

**ALPHA  
BET  
CITY**

edited by **ATOM EGOYAN** and **IAN BALFOUR**



**SUBTITLES**  
on the foreignness of film

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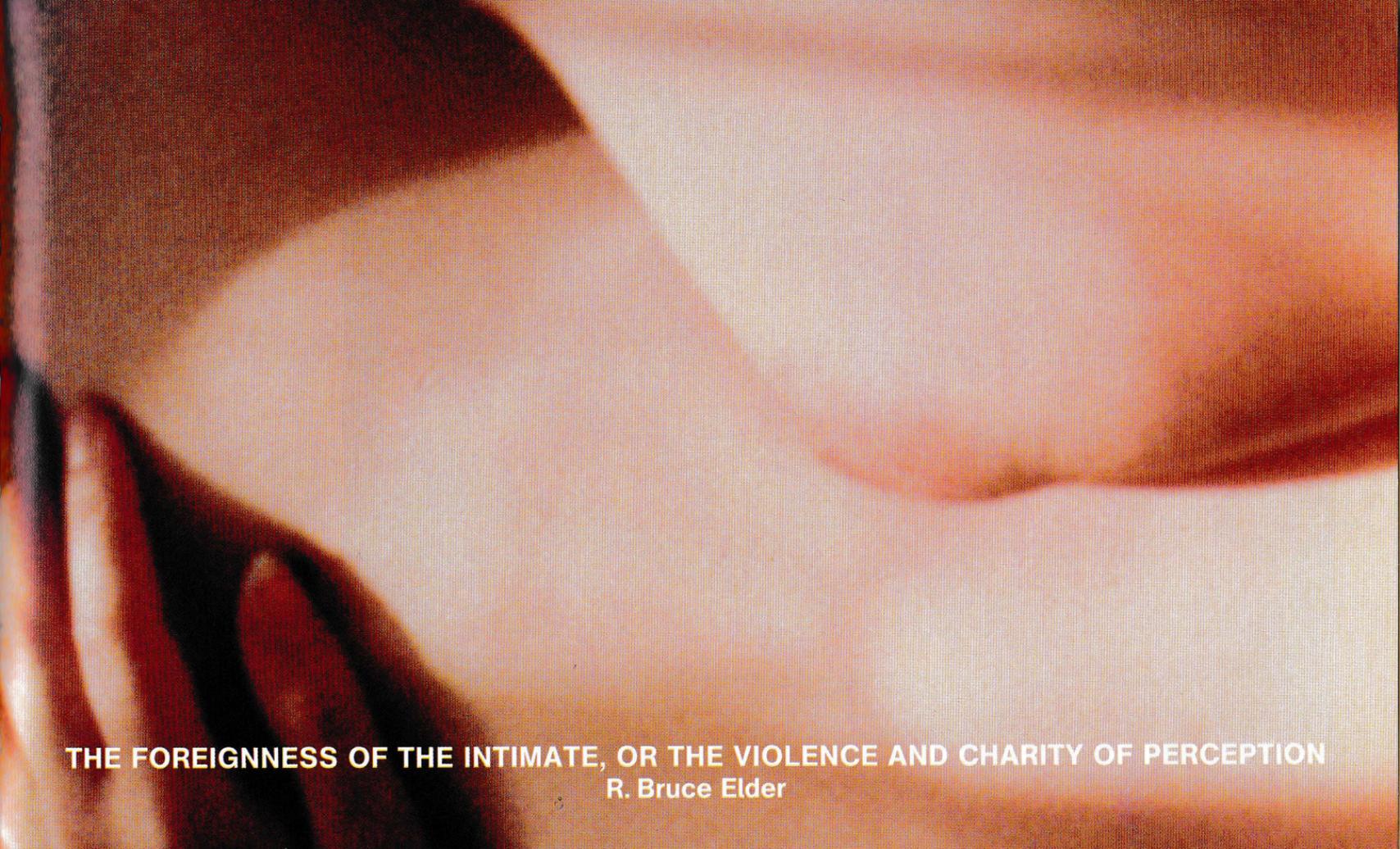
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**THE FOREIGNNESS OF THE INTIMATE, OR THE VIOLENCE AND CHARITY OF PERCEPTION**  
R. Bruce Elder













Imagine everything beyond one's self turned into nothing. What would then be left? Not a pure negativity, but an indeterminateness that retains a measure of positivity, an absence we experience as something present. Would this absence, this nothing, be an imaginative projection? An external absolute? Be-ing itself, anterior to all beings? It is not possible to determine. We know only this much: though this idea would be of a universal nothing, it would not be of a nothing that is without be-ing. What it would concern, though indefinite, nonetheless is. It is not thought. It summons no words; indeed it deranges discourse. For it disturbs, like a miscreant that threatens to return, particularized, anywhere and everywhere. This nothing is not weightless; to the contrary, as a fluidity of forces, as an atmospheric pressure, it exerts pressure everywhere, and always differently.

Awareness which is not of anything definite, of anything concrete, of anything that definitely is, then, is the awareness that nothing also is, the awareness that nothing is not without being. As it is on the side of object, so it is on the side of the subject—the subject is no more a definite entity than the object is. Each is nothing other than flux—a flux of such indefinite character that we might as well call it a nothing. It is a simply a presence, a force, an atmosphere, that has no definite being. There is, in fact, only the universality of an epistemic process anterior not just to the formation of a definite subject but even to the division between subject and object.

In order to acknowledge its primacy, let us call that awareness which is anterior not just to the formation of a definite subject but even to the division between subject and object, "thinking." All thinking is a revelation of a transcendent be-ing, and is, in its ownmost be-ing, itself a transcendence of the given (as an object of awareness).

This nothing is the underworld of things, an underworld anterior to anything definite. But if this realm is the primal, what possibly could be the appeal of cinematography, for cinematography is a means for reproducing definite things? Because an image's ontology bears evidence, through a sort of inversion, of be-ing's ontogenetic capacity (its capacity to create beings). For an image comes into evidence as the double of an object in the very act of the object's withdrawing—this is the very meaning of representation. An image is not a transparency that our mind passes through on the way to apprehending the object to which it refers. An image is actually the double of the object, the appearance that an actual being leaves behind as it departs—the ghost of a departed object one might say. In creating its own double, which it highlights through the emptying—the *kenosis*—that appears as it withdraws, an object indicates the ontogenesis of its own existence.

Every image, then, speaks of origins, of beginnings. Every image is an evidence of fecundity. For every image belongs to another order entirely different than that to which ordinary existents belong. Hence, the dimension of transcendence pertains to all images. Because an image belongs to a transcendent order, it can seem so terrible. But there is more to its *terribilità* than just the transcendence of its referent: because the image reveals the substantiality, the weightiness of nothing, it reminds us that the other side of be-ing is not non-existence. It terrifies us with the prospect that seems to have haunted the vast majority of pre-modern people (and which Dante's *Commedia* allegorizes), that our passing out of existence will not be an utter annihilation. Images, as the leavings of beings, testify that to pass beyond being is not really to go out of existence, that everything that is really is forever, that for be-ing there is no endgame. Film's character as midden speaks to this condition.

An image, in revealing the presence of the past and the future in the here-and-now, also reveals the temporalizing that is the origin of time. For a particular existent reveals itself only in the mode of immediacy, while an image always speaks of what has departed and what is yet to come—it speaks of the departed because its appearance is the result of that which has been left behind after the object has departed, and it speaks of the future because every image summons what it might become: the tablets are forever about to slip from the pressure of Moses's right elbow (or not to slip—we do not know which, for the future is unknowable). The ontology of the future, like the ontology of the image, is that of pressure, a force, an atmosphere, exerted by something that has no be-ing; it is that of absent presence.

Images shatter the consolidated presence of focal awareness and, by animating thinking, introduce what is foreign to reality, what belongs to the realms of the “has been” and the “yet to be” into our spiritual life. Images, by their association with thinking, introduce the Otherness of what has been and what is yet to be into consciousness; but they do so not as something that is, but as pressure emanating from that which has no existence.

All artmaking begins with an intimation of the uncanny, with the intrusion of something foreign, something that is close to non-being, into the everyday realm. It begins with a particular form of thinking, one that begins in a scene of violence that wrenches us from presuppositions concerning what is. These presuppositions are—despite the complacency they engender—really the ultimate of will's violent imposition upon reality, for these presuppositions violently hold at bay reality's (Be-ing's) eruptive disposition. I call that thinking which opens itself towards what is foreign, uncanny, Wholly Other, and the process of being disturbed and disordered by it, “genuine

thinking," because it is creative and because as a form of thinking it lies closer to the origins of thinking than any other. This form of thinking breaches the monotony of time which presuppositions engender. Genuine thinking emerges from a power that prevents what it receives from ever being closed, from a power that disrupts all finality, and that renders self-identity impossible. From the power of genuine thinking emerges something that is more like an electric sensation-in-and-of-flux than it is like an idea. I call this electric sensation "perception." Rendering the strangeness of perception is the goal of artmaking. Perception, the source of all genuine thinking, is attentive. Through this act of attention, what hides is able to impose itself upon us with the force of a shock.

Yet, despite their violence, these shocks are charitable. Without them, we would have to surrender to our fear that the world, in its sheer givenness, is without novel possibilities. We would succumb to the lethargy of believing that everything is determined in advance—would succumb, that is, to the mechanistic worldview that made early modern philosophers shudder. We would inhabit a too-familiar world of mechanistic necessity, a world bereft of good and evil, a world where the "being there (*Dasein*) of human be-ing" made no difference. The convulsions induced by genuine thinking produce wonderment—a wonderment that soon enough devolves into a more rationalized, instrumental form of thinking. But before that occurs, this wonderment give one over to something primal.

These shocks also encourage us to be aware of the act of perception itself. They lift one out of what Edmund Husserl called the "naive standpoint," where consciousness, because it is absorbed by its object, avoids the question of what human beings—what the fact that the human be-ing is there, as an opening for disclosure—contribute to the object perceived, the objects that make up the world we inhabit. The opening towards

disclosure that characterizes the "be-ing there" of human beings, is at one with that openness, that emptiness, that nothingness that is the scene of beings' coming-to-be. This essential unity allows us to sense, however vaguely, the being-together of human be-ing and what there was even before all creation. We discover thereby the primordality of Be-ing, that which makes human be-ing, in its openness, the image of the Divine.

The shock induced by a sensation creates an opening through which that which is strange, foreign, unexpected, novel, disrupts the complacent surface of everyday experience that is constituted when our perceptions are filtered through ideas (pre-conceptions). The strangeness, the foreignness, the alienness of what comes through the clearing prised open by a new electric sensation is a result partly of its paradoxical temporal attributes. For this opening is created by attention, and through attentiveness we learn that the future creates the present.

It is the fact that an aesthetic object comes to be through a similar retroactive creativity that makes aesthetics relevant to ontology—and that is one (among several) reasons why indeed aesthetics should found ontology. For an aesthetic object is apprehended through the poetic principle that shapes it, insofar as every work teaches us how we should consider it. But the poetic principle that shapes each work (the principle we learn by attending to the work), is absolutely unique for each individual work—indeed it develops through the process of making/reading the work. To recognize that, however, is to acknowledge that it comes into being only through what it makes. The principle that guides the making of the work is constituted only retroactively, even though its existence is presumed by—and therefore prior to—what it brings into being. The poetic principle, insofar as it is unique in every poem, designates a particular configuration of experience that gives a poem its shape; but reciprocally, it comes into being through

the poem itself. Thus, the principle of its be-ing is both presupposed by and derived from the poem.

Aesthetic experience, accordingly, makes generative temporality palpable, for generative temporality is a surface twisted into the form of a Möbius strip, in which the future generates the past even as the past brings forth the future. Generative time (unlike narrative time) is not composed of a series of "nows" strung out along a line—on the contrary, in generative time, the future creates the past from which the present is inherited. This generative time is the time of attention, of resoluteness: through resoluteness all my actions are inflected by an anticipation, for they are informed by my understanding that the future will inherit what I do. In claiming that resoluteness involves the understanding that the future will inherit my action, my deliberation is determined by my recognition of what it will mean for that action to belong to the past. Through resoluteness, then, the future brings the present into being through the mediation of a past which it (the future) creates for itself.

The reality of temporal convolution, in which the future creates the present through its influence on the past, is not the only ontological understanding that aesthetic objects furnish. Another results from aesthetic objects' capacity to make perception difficult. By making perception difficult, aesthetic objects also make us aware that human be-ing, which is an opening towards disclosure, is there to play both an interpretative and a constitutive role in bringing forth the meaning of beings—in *reading* beings. It restores to human be-ing that self-reflexive awareness that informs it of its primordially empty condition; recognition of our primordially empty be-ing, which human beings share with what lies beyond beings, grounds the possibility of human be-ing grasping the constitutive role it has in the be-ing of beings.

Formulating a thought is an act of violence—a violence that holds the eruptive, chaotic propensity of reality at bay. For a thought imposes a conceptual order on that which has no conceptual order—and the less genuine thinking is, the greater is this imposition. The character of the violence involved in formulating a thought can be understood through considering the analogy a common political situation offers. A law takes form as a means of stabilizing and 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, in the supreme act of the charity of human self-understanding, the accord is reached between them that fosters the illusion that both parties enter into the agreement with the measure of freedom requisite to assuming the obligations they contract to take on. The same occurs when law demands that the aggressor pay retribution to the victor.

The violence and charity 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, by its universality, requires that the unlike all be treated alike. To the might of power, the law counterpoises the irrevocable demands of the humbled. The law brings both the victor and the vanquished, the mighty and humble, into an ungainly accord, the end of which is to quell any possible upheaval, to quiet any possible uprising.

So it is with thinking. All thinking, and all perception, is endangered by the object of thought, for the be-ing of any and all beings exceeds thought—that which elevates be-ing above beings is intimated in the resistance that a raw perception exhibits to being turned into a thought (a representation). Attention to these features of perception disclose that even though the subject participates in the transformation of the elemental

into a percept, there is nonetheless a transcendental element associated with every object of perception which refuses to be reduced. That transcendental element is what, following Heidegger, I call "earth," and the creative transformation which perception effects results in the emergence of what, again following Heidegger, I call a "worldly" being. But perception, like all thinking, enters into a truce with beings; the truce is forged as one learns to cherish the gift of what is given in perception—learns that however troubling, upsetting, and violent perception is, human be-ing, through abiding with the gifts perception brings, may establish an ungainly, awkward peace with what brings these gifts, a peace wherein what is poorer and humbler, that is to say, consciousness, accedes to a status equal to that of the gifts that are given it. But against Heidegger, I insist that such an "abiding-with" 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.

Thinking does not passively render a pre-existent reality that lies before it. Rather perceiving transforms—violently transforms—what gives rise to it, by converting "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. 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 all that comes to pass. It brings what is into be-ing.

Nonetheless, the primordial lies in darkness and is never disclosed as it is, for that element, in being perceived, changes its character—its nature changes when it enters into language.<sup>1</sup> The transformation by which a thematized being takes form and gains

1. To show this in my films I have often contrasted the dynamics of cinematic rhythms with the stasis of texts, by incorporating texts in my film.

A black and white photograph capturing a serene moment on a beach. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a person is visible, their back to the camera as they gaze out at the ocean. The middle ground is dominated by the rhythmic patterns of waves, with white foam from a breaking wave catching the light. The background shows the vast expanse of the sea meeting a dark, overcast sky. The overall mood is contemplative and peaceful.

**Moments  
That should last a life-time**



The mind  
Constructs patterns  
in the passage of time

membership in the world (that, is to say, since perception is a form of reading, when it becomes part of the “world-structured-in-language”) 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 in such an apophantic process:

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.<sup>2</sup>

Following Merleau-Ponty, I give to this earthly darkness, insofar as it is a faculty of disclosure, a faculty of the unveiling (*aletheia*) that grants us the perception of beings, the name “flesh.”<sup>3</sup> The term “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 cannot be grasped through concepts. It is the evidence that cohesion in be-ing occurs without the mediation of any concept, that cohesion can defy the logic of form, and 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

2. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, from the letters of the Pseudo-Dionysius, “Letter One: to the monk Gaius.”

3. We call this process of unveiling truth, because through it the inscriptions of the *λογος*, which, as inscriptions belong to that category of entities of which can be qualified by truth or falsity, and yet through it beings come-to-be. “*Facta vera sunt*,” Vico wrote—indeed that the objects Being makes are inscriptions is why we call Being the *λογος*.

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 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 one’s left, of the possibility “of being able to touch [one-self] 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” (9). What he describes as miscarriage is the transformation of a thought from pre-reflexive to a self-reflexive form—an apophantic process that eclipses that mutuality of thought and its object characteristic of pre-reflective thinking (the flesh’s thinking) as thinking takes a thought as a thematized object. This transformation is a violent limitation for with it thought becomes self-enclosed.

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.” The statements of this dialogue are enigmatic, because they interlace with each other over and over again, weaving a bewildering network of relations; in fact, they possess greater depth and variety of meaning than those which appear in a penetrating philosophic 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 destined was embody.

For image and flesh are joined together in a unfathomable unity, each of which is just as strange as the other—the strange intimacy of the image is suited to unconceptualizable closeness of flesh. Accordingly, the true image is the very antithesis of narrative. Narrative valorizes the reduction of possibility into actuality, for that reduction provides narrative's founding form—the creation of a *diegesis*. Attention discloses the event of coming-to-be, 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: attention requires 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—and in doing so places conditions on—the revelation of the future, in imposing expectations of what is to be.

Cinematography also reveals that the beautiful shines within the time-bound. To say that the beautiful shines within the time-bound is to say also that the beautiful can become dynamic—another lesson the cinema was created to convey. But if in the aesthetic of the cinema, the beautiful is dynamic, and if whatever is dynamic requires time, and time implies death, then in this aesthetic, 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. Thus, in this new aesthetic, beauty condemns what is beautiful to perish.

What is—that which is—shines with effulgence of the beautiful. But whatever else it is, the beautiful is still the result of a reduction in as much it is not as rich as What-might-be. The reduction involved in all thinking, all perceiving (and all artistic representations) speaks of the deficiency of what is in comparison with what might be. It is 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 beings 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 genuine thinking cannot be simply a loving acceptance of the gift of the appearances (though true thinking must never dismiss the given, as scientific thinking does, and in fact must cherish the given). So perception must open itself even to the Violent Power that is beyond all that is, that would destroy whatever is. True thinking must be more than patient, loving attention toward all that is—more than a quiet listening that is 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.

But of the arts, it is the cinema that is most disposed towards the elemental. If the cut is the formal sign of cinema's disposition towards fragmentation, the inner cause of that disposition is its affection for the world, an affection so profligate and so unjudging that it results in self-dispersal. The assimilation of reality that is the mission of film disposes it to contamination. Film is massively promiscuous, and as impure as all whose nature is promiscuity. Its readily-given affections carry it beyond itself, towards

the other. Its proclivities, accordingly, result in dispersal. Its nature calls for forms that are fragmentary and incomplete; its promiscuity demands that works composed in the medium be dispersive opera, deploying multiple structures, plurisemic, incomplete, imperfect, unresolved, without closure. Their forms must be contaminated, impure, and full of strife. Each element in every moment must be foreign to every other. A film must allow text to contend with image, image to contend with sound, and sound to contend with text, and must do so without striving to reconcile the contention in something we conceive as good form. Films must incorporate the maximum of diversity for the cinematic medium is an outrageous violation of the ideal of purity. Furthermore, the cinema must favour repetition over narrative progress, for repetition shows contamination at work, by showing that the purity of self-identity is an impossible ideal (nothing is ever the same on two appearances). Repetition in art, because it demonstrates that any linguistic element is wrenched from self-identity with every reappearance, manifests violence at work.

The cinema itself is multiple—comprising image, movement, and sound (which, often, is itself multiple, comprising speech, music, and natural sounds). Accordingly, a film consists of constellations of elements that are alien to one another, and these constellations are arranged serially into higher-level constellations. Eisenstein taught, I think correctly, that each successive element in this serial constellation must be “estranged” from what preceded it, in order to incite strife. He also considered, correctly, that this strife was the mark of the cinema’s essential constitution. For the cinema is multiple, and this multiplicity itself lays waste to any efforts at formal consolidation premised on purist ideals. The cinema’s multiplicity opens it onto that which cannot be represented, which is similarly plural, similarly labile, similarly without identity. This multiplicity,

accordingly, should be intensified, carried to the extreme. Its sensory elements, whether visual, aural, intensive, affective, rhythmic, tonal or even verbal (oral and written) must be made to contend, for that contention evokes the unrepresentable. The cinema has the ability to show process; it does so best by emphasizing speed which liquefies, by stressing dynamism's ability to dissolve boundaries and lay form to ruin, by animating light's searing destructive power (light's power to destroy what hides) through allowing changes in light to overwhelm spatial form, and by allowing cutting, which is the domain of mutability, instability, and ambiguity, to achieve the maximum of fragmentation. Only the cinema allows us thus to effect a *dérèglement de tous les sens*.

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—and to the mystery that, like The Incarnation, that incarnation, demands sacrifice. Sacrifice, it seems, is the condition of charity's being manifested. For there is still that which is left over, that excess of unrealized possibility, that which passes into nothing when a thought is configured, that which language consigns to silence. That excess subsequently 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. Perception that rises against preconceptions create a disposition towards a strange element foreign to perception, towards the uncanny that allows one to respond, however vaguely and indefinitely, to the return of the repressed. This vague sense of something beyond knowing vouchsafes an awareness that what is does not exactly coincide with what might be. Flow, speed, liquidity, dynamism, perpetual dynamism, transformation 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.

As in many folk tales (for example, the Lorelei legend to which Heine gave poetic form), this call of the beautiful is also, though, a lure, that results in destruction. Its call is savage: “*Den Schiffer im kleine Schiffe / Ergreift es mit wildem Weh*” (“The boatman in his small boat / It seizes with unrestrained woe”). The violence of a perception is like the violence of the poetic principle: the unrepresentability of the poetic principle endangers thought only insofar as it exceeds any *a priori* precept. For through the poetic principle that which belongs to time becomes timeless, for the poetic belongs to the realm of ecstatic temporality; 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*.) So it is with cinematography: making the time-bound timeless, that act which cinematography accomplishes, 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 existence (for, as I have remarked, this inequality is the basis of law).

We apprehend the dynamics through which things come-to-be through the faculty for rhythm. An epistemology that accords thinking-through-rhythm primacy is far more sound than the currently vogueish epistemologies based on narrative—in fact better than *any other*—because 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, a sense of something whose very being is indefinite, but which we know with a certainty that quells all questions, something that participates in a pulse of something that is far larger than ourselves.

About the physicist David Bohm, David Peat wrote “That ability to touch preverbal processes at the muscular, sensory level remained with him all his life. It was not so

much that Bohm visualized a physical system as that he was able to sense its dynamics within his body: "I had the feeling that internally I could participate in some movement that was the analogy of the thing you are talking about" (68). This form of corporeal thinking is close to what I mean by thinking-in-rhythm (as everything that has to do with the body is periodic). And at what does Bohm's theoretical physics arrive? That reality is process, and that mind and matter are inextricable—that same view we have been propounding. Our richest and deepest apprehension of flux, flow, dynamism comes through our capacity to respond to rhythm. For rhythm always discloses itself at once both as something beyond us, to which we give ourselves, and as something deep in ourselves. Thinking-through-rhythm thus reveals the mutuality of self and Other. Thinking-through-rhythm can engage us in prayer by which we tune ourselves to an alien, foreign pulse, to the pulse of an Other, the pulse of something wholly beyond us, and we woo It, while in response, It draws us ever more closely into its embrace. In responding to rhythm, something deep in us responds to some profound attribute of the dynamics of earth. Giving a place of privilege to thinking-through-rhythm changes thought's relation to its object. Thinking-through-rhythm allows multiple patterns to contend, without resolution. Thinking-through-rhythm belongs to the modality of the flesh's time. Rhythm makes time, and time is the fundament of our relation to alterity, to what lies beyond us. Time, and therefore rhythm, reveals to us that future is always without apprehensible content. It aims towards an *ideatum* that eludes being thought or perceived, for it is infinitely greater than the thought that thinks it. Thinking-through-rhythm reveals the future's transcendence, i.e., it discloses that beings and possibility cannot be thought together, and that beings require non-be-ing. The pulse of rhythm too has a violence at its core. For its throb can lay order and law to waste,



**Bled to death.**



at one time:

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. The disordering of thinking that results from being-in-relation to the unapprehensible is an effective antidote to the self's desire to establish its sovereignty. The disproportion between the act of thinking itself and what the act aims at that summons the regulatory agencies of objective perception, and only the utmost of resoluteness, issuing in attunement, can forestall the violence of the imposition of law.

Thinking-through-rhythm uncovers what the be-ing of actual beings excludes; it discloses what is rejected by the order that thought imposes on experience. It acknowledges what is excluded from objective perception, cherishes the unwanted and the destitute, for it appreciates that the insignificant and absurd is 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 humble cinema, a *cinema povera* (better names for the "experimental cinema") is needed.

Narrative thinking arises from the desire for totalization, from the desire to reduce reality to an ultimate unity through panoramic overviews and dialectical syntheses. Thinking-through-rhythm is dispersive: only it, therefore, can intimate the ungraspable and incomprehensible character of what is alien to rational thinking. Only thinking-through-rhythm can intimate the power of Other that breaks through the homogeneity of the familiar world and, with its unlimited power, shatters its totality. Only thinking-

through-rhythm can intimate the violent potential of this intruder, this Other that encroaches on my familiar world, but can neither be experienced nor reduced to an object of knowledge.

Thinking-through-rhythm makes the time of the flesh palpable. Thinking-through-rhythm incorporates in the body what *dianoia*, rational thought of sort that practised in mathematical and technical subjects, can never apprehend, *viz.*, that which Plato, in the *Timaeus*, refers to as *khōra*, an element that 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,” like *khōra*, is 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, in order 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?” (50–1). In light, the objective world is severed from observer, but beyond the range of illumination, *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.”

Every work of art involves a contention between two impulses: toward form and against form. Every work of art exists simultaneously as, on the one hand, a disciplined structure, the order of which evolves out of an inner sense of the need for—or, better, a tropism

toward—harmony and as, on the other hand, 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 dimension of the work) and matter in a work of art manifests the necessary unity between the timeless and the time-bound, a unity that can only be maintained by the violence of law. But this violence condemns the be-ing of an artwork to restlessness, to the instability of the uncanny, for as we have seen, the poetic principle which orders the work of art (both in the sense of giving rise to it and in the sense of shaping it), because it appears uniquely in every one of its appearances, is supremely unstable. The unity of form and content, Hegel opined, exemplifies the mystery of the incarnation, through which spirit is turned inside out, in order to enter the material realm and to take on a material dynamism. But incarnation, we know, requires a sacrifice.

We cannot assess a work of art by its *gestalt* form because it is restless and unstable, because it is inhabited by an element that does violence to representation and perception, that is to say, by the uncanny. The idea that artwork is an achievement of form 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 be-ing emerges as a being (as an object), to obviate that which language consigns to silence, to ward off the return of that which passes into nothingness as a thought is configured, to expel from sensation that excess which rises against language, against thought, and against representation, to destroy them. Faced by the unremitting violence that is characteristic of the repressed, it has exhausted itself in the constant effort at pacifying that is required of it—it has become spent, it has had its day. Now we assume that the power of the work of art is measured

by its capacity to mime the dynamics of the power of be-ing. Form serves to focus thought in order to create an opening towards the power of be-ing—it does this by engendering a stillness that fosters the grace one requires to respond to the violence the power of be-ing unleashes. By focussing attention, it enables the elemental to lay established patterns of thought in ruin. Thus, form creates an opening for the violence of the elemental—and it does so in order to enable that violence to liberate us from our customary ways of perceiving.

Every image, because it speaks of what is too luminous to be apprehended has an affinity with nakedness. But the relation of imagery's essential character with the nude body is more profound than this. Nudity makes us aware of the wisdom of modesty, which has its ground in the fact that our being is refractory to the light of analytic reason and available only to the super-rational understanding of the care human being solicits (a solicitation nudity renders more compelling). Nudity teaches us that our ordinary metaphorical system of historically-based rumination that privileges light over darkness is wrong: the strange intimacy of darkness that relates us to something we cannot apprehend makes darkness higher than light. Nudity flees the light, as be-ing slips away from the light of reason. Like nudity, be-ing seeks darkness as the condition for revealing itself. What is revealed by the modesty that nudity desires is that the Other is constituted in mystery; and just as every image of a nude person discloses the essential nature of imagery by its concern with fecundity, so every image of a nude discloses the nature of imagery. For the subject of every image withdraws into the modesty of non-disclosure even while it assigns to a double (that which shines forth in the image) the role of disclosure. The image of the nude, like every image, compresses the absence of what it depicts into a material force apprehensible by a sensibility.

An image of a nude body informs us, too, that our being is not external, and so is not apprehensible by the senses either. The image of a nude person offers paradigmatic proof of the non-reciprocal character of relation that obtains not just between a representation and the object represented but even between visibility and being: just as objects give us knowledge of representations, but representations do not afford knowledge of objects, so too, while be-ing produces visibility, visibility affords no understanding of be-ing. Just as the object withdraws from representation, so too be-ing withdraws from visibility. It is that lack of reciprocity that makes for that peculiarity that the frankness and explicitness of that special form of visibility we call nudity conceals be-ing, that the greatest of intimacy conceals a most profound alterity.

A nude implores us to caress; but a caress acknowledges that we cannot close the divide across which the Other resides. In caressing, or in imagining caressing, we acknowledge that erotic relations are not really reciprocal relations as our sense of justice would have us believe. Caresses tell us that *eros* is bound into an unintelligible, unfathomable condition (and so a condition that cannot be reduced to signification), for they tell us that our most profound, most creative ("self-making") relationships are to a being that not only is totally separate, but belongs to a different realm altogether. They tell us, then, that we are most deeply linked to what withdraws from us.

So profound is the gulf that separates us from the beings with which we form our most profound and most intimate relationships that our be-ing and that of the be-ing which, in soliciting us, creates us, belong to different orders of time. The status of the image makes this known to us as well, for, just as the image elicits expectation, so awareness of the Other (an awareness that, like all sensory experience belongs wholly to the immediate present) solicits a longing to give care to that which belongs wholly to

the future. Thus, here we encounter again that twisted temporality, in which what comes later creates what comes before. But only a twisted temporality would be appropriate to the meaning of flesh, which is the revelation that the visible turns upon itself and that a carnal unity of the sentient with the sensed is antecedent to representation. The longing expressed in the futurity of the image is evoked not simply by the Other's voluptuousness (though it may be); rather the longing arises from all that separates me from the Other. The Other, speaking to me, in the present but from the future, constitutes the ground of time as process. What delights us in the erotic relation, and in the caress, is the tension (and so the anticipation) involved in sensing a relation that is sufficiently deep to constitute our identity, and yet that is not reducible to an identity (as the other in the relation remains ineluctably Other).

The cinema has an affinity for the faces and bodies—for the flesh of the other. We feel the other call out to us, to invite us to know her as an alike that is not alike. She calls out, invoking our desire, our sympathy, our hopes for an encounter. By the presence of an other, the film image calls out for a dialogue, and our inability to enter into a true dialogue with the other in the image—our inability either to integrate her into our world as real associate or to become a part of her world—makes us sense the gulf that separates what is closest to us.

The image of flesh, to which cinema is attuned, opens us onto the primordial realm which grants us being. The primordial grants us the recognition that the self and world unfold mutually. 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

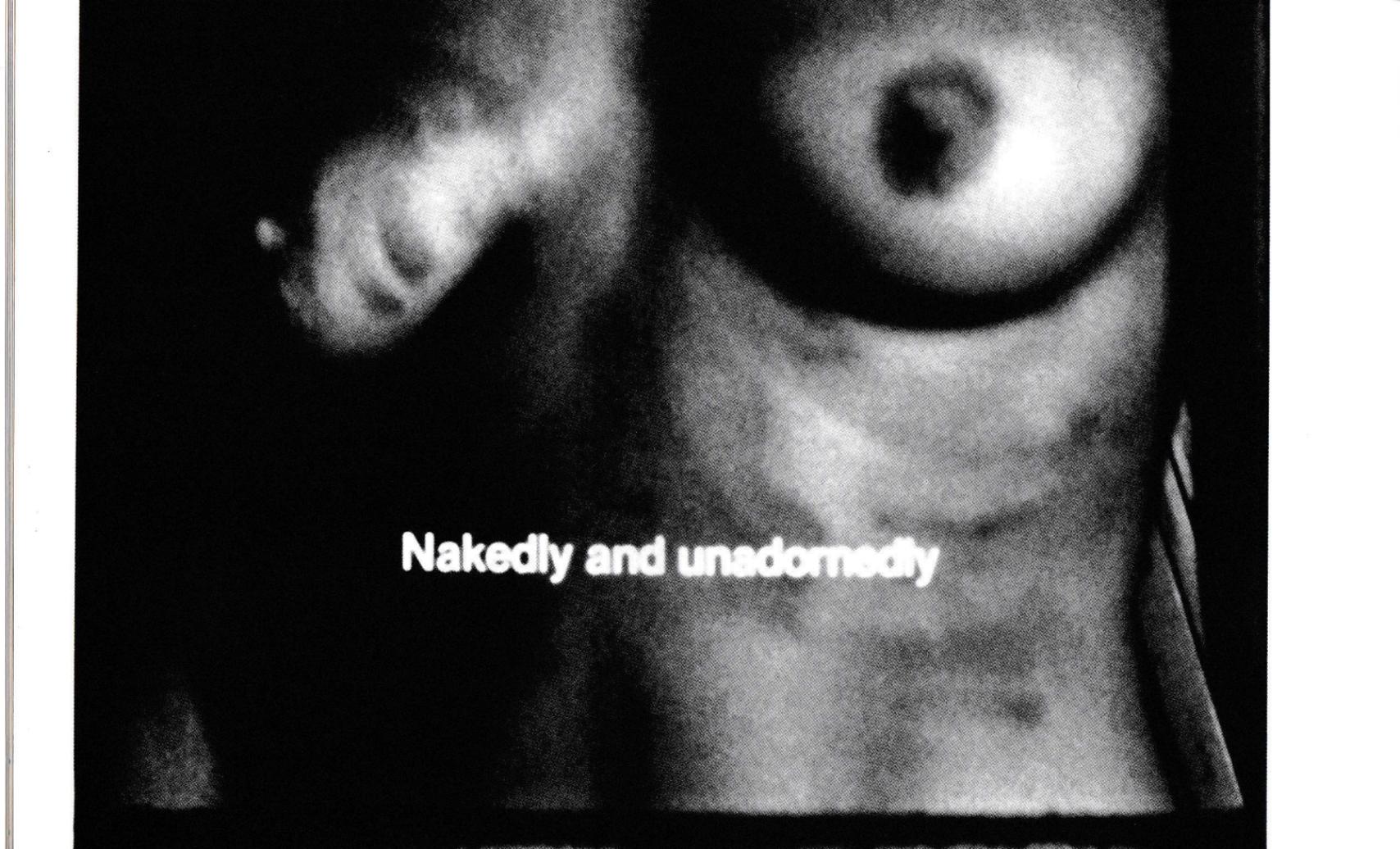
among them. Flesh is the medium through which these non-sensible similarities are revealed; flesh is the medium that opens us towards the world, for it is the medium through which that which addresses itself to us emerges. Through the earthliness of flesh, beings emerge as worldly (that is, as belonging to the "world-structured-by-language"), for incarnation is a condition for having impressions through one's interaction with the world.<sup>4</sup> Flesh reveals the prediscursive configurations that pronounce themselves silently in each mute thing, and in which our bodies participate; these configurations are active—they are prediscursive activities that lay good form to ruins, that disperse all consolidated *Gestalten*, that dismember all patterns. But these revelations are vouchsafed to us by virtue of flesh only through adopting this silent language's manner of signifying. It is through conflict, discord, plurisemicity, irresolution, the refusal of closure that makes flesh felt (narrative, a form that achieved its present condition in the Enlightenment, invites none of these attributes). The cinema is disposed to flesh, and for this reason, the cinema should eschew narrative, and adopt rigorously plural—it should intensify the strife between the elements in the constellations that constitute it, by incorporating elements that are alien to one another. It should emphasize dynamism's ability to dissolve whatever forms might pacify the strife between these elements.

"Flesh" is the name for the condition of our "be-ing between." Awareness of flesh 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

4. I say "have" because neither "create" nor "receive" is quite correct, for this "having impressions" involves both a creative and a receptive moment.

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 actually being them (for they are earthly elements), informs our decoding of things. Flesh makes every perception a communicative act. “Flesh” names the physical pregnancy that issues in perception.

Darkness is required to divulge the interweaving of language and matter in perception. Why does it require darkness to reveal this interpenetration? Because what blends language and matter together in perception is itself never perceived. The form of thinking which brings a work of art into being, however, lies much closer to the dark element than everyday thinking—scientific thinking or instrumental thinking—does. Accordingly, art has much to teach us about this essential togetherness of spirit and matter, form and content, language and perception, for which flesh is the primordial ground. 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, summons beings to be-ing, and gives them membership in the world (i.e., the “world-structured-by-language”). Beings come into being through *λόγος*, 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.



**Nakedly and unadornedly**



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 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. Flesh is prior to beings; yet, without beings, flesh cannot disclose its essence—Can you imagine 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 describe flesh as an *entre deux*, and why I have concluded that it actualizes itself only in conjunction with the world.

The thinking that makes art belongs to the flesh. That is 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; cleaving to flesh reaches towards a numinousness that binds all together in an anonymous universality.

The elements of the primordial 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 the 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, more than on 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. 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. (3–4)

The image of nude is a cause for exultation, because, in revealing a human being, it also reveals that human be-ing, as an opening towards disclosure, 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 Walter Benjamin stated, muteness is "the deep sadness of nature." "It is a metaphysical truth," Benjamin wrote, "that all nature would begin to lament if it were not 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" (1979, 329).

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 be-ing extends what the  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$  inscribed at the time of the creation (Benjamin 1979, 318). 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. (1979, 318–9)

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  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$  creates the world, and its

icons, the objects of the world, speak of the  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$ . Thus, language of things speaks of the  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$ ; 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 allows us to understand.

The cinema's mission, I contend, is to reveal the discourse of things. Cinematography, the duplication of the order of creation, 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, and by reason of this consolation, it exults. Benjamin might have understood that order. He 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  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$ ' inscription, and makes her glorify Him. To glorify the Creator is the reason of all exultation.

Nature, the order of things, speaks only mutely. Cinematography, the duplication of the order of things, translates this mute speech into an audible language. The secret language of things is vouchsafed only to those who can abide in that form of contemplation that allows the be-ing (the first actuality) of beings to enter into human be-ing, who can endure the violence of that form of charity which Keats called "negative capability." Hearing the mute language of things demands an openness, to allow the gifts of be-ing to come to presence—the receiving of which is the mission of photography. That practice perhaps is not creative, but is something higher, for it is a practice which enables the fugitive discourse of things to be preserved. This miracle should not be shunned; rather but to be taken up as the wonder it is.

But even as the image, the "seen" form, enters into human be-ing in this wondering abiding with things, and even as the "unseen" but visible *gestalt* form enters into human

be-ing at the same time, so too does an unseen and invisible principle. That unseen, invisible principle is an activity, an *energeia*, indeed a violence that actualizes all that becomes present. It operates according to an apophantic logic, as it discloses itself only by withdrawing. It operates behind the constraints of repression, and is known only through the phantasmic constructions which it produces, and which, more often than they straightforwardly reveal, reveal it only by concealing it.

Against the present climate of despair, I continue to believe that language is grounded in truth. I cannot accept that nothing fastens words and 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. (1969, 81-2)

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 evident that visible objects constitute the signs of a language, and to do so simply by repeating them. Or, as

Benjamin might have had it, translating them. Because it is without the mediation of meaning, this text is unconditionally translatable. "Cinematography" is the name for the immediate 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 Bottom realized.

Let us think of love, whether we are speaking of divine or angelic or intellectual or psychic or natural love, as a certain unitive and continuative power which moves the higher things to provide for the lower, and again those of equal form to exercise a close influence upon one another, and those things which are placed lower to turn to those that are better and are placed above them. —The Pseudo-Dionysus, "Amatory Hymns"

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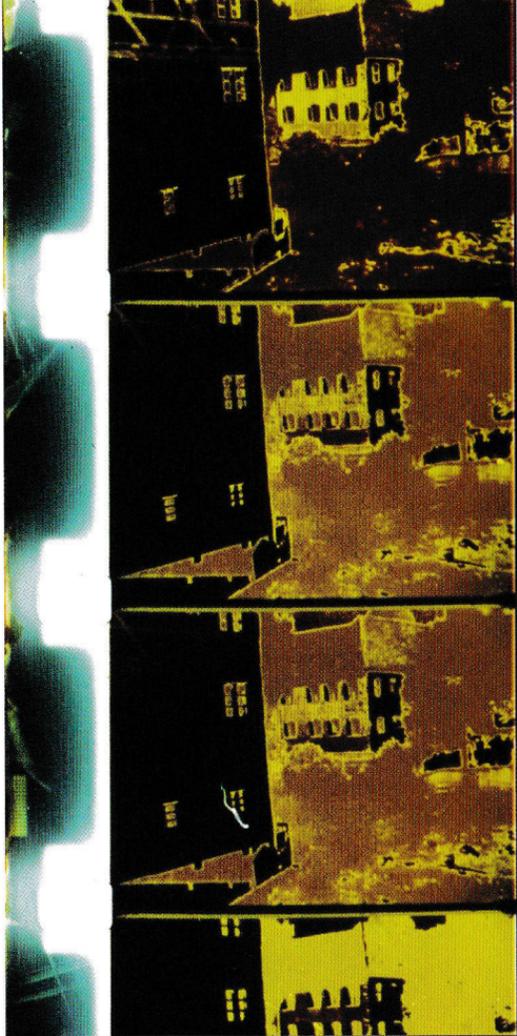
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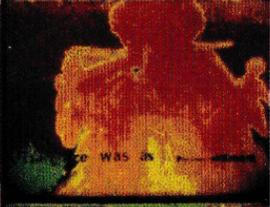
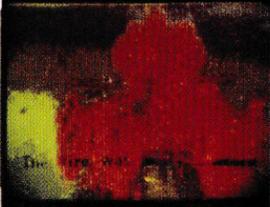
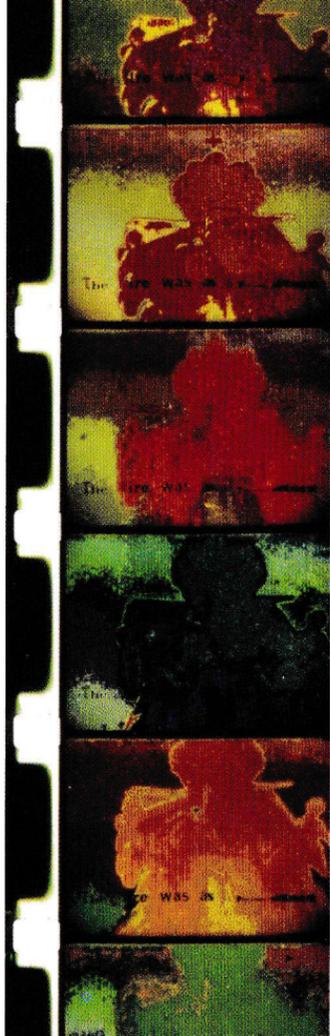
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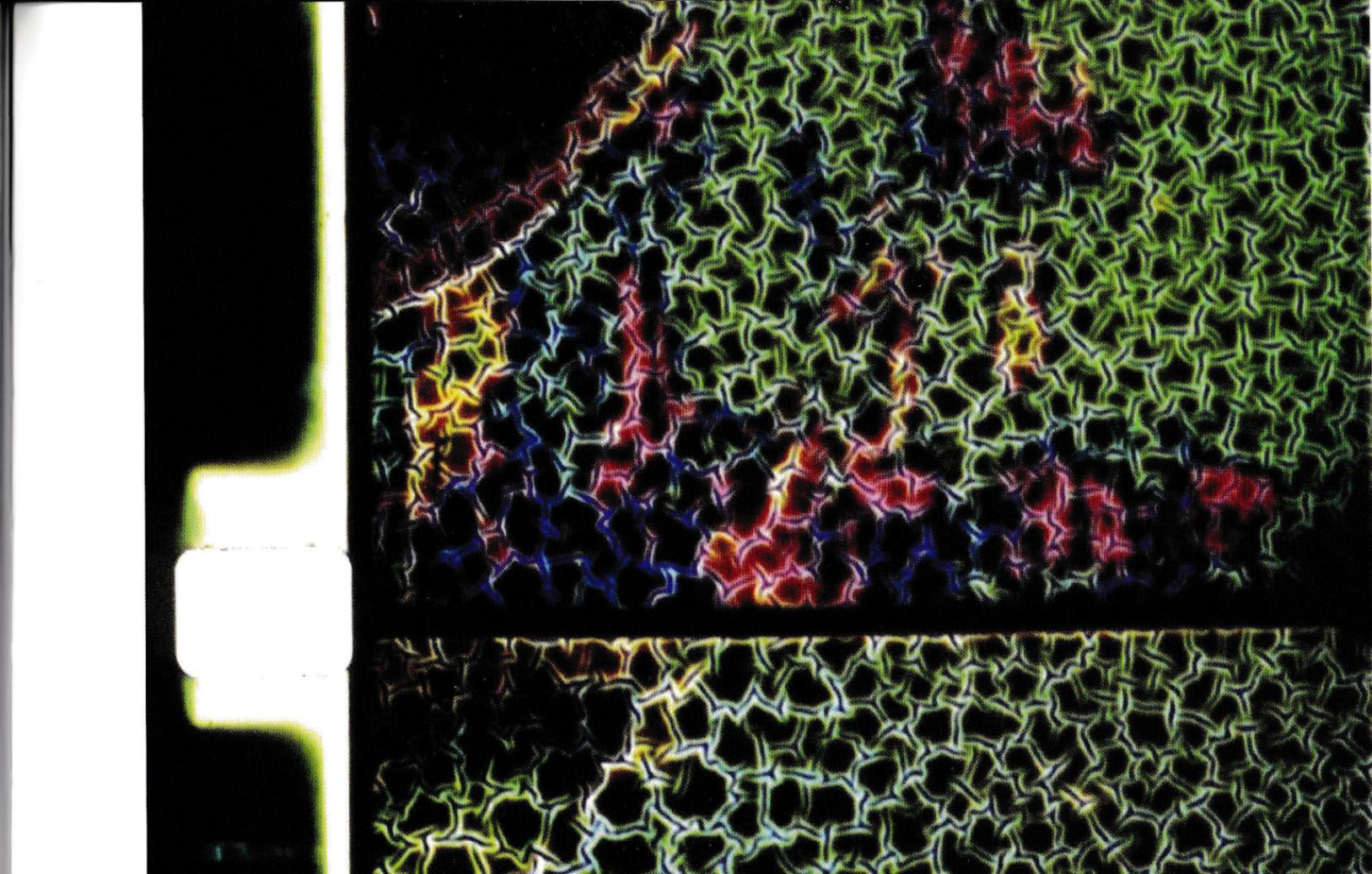
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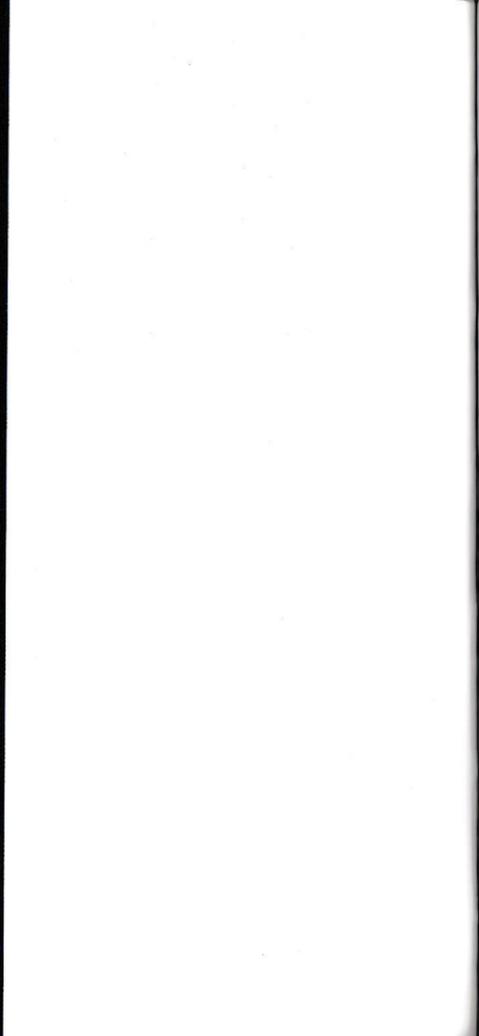
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