

le discours dominant. Mais où se terrent les autres voix, l'état n'a-t-il pas la vie facile devant le mutisme du milieu cinématographique ? Dorland donne l'heure juste et crée un immense miroir qui favorise l'introspection.

Ma conclusion aurait été différente de celle de l'auteur. À mes yeux, le livre évoque un constat : une perpétuelle renonciation au protectionnisme. Je ne peux m'empêcher de constater le besoin imminent de statuer sur un quota de films canadiens sur nos écrans, en écho à Peter Morris (dans *Embattled Shadows*, cité par Dorland): « Federal and provincial government did not, in the Twenties, legislate effective protection and support for the production, distribution, or exhibition branches of the industry. »

On peut observer aujourd'hui que le gouvernement a vu à soutenir l'industrie par différents moyens : la création de l'ONE, l'entreprise du « Canadian co-operation Project » de 1948 à 1958, l'option co-production depuis 1963, le CFDC en 1968, Téléfilm Canada en 1982, la contrainte de télédiffusion, etc. Le gouvernement a constamment légiféré en faveur d'un soutien (alias contrôle) du cinéma.

Tout dernièrement, Sheila Copps proposait de percevoir une taxe additionnelle sur le billet d'entrée en salle pour financer le cinéma canadien. On nous parle encore et toujours de « soutien

au cinéma ». Quand verra-t-on que le cinéma n'a pas tant besoin de soutien que de protection ? L'histoire démontre qu'on a constamment réfuté la légitimité de l'imposition d'un quota en raison du « sous-développement de l'industrie inapte à répondre à la demande » (l'argument tient du sophisme, quoique parlementaires obligent). L'industrie d'aujourd'hui est au rendez-vous, pourquoi n'a-t-on toujours pas de quota ? À l'heure où la télé et la radio ont chacune leur quota, comment se fait-il que le cinéma n'ait pas sa part de nos écrans ?

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THE FILMS OF STAN BRAKHAGE IN THE AMERICAN TRADITION OF EZRA POUND, GERTRUDE STEIN, AND CHARLES OLSON

R. Bruce Elder.

Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998, 572 pp.

Writing a book on the cinema of Stan Brakhage is a formidable challenge. Who has seen all his work? Who *can* see all those films, without video distribution, when the cost of renting 16mm copies runs about three dollars (Canadian) a minute? (Only a handful of his films have ever been released on tape.) Perhaps only someone like Bruce Elder, who has been a

committed viewer of Brakhage's films for thirty years, seizing every opportunity to re-see films and keep up with the new. If a scholar started today, studying one film a day, the task would consume most of a year, and by that time the filmmaker would have provided another week's work of viewing, at his current remarkable pace. The filmography of Elder's book runs nine pages with seldom more than one title per line from *Interim* (1952) to "... *Ræls 4 and 5* (1998). No wonder the text is four hundred and fifty-two pages long with another one hundred and twenty pages of Glossary, Notes (many of them essential reading for serious students of the subject), Selected Bibliography, Filmography and an Index.

Surprisingly, the primary limitation of *The Films of Stan Brakhage* is that the book leaves us wanting to know even more about Brakhage's films. That is because Elder has compounded the daunting task of writing a book about Brakhage's massive oeuvre with elaborating a prolegomena to Brakhage's aesthetics, which entails an extensive discussion of the poetics of Williams, Pound, Stein, and Olson, with long excursions into the writings of Schopenhauer, Bergson, Whitehead, William James, Merleau-Ponty, Hulme, Emerson, Lawrence, McClure, and Ginsberg.

The Rabelaisian excess of this catalogue of philosophers and poets should be a clue to the oddity of the book. It

is not precisely a scholarly or critical study, although Elder demonstrates repeatedly the qualifications of an academic analyst of this material with rigorous and insightful readings of films, poems, and philosophical prose. It is both a manifesto by a filmmaker with a lot of formal schooling about the modernist tradition he shares with Brakhage, and an open love letter about the films and the filmmaker who has meant the most to his own work.

For the most part Elder features the same Brakhage films esteemed by other critics: *The Dead* (1960), *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* (1961), *Dog Star Man* (1961-64), *Songs* (especially *The 23rd Psalm Branch* [1966-67]), *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971), and *The Text of Light* (1974). He brings fresh ideas and a vivid aesthetic context to his discussion of these films, and he scrupulously delineates the differences between his readings and those of his predecessors. Yet it is when he enters into previous uncharted territory, writing on *Made Manifest* (1980), *Unconscious London Strata* (1981), *Tortured Dust* (1984), and *A Child's Garden and the Serious Sea* (1991) that Elder makes his greatest contribution to the study of Brakhage's individual works. It is clear from the passing remarks he makes on many other films that he knows the oeuvre thoroughly and has thought seriously and originally about many films he passes over briefly. For instance, his esteem for the *Visions in Meditation* series (1989-90) ("Brakhage's

fullest achievement") makes one regret that he did not take even more space to devote analytical attention to it.

The author's personality and polemical aesthetic positions repeatedly show through despite the donnish tone; passionate enthusiasms and nurtured grudges surface repeatedly. One even glimpses a Pauline sensibility with strong Protestant convictions and an unfashionably sacramental view of marriage in these pages. Although the writing is mercifully free of contemporary academic jargon, Elder has felt the need to append twenty pages of Glossary for poetic, philosophical, and psychoanalytic terms.

The reader is struck at all points by Elder's demon of synthesis, a compulsion to compare that often reaches a frenzied pitch. No sooner does he start presenting the gist of Bergson's philosophy than he begins, characteristically, to point out its similarities to Peirce's. Later, it is as if he cannot help but insert into a sentence about Stein's view of Cezanne that Michael Snow came to the same conclusion, although Snow plays no role in this book. An endnote on *Visions in Meditation* turns into a paragraph comparing Brakhage's career to Robert Creeley's. The analogies are so promiscuous that they squander their power of conviction. For example, he compares Brakhage's *Made Manifest* to William Carlos Williams's poem "Young Sycamore." After a few very good pages on the

poem he launches into four pages on the rhythm and imagery of the film. These give us seven of the finest paragraphs ever written on a Brakhage film. But the model of "Young Sycamore" is irrelevant to their vigor and usefulness.

From the Preface we learn that Elder was himself a poet on the road to Damascus as a doctoral candidate in philosophy when an encounter with Brakhage and his films transformed his vocation. The pages devoted to the texts of philosophers testify to the author's enduring commitment to charting the philosophical bases of the principles of Brakhage and the poets. In his complex argument he has to put in place Schopenhauer's theory of being as bodily volition, Bergson's concept of intuitive empathy (and Hulme's application of it to art criticism), along with Whitehead's definition of things as semi-stable patterns in a realm of flux, in order to describe a matrix for modernist debates among the poets he admires—largely the ones Brakhage reads. Usually he is less concerned with Brakhage's idiosyncratic reading of those poets than with the poets' versions of the philosophical positions and the relevance of those versions for Brakhage's filmic practice. He does not claim or suggest, for instance, that a reading of "Young Sycamore" influenced the making of *Made Manifest*, but that for both rhythm determines form.

At what I take to be the heart of the book, in the section he calls "Out of Stein: A Theory of Meaning for Stan Brakhage's Films," Elder carefully works out the derivations of Brakhage's privileging of connotation over denotation from Stein's theory and practice. At stake is a definition of Brakhage's concept of seeing which Elder takes further than any of his predecessors, particularly William Wees, David James, and myself. And it is here, too, that he confesses a fundamental disagreement with his master: "In recent years Brakhage has argued that Stein is a more radical, and a more crucial writer than Pound. His assessment is not one I can assent to...." The matter of his assent would have no place in a strictly academic study. But this is a book modelled on Ezra Pound's writings about his contemporaries and his tradition. Throughout, Elder suggests that Pound's construction of the poetic selfhood and his theory of imagery is the fundamental paradigm of modernist lyrics; and therefore the ground for Brakhage's and, implicitly, his own films.

The commitment to Pound is so strong and fertile a conviction that Elder leaves out or under-emphasizes several of the poets central to Brakhage's project, and he discounts the temporal succession of their influences and affiliations as Brakhage's work developed. Robert Duncan, in whose house Brakhage lived early in his career, may have had the greatest influence on his reading of poetry, but

he is only a peripheral figure here. The typo in the Index that attributes his *Opening of the Field* to Olson may be emblematic of his lapse of status. Conversely, Allen Ginsberg, whom Brakhage dismissed as a poet, plays a larger role in this book because of Elder's appreciation of his poetry, while Robert Kelly, who was crucial to Brakhage in the Sixties, and Ronald Johnson whom he read passionately in the Eighties and Nineties, are conspicuously absent. Brakhage himself reads a few modern poets intensely, obsessively. Stein, and the Black Mountain school, who stem from Pound, occupy the center of his concerns. He seldom alludes to Eliot, Frost, or Stevens, even less to the poets in their tradition. He has paid little attention to philosophy.

The sheer magnitude of his ambition opens Elder's enterprise to criticism. Unfairly but inevitably one asks too much of this superb book because of the scarcity of good writing on Brakhage elsewhere. Had Elder written merely the lengthy section on Stein and Brakhage he would have made a major contribution to the study of both. The same might be said of the many pages on Pound and Brakhage, or on Olson and Brakhage. There are two or three books conjoined here, and we need even more. Wilfrid Laurier University Press deserves special praise for their support and confidence in Elder, who had previously published two substantial volumes with them on avant-garde cinema, *Image and Identity*:

*Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture and
A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body
in Recent Film and Poetry.*

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Editor's Note: Although P. Adams Sitney contributed a paragraph to the jacket of *The Films of Stan Brakhage*, he was not a reader for Wilfrid Laurier University Press, and this review goes much further than his back-jacket comments.

GENDERING THE NATION: CANADIAN WOMEN'S CINEMA

Edited by Kay Armatage, Kass Banning, Brenda Longfellow, and Janine Marchessault

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 329 pp.

Gendering the Nation brings together eighteen essays by leading feminist film scholars. Covering a range of women's filmmaking in Canada, most of the essays were written specially for this volume. While they intend to celebrate women's cinema, the editors also want to show how female filmmakers have inflected national cinema and national identity. A truly integrated account of gender and nationality would destabilize both categories, they suggest, for sexual difference "disrupts the imagined community of nation" just as localized nationalities challenge an "often essentialized and romanticized community of women."

Despite this ambitious agenda, most of the essays focus on textual analysis of works by individual filmmakers. Kay Armatage's piece on Nell Shipman opens the collection, probing what it would mean for feminism and film historiography to include a full consideration of women's cinema. By taking up Shipman, whose work, Armatage admits, can be "a bit embarrassing" in its embrace of "a patriarchal, non-oppositional construction of femininity," Armatage challenges the view that feminist filmmaking must offer "textual resistance to the dominant mode." Shipman articulates an "heroic femininity" *within* the mainstream, Armatage insists, one that resists all-too familiar stories of female victims in need of rescue. From the outset then, Armatage's essay complicates any simple celebration of women's cinema, asking us to look at the complications female filmmaking can pose for both feminism and film historiography.

At their strongest, the essays step away from questions of individual authorship to consider how women's films emerge and circulate within broader cultural debates and wider institutional forces. In a finely nuanced history Elizabeth Anderson positions the rise of the National Film Board of Canada's Studio D alongside the advent of other independent women's filmmaking collectives in the early 1970s—*Women in Focus* in Vancouver, *Reel Life* in Halifax, and *innervations/ARC* in Toronto—arguing that "Studio D's