

July 2024:

transcribed from the low-resolution original pdf; some references added.

chris tillam

10:45AM (1 hour ago)

to hbreit, Henry Breitrose

Dear Henry,

Greetings. Long time no see! Mike Rubbo hunted out one address for you, and then I remembered the internet.

I'm writing to share memories of my time at Stanford, with George Stoney. (As you'll be aware, George's death has coincided for me with revisiting those times for a memoir of my late and former wife).

Autumn 1965 --I can recall Scott Larsen and Carol who asked me to film on the UFWOC Delano-to-Sacramento march, and Evaristo Obregon (who was on the march, too), Saad Raheem, Eric Denby, Rob Meniffee, and Michael Bortman (who won the grand prize intercutting footage of a rocket with a poker-faced Dwight... a Kuleshov experiment, not sure we all got it) --we were incredibly fortunate that our arrival coincided with George's.

First class. "My name's George Stoney and I'm going to show you a film". THE FURLINED FOXHOLE, twenty minutes of sponsored confusion, for an insurance company. Awkward pause, then some of us pluck up courage to express doubts. George had a big grin and an "Exactly!" for each of his critics. Lesson One: keep it simple--don't overload the storyline, don't put all your ambitions onto one small vehicle; be clear... because, once you get into the editing room, "Every film's a patch job". (Unless you are Hitchcock). And then he screened CORRAL, a story of horses, from Film Board, and we had the fundamental lessons in screen-direction, and the separate, but not exactly novel, dimensions of screen-time: *'time takes no time in a story'*.

Soon, we were confronted with ALL MY BABIES with its spirituals on the soundtrack. I think we were in awe, of his directness--which overrode any embarrassment we may have felt on being confronted by the largest and blackest of vaginas we were ever likely to encounter: for what we were seeing was a midwife's daily work, we weren't the intended audience, yet the film worked for us. George, again with a smile, freely acknowledged that he would have loved to have made feature films, that drama was his first love.

Shortly we met Bill Godsey, George's cameraman. We learned about nose-oil for the projector gate, the use of a Bell & Howell as a defensive weapon, and "when in Rome": if you're filming nudists on Pescadero or thereabouts, all you wear is your battery belt. And, as they would shortly be filming the Oakland anti-Vietnam march which, it was rumoured, would be led by the Hell's Angels--this for a crowd-control film for a mid-West police force--they'd be happy to view any footage we might shoot, view to purchase. From memory, Carol took him up on that offer. Here was another lesson: film is a business. George was comfortable with the ambiguities.

And I think it was George--although perhaps it was you, Henry? (and was it you, or George, who hunted out Kerensky for his first viewing of OCTOBER?)--who invited a taciturn Bruce Baillie to show us his film poems. YELLOW HORSE...glinting motorbike... and MR HAYASHI... how to conjure a film from almost nothing, a man bent tending vegetables in the harsh sunlight, in the no-man's-land between freeway and factory. I don't recall who screened Maya Deren's MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON, but the reflections shimmering over her face in the window found a quick reprise in my first filmette... roped to the bonnet of Rubbo's housemate Steve's MG, the Bay Bridge streaming across the windscreen. (I had to go back to George three times before he approved the project: not impressed by "impressions of a junkyard", or "main street", but when I decided to do a story, he didn't want specifics: "It has a beginning, a middle and an end ?" "Yes, George". "OK!").

George was a wise person. As well as the smile, there was a glint in the eye, his speech was concise, realistic and encouraging. Given his avowed love for the dramatic I imagine that, in his later roles of producer and catalyst for community television, the drama for George lay in his interaction with directors and programme-makers, watching the work come to fruition. George opened

us to the work of making films, and he remains a model for anyone who would teach or encourage others into the medium.

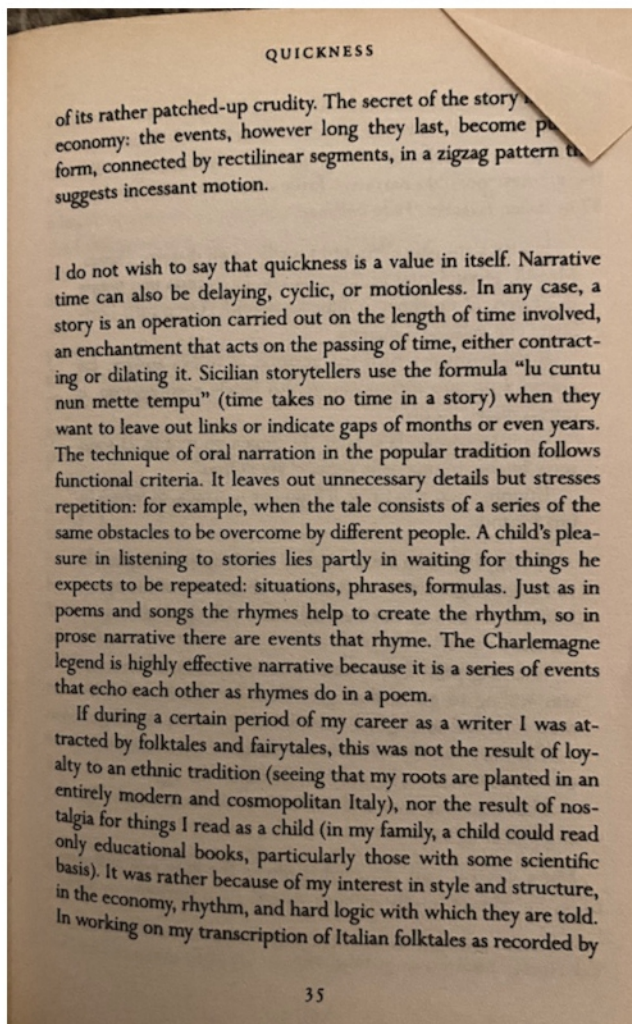
Henry, I'm very much aware in retrospect of how much my time at Stanford, and in Cambridge, depended on your good offices. I wasn't a star pupil, and I caused the Department a fair quota of trouble. But--what an amazing and life-forming experience it was ! So this is my thankyou... to both George and yourself. I trust it finds you in rude health.

with my best wishes

Chris Tillam

All the films mentioned, except ALL MY BABIES, can be found on YouTube.

lu cuntu nun metti tempi
time takes no time in a story



Maya Deren



<https://www.hhs.se/contentassets/41185a7259ff446a916f6a137bbb66b/meshes.jpg>