

dear gerald,

kim at v/tape gave me your 25 short films in and about saskatchewan and i wanted to write you something about it though it's difficult to know quite where to begin. everything i'm going to say is strictly my opinion and mine alone, and is not written as images programmer person but as one filmer to another, though having said that, much of what follows will doubtless be unpleasant and unwanted.

in general, after finishing something, anything, but certainly something as sweeping, as grand, as 25 short films, mostly we want, or should say that i want, would want, some kind of affirmation, praise, acknowledgement. and it certainly must have taken an enormous labour and time spent in the trenches. but as i'm watching it i am unmoved and wondering why this isn't working. is it because the single frame technique seems so shopworn now, a hangover from a 50s avant diction, a footnote to menken? or that the presentation is so distanced from its maker. while everything is presented as subjective and first person, there is little of you in it, there is little feeling in this footage, there is much movement for instance, but the movement doesn't lead us into a place, it doesn't take us anywhere, and so finally this movement is static, because the rate of change is constant. most of this feel work feels like exercises, the way you'd go and work out a tricep, which is fine, nothing wrong with that, but there is something disconnected in it all which stops it well short of being an art of seeing (this is just my opinion), not that this should be something aspire to necessarily, and you may well be happy with every single note you produce. but to me it's striking, when i see a brakhage film, and the whole thing consists of yellow out of focus blobs of light or quickly intercut somethings, fantastically abstract, it always works. and it always works because his films are fully embodied, because his life is on the line every time he raises the camera, because everything he knows and everything he is, pours through the lens. he is not avoiding life by taking up cinema, nor is he commenting on his life, he is living. he is alive, and we share this liveness in the work's projection. in brakhage's hands those yellow blobs are an ode to mortality, the flesh wearing away, his confrontation with death. or they are the puzzle of erotic love. or the joy and horror of his children. that's what i mean by embodied.

i was puzzled by the stories you chose to tell, about the rodeo, or the skaters, or snow. they're a bit like essays, though they are essays without the weight of say roland barthes' mythologies, who likewise takes on popular subjects in brief forms, nor do they take a speculative address which lifts the work, like marker's sans soleil, nor are they personally

revealing, or touching. there is something uncommitted in this writing, some road taken but then abandoned before it could become fully realized, some water tested and then left behind. there is something safe in this film, and old fashioned, like an old fashioned avant garde, which has given up now even its old task of making the world appear again to us as some new bright thing, but content to trace the outlines of past masters, ghosts in the machine of cinema, or stern fathers who might never relieve the terrible burden they have imposed on us, their artistic children.

having said all that can only respect the effort and dedication you bring to your craft, and this path of fringe making is a lonely one, with few rewards, it is far from the clamour of success, and can hope only that this journey, wherever it might take you, has already taken you, will prove as rich and lovely as the heavenly beating soul that pounds behind the dire necessity which requires you take up the camera in the first place.

Mike Halboim