Document Citation

Title	**[Untitled article about Nathaniel Dorsky]**
Author(s)	Brook Hinton Scott Stark
Source	*Publisher name not available*
Date	
Type	article
Language	
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Dorsky, Nathaniel
Film Subjects	Triste, Dorsky, Nathaniel, 1996 Alaya, Dorsky, Nathaniel, 1976 Pneuma, Dorsky, Nathaniel, 1977 Hours for Jerome, part 1 & 2, Dorsky, Nathaniel, 1980

by Brook Hinton — (for Scott Stark's proposed electronic mag. "HI-BEAM")

PNEUMA (1977-83/89), TRISTE (1976-96), ALAYA (1976-87)
by Nathaniel Dorsky, Pacific Film Archive 10/29/96

HOURS FOR JEROME (1982) and TRISTE (1976-96)
by Nathaniel Dorsky, SF Cinematheque at Center for the Arts 12/5/96

Early in Nathaniel Dorsky's Triste, an image of bare tree branches is seen against an unnaturally dark sky. The branches overlap - the effect is one of multiple flat planes - but we know they are connected. The reason is not because of an assumed point of origin offscreen or any particular composition the filmmaker has chosen. Rather, we know the branches are both separate (as we see them) and of one because they breathe.

It's a slight, subtle movement. Perhaps in response to a wind we don't hear, or another offscreen phenomenon. The branches barely move, but Dorsky, who is a master at finding the magical, elusive point at which an image transforms itself, leaves the shot onscreen until we see not just a beautiful image of bare branches, or wind, but of something alive. At the point of the cut, what breathes is no longer the tree, but the frame itself.

Dorsky is celebrated in the Bay Area film community as something of a shaman. His work as an editor on local films is spoken of in hushed, awed tones - it seemed a fair minority of audience members at both screenings had at one point seen him "rescue" their films by finding a magic cut which revealed a piece's structure. That sensitivity is evident in all of the work screened, but the power of Triste and his earlier Pneuma lies in something far deeper than the discovery of such moments.

On the surface the two films have little in common save a lack of sound. Pneuma is constructed entirely of unprocessed, outdated film stock Dorsky collected over a period of time, working to find the essence of each texture and its relationships to the others. Triste is composed primarily of concrete images which taken separately might be equally at home in something by Chris Marker or Bruce Baillie: moments of unexpected beauty and movement in a landscape; people in their homes going about "being filmed" with a disarming comfort and intimacy with the camera; tourists and ordinary people seen against sights both mundane and impossibly vast. What links the two works is their overall effect. To watch them is not so much to "see" a creation-in-media as to meet a complete, organic life-form.

No one shot can be extracted without losing all essence it had within the film. No understanding can be gained from examining two shots, from looking at their relationship and the nature of Dorsky's decision on where to balance them with a cut. No sequence can hold even a part of the film: these are works which exist ONLY as wholes. Yet it is only through intimate involvement with each individual image that Dorsky could possibly have found the seeds for these remarkable gardens: within the context of the films each image breathes and sings its own line in the chorus while playing its part in making the piece live.

Because of this complex balance the films feel very delicate, as if a mere momentary frame-slip from the projector could destroy everything. But the balance is so perfect that the films may be aesthetically indestructible: Triste survived an accidental 25 percent increase in projection speed at the Cinematheque with surprisingly little of its impact diminished.

The other two works screened are less successful, though still remarkable achievements. Alaya is considered Dorsky's finest work by many, but it feels incomplete to me. Structurally very similar to Pneuma, it is composed of photographed, moving sand. The range and beauty of the images are continually surprising, but the film never transcends its structure. Hours for Jerome is an early, very personal work (Dorsky refers to its elements as "youthful spurtings") filled with the joy of discovery: anyone who spent any significant time with a Bolex in their youth will surely be moved.