

STILL LIGHT

FILMS (1967 - 1970)

SPIRACLE

WINGED DIALOGUE

on the everyday use of the eyes of death

PLAN OF BRUSSELS

THE COUNT OF DAYS

VIEW

PALINODE

DIMINISHED FRAME

STILL LIGHT

ROBERT BEAVERS

STILL LIGHT

Film Notes

&

Plates

With an Introduction by

JONAS MEKAS

INTRODUCTION TO
THE WORK OF ROBERT BEAVERS

It is a privilege to write this small introduction to a book on one of the youngest, but one of the very few truly original artists working in cinema today. Let this small introduction be In Praise of a Film-Maker as a Young Artist. I'll be open, elated, and generous.

It is a paradox, that you are holding in your hands this book, and not watching the film on which this book is based. But such is the fate of all true artists: they have to master the art of waiting, too. The truth is, that not only you, but practically all of the Public of the world, hasn't seen Robert Beavers' work. But this same Public has seen all the bad works of all the bad film-makers that many thousands of cameras keep grinding out all around the world. Even those who create cinema, the film artists — only a very small handful of them have seen Beavers' work. But the final paradox, which, perhaps, is more a miracle than a paradox, is this: despite this total neglect by both the public and the artists themselves, Robert Beavers has continued, and is continuing working and creating new works, and he has done so and is doing so with an unwavering passion, with a total and unwavering concentration, with an insistence and urgency that comes closer to the natural forces of nature than anything human. Such is the miracle that we call an Artist: that he is cast here by gods to do his work, he comes charged with certain energies, certain secrets, certain knowledge that he has to give to the humanity, and he gives it through his works and nothing can stop him. No matter how deep is the darkness around him, how loud is the turmoil and bustle; no matter whether the people praise him or ignore him: he accomplishes his Mission Impossible. It's the politicians and the social workers, all the so-called socially concerned citizens who are asking for «justice»: they are still practising the law of «an eye for an eye». The artist is the only one who practices the politics of gods and gives it all without asking anything in return.

So here is Robert Beavers, a Film-Maker as a Young Artist, giving us work after work after work, and this work is not like anything any other film artist has given us. Because, really, what he's giving us, is a new film language, or the beginnings of a new film language. When we look really close, no matter what the artist is saying, if he is a true artist — what he's giving us, is a totally new language. I don't really know any real example, in cinema or any other art, where the originality of an artist can be separated from his language, from the newness and originality of his language. D. W. Griffith, Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Brakhage, Markopoulos, Warhol — it has always to do with a new film language. Later, of course, others come, and they use the found languages in their own way, make them into « techniques ». And soon there will be those who will use Beavers' language as a « technique », the same way as there are already many who are using Markopoulos' and Warhol's and Brakhage's languages as « techniques »: soon Robert Beavers, a Film-Maker as a Young Artist will become a Film-Maker as an Old Master. But no matter how many will use Beavers' « technique », it will be only in Robert Beavers' work that it will remain totally, inseparably and miraculously fused with the content of the film, and it will be difficult, impossible to say which is the language and which is the content.

It is impossible for me to attempt here to describe to you what are the specifics of Beavers' language, how he differs from the other film-makers: to do that I'd need another book of the size of this book. Because, really, to see Beavers' language you have to see his films. His language, his tongue is his art, is his films. Still, Gregory Markopoulos has described Beavers' film language most accurately, I think, when he called it « the language of diamonds », in a recent essay in *Film Culture* magazine. Robert Beavers' film language is curiously close to the crystalline qualities of stones and minerals — in shapes, in tones, in feeling, in quality. Beavers' film language is a unique merging of the actual, living reality, with the abstract, geometric realities, and the Light. I could say, perhaps, that Robert Beavers is a scientist who, by means of the alchemy of art, is transforming the known realities in order to gain a deeper insight into them and create new realities that transcend them. I could also say, that Robert Beavers is a philosopher, meditating on reality by means of juxtapositions and transformations of the Real, the Geometry, and the Light. By means of his films, that is, by means of his meditations, he presents us with a completely new philosophy of life and reality.

a new artist is a new language, and a new language is a new knowledge) — so that I, who is writing this brief introduction, on this early Sunday morning, with a pale New World light pouring over New York that is still half asleep — all I can do is but express my humble capitulation in face of the mysteries of Art, and close my own part here. Let us the book itself speak, let the work of Robert Beavers speak.

*«Brothers, sisters, take me and read me,
And reading, consider this:
Your fathers fervently desired to have this doctrine
But were not able to obtain it in any way.
They wanted to see it with their eyes
And also to hear it with their ears.
Now what your fathers never saw
Now all this has come to you.
All men, look and pay attention ».* *

Thus I honor and sing, through Robert Beavers, all the Film-Makers as Young Artists today — wherever they may be.

JONAS MEKAS

* From « The Old Lithuanian Catechism of Martynas Mazuydas », 1547.