
Personal Tribute by Yann Beauvais

Tribute to a Friend Bill Moritz

I have a memory of Bill arriving to do a show in the late 70s in Paris. It was at la Maison des beaux-arts and he was presenting the LA Coop. The show was really amazing. In contrast to the people who were listening to him, hardcore filmmakers, structuralist groups, he appeared like a kind of smiling elf. He spoke about different issues that we were not much aware of in France at that time, like his references to the light shows, and the music scene in California. He showed a group of films, and there was this incredible impression of someone coming from another space, another time. Already one could feel his incredible generosity towards the audience as much as towards the works. I was impressed by the attention and respect that he had for the work he was showing. I was not used to seeing someone presenting and not being aggressive, Bill was generous and camp. One of the first memories I have of Bill.

I don't think he spoke of Fischinger at that time. The show was about the west coast films of the late '70s. This was a rare opportunity, as usually what was shown reflected the domination of the east coast. Later we started to share a mutual enthusiasm for visual music, and that occurred while I curated a show called Film Music 1986. I got in contact with him and from then we started a friendship. At that time I did not know that much about his own writing. Bill helped us (Deke Dusinberre and I) to access a text of Oskar Fischinger for our publication. Not knowing so much about the field, I did not realize he had already written extensively about it.

Then I start to see him with Elfriede Fischinger, to distribute Oskar Fischinger's films (that was in the late '80s). At that time we had already the Len Lye films and some other works related to visual music. I have fond memories of Bill discovering that we screened Laszlo Sandor's *Magyar Triangulum* and that he had not seen it. I gave him some photos, different things and we started to exchange information, documents...

In 1987 I began seeing Elf and Bill in Los Angeles. Each time I went either to the west coast or to New Zealand, I would stop in Los Angeles to see them. It was not only for business.

They came to see us (Miles and I) when in Paris. Bill would stay sometimes when their hotel was not part of their visit. He knew that he could stay whenever he wanted. He wanted to know a lot about some of the filmmakers he'd met in the mid 70s that he was fascinated by, like Jakobojs, Michel Nedjar, etc.

One thing that I noticed about Bill that was funny. He was shocking people by affirming his gay identity thru little gestures. I have a memory of scent and the color floating.

He would put on musk oil - the scent was quite present, as well as the color of purple and violet floating around the

room. It appeared as a statement, for him to speak at these academies, these formal institutions. His appearance did not seem serious enough for these academic circles, which require less nonchalance and more reverence. I found it delightful.

I really enjoyed spending time in L.A. with Bill, not only that he drove us around and showed Miles and I different places that were important for cinema, but also for gay culture. I remember us going to a cemetery to see some famous tombs, going to Griffith Park and so on. But we also went to see the houses of filmmakers and he would tell us unknown stories about abstract experimental filmmakers who were gay. And that I thought was quite important of Bill to have never put aside the sexuality of the filmmaker that he was dealing with. He always paid attention and tried to contextualize them with that aspect when needed. I thought it was important to know that James was gay. It made a lot of sense. I know that it will not change the way I look at his films, but it brings me something that was lacking in the comprehension.

It did explain how Bill's films were received. In his filmmaking, when he was framing gay issues, automatically those films were put aside, (by many of his contemporaries, visual music filmmakers and scholars) because they were not pure enough because they were sexual.

All those films that he did about the fairies, each time we screened them in France, they upset people, including the gay community, especially because they were not showing cute young icons but were showing bears. It was very shocking for people to see that type of men naked on screen. It didn't fit the myth of the gay culture. This was another landscape for France in the '80s. The only film they could relate to was *Star Trick*, with all the people coming out of theater. At least in France, as well as in Los Angeles, people saw him more as a scholar than a filmmaker, and did not know how to handle his own work. I thought it was contradictory to what he was promoting with his scholarship.

But one has to understand that he loved opera and that opera has to do with staging. Look at his films. In *Star Trick*, he gets to the core of gay representation artifice not that far from art deco. One can easily find another linkage to abstract art – these are different patterns of exploring aspects of oneself.

Another memory I have is when Elfriede and Bill did a fantastic performance of the *Lumigraph* at the Louvre. They arrived dressed in black. It was extremely strange to see Bill without color. However, they produced very beautiful colors and shapes during the performance. It was really amazing to see their live performance of Fischinger's machine. I was like seeing one of the *Studies* live. And [See Beauvison page 21]