It is significant that the note’s poolside epiphany occurs in a written text rather than in a recorded or enacted event. The incorporation of production notes was the decisive innovation that gave the film its startling richness. The handwritten notes demand a concentrated time of reading in counterpoint to the rhythms of the montage. They open the film up to the drama of its genesis, while inviting the viewers to imagine scenes not filmed and to compare those filmed to the verbal sketches. This play between text and image differs strikingly from the nearly contemporary explorations of Hollis Frampton in *Hapax Legomena* because Beavers abjures the irony Frampton cultivates; instead, his texts expand the representation of “thought” around which the film circles. […] While concentrating on the elegant geometry and surface beauty of his cinematic tools, Beavers brings more elements from the Florentine environment into his film—Alberti’s facades and anonymous street scenes, studies of plants, a trompe-l’œil window painted on a wall—until a diminuendo signals the end of the film approaching: he closes his briefcase (presumably containing his mattes and filters), fastens the shuttered window, and stands at a news kiosk, as if to illustrate the paradoxical final note to himself. […] However, the final seconds show Beavers in the act of filming himself and Markopoulos in the mirror. First the camera pans down and then up, interrupted by the flipping of the matte on its pivot, like a blank page bound in a book. In the last shot Markopoulos turns his head to face the mirror. The sounds of a bird’s wings flapping rhyme with the click of a camera shutter. The montage of picture and sound reaffirms the play of an analogy among wings, mattes, pages, camera shutters, tripods, and the human head. Without denying the symbolical power of the dove as an icon of inspiration, even divine inspiration, Beavers concludes his film under the sign of a reflection of what Valéry called “attention itself.” […] If there is an elusive psychodrama hidden within *From the Notebook of…*, it is a version of Narcissus, perhaps the core myth of the American avant-garde cinema since Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid’s *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Even here, Beavers’ intimations of the Narcissus situation is closer to the inflection of Valéry, for whom “Narcisse” is often a shorthand for the disjunctive relationships of sound and image, inner and outer, being and knowledge, and “each visible thing is to what sees it.” The suicidal violence of *Meshes of the Afternoon* has no place in Beavers’ celebratory film of artistic incarnation. If anything the final image of him and Markopoulos posing in the mirror might be seen as a reversal of the end of *Meshes of the Afternoon* where the woman played by Deren shatters the mirror image of the man (played by Hammid) and kills herself, in a symbolic gesture combining drowning with slitting her throat, by showing a string of seaweed, which might be taken for blood at first sight, on the throat of the suicide. In contrast, Beavers’s first appears in his film with a line of sunlight crossing his throat. His concluding self-portrait with Markopoulos may be seen as an emblem of “prismatic space in film.” The examples he had given in his long note for the New York Film Festival were “the two sides of a hand or the turning of a page or the dialogue between two figures.” Here, the interior dialogue of the filmmaker meditating on the genesis of his work momentarily crystallizes in the reflection of the two filmmakers. In this way the second cycle reaffirms the “dialogue” that began the first cycle. Symmetrically, the third cycle will commence with an interiorization, literalizing the two male voices in *Sotiros*.
ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Robert Beavers is a master of 16mm personal filmmaking whose films are landmarks of independent cinema. Following his magnum opus 18-film cycle, My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure, Beavers released several works that are considered among the great films of recent decades. Beavers’ focus is on intimate spaces and how they reflect qualities of human character and life. His art is unsurpassed in its sensitivity to seemingly ordinary details, the astonishingly sensual sound and imagery, and its deep grounding in the classical arts. Tonight’s program will feature two of Beavers’ most celebrated films, including the Los Angeles premiere of the groundbreaking From the Notebook of... (1971/1998, 16mm) and the mid-career masterpiece The Stoas (1991-97, 16mm).

Beavers’s Second Cycle:
The Past in the Present — The Present in the Past
by P. Adams Sitney

The following is an excerpt of an essay originally published in the book Eyes Upside Down (2008)

...At twenty-two-years-old [Beavers] achieved a remarkable level of artistic maturity with the completion of From the Notebook of... By starting the second cycle of My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure with it he acknowledged its importance in his oeuvre. More than any other single film it established his reputation as one of the preeminent avant-garde filmmakers of his generation, at least to the few critics and curators who were able to see his work in the early 1970s. The subsequent three films of the cycle—The Painting, Work Done, and Ruskin—confirmed the prescience of that early recognition.

Sometime before making From the Notebook of... the filmmaker read Paul Valéry’s Introduction to the Method of Leonardo Da Vinci (1895), a meditation on thought and phenomena the French poet published when he was only twenty-four. [...] Beavers has always read widely and urbanely; all of his films reflect his intense study of poetry, music, paintings, and architecture. Certainly his reading of Valéry’s essay put the filmmaker on a path leading to the examination of the complex relationship between his ideas for films and the results of his practice. Consequently, From the Notebook of... centers itself on the filmmaking process and integrates the representation of the city -- here Florence -- into that process. Every moment of the film reflects the interdependence of the filmmaker, his tools, the historic environment of Florence, and the compound model of Leonardo-Valéry. [...] 

In From the Notebook of..., the filmmaker continually returns to images of his handwritten notes and of his matte box, exploring the ways in which color filters alter the light on the whole screen or parts of it. The substitution of filters and mattes gives the film its dominant vivace rhythm, accenting by abrupt camera movements, sweeping over sites in Florence mentioned in Leonardo’s notebooks. The film makes explicit how thoroughly the images of Florence have been mediated by the filmmaker’s readings, writings, materials, and craft.

He wrote in "La Terra Nuova": "The act of filming should, in itself, be a source of thought and discovery." And in "Editing and the Unseen": "The many hours of patient editing, this listening to the image, waiting for it to speak and reveal its pattern; clear and often unexpected, yet recognized in its rightness... I memorize the image and movement while holding the film original in hand; the memorizing gains weight and becomes the source of editing. To view the film projected on the editing table would only be done in viewing." Here we can hear [Gregory] Markopoulos’s intuitive self-confidence chastely refined with a Valéryan inflection into a principle of cinematic poetics: filmmaking requires special attention to the acts of thought and discovery occurring while attending the conditions under which short strips of film are imprinted with colored light and images of places; and then, it demands concentrated and patient openness to new orders of assembly, as the rhythms of the pieces of the film gradually assert themselves in editing. In From the Notebook of..., for the first time, Beavers put this double process at the center of a film. [...]

The film opens with the sound of bird wings beating against a window shutter. After thirty seconds a camera pan reveals an outdoor scene with a matte swinging back and forth to bisect the rectangle of the screen. He had constructed a set of masks that pivot from a hinge at the midpoint; by turning a mask he closes off alternately the birds and a matte swinging back and forth to bisect the rectangle of the screen. He had constructed his own camera movements when the filmmaker surveys the red tile rooftops from his pension’s window. For forty seconds the filmmaker intersperses some ten shots of the window shutter to a crack and rocks his upper body from side to side. The filmmaker intermittently returns to images of his handwritten notes and drawing diagrams about the earlier generation of American avant-garde painters who “miss the movement of the idea, of course, and even the movement of the eye. From the moment Beavers enters the film he portrays his own image in the film, at times the filmmaker even leans into the camera composition to inscribe his own image in the film, at times the filmmaker even leans into the camera composition. The analogical "method" depends upon the recognition that time, Beavers put this double process at the center of a film. [...]

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The dominant rhythm of the film derives from the frequent and rapid interruptions of the image in the unmasked portion of the frame. In effect, it suggests a hand flipping the pages of a book. The filmmaker continually returns to images of his handwritten notes and of his matte box, exploring the ways in which color filters alter the light on the whole screen or parts of it. The substitution of filters and mattes gives the film its dominant vivace rhythm, accenting by abrupt camera movements, sweeping over sites in Florence mentioned in Leonardo’s notebooks. The film makes explicit how thoroughly the images of Florence have been mediated by the filmmaker’s readings, writings, materials, and craft.
The film opens with the sound of bird wings beating air for a moment before an image appears. Then, unusually for Beavers, a series of gestural camera movements locates a cage of doves in front of the medieval tower of Florence’s Bargello. Later in the film the camera tends to pivot on the tripod head, rather than sustain this opening flourish, although there will be a similar dance of jagged camera movements when the filmmaker surveys the red tile rooftops from his pension’s window. For forty seconds the filmmaker intersperses some ten abrupt sweeps of the camera with closeups of the birds and a matte swinging back and forth to bisect the rectangle of the screen. He had constructed a set of masks that pivot from a hinge at the midpoint; by turning a mask he closes off alternately the left and right halves of the image. One mask is black, another white, and a third white on one side and black on the other. Generally the pivoting of the mask is synchronized to a change of image in the unmasked portion of the frame. In effect, it suggests a hand flipping the pages of a book. The dominant rhythm of the film derives from the recurring variations on this pivoting.

One of the moving shots follows the flight of a released bird across the Piazza San Firenze. As the film progresses elements from this scene, including the previously unseen release of the bird, will be woven into the montage. In the fluid transition from the jolting movements of the opening shots to the fixed camera positions of the images that follow Beavers extends the chain of analogies that began with an association of the bird’s wings and the matte baffles to the opening the window shutters of a room where we will see the filmmaker working with colored filter strips and jotting down notes and drawing diagrams about this and other films. In these interior scenes the written notes and diagrams become part of the imagery and rhythm of the film. [...]

Likewise the “method” of From the Notebook of... consists combining and associating images—bird wings/pivoting mattes/window shutters/the mechanism of the camera (which he filmed open, running without film so we can see into the flickering of the shutter and the mechanism of the filters)—and “searching for their implications” by recombining them in a steady rhythmic elaboration. At one point he rhymes the dome of Brunelleschi’s Santo Spirito Church (seen from the street) with the work of an artisan carving a hemisphere from wood, perhaps as a mould for a hat. At another moment, the edge of the mold matches an arch in the colonnade of the church’s cloister. [...] In addition to the Santo Spirito, we can see in the film the Ponte Vecchio, the Campanile of the Badia, and Alberti’s facades for the Church of Santa Maria Novella and the Palazzo Rucellai. Unlike the earlier generation of American avant-garde filmmakers, Anger, Menken, and Brakhage, who had preceded him in filming European architectural monuments, Beavers did not treat the historical environment ironically, as if it were the scenography for his psychodrama. Instead, his pursuit of analogy in the rhythmic substitution of one image for another sublimates the psychodrama by creating an air of both apperceptive detachment and eroticized manipulation. The recurring stylistic refinements emphasize the mediations of things and their shadows in figuratively constructing of “the filmmaker’s mind.” [...] To inscribe his own image in the film, at times the filmmaker even leans into the camera composition so that we see his face, out of focus or in shadow, at the edge of the scene. This gives the shot a subjective inflection while maintaining the crystalline imperturbability of the image, designating the framed world as the object of his gaze while transcending his perspective. In his own terms, he moves continually between the first and third person in this film. [...] From the moment Beavers enters the film he portrays himself playing with things. He adjusts the window shutter to a crack and rocks his upper body back and forth as a thin bar of light moves across him (and across his throat in closeup). In the first five minutes he returns again and again to this scene. Valéry had criticized those blinded to what is before their eyes who “miss the movement of the rows of windows, the transformation of surfaces continually changing their aspect” as they move. Here, in contrast, the filmmaker seems to be studying the continually changing aspects induced by his rocking motion, but he does not give us a countershot of what he sees. This is characteristic of his style and his aesthetics. In contrast to Brakhage, he will not attempt to mimic subjective vision. The vision of the camera and that of the filmmaker are autonomous, but linked by analogy. The analogical “method” depends upon the recognition that both the world and the filmmaker are transformed into “perfect... suspended” images within the film, in the phrase of one of the notes we see during the rocking sequence. [...]
It is significant that the note’s poolside epiphany occurs in a written text rather than in a recorded or enacted event. The incorporation of production notes was the decisive innovation that gave the film its startling richness. The handwritten notes demand a concentrated time of reading in counterpoint to the rhythms of the montage. They open the film up to the drama of its genesis, while inviting the viewers to imagine scenes not filmed and to compare those filmed to the verbal sketches. This play between text and image differs strikingly from the nearly contemporary explorations of Hollis Frampton in *Hapax Legomena* because Beavers abjures the irony Frampton cultivates; instead, his texts expand the representation of “thought” around which the film circles. [...]

While concentrating on the elegant geometry and surface beauty of his cinematic tools, Beavers brings more elements from the Florentine environment into his film—Alberti’s facades and anonymous street scenes, studies of plants, a trompe-l’œil window painted on a wall—until a diminuendo signals the end of the film approaching: he closes his briefcase (presumably containing his mattes and filters), fastens the shuttered window, and stands at a news kiosk, as if to illustrate the paradoxical final note to himself. [...]

However, the final seconds show Beavers in the act of filming himself and Markopoulos in the mirror. First the camera pans down and then up, interrupted by the flipping of the matte on its pivot, like a blank page bound in a book. In the last shot Markopoulos turns his head to face the mirror. The sounds of a bird’s wings flapping rhyme with the click of a camera shutter. The montage of picture and sound reaffirms the play of analogy among wings, mattes, pages, camera shutters, tripods, and the human head. Without denying the symbolical power of the dove as an icon of inspiration, even divine inspiration, Beavers concludes his film under the sign of a reflection of what Valéry called “attention itself.” [...] 

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**Upcoming Acropolis screenings:**
- **Dead Souls** (Dir. Wang Bing, 2018)—Nov. 11, Billy Wilder Theater
- **Caniba** (Dir. Vérona Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, 2017)—Nov. 19, Downtown Independent

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