

ALL THAT IS LIGHT - BRAKHAGE AT SIXTY

Suranjan Ganguly

When he's not in class lecturing on Méliès and the Sieneese Renaissance painters, or drinking Irish coffee at Pearl's in downtown Boulder, or armed with crayons doing a very complicated squiggle with his two small children, Stan Brakhage is hard at work in his attic, carefully adding another layer of blue with his fingers to a celluloid strip thickly coated with reds, greens and yellows. The new film doesn't have a name, nor is Brakhage sure he wants to give it one. All he wants to talk about is that deep blue and the stained-glass windows which he has just seen at Chartres.

While most of his contemporaries with whom he forged the American avant-garde film movement have slowed down or stopped working, Brakhage, who turned sixty in January, is as prolific as ever, adding six to eight films a year to an *oeuvre* of nearly 250. Widely regarded as the world's foremost living experimental film-maker, he was recently honoured by the US Library of Congress, which selected his monumental four-part film *Dog Star Man* (1962-64) for inclusion in the National Film Registry. Earlier, Brakhage received the prestigious MacDowell Medal, whose previous recipients include Robert Frost, Georgia O'Keeffe and Aaron Copland.

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1933, Brakhage made his first film, *Interim*, in 1952 when he was nineteen. Over the next few years, he met the key figures of the American avant-garde who were to influence him: poets such as Robert Duncan, Michael McClure, Louis Zukofsky and Kenneth Rexroth; film-makers such as Maya Deren, Jonas Mekas, Marie Menken, Kenneth Anger and Sidney Peterson; composers such as John Cage and Edgar Varèse, with whom he studied. Shortly after his marriage to Jane Collum in 1958, Brakhage set up home in the Colorado mountains near Boulder, where for the next thirty years he would live and make his films. From 1969 to 1981, he taught film history and aesthetics at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and from 1981 he has been teaching film at the University of Boulder. Divorced from Jane in 1986, Brakhage now lives in Boulder with his second wife, Marilyn, and their two children.

Described variously as a romantic, a visionary and a humanist, Brakhage has produced an astonishing range of work that includes psychodramas, autobiographical films, birth films, Freudian trance films, cosmological epics such as *Dog Star Man*, 'song' cycles inspired by lyric poetry, unphotographed films such as *Mothlight* (1963), and Abstract Expressionist hand-painted films such as *The Dante Quartet* (1987). In his book *Metaphors on Vision* (1963), he has defined his work in terms of 'birth, sex, death, and the search for God', but the ostensible subject of all his films is the act of seeing and its relationship to the world and to film, which becomes a corollary of that act.

* * *

Suranjan Ganguly: You've been involved with film for over forty years—as a maker, thinker, writer and academic. Has your sense of film as film changed?

Stan Brakhage: In one sense it hasn't changed: from the beginning I had a feeling for film as vision. I didn't think it was related to literature or theatre at all, nor had it anything to do with Renaissance perspective. I was struggling all the time against the flypaper of other arts harnessing film to their own usages, which means essentially as a recording device or within the long historical trap of 'picture'—by which I mean a collection of nameable shapes within a frame. I don't even think still photography, with few exceptions, has made any significant attempt to free itself from that. So I had certain instinctual feelings about film even before I made one.

Suranjan Ganguly: What do you mean by 'vision', and how is it related to film?

Stan Brakhage: For me vision is what you see, to the least extent related to picture. It is just seeing—it is a very simple word—and to be a visionary is to be a seer. The problem is that most people can't see. Children can—they have a much wider range of visual awareness—because their eyes haven't been tutored to death by man-made laws of perspective or compositional logic. Every semester I start out by telling my students that they have to see in order to experience film and that seeing is not just looking at pictures. This simple idea seems to be the hardest to get through to people.

Suranjan Ganguly: But is it really so simple? In your films, to see without picturing is a composite of many visual processes, only one of which is open-eye vision, or what we call normal everyday vision.

Stan Brakhage: Open-eye vision is what we are directly conscious of, but there's much more going on that we ignore. Seeing includes open-eye, peripheral and hypnagogic vision, along with moving visual thinking, dream vision and memory feedback—in short, whatever affects the eyes, the brain and the nervous system. I believe that all these have a right to be called seeing since they enable us to inherit the full spectrum of our optic and nervous system.

Suranjan Ganguly: Can you define them?

Stan Brakhage: Hypnagogic vision is what you see with your eyes closed—at first a field of grainy, shifting, multi-coloured sands that gradually assume various shapes. It's optic feedback: the nervous system projects what you have previously experienced—your visual memories—into the optic nerve endings. It's also called closed-eye vision. Moving visual thinking, on the other hand, occurs deeper in the synapsing of the brain. It's a streaming of shapes that are not nameable—a vast visual 'song' of the cells expressing their internal life. Peripheral vision is what you don't pay close attention to during the day and which surfaces at night in your dreams. And memory feedback consists of the editings of your remembrance. It's like a highly edited movie made from the real.

Suranjan Ganguly: How is film predisposed to embody these?

Stan Brakhage: Over the years, I have come to believe that every machine people invent is nothing more than an extension of their innards. The base rhythm of film—twenty-four frames per second—is sort of centred in its pulse to our brain waves. If you start a film at eight frames per second and with a variable speed motor slowly raise it to thirty-two, you put the audience in the first stage of hypnosis. So the natural

pulse of film is a corollary to the brain's reception of everyday ordinary vision. Then film grain approximates the first stage of hypnagogic vision, which occurs at a pulse within the range of film's possibilities of projection. Also, during editing, film comes close to the way you remember. And finally, if you cut fast enough, you can reflect within twenty-four frames per second the saccadic movements of the eyes, which people aren't ordinarily aware of, but which are an intrinsic part of seeing.

Suranjan Ganguly: So virtually all your experiments were aimed at developing this relationship between film and seeing?

Stan Brakhage: My cutting has always tried to be true to the eyes, to the nervous system and to memory, and to capture these processes, which happen very rapidly. At one point I felt my montage – inspired by Griffith and Eisenstein – had to evolve to do justice to memory recall, so I began to use the single frame to suggest what the mind can do during a flashback. Then I began to use superimpositions because these occur constantly in the saccadic movements of the eyes and in memory feedback and input. I've done as many as seven superimpositions at one time – in *Christ Mass Sex Dance* (1990) – and I wish I could do more because there are more in vision itself. Then I shot out of focus to capture peripheral vision, which is always unfocused, or used flares to give a sense of the body when it has an overload in feedback and literally flares – something you can see with your eyes open. In *Loving* (1957), a couple make love in the sun and their optic system flares – it's really the nervous system's ecstasy – in oranges and yellows and whites. I had noticed that when film flares out at the end of a colour roll, you get those same colours, and I put them in because they are intrinsic to human vision as well.

Suranjan Ganguly: But of all these possible seeings, the hypnagogic has been the most important to you.

Stan Brakhage: Yes. I sometimes like just to sit and watch my closed eyes sparking, or the streamings of my mind. They're the best movies in town! But the flow is so rapid that to document it would call for a camera that would run 1,000 frames per second. All I can do on film is to grasp a little piece of it and then make a corollary. So my films don't reflect what I see when I close my eyes – only a symbol of that. The extent to which I accept that is the extent to which I can be true to what film can do.

Suranjan Ganguly: Since closed-eye vision is largely unfilmable, then, you had to find other means of representing it, and painting directly on to film became one way to do this.

Stan Brakhage: At the birth of my first child, I was acutely conscious of my hypnagogic vision whenever I blinked my eyes. But it didn't appear in the film I made of that birth – *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959) – so for the birth of my second child, which occurs in Part 2 of *Dog Star Man*, and of my third in *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* (1961), I painted on film to include what I had seen. I became very excited when I realised that my closed-eye vision resembled the work of the Abstract Expressionist painters I admired so much – all very Pollock-like and Rothko-like.

Suranjan Ganguly: Did you sense that they were also doing the same thing – recording their optic feedback?

Stan Brakhage: When I was living in New York in the 1950s and 1960s, I became an avid gallery-goer. I discovered Turner, who is probably still the most pervasive

influence on me because of his representations of light. I was also strongly drawn to the Abstract Expressionists – Pollock, Rothko, Kline – because of their interior vision. None of these so-called abstract painters – going back to Kandinsky and earlier – had made any reference to painting consciously out of their closed-eye vision, but I became certain that unconsciously many of them had. To me, they were all engaged in making icons of inner picturisation, literally mapping modes of non-verbal, non-symbolic, non-numerical thought. So I got interested in consciously and unconsciously attempting to represent this.

Suranjan Ganguly: But it wasn't enough to paint. To find as close a corollary to hypnagogic vision as possible, you had physically to manipulate the surface of the film strip.

Stan Brakhage: I tried a number of different things, including iron filings under magnets! I would bake film before and after photographing to bring out certain chemical changes in the grain so that it would correspond to certain stages of hypnagogic vision. I once even herded brine shrimp into a pack to capture the quality of their movements. And I worked with household chemicals and dyes, and placed coloured powders under vibrators and magnets. The making of *The Text of Light* (1974), which involved shooting through a glass ashtray, was another way of capturing certain forms of both closed- and open-eye environment of light.

Suranjan Ganguly: And you would scratch on film and write on it.

Stan Brakhage: Words appear on film throughout my work. By scratching them I try to be true to the way words vibrate and jiggle when they appear in closed-eye vision – which doesn't happen very often. Also, by scratching them I can at least make them more intrinsic to what film is – they become carriers of light. Photographed words relate more to memory recall or just to the open-eyed present.

Suranjan Ganguly: Hand-painted sections appear in your work as early as *Prelude* (1962), the first part of *Dog Star Man*, but in the past few years you've been making films such as *The Dante Quartet* and *Delicacies of Molten Horror Synapse* (1991) that are wholly hand-painted. You even claim this is all you want to do now.

Stan Brakhage: I now believe that film is much more predisposed to what you can do with paint and scratches than with anything else. My hand-painted films are my favourites – I look at them again and again and they always feel like film, not as if they're referring to something else.

Suranjan Ganguly: Do you see your work within a specific tradition of hand-painted film?

Stan Brakhage: I've always felt drawn to the hand-painted films of Méliès, which are an extraordinary phenomenon in their own right, and I've felt a kinship with filmmakers such as Viking Eggeling, Walter Ruttmann, Oscar Fischinger and Len Lye, who even batted on film with his fingers. One of my main inspirations has been Marie Menken, and Harry Smith is often in my mind as I work. Many of them didn't paint on film, but their work has a hands-on quality that I admire.

Suranjan Ganguly: What do you mostly work with?

Stan Brakhage: Acrylics – mostly translucent acrylics – and India inks and a variety of dyes that are variously mixed with or not with acrylics. I have also made whole films with Magic Markers. I use brushes at times, but basically it's paint on fingers,

a different colour on each finger. Usually I prepare the film first with chemicals, so that the paint can dry and form patterns, then during the drying process I use chemicals again to create organic shapes and forms. Finally, I go over it a frame at a time to stitch these patterns into a unified whole. If you watch me do it, it looks as though I'm playing the piano – it's very quick, very deft – but people forget that I have to paint twenty-four frames to get a second's worth of film. I have hand-painted films like *Eye Myth* (1972), which is nine seconds long, as well as *Interpolations* (1992) which runs for twelve minutes – the longest hand-painted film I have ever made.

Suranjan Ganguly: You've painted on all kinds of film stock, including 65mm Imax film. You also paint directly on footage you've found or shot yourself. What part of vision does that approximate?

Stan Brakhage: Let me say first that painting on Imax was very exciting – it was as if an easel painter had been given a wall, it was such a large space to work with. The model for painting on photographed film was closed-eye vision mixing with open-eye vision. Not very many people can see that, and it took me a long time before I could do both – see what I was looking at and also watch the nervous system's immediate shape-and-colour reaction to it.

Suranjan Ganguly: Are the recent hand-painted films a new involvement with the hypnagogic, or the beginning of a completely new phase in your work?

Stan Brakhage: No, that's over. I don't want to make corollaries of my closed-eye vision any more – not consciously – because it limits me in what I can be conscious of. I feel my consciousness is no longer a very good arbiter, that it could even be a limitation on my making, which is another way of saying I'm now more nearly at one with the painting I do on film.

Suranjan Ganguly: So what is the new hand-painted work going to be?

Stan Brakhage: What's new is that I don't have anything else as reference other than what the film itself is showing me. Every time film reflects something that's nameable, it limits what it can do. If I can make films that refer to things that can't be lived through, then I feel that I'm giving film a chance to be in the fullest possible sense, and that makes me feel good. Now I really just want to fool around with paint on film, hoping to do so in such an open way that whatever is deep inside me, past all prejudice and even all learning, can come out along my arms to my fingertips, and with the help of these smudges and dyes sing a song like birds on a normal day.

Suranjan Ganguly: From 1979 to 1990, you worked on an extraordinary series of films – *The Roman Numeral Series*, *The Arabic Numeral Series*, *The Egyptian Series* and *The Babylon Series* – where there's already a sense of leaving behind the hypnagogic for the electrical patterns of thought before it even becomes thought.

Stan Brakhage: I've been going in and out of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* for the last fifteen years, and I've studied Hammurabi's code very closely. When I made those films I was trying to do two things: to get a sense of the moving visual thinking of those cultures, and to see how out of it rose the glyphs – hieroglyphs – that shape their language. I tried to represent pictorially what occurs during this 'seeing', and how within this flow of electrical colouration there are also bits of memory feedback that intermix with the hypnagogic and help shape the glyphs.

Suranjan Ganguly: So essentially you were trying to tap into a pre-natal, pre-verbal and pre-picture consciousness – the very womb of the image?

Stan Brakhage: Yes. We know that hieroglyphs are symbolic representations of the external world, but where do they come from? My sense is that they appear first as shapes in closed-eye vision. At the beginning of each film in *The Babylon Series*, I've scratched a particular Babylonian glyph, and then I go for the source of the thinking that produced it.

Suranjan Ganguly: So the films arose from a study of these written characters combined with explorations of your own moving visual thinking as a model?

Stan Brakhage: The first clear sense I had of these glyphs was when I was on a plane which was about to make a belly landing since its landing gear had malfunctioned. We were told to adopt the foetal position. It was then that I had a series of intense glyphs that was so powerful that even in that state I grabbed a pencil and piece of paper and drew them. Later, I scratched them onto film and interspersed them with appropriate colour flares that had also occurred at that time in my hypnagogic vision. The film was *he was born, he suffered, he died* (1974). As a result, I discovered how the mind can spark glyphs that seemed not pictures of events from my life, but compound symbols of those events.

Suranjan Ganguly: The films are also meditations on light, which is not new to your work, except that this light is different, situated deep within the pre-conscious.

Stan Brakhage: What is film, after all, but rhythmized light? I've always agreed with that line in Pound's cantos: 'All that is light.' That's us and everything we're seeing, the dance of the light from the inside mixing with that coming from the outside in.

Suranjan Ganguly: How did you create the light patterns in these films?

Stan Brakhage: I didn't do any hand-painting or scratching, but photographed with various glasses, prisms, crystal balls, bits and pieces of tin foil and whatever else was handy. I manipulated these with my hands in front of the lens. If I was lucky, I would get an equivalent of the light streaming and would combine fragments of ordinary photographed material with this light to create a compound – little meaningful glyphs of a sort. I also used filters. In fact, often with at least two filters in my hands I would colour the streaks of light in various ways. And, of course, the prisms provided me with refraction colours, which I found intrinsic to moving visual thinking.

Suranjan Ganguly: One can enjoy these films on another level, as analogues to music. You've even called them 'visual music'.

Stan Brakhage: Of all the arts, music is closest to film, and I've had a long infatuation with music and film. I was very inspired by Charles Ives, who has several different sound sources going on simultaneously – a brass band on one side of the stage, a choir on the other and an orchestra in the middle – each playing their own music and it all interweaving. So I tried in combining sounds and visuals to push to the furthest possibility of a corollary between music and film, which is similar to Ives's combinations of different musical pieces, each retaining its own aesthetic integrity.

Suranjan Ganguly: At the same time, you've always held that sound in film is an aesthetic error. In fact, most of your films have been silent.

Stan Brakhage: Film is obviously visual and, from an aesthetic standpoint, I see no need

for a film to be accompanied by sound any more than I would expect a painting to be. At first I did make sound films, but I felt sound limited seeing, so I gave it up. My films were complex enough and difficult enough to see without any distraction of the ear thinking. But if I felt a film needed sound, I always included it. In the last few years, I've even cut film to music—take *Passage Through: A Ritual* (1990) which I edited to a piece by Philip Corner—but that seems to be coming to an end. I believe now that you can only go so far with music, and then film is not music. It first became apparent to me fifteen years ago when I tried to cut exactly to the measures and shifts of a Bach fugue and the result was a mess. Since film clearly isn't music, I am now trying to find out what it is that film can do that's purely film. I really wish to open myself to that difference. I want to make films that are not even corollaries of music, that wouldn't even make you think of music.

Suranjan Ganguly: So a film that ...

Stan Brakhage: ... will not be about anything at all. I wish I could be more precise, but it's hard to describe this in words. It was in a chapel—the Rothko Chapel in Houston—that I had a sense of nothing. What I felt looking at those paintings was completely distinct from a religious experience, something purely organic and sensual but that drew me out to the very limits of my inner being. That's where I think it all begins—in the sense of the ineffable—and I want that to come through me into my work. I want that appreciation of nothing being everything.

Suranjan Ganguly: And anything that is referential deflects and limits that to some extent?

Stan Brakhage: Yes. A work which is too referential to things outside the aesthetic ecology, too dependent on something extrinsic, is not art. All this slavish mirroring of the human condition feels like a bird singing in front of mirrors. The less a work of art reflects the world, the more it is being in the world and having its natural life like anything else. Film must be free from all imitations, of which the most dangerous is the imitation of life.

Suranjan Ganguly: So when you speak of an 'aesthetic ecology', you're speaking of the artwork as a self-enclosed object?

Stan Brakhage: A work of art must be something with a world of its own in which everything that exists is interrelated so that it forms a whole, as do Rothko's paintings. And it must convey a sense of itself—for example, a film must show at all times some sense of it being an on-off projection of stills that flicker in the opening and closing of the shutter. The great films always do this—even narrative films have ways in which they do it. When I first scratched titles on film—in *Desistfilm* (1954)—I became conscious at once that they directed the eyes to what film is. Paint on film does that too with its irregularities and its rhythms.

Suranjan Ganguly: But isn't that too restrictive a definition? One of the complaints made about your work is that it fails to address the socio-political realities of the culture within which it exists.

Stan Brakhage: I think my films address that constantly. I don't think there has ever been a film that I wished to make that wasn't political in the broadest sense of the term, that wasn't about what I could feel or sense for better or worse from the conditionings of my times and from my rebellions against those conditionings.

Take *Scenes from Under Childhood* (1967–70) which I made out of disgust at the Shirley Temple representation of childhood which was utterly false and served only to aid and abet the abuse of children. Or take the childbirth films. It was appalling to me that childbirth was a taboo subject, excluded from human vision, and that women were often barbarously treated in child-bearing and ignored as mothers within this culture. So there were political motivations that led me to make the five childbirth films. At the same time, I would add that if in these films I had tried in some conscious way to present a political alternative, I would have falsified the art process. As an artist, I have to be very careful not to allow social and political impulses to dominate because then I would falsify the balances that are intrinsic and necessary to make an aesthetic ecology.

Suranjan Ganguly: The childbirth films are part of a long cycle you made about your first family. Although there is no implicit political subtext, these films resonate with the sense of a life lived in a specific place and time and according to a specific vision. In a way they are probably the most 'political' of all your films.

Stan Brakhage: I thought that if I photographed my daily life and photographed it as inspired by home movies or the amateur film, rather than from what I had learned from film theory and the work of film-makers such as Méliès, Griffith, Dreyer and Eisenstein, and if I could also take inspiration from errors which I read as significant Freudian slips in home movie-making, then I could avoid drama. But I didn't realise the extent to which people in their daily lives reflect the movies and what they read. We were plugged into the same literary/theatrical syndrome and our household to some extent was a template of what I wanted to avoid.

Suranjan Ganguly: How did you include Freudian slips in your films?

Stan Brakhage: I would study the raw footage so closely that it went beyond the average dream analysis in therapy. And I would find things in it that seemed very embarrassing, that I wanted to throw out, but by the time I was through, they would become the centre of the film. Also, while shooting I would sometimes consciously try to catch what seemed like a true slip—and then in the editing put it in a context where it would reveal itself fully.

Suranjan Ganguly: In almost all these films, there is a celebration of the trivia of daily life, a sense that the commonplace is itself sacred.

Stan Brakhage: For me, that's where we really live, that's what we really have. To stop the overwhelming influence of drama in film, I began to concentrate on the glories of an undramatic present, which is literally the tabletop. That is what peripheral vision is most involved with—the so-called mundane, which people use as a word of contempt when they really mean 'earth'. What they don't see is the potential for glory, for envisionment that's inherent in even doing the dishes, in the soap suds with their multiple rainbows, or in the dull edge of a plate that has to be scrubbed. If they could only see, only get involved with the wonders right under their noses—more specifically, if they could only see the movie playing on either side of their noses. All they have to do is close their eyes and look.

Suranjan Ganguly: Was there that hope behind the making of these films? Did you believe, like many of your contemporaries in the 1960s, that film could help change the world?

Stan Brakhage: Yes, we really believed we were going to change the world. One of my favourite jokes was that I was working on the 400-year plan. Well, I'm not any more. I have no world-saving ideas left in me. I would rather see my work as an attempt to clear aesthetic areas, to free film from previous arts and ideologies, to leave it clear to be of use to men and women to create formal integrities of various kinds which might help evolve human sensibility.

Suranjan Ganguly: Where is the avant-garde film movement that you helped to forge?

Stan Brakhage: There was no movement then and there is no movement now. What we shared was the uniqueness of each of us and that each of us was true to that uniqueness in his or her making, despite all attempts by society to pigeonhole us as a movement. But I must say that they succeeded, for the 'movement' became an aberration of the 60s—a drug-induced, sexually motivated movie-making tangent to pornography—and that's how it is seen today even in the academic community. Instead, we were a bunch of people who were dedicated to film and involved with the whole previous history of the arts in our concern to make an art. And this involvement we shared to some extent as 'moderns'. So you have a love of film, a love of art, a dedication to the arts. And one of the most vibrant ways to be dedicated to the arts is to be highly suspicious of every historical or inherited aspect of it.

Suranjan Ganguly: What about the current scene? Do you see anything in independent film-making today that you would consider innovative?

Stan Brakhage: There is much more uniqueness in film-making today than in the much-touted mid-60s. But the irony is that it is now truly 'underground'; in the 60s they said it was underground but it wasn't, now nobody says anything and it really is. It isn't affecting anybody; even the advertising agencies aren't renting their films to steal from them. And that's perhaps a good sign—that each of these film-makers is doing something so unique that there is no real way to pick up a trick. To that extent, the art of film is truly moving into a realm of its own, happily free from commercial usages.

Suranjan Ganguly: Looking back over forty years of film-making, what matters most now?

Stan Brakhage: That I believe in song. That's what I wanted to do and I did it quite selfishly, out of my own need to come through to a voice that is comparable with song and related to all animal life on earth. I believe in the beauty of the singing of the whale; I am moved deeply at the whole range of song that the wolf makes when the moon appears, or neighbourhood dogs make—that they make their song, and this is the wonder of life on Earth, and I in great humility wish to join this.

MY TIME IS NOT YOUR TIME

Amy Taubin

In 1963, several years after I'd become a devotee of underground cinema, I saw a film that showed me what my late-adolescent obsession was all about. Unannounced and untitled, Andy Warhol's *Kiss* (then dubbed *The Andy Warhol Serial* because it was shown in weekly four-minute instalments) flickered onto the screen of the Grammercy Arts Theater on West 27th Street. Its black and white was as deep and impenetrable as archival nitrate, its motion slower than life. Framed in tight close-up, two faces lunged at each other, mouth on mouth, sucking, nuzzling, merging, devouring. Some kisses were erotic, some comic, some verged on abstraction—less the oscillation of orifices than a play of light and shadow. Never in the history of the movies had the invitation to look but do not touch seemed quite so paradoxical.

During the months that followed, *Kiss* was succeeded by the meditative *Eat*, the torturous *Sleep*, the cock-teasing *Blow Job*, the vaguely threatening, flagrantly gay *Haircut*, and the monumental *Empire*. Nothing if not the measure of their own time, they needed to be seen to be believed. Like the best of his painting (the *Disaster* series, the *Marilyns*, and the *Elvises*), Warhol's silent films and some of the sound films that followed in 1965 and 1966 existed in the tension between presence and absence, assertion and denial. Fetishistic in the extreme, they allowed the receptive viewer access to the fundamentals of cinematic pleasure. Their surfaces opened on to the depths of your psyche.

Warhol's films were hardly *sui generis*. Their sources were in both Hollywood and the avant-garde. In the early 1960s, Warhol had trolled the underground from 'pasty' drag shows to minimalist dance/performance at the Judson Church. He had spent weeks at the Film-makers' Co-operative looking at films by Jack Smith, Ron Rice, Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos, Willard Maas and Marie Menken. At some point, although it has never been mentioned in the reams of diaries and reminiscences of the period, he must have seen *Rose Hobart*, Joseph Cornell's collage film which had been discovered and was being presented (with significant alterations) by Ken Jacobs and Jack Smith. It's all there in *Rose Hobart*: the paring down of a mass-culture object to its fantasy essence (Cornell extracted from a print of the 1930s B picture *East of Borneo* all the shots in which the actress Rose Hobart appears and edited them together); the fetishisation of the female star; the single-minded title; the phantasmal effect that results when film shot at sound speed (twenty-four frames per second) is projected at the slightly slower speed of silence (sixteen frames per second).

More generally, Warhol learned from the avant-garde how to produce a (per)version of Hollywood in his own studio for little more than the costs of a roll of 16mm film and its developing. In 1964, I was introduced to Warhol's Factory (then on East 47th Street) by the rapidly fading, early superstar Naomi Levine. Like all newcomers, I was screen-tested. (I was escorted into a makeshift cubicle and positioned on a stool. Warhol looked through the lens, adjusted the framing, instructed me to sit still and try not to blink, turned on the camera and walked away.)