

*Remarks on the new cinema at Images Film Festival.*

Formulating a thought is an act of violence — a violence that holds the eruptive, kaotic propensity of reality at bay. It is, then, a violence that answers to another, primal, disruptive tendency. The precise character of this violence can be understood through considering the very common political situation that is an analogue of the onto-phenomenological reality. A law takes form as a means of perpetuating a relation between unequal parties — one nation wages war on another and loses; the victor then grants rights and privileges to the vanquished, guaranteed under treaty. The two parties are unequal, but the accord that is reached between them fosters the illusion that both parties enter into the agreement with the measure of freedom requisite to undertaking the obligations they promise, through their contract, to take on. (A “treaty” signed under coercion is a different matter — it is no real treaty, but simply a bill of surrender, that acknowledges the utter subjugation of one party, a condition the civic equivalent of which is slavery, which likewise allows no contract between parties, the condition of being a free person being requisite to entering into a contract).

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 such 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 of 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 what is given is perception — 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 that are given it. But against Heidegger, I insist that such abiding — which Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit* — 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: it 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” into “what is” — 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.

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. That is why thinking cannot simply be what Heidegger understands it to be, a loving acceptance of the gift of the appearances (though true thinking must never dismiss the given, as scientific thinking does). Perception must open itself even to the violence beyond all that is that would destroy whatever is, and to open itself to violence is to accept that that stance towards reality that Heidegger calls “Gelassenheit” (“letting-be”) is not the highest way of knowing. True thinking must be more than patient, loving attention toward all that is, more than a quiet listening, chary of the tendency to impose upon things. Though we rightfully feel awe that anything whatsoever is, that there is that which is beyond beings is a cause for even greater wonder.

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 *demand*s — it places conditions on the revelation of the future, in imposing expectations of what is to be.

A reason for the destitute character of modernity is that its epistemological foundations have according narrative thinking a place of privilege. Everywhere we hear tell of the importance to their identity of people’s being allowed to construct their own stories, of one’s accession to individuality (that very American virtue) through writing one’s own tale. The important place that the concept of narrative have to the modern epistemology and to modern identity, is expounded by Charles Taylor’s magisterial text, *Sources of the Self*, that grand contribution to the history of ideas school that has been a cardinal strength of the Canadian intellectual tradition, from Charles Norris Cochrane through Harold Innis and, in his own way, Marshall McLuhan to the stunning synthesis of Northrop Frye. But, even against the evidence of so a splendid oeuvre as Taylor’s, I insist that an epistemology that accords thinking-through-rhythm primacy is far more sound than one based on narrative, as rhythm better reflects the discourse of Be-ing. We become aware of Be-ing in a certain throb, a certain stress, torsion and flex, we feel in our body, but which we know, with a certainty that quells all questions, participates in a pulse of something that is far larger than ourselves. Thinking-through-rhythm engages us in prayer, by which we tune ourselves to the pulse of an Other, and we woo It, while in response, It draws us ever more closely into its embrace.

Giving a place of privilege to thinking-through-rhythm changes thought’s relation to its object. Thinking-through-rhythm belongs to the modality of the flesh’s time; thinking-through-rhythm allows multiple patterns to contend, without resolution. (Theorists like Joseph Schillinger try to find ways to resolve multiple patterns, but that attempt too grows out a desire to impose

“good form” on reality, to keep multiplicity, mutability, transformation, and disruption at bay.) Rhythm makes time, and time is the fundament of our relation to alterity, a movement toward what is not only beyond us, but what is also greater than us — greater than us just because we cannot know it. Time, and therefore rhythm, reveals to us that future is always without apprehensible content. The disordering of thinking that results is an effective antidote to the self’s desire to establish its sovereignty. Thinking as rhythm reveals the future’s transcendence, i.e., it discloses that being and possibility cannot be thought together, that beings require non-be-ing. It aims towards an *ideatum* that eludes being thought or perceived, for it is infinitely greater than the thought that thinks it. As we noted above, it is this disproportion between the act itself and what the act aims at that summonses the regulatory agencies of objective perception; only the utmost of resoluteness, issuing in attunement, can forestall the violence of the imposition of law. But the pulse of rhythm too has a violence at its core. For its throb can lay law to waste, by accommodating the unexpected at the very heart of its being and, what is more important, by allowing the unexpected to arise continuously, from moment to moment. Rhythm, like all artistic form, invites regulation, only to undo the word of the law and the law of the word.

Every work of art involves strife — strife of the same order as that which Heraclitus described. For every work of art involves a contention between two impulses: toward form and against form. Every work of art exists simultaneously as a disciplined structure, the order of which evolves out of a inner sense of the need for — or, better, a tropism toward — harmony and as a process that exceeds all boundaries, refuses all containment, that dismembers syntax, destroys form and lays representation to ruin. The necessary union between form (i.e., configuration, or what is the same, the spiritual) and matter in a work of art manifests the necessary unity between time bound and the timeless, a unity that can only be maintained by the violence of law. But this violence condemns the relationship to instability. The poetic principle, insofar as it is unique in every poem, designates a particular configuration of experience that gives a poem its shape and reciprocally and that, reciprocally, comes into being through the poem itself. (Here we have another example of the twisted temporality of an aesthetic object, for the principle upon which an object’s be-ing is based is both presupposed by and derived from the object). This unity exemplifies the mystery of the incarnation, through which spirit is turned inside out (through which the inside is turned towards the outside), in order to enter the material realm and to take on a material dynamism.

Nonetheless we do not assess a work of art by its gestalt form. That was the old conception of art, and it has wasted itself in its constant effort to repress the dynamic element left over from perception, to hold at bay that excess of unrealized possibility left behind as being emerges as a being (as an object), to ward off the return of that which passes into nothingness as a thought is configured, that which language consigns to silence; and to expel from sensation that excess which rises against language, against thought, and against representation, to destroy them. It has exhausted itself in the constant passivity required of it in the face of the violence that is characteristic of the repressed. That conception of art is spent; it has had its day. Now we believe that the power of the work of art is measured by its capacity to mime the character of the dance of the primordial. Form, we now believe, has two basic roles, one material and one regulative. Form serves first to embody the play of tension that imitates the dance of the primordial; and secondly, through its regulative function serves to direct attention towards this play of tension, to focus thought so as to create an opening, to engender a grace to respond to the violence the primordial unleashes, so as to lay established patterns of thought in ruin. Form operates to channel our attention in such a way that the violence of the primordial domain can operate upon our consciousness — that it acts to create an opening for the violence of the primordial — so that that violence can liberate us from our customary ways of perceiving and can reshape our thinking. But it is the accuracy with which it conveys the gestures of the dance that is the key (though, admittedly, the only way we have to comment on

that dynamic that creates and resolves tension is to discuss the work's material construction). That, after all, is what we mean when we say that poet has "a good ear," that he or she listens attentively enough to the murmuring of the primordial to hear it well.

Thinking-through-rhythm uncovers what the be-ing of actual beings excludes; it discloses what is rejected by the order that thought (including, even, distracted perception) imposes on experience. It acknowledges what is excluded from objective perception, cherishes the unwanted and the destitute, for it appreciates the insignificant and absurd in that which cannot be reconciled with the conception of the world of objects as a standing reserve available to technique. Thinking-through-rhythm acknowledges the future is for the lowly, for time will raise them. Thinking-through-rhythm discloses that abjection and destitution lie closer to be-ing than do the vaunted and the celebrated. That proximity accounts for the redemptive power of the outcast and the rejected; and that proximity also explains why a cinema that arises out of the rejected is needed.

Darkness is required to divulge the interweaving of language and matter in perception. Why does this requires darkness? Because what blends language and matter together in perception is itself never perceived – for, that element, in being perceived, changes its character. The nature of the unknown, mysterious element out of which thinking (and perception) emerges changes when it enters into language. This recognition is akin to the insight that caused Ludwig Wittgenstein such distress, as he realized that thematizing language brought him up against the limits of language. In his Preface to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein recommends to his readers that they give special attention to what might be called the limitative theses: that the logical form of language cannot be described, that whatever language or thought must have in common with reality in order to represent it is in some sense shown, but cannot be said. *Und wovon man nicht reden kann, Daruber muss man schweigen*. The recognition that what holds language and matter together in perception cannot itself be perceived and Wittgenstein's insight that the logical form of language cannot be described are structurally similar, in that they both pick out a boundary between that which may appear within language and that which, although it cannot appear within language, nonetheless contributes to language's structure (though, of course, I should not want to assert that this element which cannot be spoken can show itself.)

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.

Following Merleau-Ponty, I give to this earthly darkness, insofar as it is a faculty of disclosure, a faculty that through its participation of the unveiling (*aletheia*) grants us the perception of beings, the name "flesh". So "flesh," as I use it, refers to the same element as "*khōra*" does, and to the same element as "earth" does; only the connotation of each term is

different: “Earth” emphasizes the primordial’s resistance to discursive logic; “*khōra*” emphasizes the element that continues to murmur within *logos* even though it withdraws itself from meaning; and “flesh” emphasizes the mutuality of the disclosure of self and other, the fact that the other is needed for the self to be. For flesh is at once a medium of experience and the ground that makes possible one’s “being with” the world.

Flesh is the body antecedent to thematization — antecedent to being represented in thought. Flesh is what, in *A Body of Vision*, I referred to as the primordial body. Flesh cannot be grasped through concepts. It is the evidence that cohesion in being occurs without the mediation of any concept — that cohesion can defy the logic of form, that, finally, cohesion is not the antithesis of dispersion. Flesh is what makes the body open to (or what, in a peculiar twist, is the same thing, prey to) influence through sensibility — for how could body grant sensation and consciousness except through the fact that body is not simply material, but also the possibility-of-knowing / sensing / feeling.

Flesh is what is brought into being through an *energeia* of a mutuality through which (as Merleau-Ponty was fond of pointing out) every grasping is also a “being-grasped,” every touch a “being-touched.” But flesh is also what disrupts the surface of being that the *λογος* creates — it can do this because flesh is non-coincident with itself; that is, it is not the same in pre-reflective consciousness as it is in self-reflective consciousness. It was, of course, again, Merleau-Ponty who was fond of pointing out this fact, to which he drew attention through his well-known example citing the presentiment that one has, by putting the fingers of one’s right hand on my left, of the possibility “of being able to touch [oneself] touching.” However he pointed out that this “reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: “the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand.” (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 9). What he describes as miscarriage is the transformation of a thought from pre-reflexive to a self-reflexive form. This transformation is a violent limitation for with it thought becomes self-enclosed — an apophantic process ensures that the mutuality of thought and its object is eclipsed as thinking takes a thought as its object.

Reality is a language activated in the dialogue between the earth and our flesh (which is anyway part of the earth) that I call perception, a language whose statements erect what, following Heidegger, I call “world.” The statements of this dialogue are enigmatic, because they are plurisemic; in fact, they possess greater depth and variety of meaning than those which appear in a penetrating discourse on a profound topic, precisely because flesh, which is the basis of the communicative practice, is so mutable. It is its resistance to flesh’s character, indeed to all that lies in darkness, that has made dominant cinema (“the movies”), like every other reactionary social form, hostile to ambiguity, lability, transformation, dispersal, contamination — those very attributes of flesh that the cinema was meant to embody.

The primordial realm grants us the recognition that objects possess a different ontological status than we ordinarily believe that they have — it grants us the recognition that objects do not stand over against, as alien objects unconnected with our being, but that we have our being in them, just as they have their being through us. We listen in on the primordial, and learn thereby that our being and that of objects arise mutually therefrom. We come to the realization that the relation between our being and that of objects is reciprocal — by listening in on the primordial we come to know that objects exist through us, just as we exist through them. Try to imagine what it would be to be consciousness in a world where there were no objects: the effort yields nothing, not because some presumed intentionality of consciousness, but because the consciousness and its objects are involved mutually in one another’s existence — it is not because all consciousness is consciousness of something that this is impossible (that view almost assumes that consciousness only has an object contingently, and so the viability of thinking about consciousness as independent of its object), but because the existence of consciousness is bound up with the existence of objects.

Listening in on the primordial shows us that modernity has reduced our conception of that relation to the point that we believe that self is separate from the world, that it stands above the world and projects its own values onto the world. The recognition that the self and world unfold mutually is one of the surest bases for arguing that the self is not a rule giver to the world, but must conform itself to whatever arises within the worldly domain.

What accounts for this “togetherness” of self and world, of language and perception? It is, surely, that beings are always already articulate — that is they are dis-jointed. Darkness is one, but beings are many; and because they are many, they are configured similarly to the way language is — that is, non-sensible similarities exist among them. Flesh is the medium through which these non-sensible similarities are revealed; flesh is the medium that opens us towards the world, for it is the medium through which that which addresses itself to us emerges. In the earthliness of flesh, beings emerge as worldly, for incarnation is a condition for having impressions through one’s interaction with the world (I say “have” because neither “create” nor “receive” is quite correct, for this “having impressions” involves both a creative and a receptive moment). Flesh reveals the prediscursive configurations that pronounce themselves silently in each mute thing, and in which our bodies participate — prediscursive activities that threaten to lay good form to ruins, to disperse all consolidated *Gestalten*; to dismember all patterns. But these revelations are vouchsafed to us by virtue of flesh only through adopting this silent language’s manner of signifying. But it is multiple structures, conflict, discord, plurisemicity, irresolution, the refusal of closure that makes flesh felt (narrative invites none of these attributes).

“Flesh” is the name for the condition of our “be-ing between.” Awareness of flesh is what undoes the fiction that the reactionary forms of the dominant cinema are based on, the fiction of “outside spectator” (to use that term from Merleau-Ponty); repetition helps make the flesh evident, for repetition, like the flesh, is dynamized by passion — and it is passion that, ultimately, renders the sign mutable, unstable, labile, unsystematic (thereby rendering fatuous every hope for a project for a scientific semiology). Flesh subjects the sign to passion; and passion makes every perception an interpretation. Flesh imprints itself on all that we perceive — and on our body (the worldly representation of the earthly element) and the body of the object alike, indeed on our body and the body of the object mutually. Flesh is an archive of passion-forms that, without our being are them (for they are earthly elements), inform our decoding of things. Flesh makes every perception a communicative act. “Flesh” names the physical pregnancy that results in perception.

Art has much to teach us, too, about this essential togetherness of spirit and matter, form and content, language and perception. Art is the consummation of language for it reveals there is, outside of language, no object of speech which language communicates. Similarly, there is no antecedent intention by which expression (or, better, configuration) can be limited, no external gauge by which it can be measured — we communicate *in* language, not *through* language. Language does not describe a pre-existing reality; rather, language transforms what stands before it, and through this transformation, summonses beings to be-ing, and gives them membership in the world. Beings come into being through *λογος*, the home that harbours them. But this charity, as we have pointed out, is also a sacrifice, for it reduces be-ing to beings, potentiality to actuality, indefiniteness to definiteness.

Flesh is an infinite surface, on which an infinitude of terms can be inscribed — but though it is infinite, it is bounded, for we can discover that there is that which language cannot say, or what is the same, that we cannot experience. In fact, there are an infinite number of these infinite surfaces. We call them collectively by the name, “flesh,” which, then, must be both one and infinite in number. Flesh entwines itself with be-ing; for it is through flesh, which is the ground of the unity of the physical and, the psychical, that a consciousness arises out of matter, out of “earth,” really, and that thereby the world is erected. We cannot posit a single sensible

thing without recognizing the role that flesh has in its disclosure, for flesh is the surface on which every inscription is inscribed (another of its infinite dimensions). Flesh is prior to beings; yet, without beings, flesh cannot disclose its essence — Can you image a consciousness that has utterly withdrawn itself? A consciousness out of relation to anything and everything? The impossibility of imagining that is another reason why I have described flesh as an “*entre deux*,” and why I have said that it actualizes itself only in conjunction with the world. Here, again, we encounter that twisted temporality (twisted, that is to say, as a Möbius strip is), in which what comes later creates what comes before. But only a twisted temporality would be appropriate to the meaning of flesh, which is that the visible turns upon itself, a carnal unity of the sentient with the sensed which is antecedent to representation.

Art has much to teach us on this topic too. Its lessons on this topic can be discerned in what spares art from being self-expression — self-expression that would eclipse the Infinite. The poetic principle is prior to all reflection, including self-reflection. The operation of the poetic is prior to thought, prior to reflection, prior even to the self. When the evangelist says, “Not I, but Thee in me, knows. . . .”, he is acknowledging being possessed by this prior-to-self anonymity, by a grandeur that shatters the vessels of self. The flesh is one; all flesh *is* the same flesh — it is made one through the reciprocity of sense, that is, through an utterly anonymous and therefore common sensibility inhabiting all humanity. So far as artworks reach towards the flesh, they reach towards something that is common to all, something that is prior to the self. Self-expression concerns what separates one individual from another; concern with flesh reaches towards a numinous that binds all together in an anonymous universality.

Art has much to teach us, too, about the processes through which this occurs. The great lesson of Open Form poetics is that any particular work bears the traces of its heritage, i.e., of the chance circumstances of its birth, but it opens up infinite possibility as its legacy to its posterity. The immanent construction of the work cannot be reduced to any objective rule; it is simply what impels the work on its passage through time. Open Form poetry shows us that an attentive reader must look for traces that the poetic principle leaves in the work’s coming-to-be, traces that characteristically one finds in distortions, twists, hesitations and exclusions. A call is issued, across these hesitations and disruptions, that summonses what is emerging towards beauty or, what is the same, towards be-ing. Plato recognized that there is a connection between beauty and the call, for in the *Cratylus*, he derived *kalon* (“beautiful”) from *kalein* (“to call”). Plotinus drew the ligatures more tightly together, for in speaking of a great power that draws the soul, in its peregrinations towards itself, when he uses “*anakaleisthai*” as the verb “to summon.” (*Enneads* 6.7.23.1-4.)

But as in many folk tales (for example the Lorelei legend to which Heine gave renown poetic form), this call of the beautiful is also, though, a lure, that results in destruction. Its call is savage: “*Der Schiffer im kleine Schiffe erhört es mit wilden Weh.*” The violence of the poem is that the unrepresentability of the poetic principle (the flesh of the poem) endangers thought, insofar as it exceeds any *a priori* precept. For through the poetic principle that which belongs to time becomes timeless; and in so doing, it comes to exemplify the nature of language. (That is also the very reason why the offspring of the Creator — who through some strange temporal twist is also identical with the Creator — is called the *λογος*). But making the time-bound timeless is a violent act, for it puts that which is humble in a relationship of which it is not worthy; that exactly is what calls a regulatory principle into being (for, as I have remarked, this inequality is the basis of law).

To say that the beautiful shines within the time-bound is to say also that the beautiful is dynamic, — another aesthetic insight the cinema was created to convey. But if the beautiful is dynamism, and whatever is dynamic requires time, and time implies death, then beauty is allied with death — as closely allied to death as it is to life, as closely associated with violence as it is with charity. Beauty condemns what is beautiful to perish. This precept is avowedly anti-

classical, for classical philosophers maintained that beauty is a form of perfection, that perfection manifests the absolute, that perfection is changeless, and therefore, true beauty does not fade. But it does have a precursor in the theory of value, in an extremely enigmatic text by Walter Benjamin on political ethic. That text contains, in its commentary on the paradoxes involved in the relation of the time-bound and the Timeless, a splendid commentary on the complex, and indeed paradoxical, relation between the dynamics of content and the stasis of form (the metaphysical image for which paradox is the incarnation):

The order of the profane should be erected on the idea of happiness. The relation of this order to the Messianic is one of the essential teachings of the philosophy of history. It is the precondition of a mystical conception of history, containing a problem that can be represented figuratively. If one arrow points to the goal toward which the profane dynamic acts, and another marks the direction of the Messianic intensity, then certainly the quest of free humanity for happiness runs counter to the Messianic direction; but just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. The profane, therefore, although not itself a category of this Kingdom, is a decisive category of its quietist approach. [We can take this quietism as form of stasis, which is strengthened by content's dynamics]. For in happiness all that is earthly seeks its downfall, and only in good fortune is its downfall destined to find it. Whereas, admittedly, the immediate Messianic intensity of the heart, of the inner man in isolation, passes through misfortune, as suffering. To the spiritual *restitutio in integrum* [which whole we can relate to form], which introduces immortality, corresponds a worldly restitutions that leads to the eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of Messianic nature, is happiness. For nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away.

To strive after such passing, even for those stages of man that are nature, is the task of world politics.

Classical aesthetics privileges the unchanging, the eternal. It denigrates whatever belongs to time. As it bears on the construction of artworks, the idea that the unchanging belongs to a higher order than whatever undergoes change results in efforts to freeze the moment, to make it an image of eternity. Against that tendency we aver that the poetic principle is an unfolding of the Infinite into the finite (and so, effects a species of violence); and insofar as this involution takes place in time, is never complete. This involution involves a pattern, aspects of which emerge, while others withdraw (another species of violence). This emerging  $\alpha\rho\chi\eta$  — if we may call it that, even though its being is completed only when the objects it produces achieve their final form — is never fully present (either present-to-consciousness or present-in-time) for it belongs neither to the object itself (rather it guides the object through time, towards its destiny), nor as archetype. It is, rather, simply a pattern that develops through time. By the same token, things are only operational descriptions, around which cluster multiform, polyphonous experiences.

The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze sheds light on the radical challenge that Open Form poetics offers to classical aesthetics. The difference between open form, as expounded in Open Form poetics, and closed form, the conception of artistic form expounded by traditional aesthetics, is analogous to the distinction that Deleuze draws between “the whole “ (which in his philosophy has so many of the features of what I call the primordial, or earth, or flesh) and



the “closed set.” As Deleuze uses the term, the whole is not the set of sets, or any other sort of set, nor does it have parts.

It is rather that which prevents each set, however big it is, from closing in on itself, that which forces it to extend itself into a greater set. The whole is therefore like a thread which traverses sets and gives each one the possibility, which is necessarily realized, of communicating with another, to infinity. Thus the whole is the Open, and relates back to time, or even to spirit rather than content and to space. Whatever their relationship, one should therefore not confuse the extension of sets into each other with the opening of the whole which passes into each one. A closed system is never absolutely closed, but on the one hand it is connected in space to other systems by a more or less “fine” thread, and on the other hand it is integrated or reintegrated into a whole which transmits a duration to it along this thread.

It is, as I have described the primordial as being, that which disrupts good form, that which prevents closure, that which liquefies whatever is solid, that which elevates definiteness to the indeterminate. It is antithetical principle to rational thought, which, through a process of reduction, imposes forms of definiteness on all that is indefinite. The primordial is the element that fosters what John Keats called negative capability, the capacity to endure doubt and darkness that distinguishes the figures of productive imagination from those who, because they are afflicted with certainty (may I call them ideas) are unworthy as makers..

The elements in the whole are connected to each other in a genuine time that I have called time of the flesh. So I have emphasized rhythm and rhyme and flow over good spatial *Gestalten*. Indeed, I believe that cinema is first and foremost an art of time, and not an art of space; and that the emphasis on the spatial design of the image, above its dynamic flow, is the most deleterious feature of most current cinema pedagogy. The awareness of that time is elemental, is productive, that beings come forth in time only, and would not be without time, is a secret that cinema was invented to disclose.

Thinking-through-rhythm makes the time of the flesh palpable. Thinking-through-rhythms incorporates in the body what *dianoia* can never apprehend, that which Plato, in the *Timaeus*, refers to as “*khōra*” (and following Martin Heidegger, call “earth,” as opposed to “world”), an element that, as Julia Kristeva suggests, defies the logic of *logos*, for it is neither intelligible nor sensible. *Khōra* (like earth) is an invisible element, that cannot be made present in a sensible form (i.e., cannot be made present-to-consciousness), yet it participates in the constitution of every worldly being — and does so even as it disrupts the process of its formation. “Earth,” of course, like “*khōra*” is just another word for what I ordinarily call “be-ing.” Be-ing, I have said, is what is eclipsed by beings, for in order for a being to come forth, it is necessary for be-ing to withdraw into that darkness which is its element, to leave a lighted clearing in which beings can come to be; and of *khōra* Heidegger writes, “Might *khōra* not mean: that which abstracts itself from every particular, that which withdraws, and in such a way precisely as admits and “makes place” for something else?” (Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp 50-1) In light, the objective world is severed from observer, but outside him; *khōric* darkness reconciles what light has sundered. *Khōric* darkness is where the endless reproduction by acroamatic logic of narrative comes to rest. “In every word, there is a blaze of light” — against this we plead, again: “Let there be darkness.”

This elemental factor with which every work of art engages is also what Dennis Lee refers to as “cadence.” He writes

Most of my time as a poet is spent listening into a luminous tumble, a sort of taut

cascade. I call it “cadence.” If I withdraw from immediate contact with things around me, I can sense it churning, flickering, thrumming, locating things in more shapely relation to one another. It feels continuous, though I may spend days on end without noticing it.

What I hear is initially without words. But when a poem starts to come, the words have to accord with that energy or I can’t make a poem at all. (I speak of “hearing” cadence, but the sensation isn’t auditory. It’s more like sensing a constantly changing tremor with your body: a play of movement and stress, torsion and flex — as with the kinaesthetic perception of the muscles.) More and more I sense this energy as presence both outside and inside myself, teeming towards words.

One reason I call the form of thinking that artworks engender “thinking-through-rhythm” is to indicate the dynamism that characterizes this form of cognition. My conception of that dynamism has certainly been influenced by Jean-François Lyotard, and his notion of what he somewhat peculiarly calls “the matrix.” So as to explain the important role that Lyotard had in shaping my thoughts on this matter, I should point out that I encountered Lyotard before *The Post-Modern Condition*, which has disseminated his ideas so widely. It was, rather, through *Discours, Figure* that I first became acquainted with Lyotard’s ideas; and I was led to that book by Claudine Eizykman, the author of *La jouissance-cinéma*, which used Lyotard’s ideas on psychic economy as the basis for advocacy of a non-narrative, non-representational, non-industrial cinema. So Lyotard joined with Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Julia Kristeva and Sigmund Freud (whose influence on me has been too broad and too deep to permit me to speak of it in this talk) in shaping that notion that, with splendid vagueness, I label “the primordial.” But my commentary on Carolee Schneemann’s films and performance art, in *A Body of Vision*, should make clear that Lyotard has had a profound influence on my writing. In *Discours, Figure*, Lyotard shows that the “matrix” (or what I call most often simply “the primordial,” but sometimes “earth,” or “flesh”), first, involves spatiality (I have, after all, referred to it as a surface), yet it cannot be inserted into the co-ordinates of external space. Lyotard remarks that for the “matrix”

places are not *partes extra partes*; the intervals required for example in the perceptual order for things of the external world to be recognizable and for them not to pile up on one another — depth in short — or, in terms of phenomenological transcendence, negation — here these intervals are abandoned.

It is, of course, the fact that several elements occupy the same space that leads Lyotard to call this *energeia*, this first actually (in the Aristotelian sense of that term) a matrix. This simultaneous presence of these superimposed elements, this invisible synchrony, is not a regulative principle that generates a structure. Rather, it disorders and disrupts structure. Its disruptive capacity lies in its ability to render everything labile. It undoes the reign of difference, by its capacity to transform any element into any other element. Because it operates to undo difference, it lies beyond language (which, as Saussure pointed out, is a structured system of paradigmatic and syntagmatic differences). They do not form a system, but what Lyotard calls a “block.” Lyotard describes a matrix thus:

If the matrix is invisible, it is not because it arises from the intelligible but because it resides in a space that is beyond the intelligible, in a radical rupture of the rules of opposition. . . It is its characteristic to have many places in one place, and they

block together what is not compossible. This is the secret of the figural: the transgression of the constitutive intervals of discourse, and the transgression of the constitutive distances of representation.

The idea of unleashing energies that resist being formed into a closed system, and of unleashing simultaneously elements which, due to their excessive number and energy, do not form a simple gestalt, of the khōric power of polyphony, is another notion that Lyotard helped me to work out.

Lyotard's idea of the blocking together of impossibles (which Freud would surely have found familiar), has also had enormous influence on my conception of poetic language. The final feature of the matrix, as Lyotard uses the term, is that it manifests itself as a rhythm or a pulse. That feature of the figural had an inestimably grand role to play in evolving my ideas on the primordial. I contend that the primordial is rhythmic precisely because it animates the return of the same-within-difference — the persistent, obsessive reoccurrence of those differences that are generated through the transformation of the self-identical. It oscillates, repetitively, obsessively, in this on / off play of identity and difference. It has precisely the form-that-is-not-a-form of the death drive, that operates below the pleasure principle, and which similarity strives to reduce difference to identity. And that, too, is why I call it a darkness.

Thinking about Lyotard on the matrix showed me that is not possible to move from the symbolic toward the semiotic *khōra*, from post-Oedipal syntax, categorization, competence, and the separation of subject from object, to the Pre-Oedipal rhythmic drive, blurred boundaries, disruption, and corporealization. In fact, I would propose, that there is a potential richness in, not the total rejection of language, gestalt, time and identity, but in the alternation between time and 'its truth [beyond time],' identity and loss, history and the extra-phenomenal history (as *energeia*) brings forth — in an oscillation between framing (i.e., framing as *Gestell*, to refer to yet another Heideggerian concept) and significance on the one hand, and rhythm and the play of varying repetition on the other. This, indeed, is what I have tried to do in my films.

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, 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. Of course I agree with Brakhage that flesh cannot be pictured, nor can one formulate what it discloses as a gestalt-ordered representation. Why, in light of this fundamental agreement, would I insist, against Brakhage, on the importance of "picture"? Because 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.