given temperature ((I don't mean Aura)) that inner temperature you have always with you -- I

mean, how you die, even, with your Aurora on, so to speak . . . but we'll get to that later." . . . something of it beginning to be clear when Charles Peter gave me some stereopticon cards with glasses, and that when I said "Thank you, I'll give them to my children" and he, the boy, replied "No. Keep them yourself", Bet gave me quick lesson in it of it by saying: "You see, he's a Hopi – that is, he doesn't know your children.) that – is . . . (damn the distraction of parenthesis) . . . there are, at least, TWO things which MUST be taken as "stabile": "energy" and "dimension": that is that when Olson was under sillosybin and went to the toilet to pee he became aware of the sense that tho' the toilet seemed miles away from him in distance, it remained the same size and that he was able to pee directly into the center of it: that is: tho' all of what was beyond 4 to 6 inches, even tho' CLEARLY not true focus ergo being CLEARLY picture of the mind OUT, appeared unstable, he (out of his energy) was peeing into it (because it had a fixed dimension). Given these two "stabile's" (this form) out of his prime necessity (out of the prime truth of total organic necessity) he could "instruct" all the rest, just as Pleistocene man had, etc . . . out of, or gaining, TWO other truths: "The World as the object of God . . . God being, therefore, the subject of The World" (The caps and the "therefore" possibly being my thoughtless addition – I don't know. That is: when I told him the vision of the four entities appearing to me during the editing of *Sirius Remembered* he took that as a kind of visitation which was to make me aware of the four corners of a given position so that I would be enabled to go on my own way; but when I told him of the statement "We cannot go deeper unless you stop smoking" Olson responded with immediate sense of: "Ah yes, that's the way she usually speaks, that is: that's instruction which you are bound, if you want to go on your own way, to resist." . . . this before he'd heard how I'd resisted, tho' he could see me smoking.) (Somewhere in here he suggested, pulled out, and read from, Coon's: "The Story of Man", making, a day later but as if to give the other side, a "horrible book", called: "The Assessment of Men", taking great delight in the fact that Coon was typical American in that he had gone to the very site ((I almost spelled "sight")) where a Frenchman had dug up "the oldest human skull yet found", and that Coon had, when shown the digging, gone immediately WITH HIS FINGERS and dug deeper until he found yet an OLDER skull and OPENED UP THE WHOLE FIELD – at which point Olson pulled out a Mayan Owl head in stone which he'd dug up with his own fingers, somehow knowing where to dig . . . and when I said: "How did you know where, if you do not rely on 'magic'", it opened up the whole discussion of magic, albeit with some reluctance on his part. Robert Duncan kept, naturally, coming up into the conversation here: "As I wrote Robert the other day: there are only three terms of time we should deal with now: day, year, millenium – He replied by referring to those first 7 years of man's growth, that being his crisis: how we get up to adolescence, that is: sex, etc." Or: "AS I wrote Robert, and that part of my reply which he could make most use of, poem coming out of it, that Christ was the FIRST sacrifice, yes LAST too, that is the beauty of how he laid his life down as sacrifice, I mean, like in animals – 'cut my throat' . . . Christ being FIRST HUMAN we know of to so come to terms with 'thought', consciousness' and 'sense perception' right out of 'Narcissism', 'shyness', yes AND 'desire to have power over the world.'" ((Olson then reading me Robert's reply which did take Christ as 'Second person', after ADAM 'First Person', in terms of subject of the world (((you see, Jane, how hard it is for me to, how I must capitalize "ADAM" over my mistake of God in that place – and I was right there to take Adam in terms of "subject of



the world”? . . . of course not – Jesus, how have I to keep the demons at bay in writing this to you with true perspective . . . i.e. what is Adam? . . . well, Duncan had said something like “I take Adam as made.” . . . puns using him?))) )) ) Wow – parenthesis’ (that is, on end, ‘says’ and/or parant thesis.) that – as a matter of FACT: “We live at the beginning of a new millenium – God, what an exciting time . . . how much there is to do, that is: how much we must here instruct the angels who are at this time running around being very busy, needing our instruction, and OF our necessity, that is of your necessity and my necessity, etc.” And, as to magic: “You are not a black magician – you are a white magician, and that is a very difficult, dangerous thing to be in a time like this . . . I mean how much we are each of us drawn to evil in such a time, how easy it is, how each of us falls into it all ways, that is because of all the ways.”

Now as I’m being presumptuous enough to put in quote marks outside of parenthesis, here, that is above, I’m going to copy out of Gerrit Lansing’s wonderful collection some printed statements of Olson’s which came up over and over again, threading in and out of the conversation as references I should, and have, and am here making, to end the substance of this letter – give you as much as I can, dear Jane, knowing your needs, dearest Jane, they being so related to mine now and for a later look-up for each of us . . .

To start with, as Olson read it over and over to me, out of the Melville book “Call Me Ishmael”, look up the passage in there where Melville makes, strikes, balance between Goetic (Olson making reference to “trickster” magic there, immediately) and Theurgic (Olson emphasizing, “to start with The – or, to pun, Godic, magic). “

(Then I copied the following:

O’RYAN  
Postscript To Proprioception & Logography  
Bridge-work  
THEORY OF SOCIETY:

and will now add the short poem Olson copied out for me on the inside of my return-train-ticket envelope, saying: “Here’s your ticket.”):

And now let all the ships come in,  
Pity and love The Return The Flower  
The Gift & The Alligator catches  
and the mind go forth to the end of the world.

In a letter dated “Early Nov., 1965,” Stan Brakhage sent the following to Michael McClure, referring to it as “the rest of your *Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book*.” This was later published in *Brakhage Scrapbook: Collected Writings 1964-1980*, edited by Robert A. Haller for Documentext, 1982.

## Making Light of Nature of Light

“Any fool can see for himself – “, like they say . . .

It is the light we share.

I had meant, since beginning *The Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book*, to write about the taking of light, the use of it: taking a light reading, so to speak – *with* a light meter, as it’s called . . . *for* the figuring out, like they say, the whereabouts, on the movable ring of the lens marked with “f”, the numbers of it should be placed so that a picture might be taken. As I came to worry the subject in the mind’s eye, came to see where I’d left off writing this book altogether and to foresee how impossible it was becoming to write was left of it, I finally arrived at the thought that the book had perhaps better be called *The Moving Picture Giving Book*: and that I had better let it go at that. IN that light then, if you’ll pardon the pun/fun of it, I’ve come to the beginning of wanting *to make light of* all taking – of *light*, of *pictures*, of *others*, of *myself* in this “take”, as an “exposure before development” is called, this taken then of my mind’s eye moving through thought to language in this writing.

My first instruction, then: if you happen to have a light meter – give it away . . . otherwise: give over reading this further and get on with the game of numbers you’re playing and its absolute sets of what is *scene*: for I am going on, from here, with *seeing* – any/everyone’s ultimate gift to the motion picture medium.

Beg, borrow, or buy (I do not believe in stealing) a moving picture camera with at least one lens on it (a “used” 8mm camera is perhaps most in need of your blessings and will, thus, very likely come to you easily in the family attic for ten to fifteen dollars *at most* from a store – but please don’t accept a magazine camera, even as more than temporary gift, as it will cost you more money for film in the long run . . . and please NO “automatic exposure” photo-machine either – that “seeing eye” dog of a camera.) Get a roll of film, *any* film that is the same millimeter as your camera. Somewhere on the box of it, or on a paper on the inside of it, or from the store proprietor, you will find a number coming after the letters A.S.A.: and if your film is a “color” one you will find the information as to whether it’s a “Daylight or a “Tungsten”. Keep all this information in mind.

Let us suppose to start with a “black & white” film, as that is usually less expensive. Let us even suppose, to start to begin, that you have not yet given yourself a camera. Collect yourself a handful of tiny objects, such as would sit neatly on a fingernail, and also an empty spool and film can the size and millimeter of the full one you have in hand, and a small or “pencil” flashlight. Find the darkest room available to you; and sit in it for

awhile, some ten to fifteen minutes say, looking all around for the light. You will find yourself, thus, fulfilling the initiation rites of many religious cults: but you need not let that worry you. Look for any light coming in under doors, thru curtains, or wheresomever; and cut it off with old rag stuffing, thick coats over windows, etc. . . . and you need not worry about that, either, for, as you cut off the light you're *used to*, you will come to *be given* to see many kinds of light you may not have known existed before.

If you begin to feel foolish in this darkened room doing these things, please continue; but if you've only come to find the me-in-your-mind as foolish for the above writing, then please stop reading and try, rather, something on your own until you've managed to make a fool out of yourself – for the writing, from here on out, is specifically for the “fool” who can “see for himself” . . . no other than that in mind.

When the room is dark of all light you're used to, and before you begin to look for more light than may come to you, open the box and/or can of film and place it on the one side of you, with the empty reel and its can on the other side of you. Unwind some film (a good five feet or so). Attach the end of it to, and wind it up on, the empty reel (a piece of tape will help). Then place both reels in their cans, bending the film carefully over the edge of each can, so that the lids may be put on without more than gently folding the film, without more than a soft diagonal crease in the film, without tearing, etc. There should be, then, several feet of film between closed cans. Place this firmly on a flat surface (tape, again, will help) so that the sticky side (when moistened to test it between fingers) is up. Place your tiny objects along the length of the film. You may, of course, do this as carefully or as haphazardly as you choose. If you choose to give your care you will remember that each space between sprocket holes (which you can feel with your fingernails in the dark) is an individual picture which will when projected flash in some other darkness at a fraction of a second – the area between and to the direct side of any two sprocket holes in 8mm and “single-sprocket” 16mm, the area within the rectangle of any four sprocket holes in “double-sprocket” 16mm, the area to the side of any four sprocket holes of “single-sprocket” 35mm, etc. The more you think of these things while placing your objects on the film, even in the case of your first endeavor, the more you give of form, of yourself thus to form, of the medium in the eventual projection of images, as always, about to be made.

Think of your flashlight, then, as a wand, for it is something more magic than a flash that we want of it, something more than any simple light, as we're used to, use of it. We want to make a ray – a Man Ray we'll call it, in honor of the man, so named, who first made it – directed by all of the thoughts, as above, and conditioned by two pieces of information kept in mind: the “A.S.A.” number and, if color, the indication of “Daylight” or “Tungsten” . . . but, assuming again “black & white” film, let us assume a number after A.S.A. a small one, say between one and ten, will tell us that the film will take a lot of the light we give it to make an “exposure”. A large number after A.S.A., say any number above fifty, will tell us that the film is very sensitive, so to speak, to light and will over-expose, as they call it, with the slightest bit of our illumination. Let us assume, to start then, an A.S.A. 5 – the American Standard Association's average exposure for most motion picture “sound stock” film . . . this low rating will permit us a great deal more play of/and/with light in our giving exposure to film. We can possibly even use the pencil

flashlight to write directly upon the strip of film, if we write quickly and if the point of light of it is sharp enough, focused enough. As we move our wand away from the film, its beam spreads till, finally, evenly over the whole length of the strip, its exposure interfered with only by the objects we've placed on it and their shadows. As we think of its beam as a ray, we may come to direct it elsewhere and only indirectly light the film; and as we come to think of the ray as a Man Ray each one can then, honoring tradition, become aware of what's undone and, being that self each is, direct the particular ray in hand, wave that wand wheresomever, as is most wanted, around whatever particular room in relation to the strip of film, writing directly upon it in one place and never permitting the light to shine other than indirectly upon it in another, creating a dance of the shadows of the object placed upon it, throwing shadows of objects in the room across it, etcetera . . . BUT, whatever each chooses to do with this instant, *we ALL share* in this: *the light* can only illuminate that room for a very few seconds for the film's exposure, film's take, as it were. Even with an A.S.A. of 5, I would guess that more than two or three seconds of direct light, from however small and dim a flash wand, would expose the film to the extent that, when developed, it would be clear leader (if reversal film) or black leader (if negative film) as defined at the beginning of this book: and we would thus – for we all *do* share the light, share thus the conditions of time of light in relation to film – be back where we started from, with no trace upon the film, no sign or record even, of the magic each was making in the room of his or her most individual dark. The higher the A.S.A. number of the film, the further must the wand be kept from the strip and/or the quicker the speed of illumination. But if all has gone well, each will have (when the film is developed) what is called “A Rayogram” for moving picture projection. But before developing, I would suggest that the process, as described above, be repeated for the entire length of the roll of film, each exposed strip being taken up into the can on the one side as the unexposed strips are unraveled from the other. As should be obvious, the whole length of film need not, indeed *should* not, be done all at once. Other than tiny objects may be placed upon the film, as say cloth for texture shadows, glass for refraction patterns, etc. And, assuming your film is color, various colored glasses or filters may be placed upon the strip, the point of the wand, or around the room, even, for a play of hues. If the film is a “Daylight” one, all whatever-colors will transform on film to completely other-colors, because the film was exposed to flash wand rather than the sun wand intended – generally speaking, there will be more yellow in everything (unless it overexposes) because the flashlight will not be passing thru the blue of the sky as the sun's light does before exposing film . . . and you can, thus, put a “sky” in front of your wand in the form of a bluish filter taped onto your flashlight to render more approximate colors with “Daylight” film. If your film is marked “Tungsten”, you'll know that word refers to the filaments of your flashbulb or electric-light-other and that the “sky” or blue of it has been put already into the film itself by the manufacturer, so that without your adding a filter the colors will be rendered more approximately – tho', in truth, they will still be transformed utterly into colors other than those of the objects placed upon the film, or between the light and the film, etc.: and I would hope you have the good sense to be aware of these differences when the film is developed, bless you.

Now if all the above does seem an end in itself, have patience for I, too, am tired of these mechanical limitations, would have us share more mysteriously in the light, am about to fool *with* the camera (rather than professionally fool it) and, for the sake of illumination,

become the fool *of* the camera and all its means (being amateur – lover . . . at heart). But if the above be beginning for you, quit reading and get on with it . . . joy to you!

Now, a camera can be thought of as a small closet (box) into which the film may be put (with pegs to hang the full and empty spools upon and a gate, much like the projector's described earlier, to thread the film thru) which has a wand-like light focuser (lens) screwed into it so that whatever external illumination which is "gathered", as it's called, by the wand *can* be focused into an image on the surface of the film, *can be*, thus, recorded by the light-sensitive grains of the emulsion of the film so as to be developed, later, into a picture which is projectionable. The motor of the camera simply conditions the movement of the film in relation to the shutter (the same as in the projector except that, in camera case, the film is always stilled for the gathering of light, at shutter's opening, rather than for the projection thereof thru the film). When we hold the camera, therefore, we have the whole closet as well as wand in hand, stand *IN* the light and condition whatever of it and of images of objects reflecting that light we wish to affect the surface of the film. The motors of most cameras will permit us to flash light onto the strip of film at a variety of speeds by pre-setting a dial on the outside of the box which conditions and indicates how fast the film is moving thru the gate (usually marked: "8 – 12 – 16 – 24 – 32 – 48 – 64", etc – meaning: "8 frames per second – 12 frames per second", etc.) because the speed with which the shutter opens and closes is conditioned by the number of times the film is stopped-and-started-etc. each second. We can also control the dimness and brightness of these flashes of light by setting the ring marked "f stops" around the lens itself (typically marked: "f 1.5 – 2 – 2.8 – 4 – 5.6 – 8 – 11 – 16 – 22" – meaning, for all intents and purposes, that when the lens is set at its lowest number, say "f 1.5", its iris, as it's called, is *wide open*, like an eye in the dark, that at "f 2" it is a little bit closed, permitting less light, that at "f 11" it's about half closed and that at "f 22" it's almost closed, like the iris of an eye looking straight into the sun or at sun's direct reflection on a beach or bright snow scene) because, for *our* intents and purposes the "f stops" are like distances we keep between the flash light and the film according to the A.S.A. of it. If the A.S.A. is a low number, such as A.S.A. 5, then we can set our lens at a low "f", say "f 1.5", on a bright day even and still set an image upon it. If it is a high number A.S.A., such as "A.S.A. 120", closing our lens to "f 22" may not suffice under the same circumstances to make other than white or black leader: but then these "circumstances" also depend, for picture, upon the speed of the film and, thus, shutter, and of course upon whether one is under the sun of this bright day or in the shade of it, in a house, etc. These many circumstances cause most photographers to use a light meter to determine their exposure, the setting of the "f stop" ring, etc.: but I suggest you play the fool, along with me, fool around in the light *with* your camera, be the fool *of* both (fool neither) and come along on an adventure, the nature of which is the nature of light itself.

First we must deal with the Light *of* Nature, than with Nature of Light. And set your science aside, please, as we've no more use for it than what is *of* it as embodied in the camera in hand – an ordinarily closed system (as any machine) for taking pictures . . . which I am about to cause to flower (as my usual) wide openly in a gift of in-and-out-sight to the means of it. The camera will try to give back simply taken pictures (as that's what it's made for) but in the exchanges between us (myself and machine) there'll be, if I'm lucky as usual (and for you too if you're able as anyone) *a made thing* (an un-pic'ed

image) which gives as much as it takes, *an illumination* (made as much *of* as *with* light) which should be a joy to see. I might, as I often have before, make a discovery (called “creation” most usually): and you, too, might, if you can but give your eyes to the medium (as any maker finally must) as a gift *beyond* any desire, to see or other, any request, etc. “We shall see” refers to conditions, such as technical limitations, which we share, as we share the light. “I see” is an unconditional surrender to the light for a fool’s vision. When giving sight to the medium, “*with*, rather than *thru*, the eye” (William Blake), *with*, rather than *thru*, machine, *with* any means at your bestowal (rather than disposal), *with* the light, and naturally then OF all these things also as in any gift, the term “moving picture giving” takes on a blessed (and necessary to me) dimension, viz.:

If you will, but listen (give your attention) to the camera motor (as you press its button – *never*, please, at speeds higher than 32 frames per second when there’s no film in it, as that will often snap its spring) and you will *hear* some semblance of the speeds of film’s run thru it . . . if you will, then, think of yourself as collector of light, thru wand of lens, for gift to film, you can then come to know yourself as conditioner of the light entering the magic box you hold in your hand – that you can slow or speed up the flashes of it, on the film’s surface, by changing motor speed – that you can collect the most of the light you stand in by turning the “f” ring to its lowest number, opening the iris of the lens widest, and/or can limit the power of the sun itself with each “stop down”, as it’s called, to the highest number. And if you can, then, but give yourself to the light around you (keeping *sense* of the above conditions on circumstances) till you are attracted to one area or another of the direct or reflected light (taking a *stance* in relation to your surroundings), you will be able, by a pointing of lens and a turning of its rings, to give some of your inner illumination to the surface of that film (give the song of your *sensing*, what you’ve seen AND thought of it, to the film’s heard movement in the camera), viz-a-viz:

If you want the light you’re sensing to take shape upon the surface of the film, to etch itself there in sharp lines of the edges of its reflecting forms, you will guess at the distance *from the film’s surface* to the most of the objects within the rectangular space of your looking (thru the “viewfinder”) and will set the numbers of the “foot” ring of your lens (usually numbered from “1 ft.” to “oo”, a symbol standing presumptuously for “infinity”) accordingly; whereas, if you want the light to affect the film’s face more impressionistically, you can “soften the focus”, like they say; and, therefore, if you want light’s tones unenclosed in shapes, you can set close object’s image in “infinity” or obliterate landscapes and distant forms with a “1 ft.” setting. Wherever you would interfere with the light, take account of shadows as exactly as if they were objects placed upon the film emulsion in a darkened room, as if a setting of the lens to the exact distance of the shadow were a placing of the object flat upon film surface, etc. A breath upon the lens will often add the Wester-eyes’ed sense of halo, or the mystic’s aura, or a whole fog even. A drop of water, or some similar refractor placed before the lens, will split the beams of any direct light into the very lines tunneling out of it which must, once, have given Western man the idea that the sun was in harness, or reigned, and then caused him to later create a way of seeing called Renaissance perspective we take too much for granted; and a soft focusing of these lines will spread these lines to rays, as clouds or dust storms often scatter sun. And many things may be put before the lens to simulate

something of mind's eye, thought's light, on film – if you use a “Tungsten” film in the daylight, for instance, an orangish filter will render the colors what we call “truer”, just as a blue filter is used with “Daylight” film to put some sky into electrical illumination, etc. . . . but all of these conditionings I've written above are a hatch of hind-sight, a taking of light for some use or other – not much more of a gift to the medium than the taking of a picture. Not being a poet, I cannot write much other than “about”, write out of some poet endeavor, whereas a gift is always a present, so to speak . . . it will take some very creative you in the gift of reading this to make this writing more than a take. Permit me to illustrate, become the reader myself of the below, now, blank of page in seeing search of nature of light, viz-ability:

“Blank” (as all words) interfering with my read of the texture of the paper, the shadow blackened creases end spots impressed on the white field of it – “white” coming to mind to block any seeing of the yellow of the lamplight upon it, reflecting from off it, and as if lying heavily across the whole surface of it – “yellow” blanketing the mind's eye as if to cover up the sense of the blue, as it's collected in each shadow like pools with deep purple centers or flaring palely over the whole surface and almost flickering at page top nearest my window in instreaming daylight – “blue” (as “purple” and “black” and all earlier color words) finally giving way to eye's sight of an other-than-electric yellow whirling within blue on page and sky out my window in some as-if struggle with blue, an eddying all thru the air of these environs, which I follow up the margin of the page I'm reading till blue takes shapes surrounded by yellows of skylight, but shapes that are almost invisible under apparently shifting folds of “Tungsten” yellow, each blue whirl taking general shape of ball with curved comet-like tail, all shapes blackened in focus of concentration on the page, tho' easily seen bluishly out my window, all tailed-spheres spiraling as if in the heat of liquid gold (those being Reich's “Orgones” in, say, C. S. Lewis's “yellow space”?) – “Orgones” taking away all sight-sense of the vision, “Reich's” taking the experiencing away from me, and “C. S. Lewis” as literary reference intellectualizing my seeing beyond any sense of it . . . thus, all within that last parenthesis disperses the vision, making sense of what was a sensing (do not, please, permit me to do that to you, dear reader) – my sense of “reader”, “dear” or otherwise, interfering utterly with my reading of this page, blocking me in a lock of attention to the inks of its letters . . . but then . . . but then, the type marks – they wink at me – not as letters but, rather, as surfaces rainbowed over; and as my eyes open to them, relax into softened focus, the prisms lines bubble open into steams of colors infinitely varied – “infinitely” (that presumptuous word again) tips me off and into a searching concentration wherein the black-born colors *tend* to arrange themselves as follows: oranges, blues, greens: and, thus: oranges in curved lines or circles, with yellow at inner or center and red at outer or perimeter; and blues in lines graded to purple one side or the other; and greens as a weave throughout – “throughout” checking my concentration, causing a spread of vision across the whole page until I see similar to black-born prisms colors moving, according to the first *tendencies* observed, among the comet-blue shapes and molten folds-over-folds of electric-yellow and in shadow pools, concentrations of prism-blues tending to impress upon me large (several inch once) *always elongated* shapes, ingatherings of prism-oranges *always forming circularly*, and green waves shaping fields of their predominance *always as irregularly curled* as vines – three underlined “always”es demonstrate to me that I'm about to make a science and/or a religion of this endeavor, damnit, about to

really try to *convince* someone else (some “dear reader” of the imagination) of my own eye’s sightings, make sights of them in sets of laws and dogmas to *convict* all other ( in a “damn your eyes”, as the saying goes) – forgive me . . . I tire, viz:

. . . goodbye again, dear reader – I’m off to work: to try to gather light this particularly, even if (as in the past) I can finally only paint some approximation of these miniscule occurrences upon the film’s developed surface . . . for film is never hypoed by the lab, “fixed” as it’s called, beyond a maker’s giving – his adding to it, thru paints and chemicals and superimpositions in editing, his sense of the light as seen – until that maker himself becomes too long exposed to the light of any particular piece of film and, thus, ceases to see it any longer . . . then, and then only, might a work be called “finished”. As I’ve ceased to read myself herein, then, and have other livelier things to do, permit me to make (not “the” but)

an end.



**Appendix B**  
***Three Ghost Tantras***  
by Michael McClure



PLEASURE FEARS ME, FOOT ROSE, FOOT BREATH  
BY BLAHR MOKGROOOOOOO TARRR  
nowp tytath brooooooooooooooooooooo

--

In the middle of the night I dreamed I was a creature  
like the great Tibetan Yogi Milarepa.

I sang a song beginning :

“Home lies in front of you, not in the past.

Follow your nose  
to it.”

It had great mystic import, both apparent and hidden.

I was pleased with it.

GROOOOOOOOOOR!

GROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!

GROOOOOOO.

ROOOOOOOOOOOH!

POWFF! RAHH! BLAHR!

SILENCE THE EYES! BECALM THE SENSES!

Drive drooor from the fresh repugnance, thou whole,  
thou feeling creature. Live not for others but affect thyself  
from thy enhanced interior – believing what thou carry.  
Thy trillionic multitude of grahh, whooshes, and silences.

Oh, you are heavier and dimmer than you knew  
and more solid and full of pleasure.

Grahh! Grahhh!Grahhhrrr! Grahh. Grahhrr.

Grahhrr-grahhhrr! Grahh. Gahrahhrr Grahhhrrrr.

Ghrarrrr. Grahhr! Ghrarrrr. Gharrr. Grahhhrr.

Grahhr. Grah. Grahh. Grahharr. Grahhrr.

Grahhhrr. Grahhh. Gahr. Grahhr. Grahh. Grahh.

Grahhr. Grahhh. Grahh. Gratharr! Grahh.

Grahrr. Ghraaaaaahrr. Grhar. Ghhrarr! Grahhrr.

Grahrr. Gharr! Grahhhrr. Grahhrr. Graherrr.

IN TRANQUILITY THY GRAHRR AYOHH  
 ROOHOOERING  
 GRAHAYAOR GAHARRR GRAHHR GAHHR  
 THEOWSH NARR GAHROOOOOOOOH GAHRR  
 GRAH GAHRRR! GRAYHEEOARR GRAHRGM  
 THAHR NEEOWSH DYE YEOR GAHRR  
 grah grooom gahhr nowrt thowtooom obleeomosh.  
 AHH THEEAHH! GAHR GRAH NAYEEROOOO  
 GAHROOOOOM GRHH GARAHHR OH THY  
 NOOSHEORRTOMESH GREEEEGRAHARRR  
 OH THOU HERE, HERE, HERE IN MY FLESH  
 RAISING THE CURTAIN  
 HAIEAYORR-REEEEHORRRR  
 in tranquility.

LOVE  
 thy  
 !oh my oohblesh !

# **Appendix C**

## ***Interviews***



## Interview with Woody Haut

**Woody Haut** was active in the San Francisco poetry and film scene during the 1960s. He moved to London in the early 1970s and is the author of a book of poems, *The Cartographers* (Beau Geste Press), and three non-fiction books: *Pulp Culture: Hardboiled Fiction and the Cold War*; *Neon Noir: Contemporary American Crime Fiction*; and *Heartbreak and Vine: The Fate of Hardboiled Writers in Hollywood* (all published by Serpent's Tail).

**CHRISTOPHER LUNA:** How did you get involved in the Straight Theatre?

**WOODY HAUT:** I was sharing a flat with Al Nieman, who I'd met in Mexico, and who wanted to re-open the Haight Theater. He was interested in showing films by independent "new American" film-makers, and I was the guy with the knowledge about what films to show. He ran into the Resnick brothers, who also wanted to re-open the theater. They were the ones with the money to get the project off the ground, and, for some reason, renamed the place The Straight Theater.

**CL:** How did the Straight Ashbury Viewing Society get started? Who attended the screenings?

**WH:** The Straight Ashbury Viewing Society must have been the first the Straight Theater's first project. Since the theater wasn't yet ready, the screenings were held in the Armenian Hall on, I think, Oak Street. I showed as many as I could—Brakhage, Harry Smith, Cassavetes, the Whitney Brothers, etc., as well as having local poets read. Because of obscenity laws, it had to be a "viewing society" with card-holding members. I think there were capacity audiences (200) at every screening, which occurred every Saturday night. A number of film makers attended (Ron Rice, Bruce Baillie, Scott Bartlett, Tom DeWitt) and poets, as well as the general public.

**CL:** How did you meet Stan Brakhage?

**WH:** I met Brakhage because I was teaching a class at San Francisco State Experimental College entitled "New American Cinema," and Stan was coming to the coast to show his film *23rd Psalm Branch*. So I got him to exhibit the film and give a talk. We also had a mutual friend, Carmen Vigil, at whose apartment Stan was staying. So I saw a lot of Stan during those weeks. Even before that I had been corresponding with Brakhage about an article I had written on New American Cinema for a local underground newspaper. I remember spending an afternoon at a local bar with Stan and McClure. I would later see Stan whenever he was in town, then, later, when he visited London, and again while I was staying with the Dorns in Boulder in the 1980s.

**CL:** How did you first encounter Stan Brakhage's films? What did you think of them at the time?

**WH:** I first encountered Brakhage's films in 1964 at the Cinema Theater in Los Angeles, at John Fles's legendary midnight screenings. *Window Water Baby Moving* and some other Brakhage films were on a double bill with [Jean-Pierre Melville's 1950 film adaptation of Jean Cocteau's novel] *Les Enfants Terribles*. I went there because someone said they were showing dirty movies. I was in a for surprise. I'd never seen anything like it.

I do remember getting headaches from watching those first Brakhage films, with their flitting images, fast camera work and abrupt editing. But I was intrigued and became regular at Fles's midnight screenings. Brakhage was also the only film-maker I have come across who was able to create near-riot situations merely by showing his films.

**CL:** How did you meet Michael McClure?

I met Michael McClure because his wife worked with my cousin. I phoned him up and he said to come over. He lived a few blocks away from where I was living, and I would see him every so often and visit him occasionally.

**CL: What were the poetry readings at the Fillmore, Avalon, and Straight Theater like? Did people hang out afterward? Were there discussions of the material? How did the audiences react to McClure's work? How did they react to Brakhage's films?**

**WH:** Poetry readings were mainly held in the local coffee houses, art galleries and bars in North Beach and the Haight (and, of course at the Poetry Center). There were a few at the Straight Theater, but none that I can remember at the Avalon and Fillmore. Though *The Beard* did have a performance or two at the Avalon or the Fillmore. And Ginsberg read at benefits at the Fillmore. But I can't recall any other readings at those places, though there might have been some. There was a lot of informal discussion at, and after, various poetry readings at places like the Coffee Gallery and, before that, Gino & Carlo's in North Beach as well as coffee houses in the Haight, but nothing that was organized. Though Dave Sandberg was instrumental in organizing street poetry and Poetry Among Friends which had a lot of influence, and published *Oar Magazine*, and there was much discussion of the poetry at Steve Mindel's weekly sessions at his apartment in the Haight. I think the audiences in San Francisco were much more receptive to Brakhage's films than they had been in LA, where he set off responses that bordered on violence. And, of course, McClure was always a big favorite, at least amongst other poets.

**CL: What did you learn from McClure as a poet and as a friend?**

**WH:** To respect the art of poetry, approach it with dignity and have faith in the new.

**CL: What did you learn from Brakhage?**

**WH:** Be true to your vision. Never neglect the mind's eye.



## Interview with David Meltzer

**Poet David Meltzer was a friend to both Stan Brakhage and Michael McClure.**

**CHRISTOPHER LUNA: Where and when did you meet Michael McClure? Did you discuss poetry?**

**DAVID MELTZER:** We met in North Beach in '57. He and Joanne Kyger were the first San Francisco poets I met and we're still friends and comrades. Poetry and the poetry community was the main subject of our talks, also domestic realities: Michael was married to Joanna and they were dealing with their newborn Janey. He was, then, working as an instructor at Vic Tanny's Gym in downtown San Francisco. He was called and signed poems as "Mike McClure." Michael and I were both married with children; Joanne wasn't until her relationship with Gary Snyder a couple of years later.

**CL: Where and when did you meet Stan Brakhage? What was your relationship like? Did you discuss poetry? Did you discuss film? If so, can you share some of the content of those conversations?**

**DM:** I first met Stan in the '50s as a teenager exiled from Brooklyn to LA. He was working at Raymond Rohauer's Coronet Louvre on La Cienega Blvd. I'd go there with my girlfriend & was able to see the canon of modern cinema as well as the emergent US avant-gardists. Stan was a combination janitor and usher and occasionally Rohauer would let him present some of his films & talk about them.

I met Stan when he and his family moved to SF and rented a house in the Mission District. [We met] as a result of my "Journal of the Birth" in the 1st issue of *The Journal for the Protection of All Beings* (edited by Ferlinghetti, McClure, and me) – even though I knew Stan in LA when he was the janitor for Raymond Rohauer's repertory film theatre called the Coronet Louvre. Rohauer would let Stan present programs of his films and that's where I saw some of his early films, but not *Window Water Baby Moving* which he identified with my piece on birth. It was later reprinted as a pamphlet by Oyez Press.

Stan knew I worked at The Discovery Bookshop on Columbus Avenue, a few doors down from City Lights, and Stan came bounding in & proclaimed us comrades. He was moved and excited that two artists had dealt with similar material differently but reverently. He introduced himself and invited me to his house in the Mission – he and Jane and the kids had recently moved to the Bay Area. That began regular visits to the Brakhages, watching films, pot lucking, gathering and blathering. Met Creeley for the first time there. A few years earlier, painter John Altoon introduced me to Creeley's work via carbon copies Bob had given John when they were living in Mallorca.

**CL: Did you know Richard Brautigan?**

**DM:** We were neighbors. He and his wife Ginny lived on Filbert and we lived on the cross street: Jones. Just recently dug deep into our relationship for a documentary on Richard.

**CL: Did you participate in the parade to free one of the Hells Angels from jail?**

**DM:** No, I wasn't involved with that aspect of Diggery. Met Peter Coyote (ne Cohn) and Peter Berg when we both wound up in the Mime Troupe. Ferlinghetti and I were intermission poets, alternately, for the Troupe's production of a Ghelderode play on tour in the Bay Area. Also met Bill Graham (the group manager) and we maintained contact. Many tales to tell.

**CL: Did you see any of the readings or film showings that they held at the Fillmore, the Avalon, or the Straight Theatre? If so, what do you recall about those evenings?**

**DM:** Yes, and I also remember private showings on [Wallace] Berman's birthday up in the hills curated by Larry Jordan.

**CL: What is your memory of participating in *The Feast*? How did you come to be cast? Did you appear in any other poets plays during this time period?**

**DM:** It was a great moment. The Batman on Fillmore was kind of like the Victoria's Secret of the deep underground scene. I also recited/chanted a McClure poem with music by Morton Subotnik in a North Beach coffee house.

**CL: How do you think McClure and Brakhage's work will be remembered?**

**DM:** This is one of those huge Questions that requires no answer. Michael is great and romantic, daring with form and language. Over the decades, he remains one of the most resourceful & experimental poets of my generation. McClure's work is an amazingly rich insistent body, a mammal exploration of the body planet and its home. His work is radically experimental, which too many critics fail to pick up on. His serious play is a constant delight to these dimming eyes. Michael will sustain; he'll stick around.

Stan's work is a definitive on all levels. A remarkable polymath like mentor Robert Duncan & Charles Olson, his work (film and writing) remains and retains its essentiality in the historical matrix of the postwar devastation and redemption.

**Appendix D**  
**Poetics and the Visionary**  
**in the Films of**  
**Stan Brakhage**

**by Christopher Luna**



## I. Biographical Sketches

Perhaps it is appropriate that the individual who would go on to revolutionize the representation of “moving visual thinking” in American film should have suffered through a childhood which he himself has described as Dickensian. Stan Brakhage was an orphan, raised in Kansas by a woman who wanted desperately to be married to a college professor, and a professor, a homosexual with little interest in marriage. Young Brakhage was adopted to save the marriage. The boy developed a certain sensibility very early on, and he was assaulted daily for it:

I started being beat up regularly every day after school, in pre-school, and having my precious books thrown in the mud, and my glasses broken, and my skin broken. It became a nightmare to try to get home from school....I started having serious asthma at one year old, I was into thick glasses, I had hives, earaches, sinus trouble, a hernia that broke out very young so that I had to wear a truss, and if ever it slipped and no one knew what to do I'd strangle to death in about three minutes. And here I was stumbling through this battery of bullies, with this brain, this sensitivity, that was already doing very elaborate plays in my backyard at three years old. That was memorizing poems at three years old....That was refusing to memorize other poems, like "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere". I had to sit in the office the whole day cause I wouldn't memorize that (Brakhage, June 5 1998).

From the time that he was nine years old until the age of twenty-one, Brakhage "assumed [he] was a poet, and wanted to be a poet, and worked consciously at the development of this craft" (Brakhage, June 3 1998). He always carried books around with him, and so "got a bad reputation as a kid carrying books when he didn't have to" (Brakhage, *Scrapbook* 224). On his sixteenth birthday, his friends searched for and found "a book that was so absurd and ridiculous that even [he] would be defeated at trying to read it" (224).

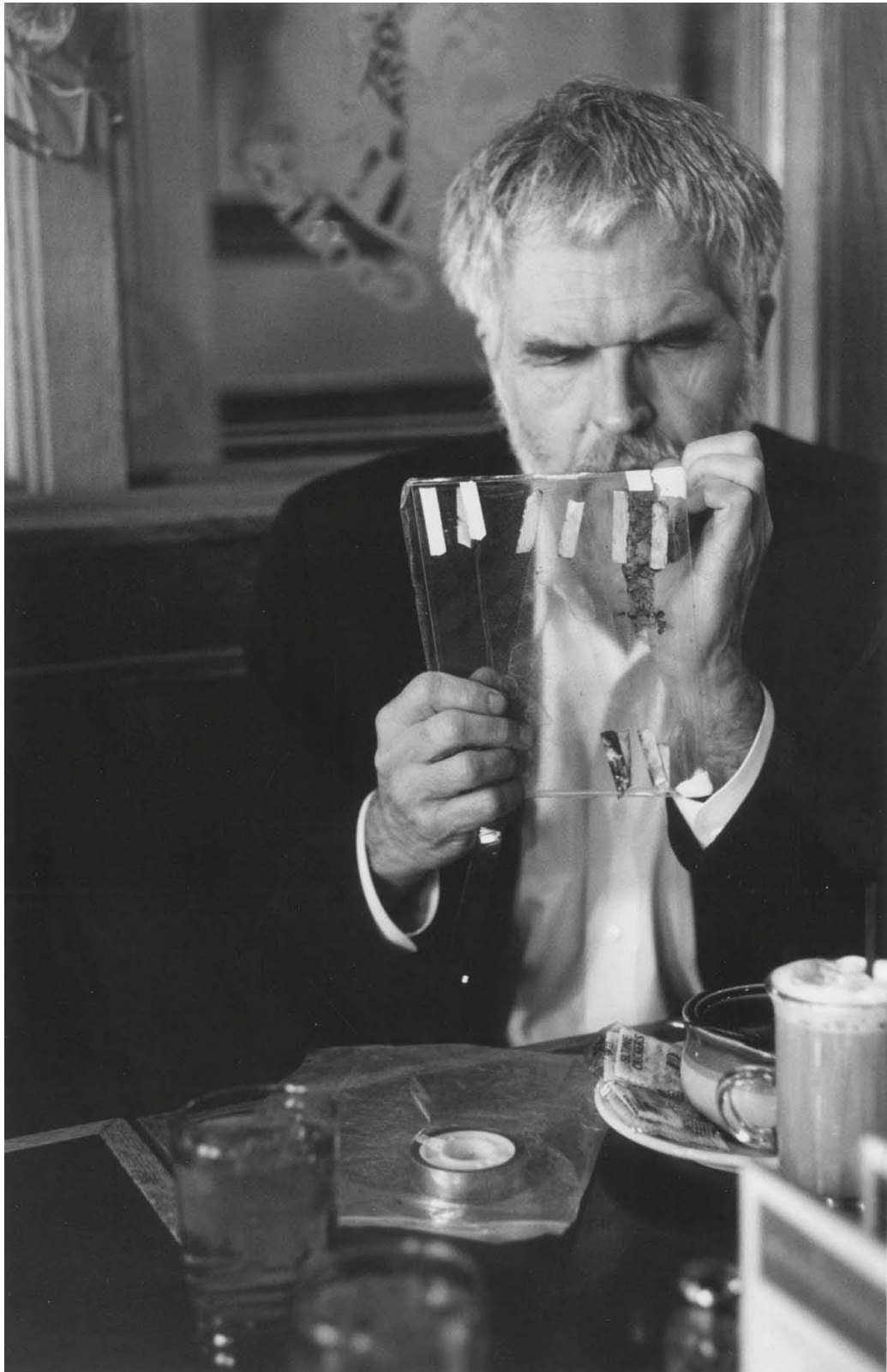
They were doubling over with laughter at the thought of giving me *this book* that would truly defeat me....First of all it seemed to be in English, but at least a third of it was in other languages; and it made references to the gods....It annoyed me to have references to a whole pack of gods from elsewhere; the final incredible thing was that this gift book was filled with Chinese. This of course was Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, which is, if I must choose one book, the single most important book in my life. Indeed I couldn't read it and they had their good laugh (224).

Brakhage saw that from the first two lines of the *Cantos*, the mind splits and goes in two directions. At this time, his "sense of poetry and what film can do begins" (225).

Direction! The poem has the capacity beyond just its rhythm to make reference to the process of thinking itself...Poetry is having to do with the actual process of thought, as absolutely distinct from what I don't regard as poetry at all, the writer telling you his mind...(225).

Pound as well as Charles Olson would come to have a profound effect on Brakhage's life and work. His artist's sensibility continued to make him the object of ridicule, as when he excitedly presented an article on the painter Jackson Pollock during Show and Tell, and both the class and his teacher reacted as if he (and *LIFE* magazine) had missed the joke.

His asthma kept him out of gym class and later, Korea. After suffering a nervous breakdown at Dartmouth, he made his way to California to study with the photographer Minor White (himself a protégé of Ansel Adams). He had made his first film, *Interim*, and aspired to be, like Jean Cocteau, a poet who made film. This first film combined the aesthetics of the Surrealists with that of the Italian Neo-Realists, using the essays of Russian film pioneer Sergei Eisenstein as well as the prototypical films of George Méliès and the Lumiere brothers as a model. His early films are "surreal poetic," influenced by drama as well as sculpture and painting. He came to realize that his study of still photography with White was destroying his sense of filmmaking, and after discussing it, they agreed "that film and still photography were probably the most polar opposite arts of any you could name" (Brakhage, June 5 1998).



Stan Brakhage handpainting film strips (using the carcinogenic paints from China that eventually killed him) in Cambridge, MA, 1995 by Robert Haller

Brakhage moved to San Francisco at nineteen and became, as he put it, the “houseboy” of Robert Duncan and Jess Collins, a situation which made him privy to after dinner conversations with poets like Louis Zukofsky, Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, and Kenneth Rexroth. He also met contemporaries like Michael McClure, with whom he established a lasting friendship. But it was through these associations that Brakhage came to understand that he was not a poet:

This was extremely painful to me, but an important recognition. I could have wasted, God, half my life, *all my life*, trying to be a poet, and Robert Duncan made it clear to me how I'm not a poet. So my impulses which had begun with being a poet who made film went all the way over to film. Now I want to be clear enough about that, that a filmmaker is not a poet. He might be *poetic*, but I've always despised that word, with its "ticking."....I don't want that appellation, because I respect poetry too much. I care more about poetry than I do any other art, always have, since I was a very small child. But I am not a poet (Brakhage, June 3 1998).

Although Brakhage believes that artists are born, not made, he agrees that teaching can save a person a lot of time, as Duncan's did for him. His young life was marked by a series of fortunate encounters with great artists. He met John Cage and Edgar Varese in New York and later worked briefly with filmmaker Hans Richter. Of this he comments, "I was lucky enough to be with people who were real people and who gave me the time to make my statement and listen to me, and collaborated with me to save my ass-thetics" (Brakhage June 5 1998). He has spent much of the rest of his life establishing film as an art form equal to if younger than the others.

## II. Aesthetic Influences

The lines which separate media blur in Brakhage's work. Many of his films are silent, as he considers himself a composer, and to add sound to the music he has already created (through editing, rhythm, and counterpoint) would be superfluous. For many years he has painted on the film itself, a practice for which he sacrificed his health, developing cancer of the bladder as a result of the chemicals in the paints he used. Titles and intertitles are often scratched on the film, a long process which involves etching letters on twenty four separate frames for each second of film. The importance of rhythm and imagery often create corollaries between Brakhage's work and poetry, as in his film *23rd Psalm Branch*, where a shot of the poet Louis Zukofsky is rhymed with a similarly bespectacled concentration camp prisoner. He spent many years on a lengthy series of thirty "Songs," which can be seen as analogous to the serial poems of Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, and Robin Blaser. His work tracks the process of his mind, and especially, the inner workings of sight.

### Projective Verse

In poetry, innovations have rendered the page as open as a painter's canvas. This is due, in part, to poetry's relationship to speech, as well as music. Many modern poets have recognized and worked through the way in which the line can reflect the rhythm of speech. It is only natural that this should lead to a view of the page as a chart, or graph, of both the mind's movement as well as the voice's ebb and flow.

Charles Olson's influential essay, "Projective Verse," asks that one begin to look at the page as a form of musical staff upon which the poet notates words in such a way as to reflect their intended sound:

...the line comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes, and thus is, it is here that the daily work, the

WORK, gets in, for only he, the man who writes, can declare, at every moment, the line its metric and its ending - where its breathing shall come to termination

(Olson, *Collected Prose* 242).

Olson speaks of a method of "field composition," based in part upon the work of e.e. cummings, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound, which involves working with all of the open space contained on the page. This openness offers the page a potential kineticism (kineticism also being an integral aspect of "motion picture" film, with the screen analogous to the page). According to Olson, "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT" (240), and the process upon which this follows grows out of the knowledge that "ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION" (240). According to Brakhage, this particular concept of Olson's was extremely valuable, "because, in photography, that really expresses, directly, the act of photographing with a handheld camera" (Brakhage, November 22 1998).

Bruce Elder suggests that Olson did not necessarily "intend that Projective Verse would convey a fast-moving stream of perceptions. Brakhage, however, took Olson at his word" (*The Films of Stan Brakhage* 353), effectively taking the form one step further:

[Brakhage] has evolved a form that concatenates a stream of visionary experiences. Thus, while Olson makes extensive use of quotation, allusion, intertextual reference, and, perhaps despite himself, intellectual abstraction, Brakhage's work remains resolutely concrete, specific, and focused on the register of what immediately presents itself in vision...(353)

This attention to particulars is one aspect of Brakhage's concerns which links his work with the poetry of William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein. In Brakhage's work, each and every frame is necessary. One must focus one's attention on the frame (syllable), as the basic unit of filmic (poetic) music which along with the shot (line), produces a film (poem). In this way the screen parallels the blank space of the page.

Many of the poets who were Brakhage's contemporaries picked up on Olson's theory. Michael McClure has acknowledged the importance of Olson's "recognition that the mind is a construct of the heart, of the nervous system, and his interest in the energy charge we derive from the subject, whether in the mind or the world, as the motivating force" (McClure, *Lighting the Corners* 15). Gary Snyder has commented that "the poem or the song manifests itself as a special concentration of the capacities of language and rises up into its own shape" (Snyder 44-45). Allen Ginsberg declared in *Indian Journals* that "IF THE POET'S MIND IS SHAPELY THEN HIS ART WILL BE SHAPELY" (41).

Thought flows freely through the page space. Begin new ideas at margin and score their development, exfoliation, on the page organically, showing the shape of the thought....with space-jumps to indicate gaps & relationship between Thoughts, broken syntax to indicate the hesitations & interruptions,-GRAPHING the movement of the mind on the page....the arrangement of lines on the page *spread out* to be a rhythmic scoring of the accelerations, pauses, & trailings-off of thoughts in their verbal forms as mouth-speech (Ginsberg 40-41).

### Moving Visual Thinking and Hypnagogic Vision

As Olson desired to track the movement of the thought and breath, so does Brakhage use film as a means to present both what the eye sees and how it behaves. Much of his work with scratching and painting comes out of an interest in hypnagogic vision, or that which one sees when one closes one's eyes and looks at the inside of the eyelids, especially after rubbing them. He has incorporated an interest in his awareness of "phosphenes and other visual phenomena produced by the inner workings of the visual system, as well as dreams and visions that are seen as vividly as anything the eyes encounter in the external world" into his filmic vocabulary (Wees 27). Brakhage also intersperses black leader at times to create afterimages very similar to what one sees when one closes the eyes after having stared at the sun. The term "hypnagogic" comes from 19th century fairy tale author Andrew Lang, and it is Brakhage's belief that hypnagogic vision is very much a part of the work of both the Impressionist (who were, in fact, painting the air) and the Abstract Expressionist painters. He was also inspired by the Surrealists to tap the brain so that he could make film that "would include every kind of seeing" (Brakhage June 5 1998). *Metaphors On Vision* ecstatically describes his experience of the phenomenon of closed-eye vision:



Closing these eye-lids, shutting Pandora's trap for awhile, believing even in the reality of it, thwarting thought awhile, traveling thru the blue sub-terrain?

-marine? -what? seeming tunnels of it, (utterly unable to photograph any of it), purposeless in my wanderings around, seeming to be spiraling at times, timelessly, encountering shapes, (indescribable), passing thru them, or were they passing thru me? or was a corner somewhere turned? into an unrepresented dimension, sometime, in this non-time, even the human drama projecting into these spaces, as if here too there were curtains to rise and fall, entrances, exits, and a feeling of inter-relation, some of these as-if shapes as if to be avoided, some of these imaginary colors unimaginable, alien even to this alien land-sea-what scape (Brakhage, *Metaphors On Vision* 11).

Brakhage is dedicated to the concept of film as art. He sees himself as the conduit or instrument for "unconscious streamings which take shape" (Brakhage, June 3 1998), and his work has "come to be inspired by [his] own closed eye vision" (Brakhage, June 5 1998).

Which I'm able now, finally...to make articulate, "articulate" begins with "art," to make it over into an art, so that if you look at it, it can remind you of your own, without being a documentary picture of it...that's what art tries to do, not to hold a mirror up to nature, that's where Milton was certainly a fool...but to hold up something, an emblem, out of the gift given to a human being to create such an emblem, that can remind others of their true, individual visions, hypnagogic or otherwise (Brakhage, June 5 1998).

In this way, Brakhage seeks to film the unfilmable, just as the poet seeks to give language to the ineffable. It is this desire which places Brakhage in the tradition of the visionary artist. Robert Duncan refers to "the inscrutable" as one of the main forces which he aims for in the writing of a poem (McClure, *Lighting the Corners* 76). P. Adams Sitney relates this aspect of Brakhage's work to Pound's concept of "Vorticism" in his description of the film *Dog Star Man*. For Pound:

Every concept, every emotion presents itself to the vivid consciousness in some primary form. It belongs to the art of that form....It is no more ridiculous that a person should receive or convey an emotion by an arrangement of shapes, or planes, or colours, than that they should receive or convey such emotion by an arrangement of musical notes (Sitney 184).

According to Bruce Elder, "nothing in the Vorticists' legacy has been more influential than their belief in the primacy of rhythm. This belief affected Pound, for whom the poets' capacity to create rhythmic form is the primary index of their creative strength" (*The Films of Stan Brakhage* 95). Consequently, Pound's understanding of this concept was to be incredibly important for many artists:

It is from Pound that we have learned to understand that the primary consideration in writing poems or making films is that of creating a design in time that is absolutely accurate to the emotion/idea that the poet or filmmaker strives to convey. Brakhage has grasped these propositions intuitively (197-198).

Brakhage's remarkably complex editing demonstrates an innate sense of rhythm. It is his understanding that "film is ideally a construction that conveys its maker's visionary experiences, and vision....he conceives as a somatic activity" (28). This awareness of the body is another aspect of Brakhage's aesthetics which he shared with several of his contemporaries.

The arts of this Man take Sense as Muse so that poetry arises in direct relationship to the word as a cultural-memory particle (Duncan), the breath of the man writing (Olson), his changes of throat, tongue, lip, etc., in rendering it into sound (Zukofsky) and the tantric reverberations of same in the various areas of his whole body giving utterance (McClure) - so that music orients itself to the emotive ear (all tape music utilizing dramatically evocative sounds) and/or intensities and rhythms of thought (all "purely" electronic music, most "twelve" - and more - "tonic" music) rather than mathematical formulation - so that painting arises out of the physical act out of emotion (Action painting) and/or takes shape according to those mental processes creating "closed-eye vision" (Op Art), etcetera (Brakhage, *Scrapbook* 35).

This idea is very similar to Duncan's understanding (also gathered, in part, from Olson) of the poem as a physiological phenomenon, connected to the heart and the breath:

Charles Olson in his essays toward a physiology of consciousness has made us aware that not only heart and brain and the sensory skin but all the internal organs, the totality of the body is involved in the act of a poem, so that the organization of words, an invisible body, bears the imprint of the physical man, the finest imprint that we feel in our bodies as a tonic consonance and dissonance, a being-in-tune, a search for the as yet missing scale (Duncan, *Fictive Certainties* 87).

Brakhage understood Michael McClure's insistence upon reminding us that we are "meat." In *Scratching the Beat Surface*, McClure writes that he became convinced "that poetry was the product of flesh brushing itself against experience" (102). Olson's theories resonated with McClure, who has always maintained an interest in physiological matters. Elder further illuminates the connection between McClure's work and Olson's philosophy:

McClure takes the biological concept of an organism, uses that as a metaphor for a poem, and then extends the metaphor, to draw out similarities between the way a poem is organized and the way the universe is organized....He insists that poetic shape (a term he prefers to form) must be seen as an extension of physiology and that physiology must be considered as a product of phylogeny. Like Olson, he believes that sequence is more important than logic, for sequence can embody the movement of "meat-thought" (Elder 425, 427).

The physiological focus of Brakhage's thinking may also be partly inspired by proprioception, or an acute awareness of internal sensations, a process which Olson described as "the data of depth sensibility" (Olson, *Collected Prose* 181) in another essay. According to Elder:

Proprioceptive sensations are especially important to us because they provide the grounds for our being-with-our-bodies. Because they are so important to us, we sometimes project our proprioceptive sensations (modified by what we identify them with) onto the structure of the cosmos, or rather, what we imagine this structure to be. This mechanism explains how attentiveness to the subjective realm and to the qualities of the subjective world can so easily become the basis for a cosmological art (Elder 79).

Brakhage is a master of the handheld camera in which every bump and every twitch is integral, to the point where the camera stands in for his eyes, as well as, perhaps, his entire nervous system:

The lyric cinema that I re-invented, powerfully includes the emotions of the maker, as *literal motion*. So that if I'm all a tremble, that tremble is being transferred along the line of my arms to the camera, to the film itself...If I stumble, that stumble is a set of tumbling rhythms within the frame that's being recorded as I breathe (Brakhage, November 22 1998).

It was only after seeing a photograph of himself in the act of making that Brakhage fully understood how completely his body was involved in handheld camera motion:

My nose is mashed up against the camera in a certain way...the lips are pursed, as if I am kissing the camera, and I realized that with these lips for years I'd been subtly manipulating the camera. With my nose also, a little bit to the right or left. I've got it gripped in both hands, one hand is pretty busy with the start and stop motor, and the other is off and working with the lens. So I was using my nose and my lips and my cheekbone and finally, my whole body, to affect the rhythms of what was being taken in, in the act of photography (Brakhage November 22 1998).

In *Allegories of Cinema*, David E. James further explains the connection between proprioception and Brakhage's technique:

Could there be a better summary of a Brakhage film than Olson's "a high energy construct and, at all points, an energy discharge" – is what asserts itself as Brakhage's style...The demands of his style, from its frenzied, kinaesthetic, rhetorical panache to its most subtle, tentative accounts of the minutiae of the visible, forced him radically to reinvent film technology ... introducing the physiological reflexiveness of proprioception into the shooting process, hand-holding the camera to allow it the motivation of the body's pulse, and otherwise empowering it with a subtlety of apprehension matching that of the biological eye. By using anamorphic lenses, pieces of colored glass, and so on, from *Dog Star Man* to *The Text of Light*, he subverted the optics ground so as to produce quattrocento perspective and the transcendental subject (James 46-47).

Brakhage has tried very hard to escape the fiction of Renaissance perspective, the traditionally accepted way of seeing which relies upon a need to "try to clutch a landscape or the heavens or whatever. That is a form of sight which is aggressive and which seeks to make any landscape a piece of real estate" (Wees 45). Wees further explains the problematic acceptance of Western perspective:

Renaissance perspective represents a special and limited interpretation of the visual world. It is, as Herbert Read has put it, "merely one way of describing space and has no absolute validity."...In effect, the norms derived from perspectivist painting have denied the cinematic image much of what the eye actually sees....Psychologically, they avoid the distortions of emotion and idiosyncratic points of view....It is, in other words, a set of pictorial conventions that, as Ivins points out, is of "such great utility and so exceedingly familiar that for practical purposes it has the standing of a 'reality.'" Because photography automatically incorporates geometrical perspective, it has confirmed perspective in the public mind, made it true, and, in Ivins's phrase, "clamped it on our vision" (42, 43, 44).

As James points out, "Brakhage's compositional attention to the entire frame, especially to its edges, produces the 'all-over' de-centeredness of abstract expressionism rather than the centered subjectivity of perspective painting" (47).

### Abstract Expressionism

In Brakhage's work, and especially in the handpainted films, there are times when the image is comparable to the experience of witnessing a Jackson Pollock canvas come suddenly to life, each drip of paint swirling and swimming before the viewer's eyes. As P. Adams Sitney points out:

It was Brakhage, of all the major American avant-garde film-makers, who first embraced the formal directives and verbal aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism. With his flying camera and fast cutting, and by covering the surface of the celluloid with paint and scratches, Brakhage drove the cinematic image into the space of Abstract Expressionism and relegated the conventional depth of focus to a function of the artistic will, as if to say "the deep axis will appear only when I find it necessary" (*Visionary Film* 197-198).

Pollock (like Charles Olson) practiced a method of composition which relied upon the belief that creation "was an activity that involved entering into and being controlled by the energies of a natural process" (Elder 392). Brakhage describes the effect that seeing Pollock's work had on him as a young artist:

Long before I was able to see painting I began sending away to get reproductions. I began thinking about it and the whole business that comes out of Pollock, that, as he put it, "I am nature." Of getting this energy literally from his soul, through a gesture, all the way over onto the canvas, that expresses the power of that gesture ...And of course, kinetic in all other respects...My feeling is that the eye, the sensibility, the mind's eye hits depth charges, the way he wrapped that package of his energy (Brakhage, November 22 1998).

This identification with nature has been one of the main aspects of Brakhage's aesthetics. The influence of Pollock, Jess Collins, and others, inspired Brakhage to attempt to film that which cannot be named:

There is a sense of organization, that permits me, while working with non-objective, non-nameable shapes and forms, to organize them, and here I'm at a loss for words...to explain how or why...What I'm doing is opening myself and trusting myself, and this trust certainly comes from Robert Duncan's trusting of himself in these ways, in his makings...I'm opening myself to sources, in this case, that are what I call the streamings of the mind, and not the logical word orders of the mind, or the number orders, and not anything namable, but certainly perceivable. Which is to say, swiftly moving shapes and forms that only, again, very obliquely would reference to autumn leaves, or to flames, or to Eggendert...I couldn't actually sit and think my way through this, but I can be sensitive enough to know that my film is making a corollary of it, and then go with that (Brakhage, November 22 1998).

*The "b" series* serves as an example of a work of art which integrates the media of film, painting, poetry and music. The film came out of Brakhage's rage at the detached treatment of blood in the O.J. Simpson case: "I had to do something against the awful, to me slighting, of what blood physiologically is, that was going on for weeks in that trial" (Brakhage, June 5 1998).

We're living in a time which so undervalues the sacredness of life, that my film, without being a documentary, or without in any sense being like a social diatribe, or statement, is an exploration of the areas of feeling that people really do have, that I share with most people a propos these matters - blood, and retribution and fear, and so on (Brakhage, June 3 1998).

The handpainted piece is in five parts, each of which begins with a haunting and suggestive title (interesting in light of Brakhage's many attempts to escape the standard use of the title, including the numbers which mark most of his *Songs*). The first section, "RETROSPECT/THE PASSOVER," presents us with shapes, chasing one another as if under a microscope, punctuated by violent slashing reds and yellows. "BLUE/BLACK INTROSPECTION" deals with picturization, both in television as well as closed eye vision. It includes a grainy, hypnotic pulse which suggests the roll bar of the television. "BLOOD DRAMA" curiously withholds the expected reds until the very end. "I AM AFRAID: AND THIS IS MY FEAR" and "THE SORROWING" return us to Brakhage's personalization of a nationally televised shared nightmare.

*The 'b' series* is more metaphorical than much of Brakhage's work, and closer to poetry in this respect than music. Brakhage worked on the film throughout the trial to keep himself sane, "evolving the inner consciousnesses of sorrow, and guilt, and blood, and so on" (Brakhage June 5 1998). The film suggests closed eye vision, and is inspired in part by second generation Abstract Expressionist Joan Mitchell, as well as the work of both Jackson Pollock and the Surrealists:

You start with Freud, and you start with the daydreams and nightdreams, and you're tapping the brain for your envisionment. And that lead most of them, early on, to go back to the Renaissance to create long, deep-spaced mountains and melting wristwatches and so on...Tanguy, Max Ernst, Dali...they're touching on the first picture, the primary picture of the West, which is Renaissance picture and filling it with their dreamshapes and images. But they're eschewing...anything like the meat sparking, it's the meat itself, or the optic nerve endings, sparking, direct from the brain cells, along the connection between eye and brain (Brakhage, June 5 1998).

Brakhage was to learn much from Pollock concerning the "link between art and the unconscious" (Naifeh and Smith 348).

The spontaneity in Brakhage's making derives in part from the automatic writing of the Surrealist poets. Like the Surrealists, Brakhage "creates an elevated mental state that he describes as a 'trance' and....he too tends to use long rolling passages between caesurae" (Elder 439). Spontaneous methods allow the artist to follow a "line of energy" without preconceived notions concerning outcome, a process which is therefore inherently natural:

This compositional method aims not at producing works that fit into traditional forms and possess the traditional values of timelessness, autonomy, and intricacy, but at allowing a work's form to evolve through the process of creation, in an interaction between the creator and the evolving form; a spontaneous compositional method that respects – indeed celebrates – the continual coming-on of novelty [that] has become common in American art since mid-century. We can observe its influence in Action Painting, in the movement in documentary filmmaking of the late 1950s and early 1960s known as cinema-verite, and especially in improvised music (e.g., that of John Coltrane (1926-67), Ornette Coleman (1930-), Pharoah Sanders (1940-), Archie Shepp (1937-), and the Art Ensemble of Chicago) (Elder 395).

### III. Brakhage and Duncan

Stan Brakhage works, as Robert Duncan did, with a deep faith in what he has referred to as the Muse, by which he seems to mean a divine force within and beyond the maker for which he/she becomes the instrument or vessel, the deliverer of a message which may be beyond his/her grasp. Although the “self” is very present in the work of both men, there is a sense in which it must be escaped from in order to relay a pure vision. As Brakhage comments, “It isn’t a case of my using the ‘I’ egocentrically, as Robert Duncan...puts it: ‘I’ must never arise in the poem except as the communal ‘I,’ that’s where we come to means and meaning” (Brakhage, *Scrapbook* 227).

#### Open Field Composition

According to Olson’s thinking, “the discovery of truth is a disclosure in immediate experience which relies upon one being open to process” (Elder 355). In Brakhage’s work, this quality (Olson’s “INSTANTER”) often springs from his decision to produce much of his editing in-camera, a method closely related to Duncan’s decision to discard revision:

There is an energy in the moment of shooting which editing again can leak out for you. What’s interesting to me is the energy of immediacy. That comes out of my involvement with Charles Olson. The actual breath and physiology of the living person being present at its most, uninterrupted by afterthought. Editing is always afterthought. Though the way to beat that is to get *that* excited at the editing table. And that’s very hard (Brakhage, *Scrapbook* 216).

This method is closely related to Duncan’s decision to discard revision.

Duncan’s essay “Towards An Open Universe” takes this visionary stance to its most logical conclusion, insisting that “the order that a man may contrive or impose upon the things about him or upon his own language is trivial beside the divine order or natural order he may discover in them” (Duncan, *Fictive Certainties* 81-82). Furthermore, “there is not a phase of our experience that is meaningless” (82). An aesthetic of trust in an energy beyond oneself and intuition develops in the work of both men. As Duncan explains:

We work toward the truth of things. Keats’s ecstatic “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” rises from the sureness of poetic intuition or recognition, our instant knowing of fitness as we work in the poem, where the descriptive or analytic mind would falter...What is at issue here is that the truth does not lie outside the art. For the experimenter it is more important to have beauty in one’s experiments than to have them fit mathematics (78-79).

A further statement, made in reference to Duncan’s poems “A Storm Of White” and “Food For Fire, Food For Thought,” alludes to both Plato’s allegory of the cave and the relation of dreams and imagination to the filmmaking process itself:

...The voice may seem to rise directly from or to the incoming breakers that had become a moving whiteness into which I stared or the flickering light and shadow cast upon a wall by a fire on the hearth I had forgotten, waking in the night, still close enough to the sleeping mind that I dreamed in what was happening (86).

Brakhage stresses the importance of dreamwork to the artist in a letter to Manis Pinkwater , written in 1964:

An artist MUST act on dream instruction (day AND night dream structures conditioning all his being) for continuance of his art. Some have called this “inspiration,” some “the word of God,” some (more modernly) “sub-conscious feed-back” or what-have-you (without quest shun mark)...it doesn’t much matter what-you-call-it – there IS a process which governs the arts, necessities of each medium which discipline the artist’s living making it impossible for him to exist in avoidance of the right, the rite...(Brakhage, *Scrapbook* 19).

Duncan’s poems in *Opening of the Field* both personalize and mythologize Olson’s method of composition. The poet becomes King, standing in a clearing which may open up a portal to another world at any time. Brakhage picked up on Duncan’s “sense of the field, that we’re at work on a field, that there are parameters to a given making” (Brakhage, November 22 1998). To Brakhage, Duncan’s opening of the field was akin to the opening of “some kind of gate, and as he did so, he was just declaring that he was a Romantic” (Brakhage, November 22 1998). As Brakhage explains:

A Romantic work resists an ending, as we know. Beethoven struggles and struggles to bring a symphony to a closure, and finally manages to exhaust himself and everyone else and gets one, I suppose. But that was the great struggle for a century, to bring any kind of closure to a Romantic work...it’s open ended, and as such it conforms very well to Duncan’s opening of the field. That’s a Romantic gesture that he’s declaring, that the field not be enclosed (Brakhage, November 22 1998).

Elder points to a parallel between Brakhage’s work and the aesthetics of the Romantics, in their emphasis on the intuitive and their refusal to distance themselves from the world. Brakhage carries an awareness that the “image has powers that words lack, for language is used to make assertions about the world, but without making contact with it” (Elder 21). It is film’s visual emphasis which makes it such a suitable medium in which to portray the imagination:

Romantic Art has endeavoured to escape the solid, and stolid, encumbrances of the material world and to depict what appears to the mind’s eye alone. It has .attempted to dispense with words and patterns that are too heavy with the burden of materiality....Cinematic representations possess the capacity to transmute external objects into visual forms that seem to belong to the internal world, for its material – light – seems so intangible and immaterial as to be unreal – or, rather, to have the status of phenomenal (phantasmagoric) appearances (Elder 39).

Permission is an integral tool of the visionary artist. He must be willing to give himself permission to open the gate and step through, to explore both the chaos and the order, the beauty and the ugliness in himself as well as the universe in which he lives. Duncan opens his book with a poem which introduces the idea of the journey the artist must make, mediating inside and outside for those who don’t have the stomach for it:

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow  
as if it were a given property of the mind  
that certain bounds hold against chaos,

that is a place of first permission  
everlasting omen of what is.

(Duncan, *Opening of the Field* 7)

Brakhage has taken pains to open himself to both internal and external phenomena, in an effort to create a document of the senses. It is this determination to present the real that links his efforts with the writing of Williams, Stein and others:

Robert Duncan and Charles Olson wanted to restore the relation between the word and world, but not by reverting to reference; rather, they proposed that we think of words not as tokens that refer to categories of objects but as physical objects that act upon the other elements of physical reality (and paradigmatically, upon the bodies of those who hear or see them); and similarly Stan Brakhage wanted to reconnect imagery, not by restoring it to its transcendental status, but by ensuring that it worked upon the bodies of those that see it (Elder 134).

## The Dance

There are several themes which recur throughout *Opening of the Field*. One of the most prevalent is the dance. Dance and movement are important elements of both projective verse and filmmaking. Both Brakhage and Duncan rely upon their intuition in order to lose themselves in the dance of life. According to Duncan:

The dancer comes into the dance when he loses his consciousness of his own initiative, what *he* is doing, feeling or thinking, and enters the consciousness of the dance's initiative, taking feeling and thought there. The self-consciousness is not lost in a void but in the transcendent consciousness of the dance (Duncan, *Fictive Certainties* 83).

The dance in Duncan is not just a metaphor but a way of being which extends into the poet's entire life. Duncan elaborates upon this concept in his essay "The Truth and Life of Myth:"

"If you have not entered the dance," the Christ says to John in the gnostic gospel of John at Ephesus: "you misunderstand the event." But this *dance* is exactly the extremity out of which the ultimate cry of anguish comes. Each child, taking breath, leaps into life with such an anguish. At the heart of the Universe, the cosmic order that is a music in which the harmony of all things is established, in the fiat that it is good, we remember there is also just this risk, this leaping into life or dying into life, that only mortal things know (58).

In Duncan's "Often I Am Permitted To Return to a Meadow," the open field is "a made place, created by light/wherefrom the shadows that are forms fall" (Duncan, *Opening of the Field* 7). The field may open at any time for the maker who has become comfortable with ambiguity (Keats' "negative capability"). Brakhage dwells in this liminal space, creating imagery that "spans the domain of the objective and the subjective" (Elder 166):

As Duncan's poem indicates, there is no better representation for this ambiguous reality than light, which is both an energy in the external world and something so seemingly immaterial that it could be the contents of consciousness (167).

The color in Brakhage's films is striking, whether or not he is dealing with nameable objects. As with many of the painters he has admired, "the use of color rather than images as the material of composition [is] a means to push the limits of abstraction, while the viewer's experience of an artwork [will be] even more immediate and arguably 'more human,' despite the fact that the work is less descriptive of the conventional scenes of the human world" (Gizzi 210-211). But it is light, and the way that light affects the eyes as it is reflected into them, that is the source of his interest in color. Brakhage is fond of quoting a phrase which appears in Pound's *Cantos*: "All things that are are lights" (Pound, *The Cantos* 571). Elder comments upon this phrase and its importance for Brakhage:

The proposition that all things are lights, which is absolutely central to the Gnostic metaphysics of the *Cantos*, actually shifts the primacy of colour as light from the genesis of experience to the genesis of the cosmos, for it proposes that primordial experience – the experience of colour as light – discloses an ontological truth concerning light's reality as a metaphysical fundamental. The shapes and names that we impose on the experience of colour as light are secondary, and derive from our mental processes, but colour as light remains an irreducible reality (138-139).

It is Brakhage's fascination with his own sight that lead him to this profound understanding of the relationship between color and light. Our experience of reality is determined by our eyes' relationship to it. According to William C. Wees:

Experiments have shown that when the retinal cells receive a steady, unchanging light, when the stimulus is absolutely fixed and unvarying, the cells quickly "tire." They stop sending the information our brain needs to construct the visual world we see lying in front of our eyes. Thus there needs to be a "flux," *a movement of light* over the retinal cells; otherwise, we see nothing at all (*Light Moving In Time* 13).

Brakhage is very aware that in order to see, the eyes must jump here and there, darting around constantly. In this sense, the dance of light becomes very important, and conventional camera techniques such as pans or zooms seem frustratingly "unnatural."

Brakhage has too much respect for the other arts to employ their methods thoughtlessly, and his art embodies the struggle to integrate these different (but most certainly interconnected) media. In an essay entitled "FILM: DANCE," Brakhage traces the idea of dance in film creation from D.W. Griffith to Maya Deren (a brilliant filmmaker who was, herself, a dancer). Although aware that dance, like drama, sculpture, and architecture, is inextricably linked to its context, and thus has a "hell of a time getting off the stage" (Brakhage, *Scrapbook* 123), he sees its relationship to his, Olson's, and Duncan's sense of the body in the work:

But the Dance is as one, *any-one*, exercises one's body, any part thereof, at large (Robert Duncan says he writes poetry: "To exercise my faculties at large"). And the Art of Dance is as someone is able to, and does, extend himself, thus, through all his means to the World of Dancing...But cinematic dance might be said to occur as any film-maker is moved to include his whole physiological awareness in any film movement – the movement of any part of *his* body in the film making ...the movement of his eyes (122-123).

## The Muse

Both Brakhage and Duncan take the idea of the Muse, or the energy behind all making, especially seriously. Like Jack Spicer, who believed that poems were dictated to him, Brakhage and Duncan take on the role of messenger. Their awareness of this role links their aesthetics to the work of visionary artists including William Blake. Duncan addresses this force in a poem entitled, "THE LAW I LOVE IS MAJOR MOVER," in which he writes, "Responsibility is to keep/the ability to respond" (Duncan, *Opening of the Field* 10). Both men can be characterized as having immersed themselves in their respective crafts to the point that their ability to respond (to their minds, their bodies, to nature and to the work of fellow artists) has been heightened. Pound sees an artists' ability to approach the world as it is as "a redemptive spiritual act" (Elder 260). There can be no mere observation, for the work comes from that same energy which allows us to breathe.

For Duncan, the Law is one which supersedes man's law, and allows the artist to explore all without concern for societal constructs. In Brakhage's case, film "takes Sense as Muse" (Brakhage, *Scrapbook* 121). But his relationship to that Muse is derived in a very significant way from the concept of the open field:



There can be no willfulness, just an opening, opening to what is streaming through the self. But at the same time, you have to come with a very prepared self, that's capable, in an instant, of getting out of this cave. That knows how to manipulate it while you're in it. That comes loaded with a lot of information...It's like being played on, like you are an organ, and it's how many pipes you have, and how many keys. How much experience...That's my sense of it, and that's how I work with it, and certainly Robert was very helpful in that respect because he believes in magic. There was an aspect of shamanism to him, and he knew where shamanism left off, and an art began (Brakhage, November 22, 1998).

For the artist who believes in the Muse, the human and the divine begin to merge. For the filmmaker, this can lead to "pictures that represent (or, as Brakhage revises the idea, conveys the energies of) the soul" (Elder 240).

## IV. Serial Form

The serial poem was an open ended form put to successful use by the poets of what has been referred to by some as the Berkeley Renaissance: Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, and Robert Duncan. According to Michael Smoler's research on Blaser and the serial poem:

The basis of serial thought and its development depends upon composition in which various components and dynamics are arranged in an aleatoric order, infinite in possibility. Its main effect in poetry is to rupture linearity and to allow for sudden leaps in meaning and placement (5).

This method of composition, which supports the wanderings of an artist with "an open curiosity towards the unknown and the disappearance and appearance of objects in consciousness" (15), must have held a particular interest for Duncan. As Duncan points out, "Life is present as long as it hasn't settled into a symmetry, so that life produces itself by constantly throwing itself out of symmetry, postponing the moment of its arriving at composition" (qtd. in McClure, *Lighting the Corners* 70). Duncan created two series, "Passages," and "The Structure of Rime," which continued throughout all of his major work. "The Structure of Rime" was conceived as a "series without end...in which the poem could talk to me, a poetic séance" (Duncan, *Fictive Certainties* 125) which would invoke multiple voices.

As the Vietnam War played itself out on television sets across America, it fell upon the country's artists to respond in some way. Both Brakhage and Duncan were affected by these images, because scenes of war were to play an important role in their work during the middle to late Sixties. Duncan believed that one should acknowledge the presence of evil in an attempt to understand it, but that ultimately war was inevitable. In "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," Duncan reminds us that, "Over and over again men disown their commonality with living things in order to conquer a place, exterminate the terrible or rise above the vulgar." (115) Duncan recognizes the necessity of disorder, especially in regard to the creative process:

The very life of our art is our keeping at work contending forces and convictions. When I think of disorders, I often mean painful disorders, the disordering of fruitful orders that form in one's own work. this is the creative strife that Heraclitus praised, breaking up, away from what you knew how to do into something you didn't know, breaking up the orders I belong to in order to come into alien orders, marches upon a larger order (112).

When Stan Brakhage began his work in 8mm, he did not intend to create a series. His 16mm equipment had been stolen and he had just completed *The Art of Vision*, the extended version of his masterpiece, *DogStarMan* (Sitney 200). But eventually this work would come to form a "mini home movie cosmology" (Brakhage, November 22 1998). According to P. Adams Sitney:

Even after making the first eight sections he resisted that idea. But by the spring of 1965, with ten Songs finished in a little more than a year, he began to speak of the totality of the work in progress: "I think there will be more Songs. I do definitely see that they relate to each other. That is, practically every Song has images in it that occur in some other Song, if not in two or three others. The more remarkable thing is that each Song is distinct from each other; that holds them together in a very crucial kind of 'tension'" (200).

Like Robert Duncan, Brakhage was moved by the images of war he saw on television. He describes the power of the television image, which eventually led to chaos in his household:

...When an image is remembered from a person's own experience it comes as if carried by the light, and is made up of moving dots, some of them being very similar to the scan on television. I began to feel that what was causing the hypnosis of the set, itself, was simply that it presented an image in a way so similar to the act of memory that the effect was as if my brain was in the television set (Brakhage, *Scrapbook* 110-111).

Inspired by the work of fellow filmmaker Peter Kubelka, especially Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer*, *23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm Branch* is a serial within a serial, a moving and relentless meditation upon the nature of war and its ramifications upon human nature. Here, as elsewhere, Brakhage's work "suggests the triumph of subjectivity" (Elder 127). Although focusing upon Brakhage's memories of World War II, its initial impetus was the Vietnam conflict. Perhaps more than in any other of his films of this period, Brakhage demonstrates in *23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm Branch* a "repudiation of the physical world in favor of the poetic consciousness" (Sitney 207). The film is divided into six sections and a coda, beginning with its longest, a series of images which contrast the figures of World War II with the artist's home. The violence of the subject matter is underscored by black dots painted over the black-and-white images as well as Brakhage's insertion of two frames of black leader in between each shot, a method which causes an insistent flicker as well as a number of afterimages (210). The film contains a recurrent sequence of a hand furiously scribbling phrases on a page, one of the most directly poetic references Brakhage has ever employed. The poet Louis Zukofsky is also featured, both in a rhyme which pairs his image with a bespectacled concentration camp survivor and in a quick glimpse of the opening of the eleventh section of his long poem A. As the montage becomes more layered, the hand scratches, "I can't go on," but of course, the piece is far from over. In one of the more poetic and haunting examples of the poetic voice in this film, the hand writes "as precise as eye's hell is!" There are also phrases scratched onto the film, a technique which Brakhage has used often.

After this harrowing introduction, suddenly the film takes a turn. "Of Peter Kubelka's Vienna" and "My Vienna" begin to collage shots of the war, Colorado, and modern day Europe, presenting the range of images of which the film will be composed. The next three sections "A Tribute to Freud" (a title borrowed from H.D.), "Nietzsche's Lamb," and "East Berlin" slow the pace considerably yet do not detract from its emotional force. According to Sitney,

Both "Nietzsche's Lamb" and "East Berlin" seek to ground Brakhage's experience of Europe in "closed eye vision." In the former he achieved this through painting over so that the maps, aerial views, boats, dances, etc. seemed to become concrete out of the cracks and colors of the paint, which at times completely obfuscated the image underneath. In "East Berlin," he transferred strategies from painting to combining flares, images only of lights against a black sky, and finally moving dots (*Visionary Film* 216).

The film ends with a “Coda” which reveals that Brakhage, like Duncan, had come to the realization that war is an inevitable aspect of human nature. First we see two people playing music, tinted blue.

These twin portraits...lead without rupture to the final superimposition. A group of children play and dance in the woods at night while the image of a donkey fades in and out several times in superimposition. The terrible association with the sparkler dance with the Nazi *Walpurgisnacht* arise, perhaps the more dreadfully because Brakhage does not emphasize them with a montage of analogies. Thus this film, which had made an equation among parades, victory celebrations, street fights, and rallies, culminates in a cyclic vision and a discovery of the seeds of war in the pastoral vision (216).

Brakhage has sometimes referred to his films as “documents of consciousness” (Elder 106). 23<sup>rd</sup> *Psalm Branch* is one of Brakhage’s most powerful, terrifying, and poetic works of cinema, a visual assault which both embraces and exorcises the human propensity for warmaking. Here he has achieved the “communal I,” losing any notion of self through a painful process of obsession. Brakhage has described the way in which the making of this film affected his psyche and caused a warlike atmosphere to develop in his home (Brakhage, *Scrapbook* 112). He later decided that war was not a fit subject for art.

In the dots of the television, Brakhage discovered a corollary to his experience of hypnagogic vision, and in his investigation of the news media’s role in the Vietnam conflict, made a discovery very similar to what is described by Duncan in “Up Rising:”

I’ve been primarily making silent films for years now – since I discovered that the eye’s sight of anything was automatically dulled when any sound was attended to...especially since the discovery that the inner-eye (hypnagogic vision and all consciousness of visual-memory’s superimposition on any external scene being looked-at) was impossible to attend to, WITH THE EYES OPEN, when and ONLY when a sound was being heard consciously. So, turn the sound down on the T.V. set-to and put your inner-eye back in your own head immediately – see, then, how the television, and movie, directors cover up a poverty of visual imagination by lulling the eye to sleep with sounds continuum...see, for instance, how President Johnson approximates with minute facial changes (as befits the medium) Hitler’s most exact gestural – (movie) stances (how the rhythm of Johnson’s slight head tilts and the shifts of his facial muscles marshal a specific television attention...(105).

Collage was also a form which both artists explored. Duncan employs collage techniques throughout his work. The voices of Plato, Shakespeare, Stravinsky, and others move in and out of his poems like ghosts. But it is in “Santa Cruz Propositions” that his use of this method of composition is most fully realized. Here he combines the words of Denise Levertov, sections of Plato’s “Symposium,” and newspaper accounts of a series of murders which took place in Santa Cruz, California. Collage is not always immediately recognizable in poetry, but here Duncan uses several different typefaces to differentiate the various sources at work. The visual effect is therefore much closer to what one thinks of in regard to collage in the visual arts. Overall, the piece reflects the violence and destructive energy which plagued California as well as the United States at the end of the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies.

Inspired in part by the work of Robert Duncan’s partner, Jess Collins, Brakhage incorporated collage techniques very early on, in *Dog Star Man*. The “Prelude” introduces a series of images which will recur throughout. Each part of the film combines more and more layers of superimposition, until in “Part Four,” a sequence involving his newborn baby, he pulls out all the stops:

He employed the technique of *Mothlight* in making this film – that is, he punched holes in the images and carefully inlaid other film material, holding the mosaic together with a covering of mylar tape. As the child screams in black-and-white, the mouth cavity is replaced by fragments of colored film. At another point, his sense of hearing is emphasized by the insertion of a colored ear in the hole made by cutting out the black-and-white original (Sitney 186).

*Mothlight* collages “dead moths, flowers, leaves, and seeds” (158) in a film which has no corollary or precedent and which, as Sitney points out, echoes Duncan in its form: “three ‘round-dances’ and a coda” (158). He would return to this technique in *Garden of Earthly Delights*, a film which he made as a response to Hieronymous Bosch’s distorted portrayal of humanity.

## V. Brakhage and Stein

Just as Gertrude Stein strove to “divorce a word from its representational meaning” (Elder 249), so does Brakhage favor concrete images over symbolic ones. For Brakhage and Stein, “art best documents things” (248).

What the contents of artworks make present are the phenomena of consciousness not by attempting to form the documenting media into simulacra of the reality it refers to, but by attending to powers inherent in the medium used, and by deploying its powers to call forth the phenomenal qualities of objects. Stein’s art, like Brakhage’s strives to awaken in the reader/viewer’s body and mind sensations which closely resemble those which prompted the creative activity that produced the poem or film (248).

Even the handpainted films are intended as documents of Brakhage’s perceptions, rather than a mere representation of them. Both artists share the proclivity to employ what Stein termed “perpetually regenerating forms” (215) in their making.

Bruce Elder points out “that Stein’s and Brakhage’s concerns with the formal principles of composition coincide with those of the Cubists” (258).

The Cubists caught the visual rhythms of reality....they captured the relationship between the objects that belong to visual reality and the body. they captured how the body feels these objects – not in their optical appearance, but how they impress themselves on the body. The Cubists, Stein, and Brakhage all made rhythm (and often rhythm created through repetition) central to their work, and rhythm, as any teenager can testify, has somatic effects....perceiving is not a passive affair (258).

Another similarity between Brakhage’s and Stein’s work is its performative quality. Each frame is of great importance to Brakhage just as each word is of great importance to Stein, engendering an energy which lends the work a “heightened presence” (273). In Brakhage’s case, this can have the effect of pulling the viewer into a close corollary of the maker’s consciousness:

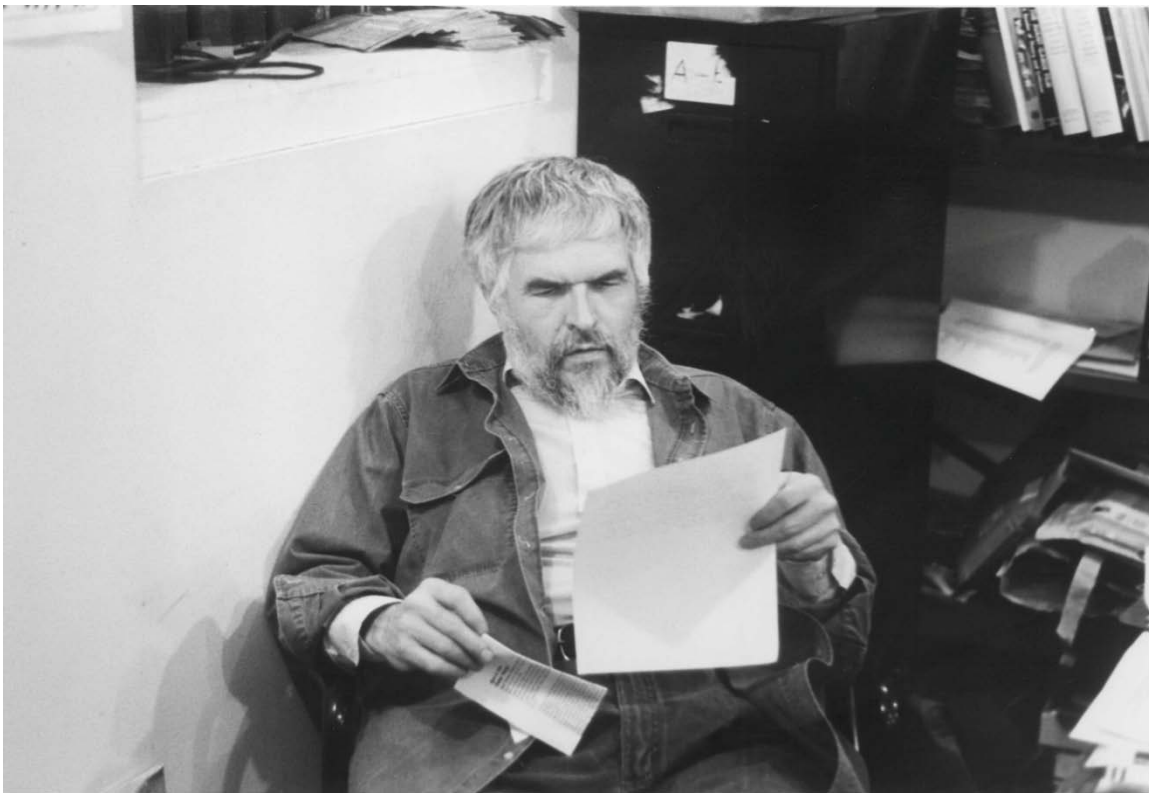
People watching a film by Brakhage identify with the maker since they must create a coherent whole from the many diverse visual forms they confront. But they identify, too, with the film – they enter into its images, and so sense their changes viscerally – and by this identification they come to feel they participate in revealing the imaginary realm the film puts on display and (this “and” is the cardinal point) elicits....The temporal qualities of Brakhage’s films and the temporal qualities of enunciation are very similar, for the temporality of both is that of the present tense; this identity strengthens the identification and makes viewers feel more strongly that they play a role in the enunciatory process (273).

Stein’s command of the language is as developed as Brakhage’s knowledge of cinematography. This skill allows both to push their respective media to the limit. The many techniques which Brakhage employs “have the effect of converting film from a representational to a presentational medium – from a medium which presents objects to a medium that presents movement” (277) bringing the work into the present tense which is so crucial to the “movement” which occurs in Stein’s work.

According to Bruce Elder, Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night* makes use of Steinian repetition, a choice which inevitably emphasizes "film's kinetic properties" (420). This kineticism is a crucial aspect of the medium which aligns it with Olson's theories regarding projective verse and proprioception:

The proprioceptive body is what allows us to apprehend the unified forms of Brakhage's films; the performative dimension of Brakhage's films suggest the struggle to make contact with the proprioceptive body, to access the resources for forging a unified form for his film (291).

So for Brakhage, for Stein, for Olson and many others, there must be a continual return to the breath, and ultimately, the body.



Stan Brakhage in the offices of Anthology Film Archives, c. 1996 by Robert Haller

## Conclusion

For Stan Brakhage, film is “ideally a document....of the filmmaker’s experiences of vision” (Elder 447). As Robert Creeley explained, “the experience offered by his films is initial, and has to do with the primary fact of sight, as light creates it” (*A Quick Graph* 365). For all his interest in poetry, Brakhage understands that the image has a remarkable ability to “convey the dynamism of reality” (Elder 21).

The Romantics understood that imagination is “the force that brings forth reality” (40). Ultimately, it is reality as he perceives it which concerns Brakhage.

Since imagination creates reality, whatever represents the inner workings of imagination are the truest documentaries. These documentaries, Brakhage tells us, are the real works of art (40).

In Romanticism, the experience of images is “an immediate, intuitive, non-rational act” (295). Bruce Elder elaborates upon the intuitive aspects of visionary creation:

No distance separates the knowing subject from the object of knowledge in such acts of immediate intuition, for this form of cognition effects an identification of the subject and the object of knowledge (while reason, to the contrary, opens up a distance between the subject and object). So the visionary experience is important in that vast, difficult complex of ideas that we call Romanticism, but it is equally true that the Romantics modeled their notion of Imagination, as the divine-like faculty in humans, on the faculty of sight (295).

Brakhage works from the belief that “immediate experience is the ground of all truth and all value, and that constructing narrative relations between events depletes the experience of the concrete particular of intensity, and what is perhaps as bad, misrepresents the truth about reality” (160). This ideal of concrete particulars places Brakhage in the lineage of American artists including Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Carlos Williams, and Gertrude Stein.

Film is a powerful and malleable medium which allows the conscientious maker to incorporate elements of all of the other media: poetry, literature, music, painting and dance. It involves an imposition of one person’s (or group of persons’) perspective upon the viewer, who, however voluntary his/her participation may be, is ultimately a captive audience. Too often critics are overly clinical in their separation of the arts; compartmentalization just makes it easier to pigeonhole and diminish work which has an energy that exists to spite academic dissection. Great artists always resist easy interpretation. Visionary artists defy category altogether.

Stan Brakhage is such an artist. Dedicated, passionate, and willing to be unfashionable in the interest of a higher power. Brakhage is not afraid to discuss his own work in terms which dismay the ultra-hip postmodern cynic. Film is Art. Brakhage demonstrates this over and over again in his work, and stands ready to defend it from the mindless scourge: Hollywood narrative filmmaking. In the development of an aesthetic, Brakhage has proved himself to be a thrilling, epic, visionary artist. To enter his cosmology is to experience the hypnagogic vision of a master.

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## Appendix

The following notes are based primarily upon discussions with Stan Brakhage which followed his Sunday evening film salon (University of Colorado, Sibell Wolle Fine Arts, N141) from 1997-1999. They are impressions of the films' contents based upon these conversations. They are not intended to be comprehensive, nor should they be mistakenly read as synopses of the films themselves. Any errors are the fault of the notetaker alone.

### **INTERIM (1952)**

Music by James Tenney/otherworld/beneath freeway/deSica, Jean Cocteau, Rossellini/poetic film/what film might be/Ken Jacobs: all film (art) shows sex organs (or at the very least, flowers), but the pictures move, bust this up/certain aspect of mind desires, creates symmetry of imagery, but diagonals can interrupt this symmetry/fake sense of depth in Renaissance perspective/*INTERIM* is one symmetry after another/symmetry of backbrain/need for symmetry is one sign of schizophrenia/walk from first shot to last shot/rhymed images/we bring stories to images/the mind wants to make a face (bane of the Abstract Expressionists)/SB and Tenney have been friends for over fifty years/made to save a friend who was out of control/SB was shy about a certain girl he wanted to meet, and thought that the film might be a way to seduce her/it was years before they could afford to put the soundtrack on the film/film is a form of silversmithing/Tenney was inexperienced, worked from his intuition/interesting psychological dynamics/one minute and forty second kiss (caused a scandal when the film was screened in Denver)/male character's strange negative reaction to the female character comes out of the repression of the time (moralism, McCarthyism)/subtext of ecological disaster, sense of lost love/disgust, fear over love and sexuality/art as a way out of the "creepiness" and despair of the time/cinematographer Stan Phillips went on to become a commercial filmmaker (*MADLINE*, ecological films for children)/SB learned never to sublimate

### **I...DREAMING (1988)**

Sound collage (by Joel Haertling) of Stephen Foster songs which emphasizes the agony behind the music/SB set pictures to the music/helped SB to get through a particularly difficult time/when to scratch, when not to/home as parlour (which relates it to Foster)/film can deal with the unnamable/we don't have a language to talk about film/both communal & private/sensitivity to the rhythm (of 24 frames-per-second or 16fps)/for the yes not for the mind/everything you put on the screen is an interruption of the purity of the life

7/13/97

**THE SONGS**  
**23rd PSALM BRANCH**  
**(1968)**

*SONG 12* made while suffering from a migraine/ series shifts from ebullient gold into blues/8 mm blown up to 16mm/glimpses of Michael McClure, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Louis Zukofsky/SB's childhood overshadowed by Hitler, Mussolini, Lindbergh/self-portraiture/Peter Kubelka took shots of SB drunk, almost passed out/overexposed shots of handwriting/SB was reading Zukofsky's *A* before it was in print/Zukofsky was frail/Zukofsky was very famous in the 20's, but had gone completely out of print/long poem inspired by Bach's "B Minor Mass"/Duncan and others got Zukofsky back into print, but it took a decade/rhymes Zukofsky with concentration camp survivors in glasses/"checkerboards of nature, zig-zags of man"/absolute geometries exist in thought only, not nature or human beings/break Os down into ovals and meat/attempts at re-creating closed-eye vision/SB used India Inks to get cracks similar to those seen in the Gobi desert/met Lichtenstein later/at this time, artists tried to stick together, one could be outspoken, critical of others' art/Lichtenstein liked Doris Day movies/Europe as the source of war/flashes, patterns/sound of Kubelka playing the recorder/Part 2: "Peter Kubelka's Vienna," "My Vienna," "Nietzsche's Lamb"/war as natural disaster/"Tribute to Freud"/inherited and bought footage/uses frame line/"I can't go on"/"My Vienna" homesickness/we are intrinsically dangerous/a Nazi was living in the house which Freud had occupied for 40 years/SB read everything Freud wrote, it saved his life/Nitsch had crucified a dead lamb, and made it into a happening/but what is Nietzsche's lamb?/did Nietzsche end philosophy?/Nietzsche's lamb is the victim without meaning, without grace/as opposed to Christ's lamb/"East Berlin" section is essentially unedited/a lot of nearly black leader/traveled into East Berlin to see Brecht play about Hitler/forbidden to shoot anything military/harassed by Nazi guards/beyond Kafka's imagination/guards could do whatever they wanted/Olson: "artists can" be heroes"/dot patterns laid in/city under siege/magic camera/"Coda:" music section (no longer about the sources of war, until the fireworks come in at the end)/remarkable imagery of children with sparklers/McClure playing the autoharp, a gift from Dylan/Hawkins is playing the lute with a feather/grabbing whatever is most charged/way out on a limb that ideas are in things/second half is spacier, argument is clearer in the first half/second section is very vague, so personal that it almost cannot be explained in words/war as child's play/balance & proportion/making the film caused trouble in SB's life, made him more warlike/"The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire"/the film demanded to be made/war is not a fit subject for art

8/31/97

**DIVERTIMENTO**  
**(1997)**

jarring/ephemeral/done in hospital after bladder surgery/disturbing to SB/  
Alzheimer paintings of DeKooning/extreme involvement: Pollock, Joan  
Mitchell, DeKooning/exploring the brain/put it away for almost a  
year/Pollock was a scary drunk, brutish, but was also extremely  
sensitive/"Frieze Painting,"/"Abstract Painting," Soufour

**FOR MARILYN**  
**(1992)**

SB decided that he could not afford to print anymore – began to run  
painted films through the projector/paint could stand for both persons &  
statements/shot in Finland/locked out of Russian Orthodox Church/Munch  
book (painting & words)/spiritual/"Praise Be Gods"/shimmering words  
scratched frame by frame/children Anton & Vaughan (whom he does not  
photograph)/where vision gets close to writing/rising and swirling  
upward/absolutely beautiful/Ken Jacobs was very offended by this  
film/shown on an evening with two other "Christian" films

9/21/97, 1/17/99

**LOVEMAKING**  
**(1968)**

no posing/more touching/engagement/children involved in a ritual with a  
stuffed alligator/Paul Cheritz and his wife (this section looks most posed),  
more edited, less documentary/Kubelka said, "It's not swinish  
enough."/Ruskin destroyed 500 "pornographic" paintings by Turner/four  
sections: husband & wife, homosexual couple, two dogs, sexual ritual of  
children (in preparation for sex, sublimating the sexual desire)/in the 60's,  
there was a different attitude about child nudity and sexuality/SB took it  
out of distribution after Supreme Court ruling on child pornography/does  
not want the last section to fall into the hands of child  
pornographers/projectionist in Lincoln Center refused to show it

11/9/97

**CHARTRES SERIES**  
**(1994)**

approximating stained glass by painting on film/was not allowed to  
photograph the cathedral/nosing into a new dark ages/if they could create  
this cathedral in the midst of such enslavement, we'll be  
alright/optimistic/movements/ INTRO – SYMMETRY/DEMONS –  
EPHEMERAL ESSENCE OF WINDOWS – SOLID WINDOW  
LINES/RESOLUTION/fear of evil/many cathedrals were built by  
volunteers over a span of centuries/built at height of Virgin  
worship/various guilds created their own windows (shoemakers,  
shipbuilders)/true symmetry horrifies SB/this is off-symmetry (as is

Chartres)/this building that should be a passage to the spirit world is sunk in stone and concrete (thus, the gargoyles)/expensive power center/if you get hung up on the structure, you're in trouble/each pane of glass was removed and numbered during the war, to be replaced later/is our society now devoid of ritual?/how many accomplishments of Western society were built on the abuse of women & children?/evil, insanity are chosen

**SELF SONG/DEATH SONG  
(1997)**

*DEATH SONG* is pale/gossamer wings which block the rays of the sun/cancer, cataracts (walking around in a cotton candy ball)/SB has met four truly evil people in his life/Harry Smith went through a few years where he was very bad/Smith was canonized and claimed at the end, although he didn't care for it/caused people's deaths through black magic, but later changed/Harry was made a bishop (anti-bishop) by Crowley's people/extreme close-up of hands and fingerprints/soft rain

2/1/98, 1/17/99

**BABYLON SERIES #1 & #2  
(1989, 1990)**

beautiful streaks, fireworks, trees, something under plastic wrap/frantic explosions of color/Hammurabi Code/extensive study/oldest law book/threes/ nails/#1 seems to be in two parts/law book for all to be equal under the law/Creeley and Robert Indiana's numbers book – language dominates even numbers/attempt to get away from titling/Roman numerals, then hieroglyphs/moving visual thinking/flares used to blow away or erase, then start again/prism/stopping down/"muddle of reflections and refractions in crumpled tinfoil" overexposed/a lot of shooting done at night/Boulder Crown Court Apts.

**CAT'S CRADLE  
(1959)**

1959 visit SB and Jane made to see old friends in Vermont/increased tension/cat in heat/two rolls of film/brief takes/terrible indigestion/Freud: every time sex takes place, it involves at least four people/single frames/match cutting/people don't need to like something to be inspired by it/the peripheral prompts dreams/people who are closest to one another (stylistically, aesthetically, philosophically) disagree most/Pound, Joyce, Stein, Proust/"Cantos" vs. "Finnegan's Wake"/SB spoke against Gregory Markopolous for years, even though he was a main inspiration/individuality/modes of production are the same in different cultures

2/14/98

**BABYLON SERIES #3  
(1990)**

scared SB so much that he did not continue the series/creeped by getting too deeply into the Babylonian mind/power madness/worship of jewelery/almost threw it away/photographing through crystals, pieces of glass/wealth side of Babylon/two rolls cut down to about 120 feet/bird's egg & purple blue/gold/deep ruby reds balanced by blues/deep jewel tones are dangerous/Kenneth Anger has an affinity for Babylon/Kubelka worked with black & white frames, then Tony Conrad made "Flicker," which couldn't contain it, caused people to have seizures

**THE WOLD SHADOW  
(1972)**

out in the yard (9,000 ft.), SB saw a giant humanoid shadow, but couldn't find what had created it/ran in to get his camera, came back and it was gone/to approximate this shadow, SB painted on a piece of glass which he placed in front of the window/fades in and out to approximate his blinking eyes/attempt to "recapitulate the history of Abstract painting" (Kiefer, Kline, Clyfford Still)/"wold" meant "wood," then for a couple of hundred years it was used to refer to a bare hill/later returned to its original meaning

**TWO ROLLS IN PROGRESS  
(IN COLLABORATION WITH PHIL SOLOMON)  
(1998)**

made to invoke musicals, as a joke response to other CU faculty who see musicals as art/lots of advice when SB had cancer/attempt at Fred & ginger/moving curtain/Solomon wants to use "Let's Face the Music & Dance" on the soundtrack/rephotographed a painted loop/at the end, knock it out of focus/2<sup>ND</sup> ROLL: autumn sliding into winter/rephotographed scratching/some of it is scratched on leader

2/22/98

**THIGH LINE LYRE TRIANGULAR  
SEX MEDITATION: OFFICE SUITE  
HYMN TO HER  
(1961, 1972, 1974)**

SB was influenced by Stein/at 18, Robert Duncan sent him a copy of Stein's "Geography & Plays"/Emerson/SB doesn't read a lot of philosophy (except Plato & Wittgenstein)/Jung's autobiography (told entirely through dreams)/never really read the American transcendentalists/despised "Walden"/can't take Emerson seriously as a poet or a philosopher/SB focuses on the object as Stein focused on the word/multi-planed, cubist/SEX MEDITATION: it takes balls to throw a sword down on a shag rug, but that is exactly what SB does/Gordon Rosenblum's office/masturbation fantasy (very difficult to make into art)/

Downy fabric softener commercial/*THIGH LINE LYRE TRIANGULAR*: recreation of memories, hypnagogic visions surrounding the birth of his third child/things that aren't photographable/ Jane resisted at first but eventually became devoted to the films/film & music have a strong kinship (tone, rhythm, etc.)/but the ears behave much differently than the eyes/eyes don't see rhythm the way ears hear it/in editing, it is important to trust the rhythm/has used rulers/complexity of rhythm within a shot/tones which come on like chords/colors vibrate (Hans Hoffman)"/tree, which contains a monkey, or a sniper"/working uphill/the office belonged to a millionaire friend and was filled with tricks/SB knew that his friend didn't care anything about sex/outrageous phallic symbols/how to capture this/Crystal's birth is fourth section of "DogStarMan"/Ed Dorn: poets throw words like stones, knowing that they can kill, but not using them for that purpose

3/29/98, 1/17/99

### **DESISTFILM (1954)**

set up party/hard to believe that this film is 47 years old/film society in Denver/shot with \$50 war surplus film (gun camera film)/made while working for Landen Abstract (lithographs)/repressed 1950s/influential for Cassavettes/Denver beatniks (Eastern High)/sound: wire recording of party noises/incredible sequence shot through a wine bottle/manic energy/existentialism did not go far enough, so SB and his friends created desistentialism/the guys wanted to travel around the country in a truck in order to make something that would be called "Christfilm"/everyone was running out of money, and eventually it occurred to them that it wasn't going to work/made *DESISTFILM* instead/whole film cost \$120/shot with metal Bell & Howell, which had belonged to Kenneth Anger/SB figured that if it had survived the shooting of Anger's "Fireworks," then it must be a good camera/advertised as a "beatnik party," but no marijuana, only wine ("good ol' dago red") & cigarettes/no sense of carrying on/everything was grabbed quickly/impressionism for the lovers/heavy boy-girl ratio/homosexual undertones/"Montovani Montoverde Liberace"/Maya Deren's parties

4/5/98, 3/21/99

### **"..." or "ELLIPSES" (1998)**

the idea that light rays are inverted inside the brain is nonsense/in reality, light bounces off of everything, like a swarm of bees/light is haphazard/you can make any representation of the world that is interesting to you/sight is fiction/technology reflects the way we have taught ourselves to see/overwhelming/"relax, and be cool, man, desist"/the West, esp., has created these fictions of seeing/Renaissance perspective drawing/making anew fiction/in movies, the fiction of the frame (wide

angles, illusion of movement)/visual music/"just live in a simple truth"/humans must evolve – we are not yet as enduring as cockroaches/we can not pay attention to EVERYTHING all the time, or we'd go crazy/artists endeavor to change our sensitivities/great artists change our perceptions/how much of daily experience is codified/Olson tried to grapple with our physiological limits/what of abilities we may have but may have not learned to use yet?/seeing as an imposition of the brain upon reality to create a picture/Pound: "making it new"/getting stuck in previous arts (to create new ways to perceive exterior reality)/Impressionists are painting the air/Plato's Cave/sit with your eyes open without blinking, until they tear, take a look at the light/lenses are ground to achieve Renaissance perspective/means of production in film are the same across cultures

4/5/98

### **THE MAMMALS OF VICTORIA (1994)**

cellular corollaries of hypnagogic vision (optic nerves)/follow-up to *THE CHILD'S GARDEN AND THE SERIOUS SEA*/envisionment of Marilyn Brakhage's growing up/teenage sexuality/sense of body/Pound's "bag of water loosely tied with a fig leaf"/shot on Vancouver Island/dreamlike/interior envisionment of childhood and puberty/ volleyball floating across the sky/teeth of the totem/first sense of the arc of life/gravity/lack of sense of consequences/SB's idea of what her puberty and teenagehood may have been like/artist's motivation can be very deceptive/difficult to invoke the interior with landscapes, our main signifiers for the exterior/undercranking allows one to get colors that can't happen at 24fps/nightvision/meditation on light/mile-long beach which is never deeper than 3 feet/remarkably warm

### **TWO FILMS: FEMALE MYSTIQUE & SPARE LEAVES (FOR GORDON)**

SB unsure when they were made, whether they were edited fully/perhaps early 60s, late 70s/no memory of making them or giving them away/somehow Gordon (Rosenblum) got them, gave them back/SB had never seen them before

### **GLAZE OF CATHEXIS (1990)**

cathexis: where impulses come to make an impression, or trace of memory (Freud)/mistranslation of Freud – cathexis means an investment, something your nervous system takes hold of/sound affects closed eye vision/first film painted after four years/bladder cancer from Coltar dyes

5/10/98

**THE 'b' SERIES  
(1995)**

*RETROSPECT*: high religious moments/Exodus/shapes chasing one another/"What does that have to do with OJ Simpson?"/figures under microscope/violent slashing reds, yellows/OJ's detachment/additional segments appear in the following order: *THE PASSOVER*, *BLUE/BLACK INTROSPECTION*, *BLOOD DRAMA*, *I AM AFRAID: AND THIS IS MY FEAR*, *SORROWING*/detachment of killers (McVeigh, Ramsey)/making a music of tragedy/significance of blood expunged/does it make any sense?/is it of any use?/closed eye vision while graffling with stories/would hypnagogic awareness help people to be a better jury?/spirituality of blood/ there is no red in *BLOOD DRAMA* until the end /blue black picturization, related to TV (as it relates to closed eye vision)/hypnotic pulse, picture composed of grains/could be showed as separate films, but do have an interactive power

**VISION OF THE FIRE TREE  
(1990)**

whip pans over mountains, clouds/aperture used to fade in and out/shakiness

**PURITY & AFTER  
(1978)**

two films/snow on windshield, then bar in Nederland, CO

**"..." (REEL THREE)  
(1998)**

SB doesn't want to refer to them as parts, or sections/reels can be shuffled/each reel is a different field/Duncan's "Opening of the Field"/Juan Gris/Braque/cubism seemed to end with Gris' death/angularity of the space within the frame/cubist colors

**NODES  
(1981)**

handpainting from the 70s

6/7/98



## **MURDER PSALM (1981)**

murder through laughter/little blonde girl, looks at herself in mirror, plays at fountain, but is interrupted by a (terrifying shot) red beach ball/some autopsy footage (knife cutting from chest to cock)/horse carts/negative images (tunnel, headlights)/red tinted Little Red Riding Hood/Stan Phillips (photographer of *INTERIM*) made a film on epilepsy for the Colorado Dept. of Health, gave bad reel to SB/pieces of this footage recur throughout (little girl, doctor, brain)/eleven rolls Dupont black & white negative & positive film which SB carried around for years (lights, tunnel)/haunting/Anger sent him the cartoon mouse footage/edited in three days/TV roll bar footage/*O LIFE STORY, THE ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES*/ circles/ cave/ cavity of man's head/done in a rage, sense of horror, out of a dream in which he killed his mother with an axe/SB had read an article that mother murder had decreased/trance/Doestoevsky's "Stabgrobin's confession"/sticks with narrative for longer than usual/Western vision/wagon wheel which runs over everything, later gets stuck in the dust/little girl watching dance of water, then ultimate bullying/cartoon-crash of Renaissance perspective, especially in the flatness of yellow flares/Siennese (stereopticon) vision/dropping rocks into water/Stan Phillips also tortured as a child (any Stanley in this era was tormented/narrative undoes itself/dead girl gets up/dead mouse gets up/things not reachable by language

## **NIGHTMARE SERIES (1978)**

jugglers in fog/white boy and black boy fight in parking lot/fish dying after having their heads chopped off for dinner/fire/filming of "City On Fire," movie starring Shelley Winters (seen in red fire cap) which never even made it to television/only Hollywood car explosion in any SB film (?)/mouse trapped inside plastic ball, terrorized by dog/horrifying hippie folk singing/parakeet on globe (third, fourth sequence)/North Atlantic Ocean/Freud is 80% wrong about dreams/limited by being a writer/nightmares come in four-and-a-half parts, series/ambiguity of number, last part of dream begins to seem like escape, ends with greatest horror of all (in this film, the cutting off of the fish heads)/what's disturbing about pins, or the guinea pig in the ball?/wanted to use his vision to show children how horrible their behavior was (it worked, they threw away the plastic ball)/tormented him with folk singing/geese are somehow horrible/Hawaiian shirt lighting the fire/youngest son horrifies him/quality of movement/where is the smoke coming from?/visual metaphors are more direct/film is more related to hieroglyphic language/language makes things more difficult to apprehend/Elder: no thought without language

**DELICACIES OF MOLTEN HORROR SYNAPSE**  
(1991)

Mark & Ruth Rheames (good Christian folk) put up the money to print it/savage, powerful film/Rheames showed 23<sup>RD</sup> *PSALM BRANCH* every Hiroshima day in Japan for as long as they were living there/close with Cid Corman/missionary teaching English poetry in Japan/died falling off a mountain (suicide?)/owned all the "Songs," showed them constantly/eradication of the spot/SB watched TV, then closed his eyes to see what it did to his hypnagogic vision/TV is a hypnotic, molten horror/brain is desperately holding on, trying to anchor itself/danger of symmetry/tiny creatures/silhouette of a grasshopper in the corner of your eye/works its way out of the traps/pull down phrase of the optical printer/ABC rolled

**"..." (REEL TWO)**  
(1998)

three-dimensional Abstract Expressionism/solarization/all three reels would take an hour and twenty minutes/future vision/like all prophecy, probably full of shit, but SB believes that people will get closer to their closed eye vision/breach from hard reality/ripping/uselessness of art is its greatest usefulness/Pound: arts as the antennae of the race/Nemeth film of Jackson Pollock painting/paint thrown on glass with camera underneath/Pollock didn't like how it worked, cracked him, began drinking, rapid decline (like Brando after "Last Tango In Paris")/paintings of the mind, but the mind is in motion, so film may be better at capturing this quality/olive, burnt umber/Man Ray also used solarization/ bi-packing/can be done through superimposition/aelfscin: light emanating from all things, eventually became difficult for SB to live with (it was like living in a blast furnace)/trails

7/5/98

**THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS**  
(1981)

leaves collaged onto film with tiny mountain flowers and plants (time-consuming process)/tweezers and paste/rapid/no camera involved/similar to *MOTH-LIGHT*/darker/sense of night/Jonas Mekas helped SB figure out to print a black and white negative, then bi-pack this with color/two layers of 35mm splicing tape/maddening, took a year to complete/"I got very angry with Hieronymous Bosch," who portrays plants very idealistically, while humans are grotesque/laid with face in the grass/grass is constantly fighting and twisting in an effort to reach the sun/tried to reflect upon the wonders of the phenomenological, which are God-given/everything is holy, but we are often incapable of acknowledging this/irritations which become the mainspring of the work/overwhelmed by: asthma, pollen, life at 9,000 feet, the end of a 27 year marriage/"Deliverance"/ plants strangling each other/complicated bi-packing/wondrous and horrible/respect what's given here now/organic/crawled through the grass coughing and wheezing/hypnagogic myths

9/6/98, 3/12/99

**FOX FIRE CHILD WATCH**  
**(1971)**

Ken and Flo Jacobs' child Neecey running around an airport/edited rhythmically to unintentional flares/child lost in space/blue

**WEDLOCK HOUSE AN INTERCOURSE**  
**(1958)**

made within weeks of marriage/black and white, ghostly, haunting/passed camera back and forth while quarrelling/mirrors, windows/figures disappear and reappear/negative of intercourse makes it less pornographic, more beautiful and passionate/Western Cine didn't want to print it/SB replied with a postcard which read "Balls!" (the reason it couldn't be printed)/manipulative work (traditional porn) is not art/to get into art things which had been excluded (sex, etc.)/there are "some things that just don't achieve an aesthetic"/death has been the primary subject of Western art (crucifixion)/Clive Bell, Heidegger, Robert Fry/"to see something, and to FEEL it"/the aesthetic affects, but doesn't tell you what to do/have to keep trying/war and sex are the most difficult subjects/when first birth film was shown, men fainted/this has changed/depictions of war: Siennese (Uccello), but mostly silly, staged representations/Ruskin burned many of Turner's paintings, which he saw as pornographic/landscapes which become violent sexual scenes with a shift of the eye

9/6/98

**"..." (REEL FIVE)**  
**with music by Jim Tenney**  
**(1998)**

looked at Tenney's score, "Flocking," which was based on some footage of SB's/often, there appears to be a race or fight between sound and picture/most often, eyes are distracted by sound (Hollywood film)/long piece of black leader (with music) before any image, attunes audience to the structure of Tenney's music/tried to avoid absolute synch/synch moments which are there are thus rendered extremely dramatic/echoing similarities/image painted over photography/stills which hang in background (sustained notes)/elements hang together, but are indifferent to one another/sound usually leads/"two snails moving along a track in the moonlight"/"parallel tracks of some kind"/*REEL FOUR* is not finished yet/first sound film in about five years/soundtrack becomes less abstract as the imagery becomes more abstract/image sometimes precedes, sometimes follows, the sound/weaving in and out/Tenney used two pianos, tuned a quarter tone apart/graphic score which requires an approximation by the players of the texture and tone/both pianists play the same score/begins with a very narrow band, then expands/music written in 1994/JT wrote a computer program which defined the form, then realized it/certain sustained tones/they are intended to have separate lives/high contrast negative of the scratches/yellow, blue, black/no paint, certain sections

colored in the printing process/there are also colors in the layers of the leader itself/"the process is always searching searching something out"/"a buzzing in the head because the voices are indistinguishable"

9/13/98, 10/4/98, 3/4/99

**THE CAT OF THE WORM'S GREEN REALM**  
(1997)

18 minutes/shot during chemotherapy/SB doesn't remember most of the photographing/boys called him out into the yard to see a worm they'd found/cat named Mack Daddy/macro lenses/shot using only natural light/after Dartmouth, asked his father to buy him film equipment rather than pay for college/lens extensions he had received in 1951, never used/first used them in *COMINGLED CONTAINERS* almost 25 years later/had to guess on f-stop/cat's tag rhymes with the moon/out of focus hexagonals/"nose all rubbed in death"/"photography's a damn crisis for me, because you come back with shapes that are namable things"/film is an ecological disaster/when it is not disposed of properly, it wrecks the water/it's poison/words were invented so that people could lie – poets, of course, hope to redeem this process/"the film must be something that words don't do"

**SHOCKINGLY HOT**  
**painted with Anton and Vaughan Brakhage**  
(1997)

Dad later messed with it/SB's flames are just like Chester Gould's in "Dick Tracy"/almost a word that Gould invented/Braque/equivalencies of nature, rather than representations/the photograph freed painters from representation/trunk filled with five years of Gould's comics cut out from newspapers/Gould was completely nuts/buried characters in the backyard when they were killed in the strip

11/1/98

**VISIONS IN MEDITATION #1**  
(1989)

four films in series so far/meditative/inspired agitation in at least one viewer/winter ice/Niagara Falls/side of a house/Stein's "Stanzas In Meditation"/ agitation at initial experience of something unique/recurrences of a very few themes/baby and candles/"bullet-like shapes of light"/oval shapes/difference between elements which repeat and elements which recur/if you can create an aesthetic, this is a good"/lessons and morals are biased, and therefore cannot form an aesthetic, and in this sense, are evil"/"music for the eyes"/most of the independent filmmakers working at "poetic cinema" teach, struggling to keep alive this other way of making film/we will none of us live to see whether film "took" as an art form/those who are so crazily obsessed that they are not dependent upon even the dream of an audience/there are a lot of great filmmakers, and

only three places in the U.S. for them to show their work/"experimental," term hatched by a "snotty" San Francisco journalist, is misleading, infers that the makers do not know what they are doing/"underground" also meant little to SB: "I'm a living room man myself"/can't call it art film, sounds dumb, makes some people think of porn/many more artists now than there were in the '60s, why do they go on?/H.D.: "Write. Write or die."/Jennifer Reeves – amazing young filmmaker (mid-twenties)/art comes through a singular source/the communal "I" (Robert Duncan)/Stein is the Cezanne of literature/"Stanzas In Meditation" has finally been released with the right words – Alice asked that all "mays" be replaced with "cans" in previous editions because Gertrude Stein had had an affair with a woman named May

11/22/98

### **TRYST HAUNT (1993)**

the meeting place – going through something to get somewhere/people see faces, etc., in the abstract shapes/superimpositions make certain planes seem to stop (step printing)

### **BIRDS OF PARADISE (1998)**

collaboration with Sam Bush at western Cine/SB sent instructions, Bush struggled with it for five months/shapes swing around/beak shapes/back pieces also swing/Bush is free to improvise/phone conversations/shaking inside the gate, causing streaming/has more solidity, even though it is the most ephemeral in its making/back and forth/"he miracle is that Western Cine exists at all"/begins with a loop (Moebius)/loose instructions/Medieval composers worked without a stave/\$100,000 step printer/Hoffman – the space that is created by colors and shapes in juxtaposition/motion in film/flaps/turning/when you turn a container, the space inside it is also turning/streaming, unnamed shapes, attached to emotions/color coded/shapes that sre variable and do not yet have names/"background music of the nervous system"/SB paints in the afternoon at Alleycatz, local restaurant on the Pearl street Mall/can only paint when he is surrounded by people doing mundane things/scared to do it in his office/fear of snapping/insanity/nothing to hold on to (nothing namable)/these things resist being brought to the light/got very sick working in this area alone/receding streaks/infinite possibilities for death

### **PRELUDES 13-18 (1993)**

free fall/blur of boundaries in depravation tank/people who have stayed in the longest all recall the same scene: three figures moving across a desert/  
BIRTH SEX DEATH

12/13/98

**COMMINGLED CONTAINERS  
(1997)**

had decided not to photograph again/got a good deal on a Bolex/tested it/  
had explorative surgery/at the time, finishing *THROUGH WOUNDED EYES* with Joel Haertling/case with extension tubes, which he had never  
used before/thinking he's going to die, just went for it/after he got back  
from surgery, saw this "gift from the mad side of the moon"/bubbles you  
can only see through film

1/17/99

**SINCERITY (REEL # 2)  
(1975)**

black and white footage from 1957/footage of Jane at football game shot  
by Jordan Belson/film class in Boulder/Jane's scratching sequence echoes  
tree branches/dog scratches earth and baby appears/outtakes from other  
birth films/SB is terrified of childbirth, could not have been present unless  
he was filming/SB believes that he had a traumatic birth/color,  
negative/red flares/lovemaking/train ride (sleeper car packed with children  
& dogs)/Edmund Wilson piece on the lie of autobiography/attempt to  
avoid lying, romanticizing/Pound: Chinese character for sincerity = a man  
standing by his word/SB translates this a man stands by his sight/SF:  
children walk through a hallway made of laundry/SB's asthma/  
representational as well as abstract images/what is this? how do we make  
it art?/equivalences/balance/certain things are unfilmable/Bruce Baillie  
shot train footage/hot tailing it back from SF/SB's mother looking through  
his things/Jane (and Jack Collom's) parents, she against wall, he relaxing  
in chair, smoking a pipe/SB loves cats, although they instigate his asthma

1/31/99

**EARTH SONG OF THE CRICKET  
(1999)**

recurring brown pattern/oak leaves/sudden pull backs/asymmetrical (Sam  
Bush)/ to center them would be schizophrenic/beerget: cartoonists' word  
for the sound of a cricket/Guy Davenport's introduction to book on  
Birchfield/beautiful painting/organic vs. .../SB argued with Bruce Elder,  
who contended that there is no thought without word or symbol/but even  
Elder had to acknowledge that there is something which occurs before the  
thought

2/21/99

**IN BETWEEN**  
**(1955)**

Robert Duncan introduced SB to Edgar Varese, John Cage/SB was living in NY with no money/ Varese refused SB permission to use his music in SHADOW GARDEN/Cage granted his permission/by his own account, this is the worst film SB has made/Duncan and Jess appear in it/film shot in their house, with Jess as main protagonist/masks, art objects/SB learning how to photograph/didn't understand Duncan and Jess' world very well/found them to be "wonderfully strange people" who were dedicated to the arts/SB lived in basement room, where James Broughton had stored his films while in Europe/Cage's "Sonata For Prepared Pianos"/the living room pictured was where SB first heard Cage's piano pieces/in the afternoons, Jess read from the Oz books, George McDonald/these are books which SB had missed out on in his childhood

**CHRIST MASS SEX DANCE**  
**(1991)**

SB and Jim Tenney lived far from one another/SB wanted to make a children's film/shot rehearsals of "The Nutcracker Suite"/immediately taken away by the sexuality of it/JT's cut up of Elvis' "Blue Suede Shoes"/cut down to the bone/film was cut to the music/music made in a very primitive studio (1960, University of Illinois, early program in electronic music)/JT built a noise generator/oscillation, filter/tape cutting and splicing/uses only thirty seconds of "Blue Suede Shoes"/came out of frustration with the equipment/five layers of superimposition (before this film, the most that SB had used at one time was four)/"wanted to make a film that Tchaikovsky would like, give him some giggles"/music used without permission/all the tape pieces were fractions of a second

3/4/99

**THE LION AND THE ZEBRA MAKE GOD'S RAW JEWELS**  
**(1999)**

reaction to the Discovery Channel/organs, bones, etc./poor zebras running away from mountain lions

3/7/99

**MOTHLIGHT**  
**(1963)**

collage/what is film?/made without a camera/moth wings, plants, flowers/originally pursued moths with the camera, but the footage was terrible/attracted to the light/does not work at 18 frames per second/intensity of moth flutter/studied them for some time/six months of taping it all to mylar/maddening process of putting the second piece of mylar on top of this

3/12/99

**PERSIAN SERIES (#'S 1, 4, 5)**  
**(1999)**

#1: fire and fade out/strong afterimages come from strong colors used/solid, a lot of color/"almost molten, huh?"/Klimt's robes/lava/flames/#5 is very hypnotic/#4: flowers/looked Persian to SB as he made it, full of glyphs/inspired by Persian miniatures/not enough maroon and blue to make one think of Persian rugs/one might have expected more geometry/glyphs lost in an explosion/grief over Iraq and Iran: SB's uncle Waldo was involved in the excavation of those lands, later drafted into the CIA, found it impossible to get out/Waldo was caught up in a controversy involving Qaddafi (who reminds SB of Kenneth Anger in the middle of one of his fits), eventually killed himself, or was killed, in his basement/the shah of Iran bought SB's SONGS, and SB was invited to show his films there, but he did not go

**SINCERITY IV**  
**(1979)**

seems true/is it a sincerity?/does it move with a clear sincerity?/separation between the man and woman/goats/features Carla Boyle and her child Sherry, in black and white, as a parallel *sinceritas*/intercutting of nodding heads/crowd shots/night time at the airport/dogs/SB naked in a hotel room, far from home/Palmer House Hotel/attempt to remember a period in time/identical rooms/thoughts of home/Sartre's *No Exit*/straight representation/Jim Otis: if something is repeated more than three times in a work, it becomes a state of mind

3/14/99, 3/21/99



# Links



## Links: Stan Brakhage

### **Brakhage Filmography:**

<http://www.fredcamper.com/Brakhage/Filmography.html>

### **“Realm Buster: Stan Brakhage: Michael McClure & Steve Anker in Conversation”**

from Chicago Review 47:4/48:1, Winter 2001:

<http://mcclure-manzarek.com/brakhage.html>

**Stan Brakhage on the Web:** A vast collection of links to writings and images related to the life and work of Stan Brakhage, curated by film historian and filmmaker Fred Camper:

<http://www.fredcamper.com/Film/BrakhageL.html>

### **Frame Enlargements by Fred Camper of films by Stan Brakhage:**

<http://www.fredcamper.com/Film/BrakhageS.html>

**Frameworks:** The Frameworks listserv focuses on avant-garde film and its archives include many discussions on the films of Stan Brakhage.

<http://www.hi-beam.net/fw/index.html>

**The Test of Time radio broadcasts by Stan Brakhage:** Brett Kashmere’s Transcripts and links to MP3 audio files of a 1982 radio program hosted by Stan Brakhage on KAIR at the University of Colorado.

<http://www.fredcamper.com/Brakhage/TestofTime.html>

## Links: Michael McClure

**“A Solid Moving Through An Inferno:”** Text of Stan Brakhage’s contribution to the 1975 *Margins* symposium on Michael McClure.

<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/mcclure/mc-brak.htm>

***The Maze:*** Produced in 1967 for KPIX television, this 25-minute film is narrated by Michael McClure, who also leads the filmmakers around the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. It is also notable for featuring the poet Richard Brautigan, the Grateful Dead, The Straight Theater, and a rehearsal for *The Beard* at which McClure was present:

<https://diva.sfsu.edu/bundles/189371>

### **Michael McClure: A Selected Bibliography 1956-2002**

<http://www.emptymirrorbooks.com/mcclure/>

**Michael McClure Literary Homepage at Light and Dust:** Poems by McClure and selections from his award-winning play *The Beard*. Also includes excerpts from 1975’s *Margins* symposium on Michael McClure:

<http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/mcclure/mcclure.htm>

### **Michael McClure Official Website:**

<http://www.michael-mcclure.com/>

**Michael McClure & Ray Manzarek:** Michael McClure’s page on the website for his frequent collaborations with Doors keyboardist Ray Manzarek includes links to many of the online sites related to McClure. This page also links to a fairly extensive selected bibliography of McClure’s published work:

<http://www.mcclure-manzarek.com/mcclure.html>

***Rebel Roar: The Sound of Michael McClure:*** Short film about Michael McClure

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1432976/>

**“17 Reasons Why I love the Work of Michael McClure” by Steven Fama:** According to Michael McClure, “My breath was taken away by Steven Fama’s essay-blog elucidating and appreciating my poetry, from Six Gallery readings through beast language and zen palpitations, to most recent iterations.” The blog also contains a link to Stan Brakhage’s film *Glaze of Cathexis*.

<http://stevenfama.blogspot.com/2010/02/17-reasons-why.html>

## Partners in Truth and Beauty

**Allen Ginsberg:** <http://www.allenginsberg.org/>

**Amiri Baraka:** <http://www.amiribaraka.com/>

**Beats In Kansas:** The Beat Generation in the Heartland: <http://www.vlib.us/beats/>

**Bob Dylan:** <http://www.bobdylan.com/>

**“David Haselwood and the Auerhahn Press:”** Article by poet San Francisco poet Cedar Sigo about publisher and Zen Master David Haselwood.

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2010/12/dave-haselwood-the-auerhahn-press/>

**David Meltzer:** <http://www.meltzerville.com/>

**Diane di Prima:** <http://www.dianediprima.com/>

**The Doors:** <http://www.thedoors.com/>

**Jim Tenney:** Brief profile and remembrances of composer and Brakhage collaborator Jim Tenney.

[http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/2006/08/james\\_tenney\\_19342006/](http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/2006/08/james_tenney_19342006/)

**Jonas Mekas:** <http://jonasmekasfilms.com/diary/#>

**Larry Keenan:** Counterculture photographer Larry Keenan documented the cultural and literary history of the West Coast in iconic photographs of Bob Dylan, Allen Ginsberg, and others. Many of the photos on this website feature Michael McClure during the time period featured in his correspondence with Stan Brakhage. <http://www.emptymirrorbooks.com/keenan/>

**Naropa Poetics Audio Archive:** Collection of audio from three decades of readings and lectures at Naropa University featuring many great poets including Michael McClure.

<http://www.archive.org/details/naropa>

**Olson Now Blog:** A Blog on the Poetry and Poetics of Charles Olson Edited by Michael Kelleher and Ammiel Alcalay. <http://www.olsonnow.blogspot.com/>

**Peter Kubelka:** Profile from Underground Film Guide. <http://www.ufilmguide.com/354/peter-kubelka/>

**Phil Solomon:** Filmmaker Phil Solomon was a friend and collaborator of Stan Brakhage, as well as a fellow professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder. <http://www.philsolomon.com/>

**Philip Whalen:** <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/whalen/>

**Ray Manzarek:** <http://www.raymanzarek.us/>

**Richard Brautigan:** Curator and archivist John F. Barber has assembled a comprehensive collection of facts and links related to author Richard Brautigan. <http://brautigan.net>

**Robert Creeley:** <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/creeley/>

**Robert Duncan:** Poet Lisa Jarnot's website includes links to information on the poet Robert Duncan. Jarnot is the author of *Ambassador From Venus*, a forthcoming biography of Duncan.

**Straight Theater:** History of The Straight Theater and the poster art of the psychedelic era by Reg Williams. <http://www.thestraight.com/index.html>

**Terry Riley:** Composer/musician Terry Riley is a frequent collaborator with Michael McClure. <http://terryriley.net/enter.htm>









# Biographies

**Michael McClure** gave his first poetry reading at the age of 22 at the legendary Six Gallery event in San Francisco, where Allen Ginsberg first read *Howl*. Today McClure is more active than ever, writing and performing his poetry at festivals, and colleges and clubs across the country.

“The role model for Jim Morrison,” as the Los Angeles Times characterized Michael McClure, has found sources in music from Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis to the composer Terry Riley with whom his poetry performances frequently share a bill.

Recently McClure joined with composer Terry Riley to create a CD titled *I Like Your Eyes Liberty*. The CD explores spontaneous music and voice (working together) expressing the outrageous and mystical in both artists.



McClure in Prague by David Port

McClure has worked extensively with his old friend Ray Manzarek, the Doors’ keyboardist, at festivals and colleges and clubs. They appeared with saxophonist David Sanborn on NBC-TV performing a jazz version of McClure’s “Love Lion Blues.” Mystic Fire released a 70 minute video of the duo and a compact disk *Love Lion* followed. McClure and Manzarek’s second CD carries on their explorations.

*Third Mind*, a film of Michael and Ray’s conversations and performances, was premiered by the Sun Dance Channel.

McClure reads with an actor’s command and a singer’s timing, his impact “transports audiences to a very different and intriguing place.” He has given hundreds of readings in venues as varied as the Fillmore Ballroom, Yale University, Stanford, The National Biodiversity Conference at the Smithsonian, and the Library of Congress. His audiences have ranged from an intimate dozen at a tiny Maui bookstore, to tens of thousands at San Francisco’s Human Be-in in San Francisco, and to multitudes at Airlift Africa. One of the poet’s readings was to, and with, four lions at the San Francisco Zoo – a film of it is sometimes shown on TV. McClure’s world-wide performances include Rome; Paris; Tokyo; Lawrence, Kansas, London, a bull ring in Mexico City, The Whitney Museum, and a steam room in Nairobi for a group of African businessmen.

A reviewer of a recent London reading wrote, “McClure’s West Coast delivery was deliberate, cool, spacious...” The *Journal-World* in Lawrence Kansas offered these observations of McClure at the William Burroughs celebration, “McClure looked cool. Yet he grew warm, wending lyrical words around the air and across the hall, The coolness fell away with his simple elegance in word and presentation... McClure was controlled and read with steady jazz rhythms, a perfect, minimal chart of spoken words.”

He has received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Obie Award for Best Play, an NEA grant, the Alfred Jarry Award, and a Rockefeller grant for playwriting. McClure has written twenty plays and musicals which are performed in the U.S. and abroad. His play *The Beard* provoked numerous censorship battles, in Los Angeles, the cast was arrested after each performance for fourteen nights in a row. Later *The Beard* received two Obies in N.Y.C. and was warmly embraced in both London and Paris. The play has played a role in U.S. censorship and free speech battles since 1966 when it won the first lawsuit.

The poet is featured in Scorsese's *Last Waltz*, in which his reading of a poem by Chaucer "lilted, rolled, and seduced the audience into the lyric tonality of Middle English" (*Atlanta Poetry Review*). McClure played a Hells Angel in Norman Mailer's film *Beyond the Law*. He has a cameo in Peter Fonda's *Hired Hand*.

McClure has made two television documentaries – *The Maze* and *September*. His many books of poetry include *Jaguar Skies*, *Dark Brown*, *Huge Dreams*, *Rebel Lions*, *September Blackberries*, *Rain Mirror* and *Plum Stones*. He has published eight books of plays and four collections of essays, including essays on Bob Dylan and on environmental issues. His novels are *The Mad Cub* and *The Adept*.

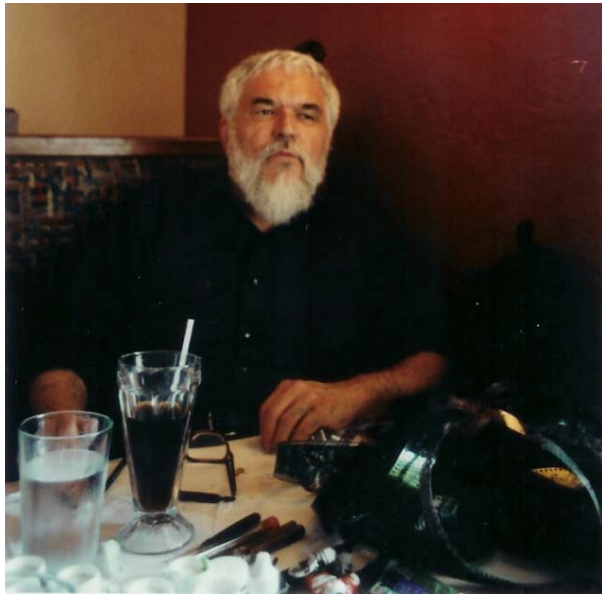
McClure's songs include "Mercedes Benz," popularized by Janis Joplin and new songs which are being performed by *Riders on the Storm*.

His journalism has been featured in *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair*, and the *L.A. Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Michael McClure's travels include Africa, Mexico, South America, India, Thailand and Japan. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area hills with his wife the sculptor Amy Evans McClure.

Two collections of Michael's poems are presently being published: *Mysteriosos and other Poems* (New Directions spring 2010) and *Of Indigo and Saffron: Selected and New Poems* (University of California Press, 2010).

McClure is a Professor Emeritus of California College of the Arts, and holds an honorary doctorate.



Stan Brakhage by Lisa Jarnot, Summer 2001

**Stan Brakhage** was one of the most important filmmakers of the Twentieth Century. His epic *Dog Star Man* was named one of the 100 best films of all time by the Library of Congress. Prior to his death in March 2003, Brakhage made close to 400 films.

Brakhage lectured at the Art Institute of Chicago and spent more than two decades as a professor at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His honors include four retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art, three honorary degrees (SFAI, Cal Arts, and Bard College), a lifetime achievement award from the Denver International Film Festival, and a MacDowell Colony Medal. In 1998 Brakhage's work was the subject of three months of conferences at the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

Stan Brakhage was born in 1933 and was adopted at the age of three weeks. He endured a difficult childhood during which he lived in a series of foster homes and his intellectual interests made him the target of bullies. After brief periods of study at Dartmouth and San Francisco's Institute of Fine Art (where he was instructed in photography by Minor White), Brakhage lived in the basement apartment of the house shared by poet Robert Duncan and the painter Jess Collins. Here he came to know poets including Kenneth Rexroth, Louis Zukofsky, Kenneth Patchen, and Michael McClure.

Although Brakhage aspired to be a poet who also made film, in the tradition of Jean Cocteau, Robert Duncan convinced him that he was not a poet and soon Brakhage concentrated entirely upon his exploration of the film medium.

Attempting to replicate the qualities of light as perceived by the eye, especially closed-eye, or hypnagogic, vision, Brakhage's film work tested the bounds of the medium and created a highly personalized and subjective vision. The filmmaker often scratched or painted on the film and rarely used sound, believing that the rhythm of the images was pronounced enough to render any added sound extraneous and that sound would, in fact, interfere with the perception of his visual rhythms.

**Christopher Luna** is a poet, visual artist, and editor with an MFA in Writing and Poetics from the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. He is the co-founder, with Toni Partington, of Printed Matter Vancouver

([www.printedmattervanc.wordpress.com](http://www.printedmattervanc.wordpress.com)), an editing service and small press that serves Northwest writers. Luna edits "The Work," a monthly email newsletter featuring poetry events in Portland, Vancouver, and the Pacific Northwest (<http://christopherluna-poetry.blogspot.com>), and is a regular contributor to Sage Cohen's *Writing the Life Poetic* E-Zine (<http://www.writingthelife poetic.typepad.com>).

His articles and criticism have appeared in *Rain Taxi Review of Books*, *New York Journal of Books*, the *Poetry Project Newsletter*, *Current Biography*, the *Columbian*, the *Oregonian*, *Willamette Week*, *Vancouver Voice*, and the *Boulder Planet*, among others.

He is a respected creative-writing teacher, mentor, and the host of a successful open mic poetry reading at Cover to Cover Books in Vancouver, established in 2004. Luna frequently collaborates with musicians and has been a featured reader at bookstores, nightclubs, libraries, and coffee shops across the nation. His spoken word recordings have been featured on Dr. Demento and Vin Scelsa's "Idiot's Delight," and his poetry has appeared in *Night Bomb Review*, *Soundings Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Full of Crow*, *Cadillac Cicatrix*, *The Lion Speaks: An Anthology for Hurricane Katrina*, *eye-rhyme*, *Gare du Nord*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Many Mountains Moving*, the *@tached document*, and *Big Scream*.

His books include *tributes and ruminations* (Dristil Press, 2000), *On the Beam* (with David Madgalene, 2005), *Sketches for a Paranoid Picture Book on Memory* (King of Mice Press, 2005), and *GHOST TOWN, USA* (This is Not an Albatross, 2008). *To Be Named and Other Works of Poetic License*, a poetic travelogue and art book created in collaboration with David Madgalene and Toni Partington (<http://www.tobenamed-artandpoetry.blogspot.com>), was released in 2010.

"More than we can bear," an epic investigative poem about the immediate aftermath of September 11, was anthologized both online (*For Immediate Release*) and in print (*On the Way After 9/11*, 2002 and *Candles in the Dark, Flames for the Future*, 2003, both edited by David James Randolph for New Way Media). He is also the author of *Literal Motion* (Bootstrap Press, 2001), which features three interviews with the filmmaker Stan Brakhage.



Christopher Luna by Anni Becker

# **Acknowledgements**



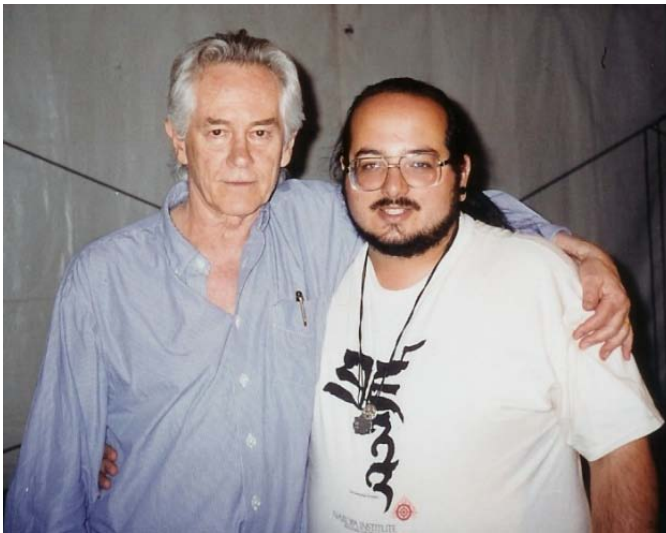


# Acknowledgments

*The Flame Is Ours* was conceived by my friend and mentor Stan Brakhage, whose weekly Sunday night film salons at the University of Colorado Boulder constituted a second education as I studied down the hill at the Naropa Institute. The salons featured the work of experimental filmmakers (including Brakhage), and each showing was followed by a discussion with Brakhage in which he shared stories about his encounters with some of the greatest artists of the Twentieth Century. He also delineated his complex aesthetics. As I was preparing my thesis on Brakhage's work and its relationship to the other arts, he mentioned his correspondence with Michael McClure, and asked me to edit it. It was as simple as that. I am grateful to Stan for trusting me with this project, and for the knowledge and companionship he shared so openly.



Stan Brakhage by Lisa Jarnot, Summer 2001



Michael McClure and Christopher Luna at Naropa University in Boulder, CO, Summer 1999

I am also grateful to Michael McClure for his patience, his guidance, and his heroic willingness to assist me in shaping the manuscript, especially in its final stages. The interviews he granted me, and his ideas on the footnotes, were invaluable. He also allowed me and my friend, the writer David Madgalene, into his home to discuss the project. He and his wife, the artist Amy Evans-McClure, made us feel welcome, and allowed us access to their impressive collection of art and literature.

It is my sincerest hope that *The Flame Is Ours* is a worthwhile addition to the legacy of these two great minds.

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Robert Haller and Stan Brakhage standing and speaking to Michael Chikiris (back to camera), 1973 by Robert Haller



Stan Brakhage's papers at the Celeste Barton Film Preservation Center in Hamlin, PA

There are, finally, two people without whose assistance the editing of the correspondence might never have been completed: my father, Paul Luna, who accompanied me to Hamlin to take a look at Brakhage's papers when they were temporarily stored there; and David Madgalene, my friend, fellow Kerouac School alum, and collaborator, who provided moral support and feedback throughout the process. David and his wife, Judy, provided me a place to stay when in California. David also accompanied me to Michael McClure's home in 2004 and 2005, and recorded our conversations.



