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From the Notebook of...

Robert Beavers

1971, 35 mm, color, 48 min., English. **Producer** Robert Beavers (Berlin, Germany). **Written and directed by** Robert Beavers. **Director of photography** Robert Beavers. **Sound** Robert Beavers. **Editor** Robert Beavers.

Contact: rbeavers@thing.net

"Leonardo's notebooks and Valéry's essays on Leonardo's creative method inspired my filming in Florence. I filmed myself observing various locations in darting camera movements, then I reflected on the details and placed them within my 'notebook-film'. [...] From the first scene [...] the film's image and sound develop through a series of metaphors. The matte moving in front of the camera plays between the horizontal notebook and vertical window, turning like a page or a window shutter. One of the central points of inspiration was Leonardo's notation of shadows. I used the surface of my notebook and desk to translate some of his observations and discovered the shadow as a place for sound. There is a constant shift between the different ways of seeing images and reading a text. The film is a hybrid between sound and silence; each of my written notes in the film is an occasion for the spectator to reflect on his or her own voice."

Robert Beavers

From the Notebook of... is presented in a 35mm print restored by the Austrian Film Museum. The restoration was supported by Markus Schleiner.

Before filming *From the Notebook of...* in 1971, I had already developed the use of mattes and colored filters as my structural and expressive means. The earliest films, made between 1967 and 1970, presented various spiritual and homoerotic themes, set in the places where I was living: Greece, Switzerland, West Berlin, and London.

I saw the film frame as a many faceted whole that could unite diverse visual elements. Each film was edited on several bands of film with its own rhythm, and these images were brought together in printing the film. I also tried to use the same measures for the sound, but the result was a dominance of the image's rhythm and a grotesquely aggressive sound track. Nonetheless, the patterning and positioning of image fragments within the film frame led to *From the Notebook of...*'s complex form.

In all of my early films, it was as if I were creating the film in the small compendium that held the filters and mattes in front of the lens. I moved the focus between the extreme nearness of the colored filters and the scene in front of the camera, and as I changed the exposure, the matte-shapes appeared and disappeared. These manipulations both inside and in front of the camera helped the image 'to breathe.'

I often placed an isolated male figure, juxtaposed against a prismatic abstraction of colors to suggest his particular state of mind. Later, I decided to replace these figures by filming 'myself as filmmaker' and balanced the view of a city or landscape with this self-portrait. The first film of this kind was *Diminished Frame* (1970) with its black & white images of West Berlin and views of my hand placing colored filters in the camera.

The starting point for *From the Notebook of...* was more complex. Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks and my reading of Paul Valéry's essays about Leonardo's creative method inspired my work in Florence. Vasari's biography of Leonardo led me to my first location: the scene of doves being set free from a shop next to the Palazzo del Bargello. The flight of doves is carried forward in the turning pages and juxtaposed to my opening of the window onto the Florentine rooftops. Starting with the bird's wings and my turning notebook pages, the sound develops through a series of metaphors.

I filmed myself observing various locations, quickly gathering image and sound in darting movements, then in my room, I reflected on the details and placed them within my 'notebook'. There is a graphic development of the film frame as page. I used the mattes to superimpose diverse elements of color, text, sound, and image in one composition. The matte in front of the camera plays between the horizontal notebook and the vertical window, turning like a page or a window shutter.

One of the central points of inspiration was Leonardo's notation of shadows. I used the surface of my notebook and desk to translate some of his observations into film. I also discovered the shadow as a place for sound. Both the matte-shapes and shadows are vehicles that helped join together diverse details.

The written notes place the spectator sometimes in the position of a reader while seeing the film. There is a constant shift between the different way of seeing images and reading a text. The film is a hybrid between sound and silence; when we read, we are creating our own subjective sound; each of my written notes in the film is an occasion for the spectator to reflect in his or her own voice.

Towards the middle of the film, I placed a second Bolex camera on my table; its aperture becomes another threshold for sound. The whirring camera shutter joins the rushing water of the Arno river,

or the click of the single frame mechanism suggests the tapping of a hammer, and because Leonardo was also a musician, I added a few notes of the viola at one point.

As the film progresses we pass from the apparent stillness of the handwritten notes to seeing movement in the rhythm of the editing; the counterpoints and juxtapositions within the page often establish the rhythm between the editing and the notes.

Near the end, when I close the notebook and the window shutter, a last handwritten note appears: "Film all of my actions that have nothing to do with filmmaking." And the sound of the bird's wings leads to the final images of Gregory Markopoulos and myself reflected in a mirror. It was his dedication and the generosity of the painter-filmmaker, Silvio Loffredo that enabled me to live in the piazza Santo Spirito and film *From the Notebook of...*

I was twenty-two years old when I filmed and first edited *From the Notebook of...* I returned to re-edit the image and went back to Florence to record more sound and edited a new sound track in the '90s. It is this final version that was used for our digital and 35mm restoration that I did with Claudio Santincini at the Austrian Film Museum and Listo in Vienna and at Arri in Berlin. We worked together to color grade and view tests before the final 35mm internegative and projection copy were made.

Robert Beavers

Robert Beavers was born in 1949 in Brookline, Massachusetts. He has lived in Berlin since 2007. Beavers attended Deerfield Academy before meeting the filmmaker Gregory J. Markopoulos in 1965. They resettled in Europe in 1967 and removed their films from distribution in the early 1970s, later creating the Temenos Archive in Switzerland, and the Temenos screenings in the Peloponnese (1980–86). Beavers is best known for *My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance* and *Sightless Measure*, a cycle comprising 18 of his films (many later re-edited) made between 1967 and 2002. This includes the multi-layered psychic explorations of his early films and the later films in which he develops his lyric sense of architectural and cinematic space. With the completion of *My Hand Outstretched...*, his films were shown internationally in full retrospectives at TIFF, Whitney Museum of American Art, UC Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, Tate Modern, and Austrian Film Museum. He has since completed the three films *Pitcher of Colored Light* (2007), *The Suppliant* (2012) (both shot in the US), and *Listening to the Space in My Room* (2013). In addition to his own filmmaking, he continues the Temenos Archive in Uster, Switzerland and Temenos screenings in Arcadia, Greece (2004/08/12/16).

Films

1966: *Spiracle* (12 min.). 1967: *Winged Dialogue* (21 min.). 1969: *Plan of Brussels* (21 min.). 1969: *The Count of Days* (21 min.). 1969: *Palinode* (21 min.). 1970: *Diminished Frame* (24 min.). 1970: *Still Light* (25 min.). 1970: *Early Monthly Segments* (33 min.). 1971: *From the Notebook of...* (48 min.). 1972: *The Painting* (13 min.). 1972: *Work Done* (22 min.). 1975: *Ruskin* (45 min.). 1975: *Sotiros* (25 min.). 1980: *Amor* (15 min.). 1983: *Efpsychi* (20 min.). 1985: *Wingseed* (15 min.). 1990: *The Hedge Theater* (19 min.). 1997: *The Stoas* (22 min.). 2001: *The Ground* (20 min.). 2007: *Pitcher of Colored Light* (24 min.). 2010: *The Suppliant* (5 min.). 2013: *Listening to the Space in My Room* (19 min.).