

Talk Delivered to the Dante and Cinema Conference, University of Toronto, April Fool's Day, 2001. Unpublished

Remaking: On *The Book of All the Dead* and the *Commedia*

I want to deliberate today on the topic of the remaking – the refashioning or recasting – of predecessor work, for that topic is essential to the theme of this weekend's conference. In particular, I want to deliberate on the conditions that allows a visual work to draw upon a verbal work – what allows a visual work, if not to propose an analogous structure, then at least to create a similar effect (ideally an equivalent, but how could be so foolhardy as to claim to have offered an equivalent effect to so great a work as that which is at the core of these discussions). The concept of effect, that is of reader or spectator response, we shall see, is central to the topic I want to consider.

The Book of all the Dead is a palimpsest, a work that overwrites, Pound's *Cantos*, which itself overwrote, first, Dante's *Commedia*, and secondly, the *Odyssey*. I have drawn bits and pieces from throughout the *Commedia* and the *Cantos* and presented them in an order that has much more to do with the form of the work I am making than with the integrity of the structure Dante gave us. Passages of *The Book of All the Dead* refer back and forward to other passages within it so specific phrases from the *Commedia* and the *Cantos* become associated in *The Book of All the Dead* with particular images, memories, and landscapes. It is as though, in the making of *The Book of All the Dead*, an Ur-form of the Pound's *Cantos*, that is to say Dante's *Commedia* had been shattered, the fragments spread out over a thousand different places and the material from all these places re-assembled in an order that, I hope, at once makes them new and preserves the meanings they had before they were broken. That is the real reason why there should be no attempt at creating an equivalent structure: That Gnostic apothegm that Harold Bloom uses to open *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* – "Everything that can be broken, should be broken" – and his supplementary formulae, "It must be broken; It must not bear having been broken; and it must seem to have been mended." – is the most precise and simple truth I know first about making art and second about the passage of time. At the same time, it is the pithiest statement of the phases in the creation of an authentic self (for the self has everything to do with time); to create either a poem or an authentic self, we must experience language or the self as 'un-wholed', we must experience the appalling truth that meaning or evidence of the self is lacking, must be familiar with the withdrawal of fullness into emptiness and the estrangement of what is most intimate, and must know of the lack of ratio between knowledge and desire, just as we must know of death, of the death of love, the death of desire, and the death of creative power. We must be acquainted with the fact that language and the self are menaced in their existence by the *apeiron*; they are adrift (truly are driftworks) in the Limitless. But the discovery of real truth of finitude takes place when limits seem to disappear, and one confronts the Unbounded Abyss. One who lives with the knowledge of death – of the deaths of love, desire and creative power – abides from moment to moment with the horrible question, 'Am I still a Poet?', and must constantly reaffirm his or her vows. This question surely fuels the urge to make, and to remake. A compositional method based on appropriation, allusion, quotation and intertextual reference is one response to the terrible doubt a creator confronts: the breaking of the whole, the election of the fragment, and its transformation in an utterly new whole describes the identical of phases in the process of both incorporation of intertextual reference and self-development – the breaking of the whole enacts a process central to all creation, revealing the horrid, violent truth that no creation takes place without

destruction. But it also helps one to arrive at an answer to another chilling question provoked by acquaintance with the death of love –“Can I ever again love another as once I loved?” The identification of one’s own creativity with another’s, essential to all remaking, and the taking of another’s powers for oneself is a means, indisputably Freudian, of coping with the impact of this question.

Qualities of the first cantica of Dante Alighieri’s *Commedia* brings the question of the maker’s survival as poet into focus. For reading *Inferno* is a task that can hardly be sustained – which reader has not asked if he or she could bear it to the end. How often we feel, when reading the *Inferno*, what the prideful feel in the tenth canto of *Paradiso*, who burdened with weights on their backs, in tears appear to say, “Più non posso” (“I can no more”). But every work of art is about, amongst other things, its own making’ and so our wondering whether we can survive the reading of this great work evokes for us the story of Dante’s great anxiety of whether he could survive as a poet.

The Book of All the Dead has made passages written by Dante Alighieri and by Ezra Pound its own, just as it has made passages of Martin Heidegger and Simone Weil its own. Certainly, the major inspiration for *The Book of All the Dead* is Dante’s “Divina” *Commedia*. Like Dante’s great poem, my epic operates on several levels. One level – a level Dante (or at least the author of the letter to Can Grande della Scala) would have called “the literal” – is an historical one. Like Pound I wanted to create a work that would include history. In particular, *The Book of All the Dead* is concerned with history’s collapse into modernity, where, I sometimes have feared, it shall remain frozen. On a philosophical (allegorical) level, it is concerned with the question of how consciousness came to its present state and, more broadly, with questions concerning the fate of consciousness. On a theological (anagogic) level, it is concerned with the possibility of recovering those capacities of consciousness, now lost, that once enabled it to dwell in the light of the Good. The individual’s quest that the personal or moral level of the cycle presents parallels Pound’s own quest for the “*paradiso terrestre*,” and suggests, finally that the only way to recreate the *paradiso terrestre* is to understand and act on the maxim that “a man’s paradise is his good nature.”

Like Dante’s poem, my film begins in the Dark Wood, whence the protagonist embarks on a journey into the world of the dead (the past and the tradition) in order to acquire the gnosis that might save him. Moreover, like the “Divina” *Commedia*, *The Book of All the Dead* offers a description of stages in the transformation of consciousness, from ordinary waking consciousness (*The Art of Worldly Wisdom*), through consciousness of the workings of the awesome Divine within ordinary (1857: *Fool’s Gold*), through *Illuminated Texts*’ acknowledgment, propadeutic to the purging of sin, of our dreadful plight to the purgation (in *The Dream of the Last Historian* and parts of *The Sublime Calculation*) of human error though the acknowledging the possibility, to say nothing of the beneficent folly, of the “repeat in time” and on to the sporadic, faltering beginnings of what might lead one out of Purgatory, that is the contemplation of love, first in its mode of absence (in *The Fugitive Gods*), then in the mode of a possibility-to-be-made-once-again-present (in *The Lighted Clearing*, and especially in *The Body and the World*), and, finally, the various stages of the beatific vision, beginning with an acknowledgement of the terrible powers of love (in *Flesh Angels*), the eschewing of intellectual love (in *Newton and Me*), to the peace of discovering the Divine Love in higher vision (in *Azure Serene: Mountains, Rivers, Sea and Sky*) and onto the exalted knowledge of the love that permeates all things and sustains all things in their being, in *Exultations (In Light of the Great Giving)*, *Burying the Dead (Into the Light)*, and *Et Resurrectus Est*.

Furthermore, the spiritual education *The Book of All the Dead* describes is similar to that

which Dante's *Commedia* presents – the growth towards the insight that all that is given in experience truly is a gift; and we must have faith that though some of our experiences, like nightmare monsters wrought in the dark, may seem like cruel repayments for our efforts to find God, even such cruel succubi turn out to disclose the Be-ing of Goodness, if we wait long enough. Consciousness of the significance of the particular is enlarged until, at last, the poetry of experience is awakened, and an emotional experience is called forth that awakens one to our oneness with our circumstance, i.e., with that which stands around us.

Just as Lucia in Dante's great poem initiates the Poet into Purgatory with a grace that leads to *metanoia*, so the coming of love in *Consolations* begins a process of transformation. *The Book of All the Dead* concerns the destitution of our time, when the Holy has departed and we live without an understanding of the sacred. And how did Dante describe his times in "*Dogliami reca*"?

<p>Oma da sé vertù fatto ha lontana: omo no, mala bestia ch'om simiglia. O Deo, qual meraviglia voler cadere in servo di signore o ver di vita in morte.</p>		<p>Men have cut themselves off from virtue – no, not men, but evil beasts in men's likeness. O God, how strange – to choose to fall from master to slave, from life to death</p>
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In the end, *The Book of All the Dead* depicts its protagonist's consciousness passing over into the awareness that love that permeates the universe, just the *Paradiso* depicts the consciousness of the poet as doing. But the journey that *The Book of All the Dead* describes is not a straight line. It circles back upon itself again and again, even though it steadfastly approaches its destination. But didn't the Pseudo-Areopagite describe the route by which humans approach God as a spiral? There is always the circling back, even as we draw nearer to the goal.

Like Dante's long poem, mine seeks after the Love that binds the scattered pages of the universe into one volume – seeks, that is, to understand that all relations are "*un semplice luce*." And like the conclusion of Dante's long poem, the end of *The Book of All the Dead* presents a vision of the cosmos as held together by the three forces of light, reason, and love, which, in the end, are all understood to be identical. As Beatrice tells the Poet that the Empyrean is made up of light, reason and love:

<p>. . . pura luce: luce intelletual, piena d'amore; amor di vero ben, pien di letizia, Letizia che trascende ogni dolzore (<i>Para. XXX, 39-42</i>)</p>		<p>. . . pure light intellectual light full of love. love of true good, full of joy Joy that transcends all sweetness of delight.</p>
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Still, one acknowledges with despair, that every contemporary effort at remaking Dante's

magnum opus is bound to fail – bound to fail precisely because this vision has been obscured.

One key realization in my efforts at remaking the *Commedia* was the discovery that it has something of the quality of an open form work that is, its form can accommodate sudden shifts in direction, according to what the poet encounters in the process of making his work. After all, one might say, Dante highlighted this feature by structuring his narrative like a voyage in which the traveler is continually taken aback by the new things that he encounters as he proceeds along the “*nuovo e mai non fatto cammino di questa vita*” (the new and never before traveled road of this life.)

Dante’s *Commedia* is a work that is open to discoveries that appear in the course of its compositions – qualities Pound must have recognized when, modeling his *Cantos* on it, he referred to adventure that his work set out as a *periplum* – that is, its form can accommodate sudden shifts in direction, according to what the poet encounters in the process of making his work. This open form quality affects its temporal quality. The text describes encounters with novel experiences, and because the experience of this encounter is so forceful, the modality of the immediately present overwhelms all other temporal modalities. In particular, the encounter with the new and the unexpected undoes the successiveness (the “*ad una ad una*” structure) of narrative construction.” Accordingly one might claim, that Dante’s *Commedia* proceeds in its course from the temporality of narrative succession that characterizes its early parts (which, of course, depict the realm of alienation from the Divine), to the quasi-divine temporality of the intensified lyric mode, which subsumes the past and future in the immediacy of presence. The *Commedia* is just the opposite of *La Vita Nuova* in this respect. While the latter work wraps its lyrical poems inside a narrative container – the prose texts, of course, but think of their character: “at that moment I say truly that the vital spirit, that which lives in the most secret chamber of my heart began to tremble so violently” – and so cedes to the temporality of narrative the role of governing the work, the *Commedia* proceeds from the sequentiality of narrative time to the spacious present of an intensified lyric temporality. The *Commedia*’s temporality is closer to the ecstatic temporality of the intensified lyric mode – it is a narrative poem, but one which, like Pound’s *Pagana Commedia*, integrates historical and mythical meditations with exalted lyrical passages.

Of course, this is not exactly how Dante understand what he had achieved. My claims are disavowed by the text, for the *Commedia* claims to have been constructed only after the Poet had been granted the visions described in the last *cantica*. Dante states as much right at the beginning of *Inferno*:

<p>Ahi quanto a dir quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte che nel pensier rinnova la paura!</p> <p>Tant' è amara che poco è più mort; ma per trattar del ben ch'ì' vi trovai, dirò de l'altre cose ch'ì' v'ho scorte.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Inferno</i> l 4-9</p>		<p>Ah, it is hard to speak of what it was,</p> <p>that savage forest, dense and difficult, which even in recall renews my fear:</p> <p>so bitter – death is hardly more severe! But to retell the good discovered there, I'll also tell the other things I saw.</p>
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But these assertions, I suggest, are really only a *topos* – the *Commedia* does not really offer a retrospective view of how the Poet came to be granted Vision, but actually embodies his struggle for vision. The *Commedia* gives too great evidence of patchwork composition to make the narrative's claims about itself truly believable: the topical, political concerns of *Inferno* seem remote from the philosophical and theological interests of *Paradiso*; and some individual passages in the work seem detachable – separable from the overall structure and able stand on their own, and its (what I suppose postmodernists would call) pastiche-like quality does not adversely affect the integrity of the work. To push this postmodernist-inflected claim, the *Commedia* resembles a composition of diverse passages, tied together by the presence of common individuals (e.g., the Poet's guides), the unfolding of the Poet's vision and the progressive revelation the worlds beyond our own.

At a deeper level, the narrative constructs the protagonist as an individual who, as he departs on his journey, is prone to error and sin, in need of witnessing the Hell's horrors and of experiencing Purgatory's cleansing in order to prepare for the vision granted him in the end. That is, Dante's *Commedia* presents a person in the process of becoming worthy of receiving the Vision. The parallel that Dante constructs between the events depicted in the text and his own efforts at writing the text implies that Dante's artistic endeavour was an effort at spiritual preparation, to prepare himself to become an author worthy of *Paradiso*, with its Visionary scenes.

Anyone committed to the ideas of Open Form, but especially one who remembers the length of time it took Dante to compose the *Commedia*, would interpret the spiritual progress of the *Commedia*'s narrator to suggest the truth about all poetic composition: that it is an adventure that puts at stake whether the poet will become worthy of writing the poem. If the narrative form of the *Commedia* is an ambitious one, it is because it puts a great deal at stake and because it culminates in an achievement of great importance – the achievement of Vision. I interpret this just as Pound did, to suggest the poet's pitching him or herself into the work, taking the chance that, in the course of one's work, one will develop the insights necessary to carry it through to a conclusion.

Since Auerbach, scholars, quite rightly, have made much of Dante's use of direct address to the reader. One reason that Dante's use of direct address has exerted the fascination that it has is that it foregrounds something that is essential to poetry. Four decades

ago, Archibald MacLeish's slogan, "a poem should not mean, but be" had considerable currency. I think MacLeish was close to right, except – and it's a pretty big "except" – that the metaphysics implicit in his slogan is both hidebound and constricting. I share MacLeish's skepticism that the value of a poem is as a semiotic transformer; but I should want to say, not that "A poem should not mean, but be" but, rather, "A poem should not mean, but act." A poem or a film, I should be a dynamic thing.

Certainly, we can acknowledge that Dante's use of direct address extends his deliberation on the character of poetic language that was the topic of *La Vita Nuova*, and is really the key aspect of the "ineffability topos" of the final *cantica*: in addressing the reader, he creates a realm of the "here" which is juxtaposed to the "there" of the solitary phase of the poet's quest. But we interpret the significance of Dante's address to the reader in another way: what Dante's use of direct address indicates is that poetic language has a perlocutionary character (to adopt a term from Grice), i.e., that it is an utterance that does something to somebody. The plausibility of this interpretation becomes more apparent as we consider that Dante's lament in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* that the *Volgare Illustre* nowhere exists in *act* – i.e., as a dynamic thing, exhibiting *energeia*, and that it is the responsibility of the poet to bring it into being, i.e., to actualize it, to release its *energeia*.

A text is dynamic – it has effects. Dante says as much: in *Il Convivio*, Dante argues against translations of poetry, asserting that his lyrics do not wish "that their meaning should be expounded where they themselves could not carry it together with their beauty." "And therefore let everyone know," he continued, "that nothing which hath the harmony of musical connection can be transferred from its tongue into another without shattering all its sweetness and harmony."

I want to deliberate a little further on this matter of the dynamics of an art work, for on this matter Dante's example was a key for me. For Aristotle's interest in change and process prompted him to focus upon the agency by which words and images are engraved upon the soul. Aristotle proposes that the agency that writes words or paints on the soul are not distinct, as Plato had stated, but are really the same; moreover, Aristotle deanthropomorphizes the agency that performs the act of inscription: it is, Aristotle offers, not an artist that imprints words and images on the soul, but simply "*energeia*." (ἐνέργεια) Notice, regarding our topic, that of remaking a literary work in a visual media, that Aristotle considered discusses words and images as interchangeable entities: both embody and impart *energeia*.

The term "*energeia*" is crucial to our inquiry, for it affords some understanding of how it might be possible to "remake" Dante's *Commedia* in a visual medium. For we can't understand that possibility in other terms – it's not enough to say that the *Commedia* presents striking images which could be transferred to film, as everyone knows that image in visual media has a different character than an image in film. Aristotle's idea of *energeia*, and the role that the concept came to play in Roman and Medieval reception theory, is a basis for understanding how, at a deeper level, verbal and visual constructs can be equivalent. Aristotle coined "*energeia*," from *en*, "in" and *ergon*, "work," a term cognate with *ergos*, "active." Etymologically, "*energeia*" (ἐνέργεια) simply means "(the state of being) in action" or "(the state of being) at work," or "(the state of being) in operation" and sometimes Aristotle actually used the word according to its root meaning. But he used it in an extended sense, too, according to which it refers to "force," "the active exercise of some power," "activity," or "the process of a thing's development from potentiality to actuality." In the latter sense it is evidently associated with "*entelecheia*," (ἐντελεχεια) and Aristotle often used the words interchangeably.

In the middle books of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle links *energeia* and *dunamis*, the root

meaning of which is “force,” “power” or “strength” and which Aristotle uses to mean the potential to become something. Every *energeia* is correlative with some *dunamis*, Aristotle tells us in *Metaphysics*, and the relation between the two is analogous to that between form and matter. For *dunamis* is unrealized potential to be a certain thing or to act in a certain way, while *energeia* is the actualization of that potentiality, or the movement towards that actualization. *Dunamis*, in short, is unrealized potentiality, while *energeia* is the state or process by which that potential is actualized.

Or, rather, this is the standard wisdom on the matter. George A. Blair, argues that Aristotle uses the term to mean the activity that something has in itself, through being what it is. It is the activity that belongs to something by its nature or its form – this is what is implied by the “en” part of “en” + “*ergon*.” Recall that for Aristotle, the formal principle that makes humans what they are is the soul; so we may conclude that for humans, and other beings that have souls, *energeia* is, a principle of the soul. Aristotle’s discussion of *psuche* confirms this. *Psuche*, as Aristotle describes it, is not something that attaches to the body; rather *psuche* is what distinguishes animate from inanimate matter. It is a capacity for functioning, and inward power. The soul is *energeia* (the principle through which animated things have their being); therefore, as concerns humans and other beings with souls, *energeia*, though inseparable from the body, is nonetheless a spiritual principle.

Aristotle defined imagination, as an “imaging” faculty, which he called *phantasai* (*φαντασαι*). What exactly Aristotle meant by *phantasai*, and how he conceived its role in cognition, are topics on which it is difficult to be precise, for the section in his writings which focuses on the topic (*De anima* III) is notoriously imprecise. But this much is clear. Aristotle believed that *phantasai*, rather than being a combination of perception and judgment (required to make up for the lack of perceptual data), is a faculty that mediates between perception and thought; the role the imagination has, according to Aristotle, is to revive sense impressions, as dream images, afterimages, and memories, as *φαντασται*, *phantasiai* (*phantasiai* are the products of *phantasai*). According to Aristotle’s picture, perception produces imagination, and imagination makes thought possible – without perception there is no imagination, without imagination there is no thought. The signal importance of this analysis of cognition is that, unlike Plato’s, it did not disparage mental images, for it recognized that mental images are indispensable to all higher forms of cognition

As concerns beings that have souls, *energeia* belongs to the soul – indeed *energeia* is simply the soul’s exercising its spiritual/intellectual potential. The soul uses the organs or the body for acquiring knowledge, but it is *energeia* (be-ing, i.e., the principle that preserves it in being) that fuels the quest for sensation, for pleasure and for knowledge. It is an internal matter that pertains to the soul. In the end, the soul is what the body does, and what the body does, it does through *energeia*, the principle of be-ing. *Energeia* allows humans to engage in the characteristic human activity, that is, to think. And thinking issues in words and images.

Energeia forms imagination; philosophers who came after Aristotle took the imagination as a power of visualization, which presents objects and events to the inner eye almost as though they were present. Thus, from Aristotle’s time onward, and conspicuously with the birth of secular art in the tenth century, verbal and visual image production is linked to the realm of subjectivity. That the words of a skillful writer arouse images (“*phantasiai*” in Greek, “*visiones*” in Latin) was a commonplace of Roman and of Medieval reception theory. But notice, again, regarding our concept of remaking a literary work in a visual medium, that at some level images and words are interchangeable. In Roman poetics and Roman theory of oratory the power of

language to arouse images in the readers/listener's mind (following Aristotle, we could call this language's *energeia*, for it constitutes its be-ing) is associated with its capacity to convey emotion: if the listener/reader experiences the same "*visiones*" as the speaker/writer (and it is within the power of language to ensure that the listener/reader does), then the listener/reader will experience similar emotions to that which the speaker/writer felt. Such ideas appear, for example, in the Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime*. The Pseudo-Longinus maintained that the poets must themselves feel the emotions they attempt to elicit through their writings, and that it is the capacity to imagine (i.e., to visualize, to formulate *phantasiai*) that allows them to feel the emotions appropriate to the situations they write about. They appear, too, in Cicero's writing (e.g. *De Officiis*, I, 50). Quintilian instructed orators, and even legal councillors, to cultivate this power of visualization – cultivating and, through the evocative powers of language, transmitting *visiones*, was the role of the poet and the orator. Thus, in Roman rhetorical theory, it is *energeia* that accounts for the power of the word, its vigor and strength. But words and images do not constitute simply a model of consciousness – consciousness is made up of nothing but words and images. So the *energeia* (the be-ing) of the word itself has a relation to subjectivity. *Energeia*, the inmost power of the word, is the power to stimulate the mind of the recipient to images or thoughts, and so (according to the classical mode of reasoning on these matters) it must have an affinity with thinking.

Medieval philosophers confirmed the connection between words, *energeia* and subjectivity. Hugh of Saint Victor's *Didascalicon*, approximately contemporaneous with the *Commedia*, identifies human *energeia* (human be-ing, which Hugh of Saint Victor defines as "the power of mind and reason") the third and highest of the powers of the soul. The *Didascalicon* in fact represents image production as a central fact of mental activity: like Aristotle, Hugh of St. Victor asserted that the higher cognitive powers depend on *phantasiai*: we think with images and reason from images, including images of things that the senses cannot see, but the imagination can represent.

Rooted entirely in the reason, the third power of the soul exercises itself either in the most unfaltering grasp of things present, or in the understanding of things absent, or in the investigation of things unknown. This power belongs to humankind alone. It not only takes in sense impressions and images which are perfect and well-founded, but, by a complete act of the understanding, it explains and confirms what imagination has only suggested. And, as has been said, this divine nature is not content with the knowledge of those things alone which it perceives spread before its senses, but, in addition, it is able to provide even for things removed from it names which imagination has conceived from the sensible world, and it makes known, by arrangement of the words, what it has grasped by reason of its understanding. . .

According to Aristotle's philosophy, God, or absolute being, was the *primum mobile* ("primum," "first," as regarded from the standpoint of causation and not of mere being), and also a thinking subject: the prototypes of finite beings are accordingly to be found in God, who is their final Cause. Thomas took over from Aristotle the belief that God's own nature, as a thinking subject, is *actus purus* – pure, absolute *energeia* or actuality without the distinction found in finite beings between potentiality and actuality. In so far as anything is actual (displays *energeia*), it is like God, who is pure act – pure *intellectual* act. Each thing, in its existence, manifested an *energeia* related to that of the Creator. *Energeia*

sustains all beings in their existence. The great importance of this principle is what installed the principle of actuality at the very heart of beings themselves, rather than confining it to some transcendental realm.

Dante alludes to these ideas at several places in *Paradiso*, e.g.:

Non per aver a sé di bene acquisto,
ch'esser non può, ma perché suo splendore
potesse, risplendendo, dir '*Subsisto*,

In sua eternità di tempo fore,
fuor d'ogne altro comprender, come i paicque,
s'asperse in nuovi amor l'eterno amore.

Né prima quasi torpente si giacque;
ché né prima né poscia pocedette
lo discorrer di Dio sovra quest' acque.

Forma e materia, congiunte e purette,
usciro ad esser che non avia fallo,
come d'arco tricolore tre saette.

E come in vetro, in ambra o in cristallo
raggio resplende sì, che dal venire
a l'esser tuto non è intervallo,

così 'l triforme effetto del suo sire
ne l'esser suo raggiò insieme tutto
senza distinzione in essordire.

Concreato fu ordine e costruito
a le sustanze; e quelle furon cima
nel mondo in che puro atto fu prodotto;

pura potenza tenne la parta ima;
nel mezzo strinse potenza con atto
tal vime, che già mai non si divima. (XXIX, 13- 36)

Not to acquire new goodness for Himself
Which cannot be, but that his splendour
might, when it shines back to him, say,
'Subsisto"

in His eternity outside of time,
beyond all other borders, as pleased Him,
Eternal Loved opened into new loves.

Nor did he lie, before this, as if languid;
There was no after, no before – they were
not there until God moved upon these waters

Then form and matter, either separately
or in mixed state, emerged as flawless being
as from a three-stringed bow, three arrows spring

And as ray shines into amber, crystal
or glass, so that there is no interval
between its coming and its lighting all

so did the three – form, matter and their union –
flash into being from the Lord withno distinction in beginning: all at once.

Created with the substances were order and pattern; at the summit of the world
were those in whom pure act had been produced

and pure potentiality possessed
the lowest part; and in the middle act
so joined potentiality that they

Or again, Beatrice's statement:

<p>... Le cose tutte quante hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante.</p> <p>Qui veggion l'alte creature l'orma de l'eterno valor, il qual è fine al quale è fatte la toccato norma.</p> <p>Ne l'ordine ch'io dico sono accline tutte nature, per diversi sorti, più al princio loro e men vicine;</p> <p>onde si muovono a diversi porti per lo gran mar de l'essere, e ciascuna con istinto de lei dato che la porti.</p> <p>Questi ne porta il foco inver' la luna; questi ne' cor mortali è per motore; questi la terra in sé stringe e aduna;</p> <p>né pur le creature che son fore d'intelligenza quest' arco saetta, ma quelle c'hanno intelletto e amore. (Para. I, 103-120)</p>		<p>... all things themselves possess an order; and this order is the form that makes the universe like God.</p> <p>Here do the higher beings see the imprint of the Eternal Worth, which is the end to which the pattern I have mentioned tends</p> <p>Within that order, every nature has its bent, according to a different station nearer or less near to its origin.</p> <p>Therefore, these natures move to different ports across the mighty sea of being, each given the impulse that will bear it on.</p> <p>This impulse carries fire to the moon; this is the motive force in mortal creatures; that binds the earth together and makes it one</p> <p>Not only does the shaft shot from this bow strike creatures lacking intellect, but those who have intelligence, and who can love.</p>
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It also appears in words the Poet attributes to St. Thomas himself:

Ciò che non more e ciò		
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che può morire
non è se non splendor
di quella idea
che partorisce, amando,
il nostro Sire;

ché quella viva luce che
sì mea
dal suo lucente, che
non si disuna
da lui né da l'amor ch'a
lor s'intrea

per suo bontate il suo
raggiare aduna,
quasi spechhiato, in
nove sussistenze,
etternalmente
imanendosi una.

Quindi discende a
l'ultima potenze
giù d'atto in atto, tanto
divenendo,
che più non fa che brevi
contingenze;

e queste contingenze
essere intendo
le cose generate, che
produce
con seme e senza
seme il ciel movendo.

La cera di costoro e chi
la duce
non sta d'un modo; e
però sotto 'l segno
idëale poi più e men
traluca

.
. .
.

Both that which never
dies and that which dies
are only the reflected
light of that
Idea which our Sire,
with Love, begets.

Because the living Light
that pours out so
from Its bright Source
that It does not disjoin
from It or from the Love
intrined with them

through Its own
goodness gathers up its
rays
within nine essences,
as in a mirror
Itself eternally
remaining one.

From there, from act to
act, light then descends
down to the last
potentialities
where it is such that it
engenders nothing

but brief, contingent
things, by which I mean
the generated things the
moving heavens
bring into being with or
without seed.

The wax of such things
and what shapes that
wax
are not immutable; and
thus, beneath Idea's
stamp, light shines
through more or less.

Yet where ardent Love
prepares and stamps

<p>Però se 'l caldo amor la chiara vista de la prima virtù dispone e segna, tuta la perfezio quivi s'acquista.</p> <p>Così fu fatta già la terra degn di tutta l'animal perfezione; così fu fatta la Vergine preгна; (<i>Para.</i> XIII, 52-69, 79-84)</p>		<p>prepares and stamps the lucid Vision of the primal Power, a being then acquires complete perfections.</p> <p>In that way, the earth was once made worthy of the full perfection of a living being; thus was the Virgin made to be with child.</p>
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The idea is also conveyed in what is probably the *Commedia's* most famous *terzina*:

<p>La gloria di colui che tutto move per l'universo penetra, e risplende in una parte più e meno altrove. (<i>Para.</i>, I, 1-3.)</p>		<p>The glory of the One that moves all things permeates the universe and glows in one part more and in another less.</p>
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and, almost as famous, the lines that, with those immediately, form *Paradiso* into a circle.

<p>Veder voleve come si convenne l'imago al cerchio e come vi s'indova;</p> <p>ma non eran da ciò le propri penne; se non che la mia mente fu percossa</p>	<p>d a u n f u l g o</p>	
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A l'alta fantasia qui
mancò possa;
ma già volgeva il mio
dissio e 'l velle,
sì come rota
ch'igualmente è mossa

l'amor che move ii sole
e l'altre stella.

(
P
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r
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X
..

I wished to see
the way our human
effige
suited the circle and
found place in it –

and my own wings were
far to weak for that.
But then my mind was
struck by light that
flashed
and, with this light,
received what I had
asked.

Here force failed my
high fantasy; but my
desire and will were
moved already – like
a wheel revolving
uniformly – by

the Love that moves the
sun and the other stars.

But, as we noted above, for Aquinas, this actuality – this *energeia* – that is diffused universally, throughout all existents, is a mental principle; since it is apprehended by the intellect, it must be akin to the intellect. This is the basis on which the physical word or the material image and its spiritual/intellectual/emotional force are understood as one. This accounts for the power of the word to reveal the being of beings.

This I think is the very point of Dante's invocation of Apollo's powers at the very beginning of *Paradiso*:

Entra nel petto mio, e spira tue
sì come quando Marsia traest
de la vagina de le membra sue.

O divina virtù, se mi ti presti
tanto che l'ombra del beato regno
segnata nel mio capo io manifesti, . . .
Para. I 19-24

Enter into my breast; within me breathe
the very power that you made manifest
when you drew Marsyas out from his limbs' sheath.
O godly force, if you so lend yourself
to me, that I might show the shadow of
the blessed realm inscribed within my mind

The immanence of the actuality that sustains beings in their be-ing led to a sense of the renewal of the world – of Aquinas' *novitas mundi*. And because it brings the creative impetus out of its transcendent enclosure and installs it among existents, indeed right at the very heart of their be-ing; and because of *energeia*'s mental nature, it brings the soul's intelligence closer to that of the Divine. Beings' *energeia* (be-ing) reflects that of the Divine,

so God dwells within, in our sensations and our ideas. It would not have been possible for Dante to conceive of the anagogical vision ultimately bestowed upon the Poet were it not for the Gothic era's conception of an indwelling *energeia*. (be-ing, or principle of existence). The word and the image – the very stuff of the spiritual/intellectual realm – becomes the very paradigm of the indwelling *energeia*, the indwelling intelligence which moves things towards their being.

These ideas about *energeia* are crucial to Dante's perlocutionary poetics (ideas that allowed me to understand that it might be possible to remake Dante's great poem). The idea that Roman and earlier medieval poetic theorists offered, that the function of works of art is to convey subjectivity – or, more exactly, the dynamics of the soul that results in thinking, which is to say, the soul's *energeia* (be-ing) – can be taken in either of two directions: First it can be taken in the direction that Quintilian and Cicero developed it: the image itself could be taken as a form of thought, so the vivacity of the image that an artwork elicits could be taken as an index of the greatness of an artwork; in this case, because our most intensely felt images are usually representational images – images of loved ones, loved places, of bitter adversity or great delight – so in this case representational fidelity is no enemy of aesthetic value. This has not been a widely regarded view in the past one hundred years. Alternatively, the focus could be placed where Stan Brakhage has placed it, on *energeia* itself, this unembodied form that underlies all subjectivity, and as unembodied, as form without matter, is wholly indefinite – in which case the raw drive itself, best suggested by non-representational forms, would constitute the content of the work of art; in this case, the principal criterion of aesthetic worth will relate to its dynamic attributes which can be identified with the dynamics of subjectivity. The intensity of Dante's imagery reveals that he was committed to the former belief – and that was certainly one of my reasons for taking up this decidedly unmodern(ist) view. It is also part of my reason for working in the cinema. Brakhage, following Olson, thinks of the image as "a dead spot"; my reading the Medievals convinced me otherwise. That was permission to believe that cinema could be used for remaking a work whose imagery has fascinated readers for centuries.

These remarks on cinema, and representation bring me to a few reflections on the interchangeability of verbal and visual effects. First let us dismiss the idea of pure visuality, the idea that has subtended much of the strife between verbal and visual arts. I hope, in my effort to be brief, that my remarks will not be too obscure. Let us admit, first, that the word is a regulatory principle, that it has something of the character of law. The violence of law is to place the weaker on an equal footing with the mightier – and of course, the prototype for this attribute that all positive laws evince is the moral law, which demands that the mightier pay tribute to the weaker. To the might of power or force, the law counterpoises the irrevocable demands of the humbled. The law brings both into an ungainly accord, the end of which is to quell any possible upheaval, to put down any possible uprising. So it is with thought. All thinking, and all perception, is endangered by the object of thought, for the be-ing of all beings exceeds thought – that excess may be revealed in the very perspectival nature of perception, or it may be revealed in thought's desire to give objective content to a concept that refuses such a density. But however it is revealed, attention discerns a transcendental element in the object of perception, even though perception participates in the transformation of that element into a percept; that transcendental element is what, following Heidegger, I call "earth," and the creative transformation which perception effects results in the emergence of a 'worldly' being. But

perception, like all thinking, enters into a truce with beings, whose be-ing exceeds thinking; the truce is forged as one learns to cherish the gift of the worlding of the earth – learns that however troubling, upsetting, and violent perception is, human be-ing, through abiding with the gifts it presents, may establish an ungainly, awkward peace with it, a peace wherein what is poorer and humbler (that is to say, consciousness) accedes to the status equal to that of the gifts given by the worlding of the earth. Such is the result of a truce, a pact that a violence mightier than our own establishes with us, to grant us the time wherein we can complete the work of Be-ing.

All perceiving (and, indeed, all thinking) is a violent act, that does not passively render a pre-existent reality that lies before it. Rather perceiving transforms – violently transforms – what gives rise to it. Perception converts “what might be,” the earthly, into “what is,” the worldly – the violence of the conversion is that it reduces potentiality into actuality, possibility into determination, the infinite into the finite. Perception configures one particular arrangement out of the infinite possibilities that are implicit in the nothingness that hides itself in darkness so that be-ing might be rendered as beings. But this sacrifice of the infinite for the finite is also, like the great sacrifice, an act of charity, for it grants the beauty of be-ing – of the very be-ing of all that comes to pass. Nevertheless, there is still that which is left over, that excess of unrealized possibility, that which passes into nothing as a thought is configured, that which language consigns to silence; and that excess rises against language, against thought, and against representation, to destroy them. Its violence is the violence that is characteristic of the revenge of the repressed. The fragmentary, paratactical form of *The Book of All of the Dead* reflects this violence.

What is, shines with effulgence of the beautiful. But whatever is still the result of a reduction. It is not What-might- be. The excess speaks of the deficiency of what is, in comparison with What-might-be. It is, I believe, the pressure of what is greater than beings (that is to say, the Good), to manifest itself that accounts for this impulse to dismantle form and to liquefy all that is fixed (just as it is the pressure of what is beyond be-ing to manifest itself that impels “world” to change). The violence of the process reveals the judgement of what might be on what is and the Good’s striving for realization. The gap between what is and what might be is the real source of our intimations of deprivation; it is that gap which draws our attention towards the Good. Perception must open itself even to the violence beyond all that is that would destroy whatever is.

Perception that attunes itself to the process by which what the Infinite Beyond Be-ing becomes determinate is privy to the mystery of the incarnation, an incarnation that requires a sacrifice so that charity might become manifest. Perception can then sense that what is does not exactly coincide with What-might-be. Narrative, to the contrary, valorizes the reduction of possibility into actuality, for that reduction provides narrative’s founding form – the creation of a *diegesis*. Flow, speed, liquidity, dynamism, perpetual dynamism, transformation put on display, and fragmentation are required to reveal the multiple possibility inherent in that which precedes beings, and so provoke a sense of the gap between what is and What-might-be.

Attention discloses the event of be-ing, the event whereby the Unlimited becomes limited, the Indeterminate becomes determinate. Attunement knows this reduction to be a sacrifice, an act wherein charity and violence mingle. However, attention, and its result, *viz*, attunement, require that the sovereign self be deposed. Narrative, to the contrary, establishes the conditions under which the self legislates to perception by quashing all awareness of beings’ coming-to-be. It *demands*, – it places conditions on the revelation of

the future, in imposing expectations of what is to be.

Medieval thinkers understood these matters.: The transformation by which a thematized element takes form and gains membership in the world results in the occultation of the earthly elements that go into its making; that process therefore has the nature of what I call an “apophantic process.” The Pseudo-Dionysius wrote about this darkness, and its occultation by light:

Darkness disappears in the light, the more so as there is more light. Knowledge makes unknowing disappear, the more so as there is more knowledge. However . . . the unknowing regarding God escapes anyone possessing physical light and knowledge of beings. His transcendent darkness remains hidden from all light and concealed from all knowledge. Someone beholding God and understanding what he saw has not actually seen God himself but rather something of his which has being and which is knowable. For he himself solidly transcends mind and being. He is completely unknown and non-existent. He exists beyond being and he is known beyond the mind. And this quite positively complete unknown is knowledge of him who is above everything that is known.

The primordial perhaps expresses itself in disordered (and disordering) forms and hallucinatory images — but it does express itself in images. In fact, it can only be known as concealed — concealed within the images it leaves behind as it withdraws — and in the way it disrupts form even as it withdraws to allow form to emerge. The logic of apophansis ensures that it is possible that the act of picturing can convey also what cannot be pictured, in just the same way that speech can convey what the speaker can never know. The reign of language over consciousness cannot be put to an end, precisely because of the connaturality of language, world and thought. But there is also that which is not thought, but which, nevertheless, acts — acts because it connives with desire.

Still, every expression — or, better, any configuration, insofar as it communicates a “psychic” (i.e., spiritual) content, already actualizes a language; only that fact makes cinema possible, and exempts the film artist from the requirement of forsaking imagery. I insist that there is a form of language that cinema was meant to embody, a form of language that is prior to the languages of man, a form of language that reveals the inscriptions that the *λογος* has made, the unspoken and nameless language of things, related together in Glory that is One.

The Personalist film theorist, André Bazin insisted that the cinema reflects the fundamental configuration among things, the inscription that the *λογος* made.

The aesthetic qualities of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities. It is not for me to separate off, in the complex fabric of the objective world, here a reflection on a damp sidewalk, there the gesture of a child. Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love. By the power of the photography, the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can see, nature does more than imitate art: she imitates the artist.

For Bazin, then, the cinema exemplifies the nonsensuous relations that exist among things; in doing so, it reveals what, with Benjamin, I call the language of things. I agree with Bazin on this matter. Further, for him, as for me, the glory of the cinema is precisely that it grants priority to that which is rightfully language, viz., the unspoken and nameless language of things. The desolation that characterizes modernity has been to make the positive human language the gauge of clarity, intelligibility, even of meaning – from what Benjamin referred to as “over naming,” in which meanings are ascribed to things from without. But there is also the language of things, the language that demands the respect that Benjamin testified to in “The Task of the Translator.”

In the realm of translation, too, the words ἐν ἀρχῇ ὁ λόγος [in the beginning was the word] apply. . . . In all language and linguistic creation, there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized. It is the former only in the finite products of language, the latter in the evolving of the languages themselves. And that which seeks to represent, to produce itself in the evolving of languages, is that very nucleus of pure language. Though concealed and fragmentary, it is an active force in life as the symbolized thing itself [Note this: Benjamin contends the assertion, the symbolized thing, the referent, is an active force that forms the very nucleus of language], whereas it inhabits linguistic creations only in symbolized form. . . . In this pure language — which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages — all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished.

But the idea antedates Benjamin – in fact it is a venerable idea. Plotinus, too, contended that reality offers a discourse – in fact he went so far as to say that all reality says one thing only: “A god made me.” (a notion that St. Augustine reiterated in his powerful phrase, “*Ecce sunt caelum et terra, clamant, quod facta sint.*”). Plotinus treated speech as though it were located not simply in ourselves, but in the cosmos of which we speak. And I say the world declares itself; or, rather, the Word declares itself through the world. But we, because we are flesh, mediate between the primal Word and the world; flesh brings the discourse of things to articulation. But the cinema, because it is multiform and multisensuous, because it is fluxing and fragmentary, can participate in the discourse of things.

The great poet, and lover of Dante, Robert Duncan, finds similar ideas in the *Commedia*. He wrote in an early book:

The universe and our experience in it is a text that we must learn to read if we are to come to the truth of it and of ourselves . . . this creative life is a drive towards the reality of Creation, producing an inner world, an emotional and intellectual fiction, in answer to our awareness of the creative reality of the whole. . . . If we view the literal as a matter of mere fact, as the positivist does, it is mute. But once we apprehend the literal as a language, once things about us

reveal depths and heights of meaning, we are involved in the sense of creation ourselves. . . If the actual world be denied as the primary ground and source, the inner fiction can become a fiction of the Unreal, in which not Truth but Wish hides. The allegorical or mystic sense, Dante says in his letter to Can Grande, is the sense which we get through the thing the letter signifies. It is our imagination of what the universe means, and it has its origin in the universe. To put it another way, it is by the faculty of imagination that we come to the significance of the world and man, imagining what is in order to involve ourselves more deeply in what is.

But notice that the cinema is an ideal medium for recording the text that is the universe. That the universe is a text was, I believe, Dante's conviction. Hence there exists a fundamental harmony the conception of reality that lies at the heart of Dante's world-view and the cinema's stance towards reality. In *The Sweetness and Greatness of Dante's Divine Comedy*, a later work in which he again affirms the absolute value of the concrete existent, Duncan refers to his doctrine that identifies Dante's literal level of significance with the actual as "heretical." In fact his doctrine is not so heretical, for we have already seen that Aquinas' expansion of actuality's compass to include beings as well as Being is a key to the world-view of the Gothic age. But Duncan's views display another key attribute on the mind of the middle ages: "It is our imagination of what the universe means, and it has its origin in the universe," he writes. The sentence conveys the to-and-froing between meaning (associated, for the medievals, with consciousness, and for Duncan, with imagination) on one hand and reality on the other.

Naming beings summons them into being by making them definite and distinct — that, I believe, is why Benjamin proposed that "*in naming, the mental being of man communicates itself to God,*" for in doing this, human being extends what the $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ inscribed at the time of the creation. So Benjamin concludes from considering the difference between human language and the language of things:

The quintessence of this intensive totality of language as the mental being of man is naming. Man is the namer, by this we recognize that through him pure language speaks. All nature, insofar as it communicates itself, communicates itself in language, and so finally in man. Hence he is the lord of nature and can give names to things. Only through the linguistic being of things can he gain knowledge of them from within himself — in name. God's creation is completed when things receive their names from man, from whom in name language alone speaks. Man can call name the language of language (if the genitive refers to the relationship not of a means but of a medium) and in this sense certainly, because he speaks in name, man is the speaker of language, and for this very reason its only speaker.

Aesthetic objects help us to understand a peculiarity in this discourse of things. Through aesthetic experience we have come to understand that art objects often concern the medium in which they are realized and the process of their coming-to-be. But the discourse of things has similar intentions: the $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ creates the world, and its icons, the objects of the world, speak of the $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$. Thus language of things speaks of the $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$; or, to put it otherwise, the language of objects speaks of the word, of language itself; that

language speaks of language itself is another ontological revelation the aesthetic experience vouchsafes to us.

The cinema's mission, I contend, is to reveal the discourse of things. Objects, in reality as in the cinema, are put on display, though the activity of the *λογος*, and reality is simply what appears, what shines out of the darkness of the primordial. But to appear is to be interpreted. (This is the sense in which what is, reality, is what is perceived, for reality really is what is interpreted – whatever is not interpreted lies in the darkness of nondisclosure.) "*Res sunt nomina*," we might say, appropriating of the traditional formula that Pier Paolo Pasolini proffered, to advance a formula that underlies his much reviled naturalism – a naturalism just as extreme as my own. Thus, the cinematic sign is a metalinguistic sign, an interpretant for another sign, that is for reality itself – for reality itself (that which the cinema puts on display) is itself a signifier that asks to be interpreted through another sign – things serve as the Dynamic Object that determine the formation of a cinematic signifier, but things themselves are signs, i.e., objects whose meaning stand for us, or refer us, to an Other. The interpretant through which we understand the meaning of a photographic or cinematographic image is itself the subject of another sign. (The ultimate, the transcendental signifier, obviously, is the Goodness of the *λογος* responsible for these inscriptions). The cinema is written in the language of reality, a language that puts on display the discourse of objects; it is a language that makes manifest the language that structures reality, the language first spoken by the *λογος* in the original act of creation. The cinema is the *écriture* that makes evident the *langage* that governs reality. It is a system of signs inhabited by the trace of signs belonging to another system -- and the signs whose traces inhabit it are themselves inhabited by traces of origin that the logic of apophansis precludes them from manifesting.

But Dante, with his characteristic prognostication, glimpsed a similar idea: as Prof. James Miller from the University of Western Ontario pointed out to me, in Purgatorio the poet experiences a proto-cinema – a proto-cinema that, for me, reveals the language of things. It appears in the tenth canto; here is a prose translation of it. "I discovered a bordering bank, less sheer than banks of other terraces, . . . of pure white marble and adorned with such carvings that not only Polycletus but Nature herself would be put to shame. The angel who came to earth with the decree of peace, wept for since many a year, which opened Heaven from its long ban, before us there appeared so vividly graven in gentle mien that it seemed not a silent image: one would have sworn that he was saying, "Ave," for there she was imaged who turned the key to open the supreme love, and these words were imprinted in her attitude: "*Ecce ancilla Dei*," as expressly as a figure is stamped on wax. "Do not keep your mind on one part only," said the sweet master, who had me the side where people have their heart: wherefor I moved my eyes and saw beyond Mary, on the same side as was he who prompted me, another story set in the rock; wherefore I went past Virgil and drew near to it, that it might be displayed before my eyes. There carved in the same marble, were the cart and the oxen drawing the holy ark, because of which men fear an office not given in charge. In front appeared people, and all the company, divided into seven choirs, made two of my senses say, the one "No," the other, "Yes, they are singing." In like manner, by the smoke of the incense that was imaged there my eyes and nose were made discordant with *yes* and *no*. There, preceding the blessed vessel, dancing girt up, was the humble Psalmist, and on that occasion he was both more and less than king. Opposite, figured at a window of a great palace, was Michal looking on, like a woman vexed and scornful. I moved my feet from where I was to

examine close at hand another story which I saw gleaming white beyond Michal. There storied was the high glory of the Roman prince whose worth moved Gregory to his great victory: I mean the Emperor Trajan. And a poor widow was at his bridle in attitude of weeping and of grief. Round about him appeared a trampling and throng of horsemen, and above them the eagles in gold moved visibly in the wind." The cinema helps those who are not so mighty as Dante to experience this language of things."

The cinema we see on the screen only replicates the cinema that unfolds in nature. If this proposition strikes you as extravagant, recall that Bergson argued that matter itself is an image. For matter is fundamentally a mode of appearing, as Bergson pointed out: "the objects exists in itself, and . . . The object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: image it is, but a self-existing image. . . [M]atter exists just as it is perceived, and since it is perceived as a image, the mind would make of it, in itself, an image." Furthermore, Bergson affirmed that matter and image are continuous with human perception, but distinct from it, for human perception is a limitation of the more general, indeed, infinite form that is an image, that Bergson calls a "present Image": "The present Image constitutes an objective reality, defined by "the necessity which obliges it [the present Image] to act through every one of its points upon all the points of all other images, to transmit the whole of what it receives, to oppose to every action an equal and contrary reaction, to be in short, merely a road by which pass in every direction, the modifications propagated throughout the immensity of the universe." Thus Bergson proposed, "*I call matter the aggregate of images, and perception of matter these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body.*"

Suppose all physical events are accompanied by images and that these images constitute the discourse of things. The cinema is the means that replicates these images, so as to make them visible to humans. Benjamin again:

The existence of language, however, is not only coextensive with all the areas of human mental expression in which language is always in one sense or another inherent, but with absolutely everything. There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some what partake of language, for it is in the nature of all to communicate their mental meanings. This use of the word "language" is in no way metaphorical. For to think that we cannot imagine anything that does not communicate its mental nature in its expression is entirely meaningless; the greater or lesser degree of consciousness that is apparently (or really) involved in such communication cannot alter the fact that we cannot imagine a total absence of language in anything. An existence entirely without relationship to language is an idea; but this idea can bear no fruit even within that realm of Ideas whose circumference defines the idea of God.

Or, in a similar vein:

Language communicates the linguistic being of things. The clearest manifestation of this being, however, is language itself. The answer to the question, "*What* does language communicate?" is therefore "All language communicates itself" [another revelation that asserts itself with greatest force in the realm of aesthetics]. The language of this lamp, for example, does not

communicate the lamp (for the mental being of the lamp, insofar as it is *communicable*, is by no means the lamp itself), but: the language-lamp, the lamp in communication, the lamp in expression. For in language the situation is this: *the linguistic being of all things is their language*.

But Bergson anticipated Benjamin in presenting a conception of reality on which all things are through their participation in language. In fact, Bergson's ideas on this topic are even more germane to our purposes, for Bergson presented a philosophy which depicts matter as Image, and defines the universe as the entire aggregate of images acting and reacting to one another on all their surfaces, and in all their parts. Cinematography is just such an extension: the pictures that cinematography presents allow the pure language of things to re-address themselves to human be-ing. The discourse which things address to human be-ing resonates when they are translated to the screen, and by that resonance the cinema can provoke a sensation of the inner being of things. Thereby is God's creation completed. The exultation of human be-ing is the discovery that human be-ing completes the work of creation by enabling what is mute, or what became mute through the Fall (in which God's word curses the ground), to speak. For as Benjamin stated, muteness is "the deep sadness of nature." "It is a metaphysical truth," Benjamin told us, "that all nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language. . . . Speechlessness: that is the great sorrow of nature (and for the sake of her redemption the life and language of *man* — not only, as is supposed, of the poet — are in nature). . . . Lament, however, is the most undifferentiated, impotent expression of language; it contains scarcely more than the sensuous breath; and even where there is only a rustling of plants, in it there is always a lament. Because she is mute, she mourns." Cinematography helps human be-ing complete this work for the sake of which human be-ing is in nature. Nature finds consolation for lamentation in cinematography, for cinematography enables the mute to speak — a film, composed of fragments of real, addresses itself to the mind. By reason of this consolation, it exalts. Benjamin realized that inversion of the proposition, "because she is mute, nature mourns" is even truer "the sadness of nature makes her mute." Cinematography discloses the beauty of the *λογος*' inscription, and makes her glorify Him. To glorify the Creator is the reason of all exaltation. These ideas, which Robert Duncan realized where so very Dante, allowed me to believe that it might be possible to remake Dante's magnum in film.

I continue to believe that language is grounded in truth. I cannot accept that nothing fastens words to things, that language is free play. To quote Benjamin again:

Hölderlin's translations from Sophocles were his last work; in them meaning plunges from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language. There is, however, a stop. It is vouchsafed to Holy Writ alone, in which meaning has ceased to be the watershed for the flow of language and the flow of revelation [that is language and revelation flow in the same direction in the Holy Writ]. Where a text is identical with truth or dogma, where it is supposed to be "the true language" in all its literalness and without the mediation of meaning, this text is unconditionally translatable. . . . Just as, in the original, language and revelation are one without any tension, so the

translation must be one with the original in the form of the interlinear version, in which literalness and freedom are unity. For to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines; this is true to the highest degree of sacred writings.

But the *λογος* also wrote all things, into the book of Creation. The discourse of things also constitute a Holy Writ. The cinema was born to make the signs of language, and to do this simply by repeating them. Or, as Benjamin might have had it, translating them. Because it does without the mediation of meaning, this text is unconditionally translatable – that, ultimately, is my justification for continuing realistic representations. “Cinematography” is the name for the process of translating the discourse of things, of filling in the translation between the lines in the sacred text which the *λογος* composed – an activity that results in a sort of interleaving of the translated images of things with things themselves. In the course of making that translation, I too am translated, as Shakespeare’s Bottom realized. The cinematograph indeed has become a form in which we think; this form, brought forth from the intelligence of an age, became the form which recorded the thoughts of the age that first made it. Our age’s self-knowledge is given form by the moving images, for moving images have been used to embody our most inward thoughts and feelings. As the Intelligence of our age and the agency through which we discover our inner being, the cinematograph has looked outward to history that constituted it fate and so it now, in its own inner being, reflects the patterns that perdure through history. That is why I cannot follow Brakhage.

But the Medievals were there long before. For poets of Dante’s era, the purpose of a poem was to impart *energeia*, that is to say the direct communication of inwardness; a poem (or a “poetic film”) is as close as we come to imparting the deeper layers of our thinking, soul to soul – for the deeper layers of thought are nothing but dynamic pulses and rhythmic energy [*dunamis*] (and energy [*dunamis*], like *energeia* itself, we take as a sign of inwardness). A poem, exactly, is something that, though immobile on the page, nonetheless animates mind movement – it seems timeless, yet it possesses dynamic tension. But the relation between the timeless poem, which nonetheless has the potential of actualizing an experience in time, and the mind, is like that between the seed and tree in St. Thomas’ analogy, and so like that between essence and existence. The text of the poem contains the written potential (to animate the mind) which is actualized in the act of interpretation. A poem transmits *energeia*, a light that flashes and sates the soul’s thirst for knowledge. This is a profound reason for Dante’s direct address to the reader – direct address stresses transmission and the perlocutionary effects of the poem.

The poets and philosophers of Dante’s era believed that poems, indeed all works of art, are repositories of psychic energy [*dunamis*] which in being read is converted to *energeia* and transmitted to receptive soul; or, rather, that a flash of meaning summons thinking into be-ing. When it is communicated, *energeia* transforms the recipient – beautiful sounds and stimulating objects can engender a higher form of awareness. Similar ideas were proposed, for example, by the Persian philosopher Al Ghazzali (a philosopher some of whose works certainly Dante knew, for he quoted from him in *Il Convivio*). This, I believe, is what Dante meant when he (I am assuming that the letter to Can Grande della Scala is genuine) stated that the aim of the *Commedia* is “to remove those living in this life from a state of misery, and to bring them to a state of happiness.” This is what he meant (again, assuming that genuineness of the letter) in saying that the *Commedia* was

conceived “not for speculation, but with a practical object.” The poem is a practical object, with a practical air, because it is perlocutionary generator. And it is a perlocutionary generator because it stores up energy [*dunamis*] which, when activated, is converted into *energeia* (be-ing). The activation of that energy has the power to change souls.

This long exposition of ideas of *energeia* take us right to the heart of what I believe about cinema. The energy transmitted by the unfinished unit to the reader, who picks up the momentum of forward drive intrigues me for I believe this momentum excites feelings that, under the right conditions, can turn into knowledge. I am fascinated by the moving image’s flow of energy and awestruck by the potential for EVERY MOMENT in a film to be a Vortex whirled in the larger Vortex that is the whole film, for every moment of a film to spin a myriad of sounds, words and images through itself. There circulate within a single image a number of different times – the time when the image is seen, the time when it was shot, the time when the text that is overlaid onto image was written, and even the “whole time” when the construction of image-text-sound was assembled (i.e. its entire cultural context) in relation to our own time. Thus paratactical constructions replace the single moment that, according to the conceits of the lyrical poem is the eternal and unchanging (never-passing) “Now,” with a multiplicity of fugitive moments, as each moment surges into presence and then rushes away. The work constructed on the principle of parataxis therefore must accept to dwell on earth. But it is through beings that we know Be-ing, after all. Parataxis suits the epic form (consonance between structure and technique) because the paratactical must come down out of the heavens and open itself to history, to change and to death. It accepts the force of the negative as the lyrical work does. Yet, at the same time, if the abundance of energies succeeds, then these times are all made one and the work manifests the energies of Being coming to presence in beings and events. Unfortunately, they succeed all too rarely, but how delicious it is when they do! The ideas that image that belongs to the external world is also the stuff of imagination, that what we see belongs to our inmost soul, that perception is a principle of the soul that embodies that activity of that divine, that making a photograph is an act that translates what is given into the medium of pure imagination all contribute to the appeal that the cinema has for me.

Throughout this talk, I have been stressing that I share Pound’s interest in remaking – thought pressing other texts (most notably, Dante’s *Commedia*) into the service of my own, and I employ the strategy of appropriation in the service of ends that I think Pound also would have been familiar with – for one, of constructing a genealogy of consciousness and, for another, of excavating evidence of modes of consciousness lost to us moderns. The leavings and middens of a civilization amount to only a few snippets of special intelligence. From those bits that come to our cognizance, we attempt to reconstruct the form of thought of that civilization – really, its form of life – rather as an archaeologist attempts to reconstruct an economy, a religion, and a complex web of social conventions from shards of pottery, wooden-carvings, foundation stones and the like. The formal principal on which this operation is based is synecdoche, and synecdoche is the rule of the procedure that the appearance of the fragment invokes. From the few remnants of the documents a culture produces, we intuit a particular form of the life of the mind, and it becomes for us a living reality. Though the form of life we intuit perhaps is not the same form of life as that which was the fragments provenance, still, a few dozen luminous details can give us a better sense of the intelligence of the period in a way than can be gleaned even from an enormous number of inert pieces of information. Despite appearing outside of their original context – a context that undoubtedly contributed to their meaning – the

luminous details left to us by the incendiary intelligences of their time retain the power to inform us. This is not because their significance has been trapped in their form as a fly is trapped, forever unchanging, in amber. Their illuminative power depends on their being complexly integrated unities. The persistence of their truths, as abraded by time as they may be, is the result of the persistence of the patterns through which these complex unities emerge. Though time demands that these details pay it homage, both in their appearance and their disappearance, the power of these fine details to reveal the workings of Be-ing are not lessened as they are obscured; for, in spite of everything, they are perfect wholes that belong to another order than that which was the site of their origination; and so these fine details draw those who attend to them contemplatively into the lighted clearing of their Be-ing. The withdrawal of once-present meaning is only further testimony to the workings of time and Be-ing, which advances through retreating and is unconcealed as present existents, or once-present meanings, withdraw into concealment. The truths these complexly integrated wholes disclose are not the revelation of an ἀρχή; rather, as *Lamentations: A Monument for the Dead World* suggests, they are truths disclosed in their distance from an unrecoverable.

Now remaking could ever re-present an Ur-text – it remains, in its integrity, an unrecoverable ἀρχή. Nonetheless, some intimation of the Ur-text's power survives the deliberate destruction of its integrity. In the same way that the power of language to call things into their ordained order discloses, to those who attend to the gaps and absences and silences within language, what is concealed by the vocation that issues forth from language (namely Nothing), the distance of the fragment from its unrecoverable origin shows us the forfeiture implicit in things' coming-to-be, a sacrifice which is undeniably productive and creative. The antitheses order/disorder and beings/Nothing are disclosed just at the moment when they come to pass; thereafter there is only the forgetting and oblivion of the Be-ing which first brought on this event. In *Consolations (Love is An Art of Time)*, I suggest the sacrifice is associated with the gift, as is the gift with a sacrifice; so the re-recollection of the fragments of texts whose first meanings no longer present themselves shows the power of time through which they first were. It shows the errancy of Be-ing, for it makes manifest features of language's relation to time and Be-ing that would remain forever in concealment were it not for the forfeits of time, for the testimony to time that the fragment bears, and bears just because it is 'un-wholed.' In the same manner as the order of language always testifies to disorder, chaos, and Nothing, creation is always accompanied by destruction; those destructive questions I began with, and the Nothingness they bring us to confront, are necessary to creative activity. All of this is revealed by compositional processes that are based on the destruction of an originary textual integrity, the s/election of some of the resulting fragments and recreation of a textual unity that incorporates the fragments--that is, by a compositional process based on intertextual reference. Such a compositional method is thus destructive, for it disperses, dismantles and liquidates beings in bringing once-present meaning to Nothing. It thus enables renewal and re-creation, in the most profound sense of that word.

The fragmentation of which I speak leads us beyond what exists to the meaning of the world and makes us understand that for the meaning of the world can be known only from outside the world. Luminous details afford "sudden insight into circumjacent conditions, into their causes, their effects, into sequence and law," as Pound noted. Sometimes when this happens the luminous details themselves transform into a background that lights up the conditions that brought them to presence. Something of that

which is beyond all presences shows itself, as all that is recedes in a background against which Nothing shows.

The activity in which we contemplate the meaning of the world, and understand it belongs to a higher order, is prayer. In one form of prayer, we empty our minds of abstract thoughts and give ourselves over wholly to the perception, to seeing a thing for what it is. It is this activity that discloses “the giving of things,” the Be-ing through which beings come into presence, and reveals that everything that exists is a gift. It consists in allowing the concrete particular to fill the mind entirely and in giving ourselves over to wonder that it has come to be. This leads us into a state in which we know through feelings that whatever is in world is dependent on what has brought them to be. Feelings inform us that all that we know is wholly contingent, and this feeling for things leads us ultimately into a state in which a significant ratio is grasped, according to which beings are to their be-ing as the material support of sign is to its meaning. This is the truth that emerges from that form of prayer which is the contemplation of particulars.

Thus, what is at stake in the collage of quotations and allusions I have constructed is more than the simultaneous presence in a film of various represented times – more even than any theory of time which that co-presence might suggest, though both those are important. The incorporation of various forms of consciousness transforms a work of art into a meta-work (of a 2nd or nth order work that both incorporates and reflects on earlier works in “the tradition”); it is the particular power of a meta-work to demonstrate how enduring certain patterns of intelligence are.

Pound’s efforts at re-writing Dante’s *Commedia* led him to understand the vortex as a pattern of energy made visible to us by reason “our kinship to the vital universe of fluid force.” He realized that the mind of the West, that which we ordinarily call Tradition, is made up of semi-stable patterns of energy. As fresh minds create in new circumstances, with new materials, the same complexly integrated wholes occur and recur. Such patterns of intelligence we call by the names Odysseus, Romulus and Remus, the Bridegroom, Helen, Roland, and Thomas. Particularities differ, details of the configurations change, but the patterns remain essentially intact: The brave one who longs to return home – the city’s founder, the lover, the one men long for strives to return, and both the hero and those who long for him pay the price of that longing. “Hast thou seen the rose in the steel dust?” Thus Homer’s *Nekuia*, his tale of visiting the ancient archaic bards in the land of the dead, was put into Latin in the 16th century by an Andreas Divus Justinopolitanus. Divus’ rendering chants out, “*Et postquam ad navem descendimus, et mare. . .*”. Pound purchased a copy of Divus’ translation at a bookstall on a quay in Paris. The vortex whirled.

The Book of All the Dead developed out of similar notions – and the making of it further helped me to develop those notions in the ideas I have presented today. *The Book of All the Dead*, then, is not a version of Dante (or of Pound) but a demonstration of the endurance of a particular pattern of intelligence – a pattern to which we might give the name “Nekuia” after Homer’s text. Dante’s *Commedia* is another manifestation of the same pattern, the *Cantos* are another, and *The Book of All the Dead* yet another.

The film that includes history thus figures an Uniting Intelligence in which, occasionally, our own minds are able to participate and so to discover the Order of Things. It reveals the transfiguring power of Intelligence, that by which all particulars are made an everlasting one. Works that manifest the enduring patterns of Intelligence themselves join a semi-permanent order of existence. Because they partake of some features of those enduring Order of Things, they have the power to console us. A work like Pound’s *Cantos*

and, I hope, my *The Book of All the Dead*, manifest the co-existence of works in this higher Order of Things and the co-presence of all such works even in the intelligence of our own miserably destitute times. This is the fundamental point of remaking.

Thus the *The Book of All the Dead* attempts to make its predecessors speak again.. So do Pound's *Cantos*: consider, for example, Pound's Cantos XXIV-XXVI, which present the hellish lack of reverence for sacred nature, the consequent corruption of art by unnatural greed, sloth and ruthlessness, and even the blighting of natural human affection by unnaturally ruthless greed, are written over scenes from Dante's *Inferno*. We may well cite this recognition of the destructive consequences of reusing materials as evidence of the influence that Pound's Cantos had on *The Book of All the Dead*. But Dante, too, reused the material of his predecessors. Dante drew both themes and words from Virgil for *Commedia* (especially for his passages concerning the descent into Hell), passages in which Virgil, not insignificantly, reshapes a tradition and a text he got from Homer, from the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus visits the shades, but recast them, fashioning a Christian significance out of them. Dante used several other classic *autori*, most notably Ovid, similarly, if not as extensively.

In a letter to his father written in 1927, Ezra Pound provided a sketch of the outline of the *Cantos*. "Have I ever given you outline of the main scheme:::[sic] or whatever it is?" he asks, and then encapsulates the essential character or the form, "1. Rather like, or unlike subject and response and counter subject in fugue." Then, becoming more specific, he expounds upon the different moments of the work:

- A.A. Live man goes down into the world of Dead
- B.B. The "repeat in history."
- C.C. The "magic moment" or moment of metamorphosis, bust through from quotidian into "divine or permanent world"

Elsewhere (in one of the *Money Pamphlets*), in 1944, he informed his readers that:

For forty years, I have schooled myself. . . to write an epic poem which begins in 'The Dark Forest', crosses the Purgatory of human error, and ends in the light, and 'fra i maestri di color che sanno [among the masters of those who know].'

The comments also apply to *The Book of All the Dead*.

1.) The cycle's protagonist finds himself in a moral, emotional and spiritual crisis that brings him to the Gates of Death. A harrowing confusion of voices leads him down into a journey of the dead, the past, in a quest for that knowledge that might save us. This descent into the underworld also holds out hope for a vocation, hope that in the midst of the tumult of voices a voice, like that which saved Augustine, will be heard. But who can serve as the true guide? And how will the Poet come into his own? (Dante's questions)

2.) Beneath the surface differences among cultures are beliefs and actions that are nearly identically repeated across cultures. The journey (and *The Book of All the Dead* is a quest film from beginning to end; the portrayal of the journey

across deserts and plains and into the mountains is, perhaps, the only constant of the entire cycle) reveals these durable (not permanent) patterns, as recurring states of mind. Thus, by the end of *Lamentations*, the journey discloses that history is vectorial. There is no return to the past, no exit out of modernity, no way to resurrect those modes of thought that apprised of the Good. The vestiges of past inhabit the present as mere simulacra.

Yet, it is as forms rather than as actual instances that the past lives in the present's knowledge, for the recurrent patterns known by consciousness constitute the unchanging objects of true knowledge. History may be a vector, but as it moves it drags the past with it; nothing is ever wholly lost. (This is the lesson of *Consolations (Love is an Art of Time)*.) Thus, in the end, the historical permanence of consciousness becomes the source of hope. It is in the realm of the Intellect that the permanence of that which passes is evident, and nowhere else. Intellect furnishes us with an image of eternity, though it is only an image we know, and not Eternity itself. Still, the image of what perdures does open toward the Divine. It is Mind that leads us to the only knowledge that really is worth having, the knowledge that can save us. In this way, the quest described in *Lamentations* really is purgatory, by which human error is cleansed.

3.) Occasionally, visions of light, of divine energy, break through; the eternal comes into history and halts the movement of time. As in Pound's *Cantos*, the root from which such visions grow is the sense of the mysterious communion of self and nature. As in Pound's work so in mine, the vision of Paradise does not disdain erotic experience, but rather exalts it, for this, too, is a mode of experience that stops the frightful movement of time. Eros binds humans to nature. Thus, in erotic experience, it is possible to recover, if only briefly, the Ovidian knowledge that one energy passes through gods and humans alike, that one energy connects all things with everything else.

And there is light—the same manifestation of the divine we find in Pound, in Dante, in Cavalcanti, in the neo-Platonic philosophers, in Grosseteste's Pythagorean inflected Neo-Platonism, in Languedoc poets and even, as Pound points out, in Confucius. From light we learn that all things derive from one source. (Thus *The Book of All the Dead* can be said, with facetiousness or exaggeration, to be about everything, but more accurately about that Be-ing through which all existent come into presence.) Consciousness discovers, as *Azure Serene* joins with the *Cantos* in saying, that light “fills the nine fields to heaven”; and so it turns towards prayer, toward the contemplation of the gift of the given and towards the state of wonder that discloses “the giving of things.” The culminating work in this section of the cycle, is *Exultations (In Light of the Great Giving)*. Here the gods show themselves again.

But only briefly. Not even Dante, as mighty as he was, could sustain the knowledge that was vouchsafed to him at the mountain top. Speaking of himself in the third person in that famous, much cited, letter to Can Grande, Dante stated:

And after he has said that he was in that place of Paradise which he describes by circumlocution, he goes on to say that he saw certain

things which he who descends therefrom is powerless to relate. And he gives the reason, saying that 'the intellect plunges itself to such depth' in its very longing, which is for God, 'that the memory cannot follow'. For the understanding of which it must be noted that the human intellect in this life, by reason of its connaturality and affinity to the separate intellectual substance, when in exaltation, reaches such a height that after its return to itself memory fails, since it has transcended the range of human faculty.

Nor could Pound hold the experience of paradise fast ("Charity I have had sometimes/I could not make it pull through"). He could convey the experience only in 'Drafts and Fragments' of an extremely tentative character.

Still, even if our knowledge of the realm is only partial and fleeting, the testimony of art and the testimony of the "masters of those who know" at least gives the wisdom a place to dwell, a place for it to abide until the time of discovery.