

The central achievements of the graphic cinema in this period also reflect the tactility of the medium. Robert Breer's films turned back from the minimalist sheen of his work in the early seventies to the playful drawing and coloring of his films of the early sixties. Lewis Klahr became the most prominent animator of the subsequent generation. His works are cutout collages, for the most part filmed in Super 8mm, that openly flaunt their direct, artisanal manipulation of images minutely budgeted from frame to frame. The masterpiece of this mode, Larry Jordan's magisterial *Sophie's Place* (1986), directly acknowledges the convergence of a religious, cultic site and what he calls his "alchemical autobiography"; for "Sophie's Place" is the Byzantine interior of the Church of Hagia Sophia, which forms the backdrop for much of the phantasmagoria of unpremeditated collage juxtapositions as images float and collide in its immense nave.

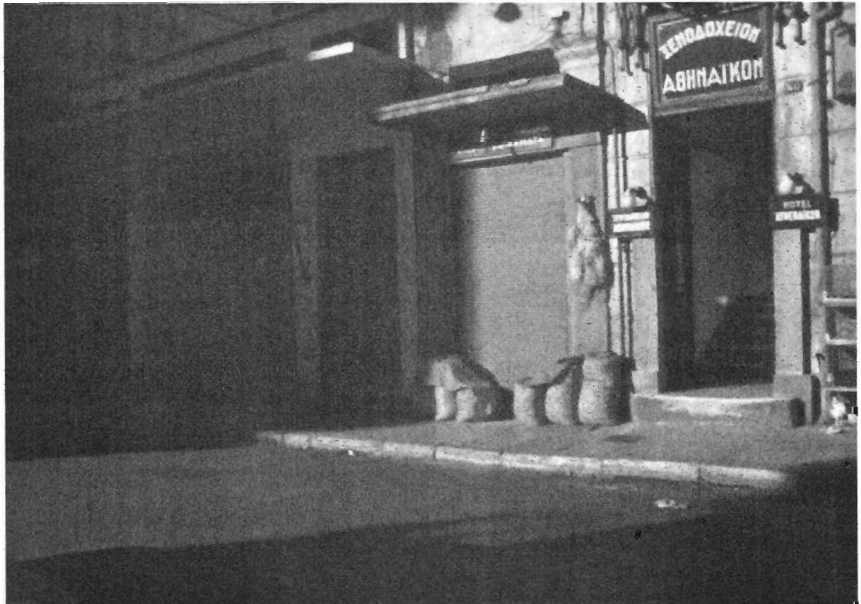
In *Circles of Confusion*, Hollis Frampton describes four modes of composition for post-Symbolist art. One he called "constriction": the reduction of a canon to a single author. His example was James Joyce: "the works from which he derived the laws that govern his writing were those of one author, Gustav Flaubert." A similar case in the history of the American avant-garde cinema would be that of Robert Beavers; a parallel hyperbolic claim might be that he constricted the history of the cinema to the films of Gregory Markopoulos, whom Beavers met in 1965 and with whom he lived for the next twenty-seven years, until Markopoulos's death.

In the mid-1970s Markopoulos withdrew his films from distribution and envisioned the ultimate cultic center, a pilgrimage site in rural Greece to be devoted solely to the cyclical screenings of his and Beavers's films: The Temenos (literally "temple precinct") where he hoped to build a theater and archive eventually. In the eighties, outdoor exhibitions were held annually on the site. The major work of Markopoulos's last fifteen years was the re-editing of his entire corpus for screenings in the Temenos; he restructured his work into the more than one hundred cycles of *Enaios*, which would take more than eighty hours to show.

Beavers conceived of three cycles which would constitute his collected films, entitled *My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure*. The third cycle, when it is completed, will consist of nine films—the longest of them a half hour—made since 1975. Two are not yet completed: one on themes from Borromini's architecture, another on paintings of Sassetta. The films of his third cycle dramatize the problematic status of the image by repeatedly interweaving gestures of signification—especially hand movements, glimpses of a natural theater in Salzburg, maintained in topiary shrubs, and allusions to vessels of storage. Having tacitly repudiated the mannerism and mythopoeia of Markopoulos's cinema, Beavers divested his art of any appeal to a myth of originary experience and even to most references to extracinematic emotions. The consequent projection of noetic movement, as the coming into being and testing of perceptions, associations, and ideas, invests his work with lucid serenity.

Under his persistent gaze the polished isolation of solid things and simple acts gives way to the picturing of a restless mind, repeatedly attempting and almost succeeding in defining the peculiar timbre of a place and finding the measure of his presence in it. The films themselves succeed so startlingly because the film-maker has so subtly comprehended the structural impossibility of absolutely coming to that definition. In *Efpsychi* (1983) he may be acknowledging the perpetually deferred teleological moment in this paradox by repeating the Greek word “telftia” [last things] on the soundtrack.

In its purity and conceptual rigor Beavers's achievement is matched by that of Ernie Gehr. His very rapid evolution as a film artist entailed the radical divestment of almost all recoverable traces of an autobiographical or affective relationship to the visual field towards which he directed his camera. For, if in some of his first films the sentiment linking the image and the film-maker recalls Brakhage's hyperpersonal gaze, neither the institutional corridor we see in *Serene Velocity*, nor the flowing New York traffic of *Still*, nor the isolated vehicles in *Shift* (1971–1974), nor the brick wall of the short untitled film of 1977, nor the Berlin streets of *Signal—Germany on the Air* (1982–1985) appear on the screen as privileged images or epiphanic moments. The film-maker maintains the type of cool and distant isolation from his nominal subjects that Warhol practiced, although by focussing on things and places rather than people (or by de-individualizing them by shooting from above or in grainy slow motion), Gehr's films never suggest Warhol's cruelty.



Robert Beavers's *Efpsychi*. Copyright Robert Beavers, courtesy Temenos Archive.