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Brakhage's Homage to the Heavens

BY KEVIN THOMAS

Times Staff Writer

Stan Brakhage's "The Text of Light" (in its local premiere at the Theater Vanguard tonight only at 8 p.m.) is 60 minutes of images of pure abstract beauty—images that alternately suggest sunlight falling on a butterfly's wing, light shining through a thin slab of alabaster or quartz, a cloudy sunset, a comet's streak, moonlight glistening upon a waterfall.

It is a tribute to the profound sense of beauty of Brakhage, one of the major pioneering figures in the un-

derground film, that he can command our attention with such simple, indeed blurry, abstractions for so long a time span.

In contrast to Jordan Belson's hypnotic, sensual flows of lush color, Brakhage's film is an austere silent montage, superbly structured and paced to be sure, yet possessing so little movement within most sequences as to verge upon the static. Yet to watch "The Text of Light" is to be asked to contemplate the heavens in all their awesomeness.

If "The Text of Light" deserves a poem rather than a review, then

Brakhage's 16-minute "The Stars Are Beautiful" (also in its local premiere), in which he combines poetic words and images, could serve as its critique.

Yet Brakhage not only pays homage to the heavens in sight and sound but also intercuts these starry musings with glimpses of rural domestic life as his wife and children go about daily activities—which include clipping the wings of a plump chicken so it will not fly off. Aptly enough, Brakhage, a man for whom the earth and the stars are one, says of himself "I have one big toe in bronze and the other in eternity."