

CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT NELSON

Milwaukee 10/22/79

Gunvor: You said you found the Samurai creed very interesting. What else would you put in the News?

Bob: If I was doing the News I would be looking for stuff.

G: Right.

There might be some quotes and phrases of your own...theories...

B: I haven't figured out any theory.

G: Reactions to other people's theory?

B: Yeah. Put that down: reactions.

One of the things I thought interesting was that you wanted to make the issue more fun.

G: Right.

B: What seems deadly about the whole scene these days is the absolute seriousness that so many people take the whole idea of movies...and why the hell they have to be made. The whole thing gets so humorless and heavy. Not everybody but there is an awful force of it in the scene.

G: I think it started with all those people that study cinema, those that comment about cinema, and then it spilled over to those who make cinema.

B: Yeah, theorists.

G: ...who want to make a dent or shape history.

A heavy leaden belly is what it is. Yet there are so many people interested in it, so I wonder, am I wrong.

B: That is where the energy is. This school is strong on theory and the people are very serious about film. There is almost nothing that I ever hear anyone say that is of interest to me. Instead of speaking from the experience of what the film is, they take it out, abstract it, reduce it and then speak about it.

G: Now there are filmmakers that are theorists.

B: I have an awful sense about it but I can't judge it. It might lead to some wonderful things, yet my intuition says that it is the wrong way to go. Filmmakers and all artists pursue knowledge but you don't need to study films or film theory, which is a narrow package. Especially when it gets to be a closed circle where the theorists and the filmmakers are verifying one another and people are making films to demonstrate a theory, and in that way eliminate risk.

They are so lodged in this theoretical position that they can only conceive of their films through the filter of that same ideological position. It has to do with what people are talking about at that time. Most of the films are cold and dry, I think. The independent film scene is small enough anyway...to make a closed circuit between the independent filmmakers and this small group of theorists who talk to one another in journals and have meetings. I think it is a mistake.

G: I am steeped in the philosophy of everybody having their own individual avenue.

B: For me the spirit of independent film really is that fact that it is all wide open every minute, always; and your choices are not limited and defined by some outside force or form or tradition or philosophy or theory...I would want to represent this freedom to explore outside of any codes established by some in-group, which for me is repulsive.

G: And pompous and ponderous...Yes, we might be snobs.

B: Maybe individual artists are not willing to swallow theory, to justify what they are doing, to explain it for the most part. They don't want experience that has meaning reduced in ways that doesn't touch on where the power of that experience is. When you are making films you are coming from an interior position...Passion.

The real risk is opening your own self to imagery, to energy.

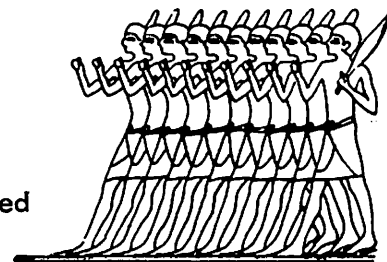
G: Testing new ground. And this is where you've been and what you have seen and found.
B: Rejection or applause. I tell you I would not particularly recommend to any filmmakers or students that they read the theorists.
New York is formalistic to the highest degree. It is like Egypt. There is a way that images are presented that is very much formalized.

G: Every person has to go sideways, like that.

B: Yeah, right.

G: And in California ?

B: ...every which way, right?
And from New York, films from California look stupidly undisciplined and indulgent.



G: Right.

B: And reckless and once in a while kind of interesting but totally wild and wooly and unrespectful of the forms.
And on the West Coast the films from New York look rigidly formalized.

G: Forboding and...

B: ...and in the Midwest it really is in the center of those two poles. Maybe something new can happen here.

"There are many ways to live in the middle. There is only one way to live on the ends, the end." --Jerry Gooch

"I've been dreaming about thousands of them," she said in malaria delirium.

"Redundancy reorders the rhyme." --Lout Sue Sez

"I think my paintings are easy to like but you have to want to like them."
--Ellsworth Kelly

John Cage: "Is a truck in a music school more musical than a truck passing in the street?"

Gunvor: "Probably."

Bob: "Yeah, Probably."

John Stuart Mill: "...sensible phenomena in experience..."

Albert Einstein: "The most beautiful and the most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all science and art."

Carl Jung: "After all, science is the art of creating suitable illusions."