**The Downtown Review**  
*Volume One, Number Two*  
*April 1979*

**Table of Contents**

1. Number Two  
2. The Poetry of Charles Reznikoff  
   - John Pruitt  
3. Mekas in Mid-Passage  
   - Raymond Foery  

**film**

4. Commentary  
   - Wendy Dzuzoetz  
5. Brakhage’s Sincerity  
   - John Pruitt  
6. The Cycle  
   - Leger Grindon  
7. Gutheim’s Four Shadows  
   - Raymond Foery  
8. Andy Warhol at Heiner Freidrich  
   - Tracy Farrell  
9. Commentary  
   - Raymond Foery  
10. Bill T. Jones  
    - Judith Ren-Lay  
11. Cricot 2: The Dead Class  
    - Bruce Coughlin  
12. Lenoy Jenkins  
    - Michael Martin  
13. Clark Terry’s Big B-A-D Band  
    - Warren Leight  
14. The Art Ensemble of Chicago  
    - Michael Martin  
15. Rhys Chatham’s Guster Trio  
    - Joe Hannan  
16. Robert Longo’s Pictures for Music  
    - Michael Martin  

**books**

17. Critique  
18. Talking Poetics from Nanoya Institute  
19. Hello, La Jolla by Ed Dorn  
20. Maestodog by Charles Olson  
21. Letters  
   - Anne Pitman  
   - Ruth Perlmuter  

Cover Photograph: John Sheldon  
Cover Reproduction: Thomas Ames  
Published by The Downtown Review, Inc.  
270 Bowery  
New York, N.Y. 10012  
Advertising rates available on request  
Subscriptions: $12.00 yr. and $20.00/2 yrs.  
All articles © 1979, The Downtown Review  
Unsolicited manuscripts welcome  

---

**Number Two**

It was a long winter and we’re not quite sure that Spring is truly here. But the second issue of *The Downtown Review* is here, and we are sure of a certain continuity. We are only slightly behind schedule. We expected the second issue by the end of March (the mention of the end of February in the introduction to Number One was an error that escaped into the mechanism that sets the type), so we are a few weeks behind. But we are getting better and fully expect to be on a monthly schedule as planned. One of the reasons for the delay is the amount of copy in this issue. We are indeed gratified by the increase in the number of articles over the first issue, but just a little disappointed that we have to sacrifice some of those vintage drawings and photographs of Lower Manhattan. The next issue, though, will be a double issue, so we hope to have a little more room for images as well as words.

Ironically, despite the increase in the number of articles, there were still many events that took place in the time since our last issue that we were not able to cover. A listing of some of them would only underscores our frustration. But we remain determined to do more, to respond to more, to write about more. Another reason for a double issue next time.

**Correction** (we’ve decided to print out corrections on page one): It was P. Adams Sitney, and not Jonas Mekas as stated in Anne Friedberg’s article, who brought the New American Film tour to Europe in 1964-5.

---

"the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself is really not"  
Oscar Wilde
Stan Brakhage’s Sincerity, Reels One, Two and Three

at the Collective for Living Cinema
February 10, 1979

More than for almost any other filmmaker I can think of, a solid understanding of a Brakhage film requires repeated viewings. This seems to frustrate some film-goers. At a first screening, a new Brakhage work can roll by, shot after shot unfolding into a still greater incomprehensibility. But there is always something to hold onto, if not just the masterful rhythmic and visual sense which is always at Brakhage’s command. In this regard he has no peer.

The autobiographical Sincerity series is perhaps the major work in Brakhage’s recent output, and thus it is with some trepidation that I approach it. Frankly, I’ve only seen it a couple of times, but possibly the simplicity with which I must console myself (no small consolation actually) will prove to be refreshing.

The major sequence of Reel One, on which the meaning of the entire film turns, is that portion which shows Dartmouth College. I am moved by the very realization of the fact that Brakhage made a lonely 2,000 mile pilgrimage to a college at which he only spent six months, a place which he rejected and which has apparently all but disowned him for all the attention it has given him. No doubt Brakhage’s personal ghosts are quite efficacious in their power to haunt. In Thomas Mann’s Tonio Kroger, the artist-to-be protagonist (certainly a fictional version of Mann himself), makes a similar trip to his hometown, Lubeck, where the narrow streets and crowded row houses just stand there in indifferent silence. This is what appears to have happened in Brakhage’s return to Dartmouth. There is hardly a human encounter, only stone walls, wired (cage-like) glass, roof-tops, and the occasional back of a student who presumably will graduate in the same regulated fashion in which cafeteria trays slide by on a conveyor belt. The camera repeatedly returns to a painted sign that bears a window “through” a Dartmouth scene. This is Brakhage’s personal experience of a window “through” a Dartmouth scene to the negative image from his first film, Interim. The brilliance of this moment is that Brakhage’s circa 1971 experience parallels that of circa 1951. Twice in the span of 20 years, Brakhage journeyed East to encounter Dartmouth College. Once he went as a precocious teenager, who, as so many of us, vastly overvalued the first break from home which going to college represents, and the second time, he sought a meaningful image of his past. But twice he failed and both times he turned to the same film for an evasion of that failure, first as a therapeutic means to self-discovery and then later to find the only image from the past in which he discovered some sense of self, some sense of his having been “there.” Only his self-generated images could “speak” to him across the gap of time. The fact that the image from Interim is in negative is a detail reminiscent of the end of The Way To Shadow Garden, in which the central protagonist likewise turns to an interior world represented in negative. The process of autobiography and filmmaking, past and present, time and space, have quite ingeniously collapsed here in a number of ways.

Reel Two is a comic and kind of a sunlit interlude between Reels One and Three. It doesn’t deal so
with Brakhage the film artist (except in a mock- ing way) as it does with Brakhage's husband, father, and in general, simply a man who must cope with everyday practical affairs. The best way to un- derstand the deliciously wicked Brakhage is to realize that, like in *Reel One*, the center of the film is a journey (this time by train) which can serve as a parody of its earlier counterpart. We see Brakhage somewhat out of character, creating a Wizard of Oz, bar- ried with luggage, camera, tripod etc., trying to marshal his children and paraphernalia into a van whilst presumably taking them all to the train station. It is Mr and Mrs Brakhage's travel powers don't pay the phone bill and it is the fact that the film deals with a domain where no amount of artistic inspiration can aid Brakhage that produces most of the comedy of the film. Following this a long sequence on a train with wife, kids and dog crowded into a small compartment. There are shots of Brakhage looking out the window, but another part of the film shows him to be literally col- lapsed on a kitchen table, pinflation transforming Brakhage's drooping into a restless sleep as he witchtches and yawns.

Even the awareness of the passage of time, another echo of *Reel One*, is mocked. Brakhage and Jane stand in a doorway is the background arguing while through a camera that has been passed to them, which is more gaudy hut in the foreground. The comic side of taking a family seems encapsulated here in a few sec- onds. *Reel Two* is devoted to the passing of a dreamlike of Brakhage in that the complete vacuum and even, I can't think of any other Brakhage film which elicits from an audience such repeated laughter on maise.

Usually there are just a few scattered sitters or guffaws.

Numerous times Brakhage has spoken of how he would have wanted for being the "Hans Christian An- dreasen" of cinema but that the many films he has made for his children have never quite panned out. I am guessing that some of the images from *Reel Two* are from these "children's" films—from the side of Brakhage which has been ignored. Brakhage's three daughters "exploring" the house as if it were a threatening jungle, stalked by three stuffed alligators. Such play and play-acting is a theme of the film, perfectly appropriate to the child's fantasy. There are, for example, many shots of Jane romping with the family dog, here, as in other shots, the sexual undertones being a pre-pubescent ingenuousness. Brakhage's frustrated and introspective sexuality suggested near the end of *Reel One* in the shots from *Interim* are now transformed into joyous exorcism and mischievous play.

Sitten included in *Metaphors in Vision*, Brakhage as- serted his desire to break the myth of the lonely, frustr- ated, and self-destructive artist. *Reel Two* heralds that assertion. Brakhage's quest for normality of that

The image 'Bickers' quite violently at times but still remains essentially unchanged, the motion basically unincremented. It is as if we are catching Brakhage in the midst of a search for some form out of a continued flux which really does not need his searching. Lasts shots which show Brakhage at his editing bench and suspended strips of film through which he camera peen out of a window, below this interpretation. The editing of the images of course associated with the editing process, out of his image bank of unedited rolls, Brakhage must find the particular film of the moment, be it more impressive in its own consciousness or something ultimately alien. In a great metaphor, this process becomes a kind of vision.

One can't be sure, but the film contains a sense that Brakhage makes his films in a tenacious upper room, much as the young Hawthorne wrote in *a* similarly lonely room, occasionally peering down on the world between, the human world with which the artist wants to be in direct contact, but has been cut off by the network. The film does indeed contain a shot in which the camera descends a flight of stairs as if tracing Brakhage's descent into the mundane after his work is done. Also, I believe I recognize in one scene the face of Christopher MacLaine who would most likely signify for Brakhage the dangers of intense artistic vision that is too hot. I mention this, because in *Reel One*, MacLaine suffering from schizophrenia, ended his days in a rest home for mental patients. Incidentally, I have heard Brakhage relate the story of a visit to his household by MacLaine which Brakhage had to throw MacLaine out because the latter couldn't behave himself, an indication of Brakhage realizing the point at which one has to learn how to cope. If my first surmises are correct about *Sinety Three*, then the title for Part Four, *Duplicity*, would make sense since it would imply a coming to terms with this dual vision, this dual world he has evoked. Also the first three films would show a remarkable balance containing parallel themes: Brakhage as artist/idealist (*Reel One*; man of the world/father/husband (*Reel Two*); and the painter and heroic voyeur to reconcile the other two Brakhages, in fact to deny the dichotomy (*Reel Three*). But frankly I still wonder where Brakhage's autobiographical heading: *Duplicity* not only seems a title, but a title which has been penciled on the film's title screen for the Cooperative, though it has yet to receive a N.Y. premiere. However, throughout the first three reels there are many common images (absent from *Duplicity* as far as I can tell) which serves as leading motives (apricot trees, a bird pecking in the snow), perhaps signifying for Brakhage a denial of time and change altogether. The autobiographical goes anywhere in any sort of teleological scheme, that it is not so much a narrative of one's periods of development, as it is simply a manifestation of all who one has been all along.

**The Cycle**

at the Public Theater, February 13 to 18

at the Thalia February 27, 1979

Movies, whether fact or fiction, project a vision that molds the public's response to the world. Hollywood's domination of the international movie market has acted as a nurturing source for the global spread of Amercan culture. The urban toughness of Bogart or the easy intelligibility of Hepburn are only two of the legendary icons that have established American behavior as a model for the world. But the relations can be reversed. With the appearance of films from a neglected national cinema, Americans gain an opportunity to respond to the native expression of another people. The opening of *The Cycle* (1974) from Iran should find an audience eager for a glimpse into a nation even now being transformed by revolution.

The picture deserves attention, and hopefully its screening will be followed by further features from the Middle East.

*The Cycle* portrays the transition that marks eco- nomic development, offering a bleak tale of passage from father to son, from the countryside to the city, from the agrarian to the industrial. The film opens with a man and his son walking the dusty road toward the city. After three score years the father can no longer hold down his food, so he decides to travel to the metropolitan hospital in search of a cure. The health center looms like heaven's promise, but resists every attempt to gain access to its services. The sick man struggles with bureaucrats, endures the descent, pleads with Allah, and finally waits beyond the gate, with the lingering poor. He has come to the city to die.

Ali, the boy, submits to his father's curbs, begs food, and raises money striving to provide for the old man. While the tempest of the city ignores the cries of the father, it quicklyshapes the character of the son. Under the pressure of the moment Ali sheds his provincialism. As the boy's submissive demeanor fades, he slips from under the tyrannical abuse of his father, and reaches a state of maturity promised by his act. *The Cycle* follows Ali as he makes his personal pact with the forces transforming Iran.

Ali and his father sleep their first night in the street, anxious for an opportunity to earn the next day's meal. Awakening to the prospect of money they are herded into a crowded truck at dawn. Ali finds himself packed into a bare room, a needle penetrates his neck, and he feels the poison drain away. Back at the hospital the old man and his son are aided by a sympathetic nurse, but the need for work haunts Ali into the petty schemes surrounding the