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Contraint, Excess, and Flesh

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A work of art exists simultaneously as 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 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, 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 take on a material dynamism.

Nonetheless we do not assess a work of art by its gestalt form. That seems to me an old conception of art. One that 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 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. Secondly, through its regulative function, form serves to direct attention towards this play of tension, to focus thought and 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. It operates to channel our attention in such a way that the violence of the primordial domain can operate upon our consciousness. Form 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 the dynamic that creates and resolves tension is to discuss the work's material construction). That, after all, is what we mean when we say the 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 that 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 require darkness? Because what blends language and matter together in perception is itself never perceived — for, that element, in being apprehended, changes (that is, 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. 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.

Let us following Merleau-Ponty and 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." Thus "flesh" here will refer to the same element as "*kh[?]ra*" 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; "*kh[?]ra*" 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. The antecedent to being represented in 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 ????? 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 one has, by putting the fingers of one’s right hand on one’s left, “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 — the 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 be-ing and that of objects arise mutually there from. We come to the realization that the relation between our be-ing and 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 of 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 also 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 the 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. 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, while 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 of scientific semiology). Flesh subjects the sign to passion, and passion makes every perception an interpretation. Flesh imprints itself on all that we perceive, 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 informs 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, summons beings to be-ing, and gives them membership in the world. Beings come into being through $\square \square \square \square \square$, 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, like a Möbius strip), 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 visible turning 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.

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, so then beauty is allied with death, 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.

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 as “*kh[?]ra*” (and following Martin Heidegger, I 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. *Kh[?]ra* (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 “*kh[?]ra*” 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. Of *kh[?]ra* Heidegger writes, “Might *kh[?]ra* 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, *kh[?]ric* darkness reconciles what light has sundered. *Kh[?]ric* 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. 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 actuality (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 kh[?]ric 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 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 it is not possible to move from the symbolic toward the semiotic kh[?]ra, 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 apophrisis 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.

The Personalist film theorist, André Bazin insisted that the cinema reflects the

fundamental configuration among things, the inscription that the [?][?][?][?][?] made.

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

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

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

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

Naming beings summonses 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 [?][?][?][?][?] inscribed at the time of the creation. So Benjamin concludes from considering the difference between human language and the language of things:

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

Aesthetic objects help us to understand a peculiarity in this discourse of things. Through aesthetic experience we have come to understand that art objects often concern the medium in which they are realized and the process of their coming-to-be. But the discourse of things has similar intentions: the [?] [?] [?] [?] [?] creates the world, and its icons; the objects of the world, speak of the [?] [?] [?] [?] [?]. Thus language of things speaks of the [?] [?] [?] [?] [?]. Or, to put it otherwise, the language of objects speaks of the word, of language itself. That language speaks of language itself is another ontological revelation the aesthetic experience vouchsafes to us.

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

Of a photograph, we cannot say whether it was a person, the photographer who made it, or whether it is a product of nature, that a photograph is at once a product of mind and product of nature. This idea overlaps with Benjamin's notion of "linguistic being of the lamp" or with Bergson's assimilation of matter to Image, with Spinoza's idea that thought and matter were simply modes of a common substance, or with Hegel's dialectical integration of form and matter, Idea and substance, Mind and Nature. For what is at issue is the idea that there is a discourse of things. That there is a discourse of things is what founds photography and cinematography.

The cinema we see on the screen only replicates the cinema that unfolds in nature. If

this proposition strikes you as extravagant, recall that Bergson argued that matter itself is an image. For matter is fundamentally a mode of appearing, as Bergson pointed out: “the object exists in itself, and . . . The object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: image it is, but a self-existing image. . . . [M]atter exists just as it is perceived, and since it is perceived as a image, the mind would make of it, in itself, an image.” Furthermore, Bergson affirmed that matter and image are continuous with human perception, but distinct from it, for human perception is a limitation of the more general, indeed, infinite form that is an image, that Bergson calls a “present Image.”

The present Image constitutes an objective reality,

defined by the necessity which obliges it [the present Image] to act through every one of its points upon all the points of all other images, to transmit the whole of what it receives, to oppose to every action an equal and contrary reaction, to be in short, merely a road by which pass in every direction, the modifications propagated throughout the immensity of the universe.

Thus Bergson proposed, “*I call matter the aggregate of images, and perception of matter these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body.*”

We have one clear example of a domain in which material activities result in (or are accompanied by) images: the neuronal activity that results in “mental images.” Why should we be reluctant to grant that other physical activities might be accompanied by images, or even that all other physical activities might be images, at least in one of their aspects? We should be reluctant to grant that the relation between matter and image might be analogous to the relationship between the modes in Spinoza’s philosophy. (On this analogy, one might remark that Spinoza considered the modes to be like infinite surfaces, and that there are an infinite number of these surfaces, though we know only two of them. One might also recall that Spinoza’s idea of *conatus*, the striving that sustains beings, has more than passing similarities with what I have loosely termed “*energeia*” or be-ing, which denotes a first actuality behind any disclosure, any unveiling, any truth (*aletheia*). But perhaps finding such Spinozistic elements in Bergson should not be surprising, for as Deleuze has done much to show, there is some common ground that Spinoza and Bergson share.)

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

The existence of language, however, is not only coextensive with all the areas of human mental expression in which language is always in one sense or another inherent, but with absolutely everything. There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of all to communicate their mental meanings. This use of the word “language” is in no way metaphorical. For to think that we cannot imagine anything that does not communicate its mental nature in its expression [I hope a few of you have just thought of Spinoza’s idea of *conatus*] is entirely meaningful; the greater or lesser degree of consciousness that is apparently (or really) involved in such communication cannot alter the fact that we cannot imagine a total absence of language in anything. [What we are implored to do at the beginning of Brakhage’s *Metaphors on Vision* I believe to be simply impossible.] An existence entirely without relationship to language is an idea; but this idea can bear no fruit even within that realm of Ideas whose circumference defines the idea of God.

Or, in a similar vein:

Language communicates the linguistic being of things. The clearest manifestation of this being, however, is language itself. The answer to the question, “*What* does language communicate?” is therefore “All language communicates itself” [another revelation that asserts itself with greatest force in the realm of aesthetics]. The language of this lamp, for example, does not communicate the lamp (for the mental being of the lamp, insofar as it is *communicable*, is by no means the lamp itself), but: the language-lamp, the lamp in communication, the lamp in expression. For in language the situation is this: *the linguistic being of all things is their language.*

But Bergson anticipated Benjamin in presenting a conception of reality on which all things are through their participation in language. In fact, Bergson’s ideas on this topic are even more germane to our purposes, for Bergson presented a philosophy which depicts matter as Image, and defines the universe as the entire aggregate of images acting and reacting to one another on all their surfaces, and in all their parts. If this sounds a little like the metaphysics of Open Form poetry, and if one bears in mind that Olson and other Open Form poets found their ideal metaphysician in Alfred North Whitehead, one can glimpse a truth that Whitehead insisted on, but which most have dismissed without consideration — that Bergson was one of Whitehead’s antecedents. This cosmology, however, is further evidence that aesthetics is the best ground for ontology.

I insist again, the purpose of cinematography is to record — or better, to translate — this discourse. That is why I will not forsake “picture.” Brakhage describes a “picture” as a set (he generally uses the word “collection”) of namable forms, and he decries the effect that thinking of form through language exerts upon our perception of it. In *Composite Nature*, a record of a series of interviews Brakhage did with the painter Philip Taaffe, Brakhage adds the condition, that this collection of namable things is “framed,” explaining that he intends a pun, that the collection is “biased” (p. 77): the names evoked by recognizable images prejudice our perception (as an accused might be “framed” due to prejudice), causing us to ignore crucial, biological features present in all our mental images (but which we ordinarily overlook). I agree. Nonetheless, I argue two points against his claims. The first is that it doesn’t go far enough. I believe that Brakhage’s discussion of the biological is highly metaphoric, and ultimately what he means by using that metaphoric vehicle is that which disrupts gestalt form (he often uses the metaphor of the geometric), that which liquefies forms (he expounds upon cinema’s dynamism), dismembers good form, and opposes stability. I believe that the biological metaphor serves to hide the violence of the primordial — a violence with which, to be sure, he is well acquainted, for he has stated his fears about the psychological toll exacted by working with such intimacy with the primordial. The biological metaphor hides this violence by forming the idea of something substantial, something real, something that could be measured through scientific instruments, to conceal the void, the emptiness, the nothingness out of which the world (in the Heideggerian sense) emerges. Second, with Benjamin, I maintain that evoking the name of thing invites a creative response that extends the work of creation. Human be-ing, as the namer, allows pure language to speak. Cinematography is just such an extension: the pictures that cinematography presents allow the pure language of things to re-address themselves to human be-ing. The discourse which things address to human be-ing resonates when they are translated to the screen, and by that resonance the cinema can provoke a sensation of the inner being of things. Thereby is God’s creation completed. This, I believe is the inner meaning of André Bazin’s profound statement, “All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives

an advantage from his absence. Photography affects us like a phenomenon of nature, like a flower or snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty.” It is Bazin’s understanding that the discourse of cinema takes up the mission of making the discourse of things audible again, which makes him such a crucial thinker on cinema.

Or again, Bergson offered: “*Wherever anything lives, there is, open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed.*” This register is what I just referred to as the cinema in nature, which the cinema we see on the screen duplicates. The image in the cinema is not a form cut in space, as Brakhage would have it. Rather, it is fundamentally a matrix of temporal relations, relations that are never visible in the object itself — that is why, as Bazin says, photography, or especially cinematography, offers “the natural image of the world that we neither know nor can see.” By blocking them together, the image makes these temporal relations felt. But time is intimate with the Open, out of which beings emerge. Thus the image helps make the Open palpable, even though it does not present it. To use Deleuze’s language, space is domain of sets, of structured forms, of what I call “world”; but time is the domain of the whole, of what I call “earth.” The world is composed of definite things, and resists change, while earth (the whole, duration) is constantly changing. Its capacity to convey change and transformation gives the cinema a relation to the primordial, though many try to deny it, by imposing “good form” on the cinema and arresting change. Change — transformation — is the most fundamental effect of the cinema. I propose that this change be liberated, released from the regulatory controls of narrative and good form, for doing so will enable the screened cinema to more closely approximate the cinema of things.

The exultation of human be-ing is the discovery that human be-ing completes the work of creation by enabling what is mute, or what became mute through the Fall (in which God’s word curses the ground), to speak. For as Benjamin stated, muteness is “the deep sadness of nature.” “It is a metaphysical truth,” Benjamin told us,

that all nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language... .
Speechlessness: that is the great sorrow of nature (and for the sake of her redemption the life and language of *man* — not only, as is supposed, of the poet — are in nature)... .
Lament, however, is the most undifferentiated, impotent expression of language; it contains scarcely more than the sensuous breath; and even where there is only a rustling of plants, in it there is always a lament. Because she is mute, she mourns.

Cinematography helps human be-ing complete this work for the sake of which human be-ing is in nature. Nature finds consolation for lamentation in cinematography, and by reason of this consolation, it exalts. 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 [?] [?] [?] [?] [?]’ inscription, and makes her glorify Him. To glorify the Creator is the reason of all exaltation.

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, it should 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, at the same time, the “unseen” but visible gestalt form enters into human be-ing, so too does an unseen and, indeed, invisible principle. It is an activity, an

energeia 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. These, more often than they straightforwardly reveal, reveal only by concealing. (This, for those who might have been wondering, indicates the arena of Freud's influence. Likewise my interest in a principle that makes itself evident not in the mode of appearance, but by disordering and disrupting structure.) So it is with images, or what Stan Brakhage calls "pictures." They are, as Brakhage claims, regulated by the economy of language; but that regulation is inevitable anyway, for the world as it comes forth in consciousness, and indeed thought itself, is always already articulated, already structured by terms of oppositions. That is inevitable and explains the "correspondence" between thought and the world. It also explains why, as Adorno pointed, every unified work of art is a "pseudomorphosis" of verbal language.