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**Digital Cinema**  
**R. Bruce Elder**

For the past several years I have been working in digital cinema – that is, cinema that incorporates digital images. To be able to do this, I went back to night-school and, I suppose, did the equivalent of a degree in applied mathematics and computer science – and devoted much of research efforts to writing computer programs for processing images in ways that conform to my aesthetic ideas. There is, I believe, a radical breach between the classic, photographically-based cinema and new, digital cinema. Of a photograph, it is always reasonable to ask: “Who created the photograph, the photographer or nature?” The question cannot be answered, but one must acknowledge that an aspect of the beauty of a photograph, is that a photograph, as André Bazin pointed out long ago, strikes us as a phenomenon of nature. Thus, making photographs, or photographically-based films, seemed to me a way of cherishing the gift of what reality – actually, of what is more accurately described as *natura naturans* – makes for us. Photography, I concluded, succeeds when the photographer transcends wilfulness and learns to cherish the gifts given him or her. That the will of the human “maker” should have no place in the creation of the image is the most radical implication of photography, its most profound rupture with the traditional image-making. Photography even allows the imagination to be circumvented, and by this, it reveals our being-with-the-world

Digital cinema is another matter entirely – digital cinema gives the subject back its traditional role – or, rather, something close to its traditional role. The imagination resumes its traditional function in image-making: digital images once again require that we step back from the world and enter into the space of subjectivity. And all the usual ontological and epistemological problems that tradition has with images – both philosophical tradition that descends from Plato and the theological tradition that developed out the Judaic religion – reassert themselves with digital images: one can ask whether what one sees in the image is an object; the image allows for contradictory interpretations, and so exposes the knowledge we gain through them to doubt; images mediate between the subjective and the objective world (and so, in a process that Baudrillard’s writings expose, take precedence over the objects they purport to represent and, finally, block access to those objects).

The digital image does offer something that changes the tradition of image-making: it makes it possible to realize the Pythagorean dream of producing images/reality through number and through calculations of a complexity that Pythagoreans could never have conceived them rather than through the depictions of facts (pictures as Wittgenstein understood them – arrangements of elements that mirror states of affairs). This is a whole new possibility for the imagination, and, though I have dabbled with it, I have not been able to come to terms with it.

Insisting on the role of subjectivity and imagination in the production of digital images of course raises the question of the subject, and issues around the subject are vexed. One can see the appeal of the idea that the subject is something that can be detached from one body and transplanted. For let’s admit that the term “I,” as it is ordinarily used in intellectual discourse, is hopelessly troubled – its meaning all but indiscernible, inasmuch as it is surrounded by a thick fog of philosophical, theological and psychological confusions. The new technologies, and the new media they have produced, promise to help render this traditional confusions obsolete, for they propose a new definition of the subject: “I” am a complex system of electromagnetic and chemical brain processes. This new start on the description of the subject at least promises to clarify what this reality that we refer as “I” really is.

But it also proposes the hope that the “I” might be transplanted – already the brains (or parts of brains) of rats can be transplanted from dying bodies to fetuses. In this sense, the immortality of “I,” through the repeated transfer of brain parts, has become a theoretical possibility that the new technology will undoubtedly strive to realize.

Despite all the confusions that have surrounded the traditional concept of the subject, and potential of the new conception to sweep away that fog of confusions, I find the whole idea really pernicious. It denies the important role of the particular body that each of us has in establishing his or her identity – thus, because our identities are so crucial, it devalues the body. All my recent work – and much of the work that I have done earlier (though I didn’t realize it at the time) – has been devoted to enhancing the sensation of flesh (and flesh’s belonging to the world). I think the topic of the body is the most important topic one can devote oneself to in this contemporary climate, where “despisers of the body” are so prevalent. If I were starting out now (or, rather, if I were young enough) I would surely be doing very “in your face” performance pieces that dealt with the body. They would be “in your face” pieces not so as to be transgressive – the idea of transgressive art strikes me as among cultural theory’s most boring ideas – but because body art can so bring to our attention the importance of rapture. By “rapture” I mean any intense experience (because of its extreme intensity, such experience is sometimes felt as displeasure) that deranges focussed, analytical consciousness – experience so intense that it leaves conventional ways of thinking in ruin (at whatever cost). This sort of experience invariably makes us sense the body’s role of experience: we feel at once acute anxiety (one can even feel a some measure of nausea) and acute pleasure as every nerve ending seems to tingle and we feel waves of bliss surge through the body, from head to toe and from toe to head. One experiences this when the energy of the body rises up and imposes itself on us, as occurs in love-making, or when we find ourselves intensely aroused and intensely embarrassed at the same time – I sometimes experienced it when my assistant photographed me for films we made together (as she did many times), and it was primarily those occasions that taught me the crucial importance of this sort of experience. I am sure that making performance art would allow me to focus much more directly and clearly on that sort of experience, which I believe is so important.

The most important thing that the body teaches us through experience of this sort is that we are “owned” – first by the divine, that fills flesh with desire, and then, through the divine, by all other people. Thus flesh teaches us we owe deep allegiance to one another. It teaches us that the obligation that any other person imposes on me, just by being human, is absolute and unconditional; and we have even more profound obligations to those who fall into the circle of our love. I have no choice but to care for others around me, and seek to a life in which I care profoundly for a number of friends whom I love deeply. Through the divine, they own me; and I am not free to choose what I wish to do – I belong to them and must act out of my concern for them.

Art should reveal areas of experience that we cannot reveal to others except by making art – forms of imagining that we cannot reveal in any other way. By doing this, art gives us a more profound sense of what human being is – it acknowledges that we think in ways other than the analytic/instrumental/propositional forms that have dominated us (in the West) at least from the time of the Enlightenment (and possibly earlier). Propositional thinking, thinking that can be modelled by rewriting of one string of symbols into another according to an established rule (thinking of the sort that computer scientists are prone to think of as the sole form of thinking available to us), is “deranged” by the intense feelings surge through the body as it responds to the field of energy that lies “beyond us.” I believe it is important to tell one another that we possess the capacity for rapture, too – and for all those sorts of experience that are close to rapture (such as mad love or the states that strong, repetitive rhythms induce, a state

akin to trance and prayer). To do this, art has to acknowledge the less seemly contents of our thoughts.

The fundamental responsibility that artists have to is to make contact that beneficent field of energy that lies around us and to enter into that energy. When one does this, it takes control. Then one's responsibility is to obey its commands; in this, there is no "freedom of imagination." One takes orders – an image flashes into your mind and you have to make it, no matter how wrong-headed or embarrassing or unaesthetic or humiliating it might be. One cannot be allow considerations of audience/reception to intrude upon this; such concerns make one less willing to go to the extremes to which one might be commanded to go – one might get to thinking "What will people think?!?" When one becomes disobedient, one breaks with the source of one's imaginings. This is why the Muses were frequently thought to be very jealous.

I am concerned to reject assertions like those of Arthur Kroker that the new media (cyberspace and virtual reality) will lead us into a better future – a future that will undo all the devastations of the centuries since the Enlightenment have wreaked on us, a future that will be heaven-on-earth. One hysterical comment from Kroker, formulated on the model of neo-Platonic philosophers Robert Grosseteste's metaphysical light proposes "So begins our violent descent into the electronic cage of virtual reality. Down we go into the floating world of liquid media where the body is daily downloaded into the floating world of the net, where data is the real, and where high technology can fulfill its destiny of an out-of-body experience." Gibson opines that soon we be shuffled off into "bodiless exultation." And Microsoft asks "*Where do you want to go today?*" as we sit in front of the screen of our monitor. Eric Voegelin, in his *The New Science of Politics* identifies the historical shift that generated these hysterical, and body-despising, comments: in the 13th Century, Joachim of Flora (or Fiore) broke with the Augustinian notion of a de-divinized "Civitas Dei" by resurrecting the Gnostic notion of heaven-on-earth. Joachim was nominally a Cisterian monk in Calabria but actually a Gnostic. One of Joachim's contribution to the history of millenarianism was the notion that history should be divided into three periods that correspond to the three persons of the Trinity. The Second Age of the Son was coming to a close, Joachim professed, and the glorious Third Age of the Spirit was about to dawn.

Later Utopian movements adopted this formula for dividing history into three periods. Ivan IV forced Constantinople to recognize Moscow as the Third Rome in 1589 – an early painting of the Theosophist/Gnostic painter Wassily Kandinsky in fact depicted the dream that Moscow would be the Third Rome. The historical fantasy that was the Third Reich incorporated possessed the same mythological structure. The later example, especially, imposes on new media thinkers who adopt the gnostic metaphysics – and they are many – the responsibility of considering with whom else (besides the Urantians, Tim Learyian reprogrammers, and other extravagant cult-adherents who have played a role in formulating the received "metaphysics of digital reality") they are associating themselves

According to one prevalent conception of the metaphysics of digital reality, the convergence of the media (of text, image, moving image, and sound, all "interactively" available) promises to unite non-corporeal information and non-corporeal individuals in the same electronic medium, in which everything and everybody are co-extensive. This total co-extensivity is the basis for the "total awareness" my new media students keep telling me is dawning (or rather, I understand, their classes inform them is dawning). This idea of the non-corporeal self, of the self that is identical with information, is a modern version of the soteriological dream of transcendence through the emptying out of the self. The appeal that the idea of dematerialization has to new media theorists is that it supposedly exposes that nothing possesses an internal principle that accounts for its growth – that the self, to take it as an instance, is wholly and completely malleable, and can – and is – constantly made and remade

by changes in the conditions of the system of representation that shape it. The Gnosticism of this conception is evident: our world is a wrong world not only because it is a bad world, but also because it offers the illusion of corporeality (that things have an nature by virtue of their constitution). According to the soteriological principles of these new media theorists, why it is so important to see through the illusion of the self – why it is so important to understand that we possess no internal principle but are subject to endless remaking – is that the new non-corporeal world can come under our complete control, because we know how we made it and how to reproduce it. In the end, we would act as a new Creator – this is the dream that fuels those who proclaim that the new media offer unlimited creative freedom, that we might usurp the place of the Divine. We are unshackled from all moral limitations of our world as it is, and nothing outside of us limits our capacity to impose on the world.

The great Canadian philosopher George Grant critiqued this very position in such stunning books as *Technology and Empire* and *Technology and Justice*. Grant showed that the belief that the Good is not inherent in the order of nature underpins that belief, essential to the regime of technique in which we exist and through which we conceive the world, that humans are free to remake the world. Grant pointed out the notion of technique is central to modern civilization – so much so that the progress of techniques has now become the horizon for those who seek to understand the Good. Moderns have lost the ability to understand the standards of goodness by which particular techniques may be judged. The conviction that human knowledge has the purpose of mastering human and non-human nature is central to moderns' ideas about the nature of human being. The idea that new media theorists expound, that human being possesses no inherent nature has the purpose of justifying the proposition that humans can be made and remade at will – that nothing in the nature of human being limits society's/ideology's/ the artist's freedom to refashion them. And that conception, in its turn, belongs to a discourse on value and freedom that is associated with the will to technique – indeed it is part and parcel of the modern belief that nature, since it is objectively devoid of value, can be remade at will.

What more than anything impresses me about what the propositions issued as the metaphysics of digital reality is their tendency towards imperial aggrandizement. The consequence of this, I fear, may well be tyranny. I mean “tyranny” here in the Straussian sense, as it arose within a remarkable exchange between Leo Strauss, the renown conservative political philosopher, and Alexandre Kojève, France's great interpreter of Hegel. A key topic of the debate was Kojève's affirmation that “that the universal and homogeneous state is the best social order, and that mankind advances to the establishment of such an order.” Kojève pointed out that the final stage of civilization, the establishment of the universal and homogeneous state, comes into being as the secularization of the political ideal of the Christian community, which proposed that all humans could transcend their given differences through their faith, and be made one in the body of Christ's church – I hope everyone noted that this claim resonates in the beliefs of the new media communitarians. Behind this lies the assumption (not unlike that of soteriological assumptions that undergird the metaphysics of digital media), that thought (and specifically, for the ancients, philosophy) takes its bearings not from an ahistorical eternal order, but from eternity as the totality of all historical epochs (the sum of all knowledge that our new hypertextual “koran” represents).

Strauss argued, against Kojève, that the goal of Hegel's state, universal happiness, is unachievable – and what is worse, that it will end in tyranny. I don't find myself in agreement with much in Strauss's political outlook, but on this matter I think he absolutely right – his thesis turned out, in fact, to be prophetic. Strauss' argument was founded in the classical belief that humans find their fulfilment in that thinking which leads to wisdom – a premise the Hegel had rejected for the premise that humans find adequate fulfilment in that form of recognition that is available to all. Hegel's gambit, Strauss argued, had effectively lowered the goal of political

action, for his idea of universal recognition as the basis of community and state cannot recognize the inevitable differences among humans, and conceives of communities as nexûs of undifferentiated humans. When we must all be the same, no person will be a true thinker. Philosophy will disappear in such state, through the wedding of technology and ideology (a process that probably is now too far advanced to be reversed). The ideas of a totalization of truth and of total awareness (acquired through the complete co-extensivity of the decorporealized mind and the decorporealized text) that cyberspace promises will surely eventuate in tyranny.

It is time to put away this myth of decorporealization, of the totalization of knowledge that will bring history to end. Because it is grounded in the myth of total identity, total transparency, the prevalent metaphysics of digital reality neglects the actual condition of knowledge: it arises from the Gnostic belief in the possibility of immanentizing of the *eschaton*, a belief that goes hand in hand with the idea that the future can be foreseen and planned. The prevalent metaphysics of digital reality is simply the “dream world” of Gnostic lore, where the structure of reality is disregarded, the facts ignored, and the openness of history replaced by a revolutionary step into the New Age. To replace this myth, may I suggest that we return to where all true understanding starts – with the real body, not the amalgam of metal and flesh that is the cyborg nor the data body of Kroker’s Gnostic dream, but the real body of flesh.

Attunement to the rhythm of what unfolds beyond us – a rhythm that is flexible and ever changing, has the strength to release us from the tyranny of an abstract, rationalized temporality. Awareness of rhythm, because rhythm is experienced corporeally, also undoes the effects of the rationalization of space into a wholly abstract form. Contemporary virtual existence has rendered space wholly abstract. The etiology of that form of space can be readily charted, beginning with the geometric optics of the Renaissance. The development of geometric optics and camera obscura led to the rationalization of vision around an axis consisting of the fiction of a single, fixed vantage point outside the depicted scene, at a place established by the vertex of a pyramid, whose base is the surface of the painting and the slope of whose sides is arbitrary. Thus, the body was removed from the scene of vision. But in the nineteenth century representation took on a different character: the space of a drawing, especially those drawings whose primary purpose is to provide information about reality, came to be understood as a Cartesian plane, and the relations between elements in the drawing were to be determined not through appearance, as projective geometry had attempted to do, but rather through measurements, which were then transposed orthogonally to the drawing surface. If the body had been excluded in the system of Renaissance perspective, the subject was excluded in the representational regime that developed in the nineteenth century. When the subject is given no place, the drawing surface itself becomes utopian. That utopic space is the predecessor of the utopia of cyber-nonreality – a non-place where “there is no there there,” and, above all, no place for the body. Paul Virilio points out that cyberspace constitutes a new space without the usual space-time coordinates; as a result, cyberspace engenders a disorienting and disembodied form of experience in which communication and interaction takes place instantaneously in a new global time, overcoming boundaries of time and space. It is a disembodied space without fixed coordinates, a space in which one loses connection with one’s body, with nature, and with one’s community. It is a dematerialized and abstract realm in which cybernauts can become lost in space and divorced from their bodies and social world. To counter the abstraction of space and time, we insist on working methods that, in their intensity, leave the trace of the body all over them.

