

This paper was written for a conference that Dr. Linda Henderson organized on the Park Place Group at the Blanton Art Museum, University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

This paper addresses three separable, but related themes. The first part lays out some ideas concerning a strain in American art, especially American art of the 1960s, that was grounded in a metaphysical position that the aesthetician and musicologist Leonard B. Mayer called “transcendental particularism.” Many American artists of the 1960s associated their interest in direct perception with the belief that language imposes the deadening weight of tradition on experience, and only the raw, unformed experience of the natural body has an authentic relationship to the immediate conditions of living (*i.e.*, related to what, in William Carlos Williams’ sense of the word, is “local” and to its particular energies). Concern with direct perception also leads to the stress on the individual, autonomous existent – to the belief that only individual sensations are real. I show that, within the tradition of American art, this process metaphysics begins with the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (whose importance to the American avant-garde film of the 1960s P.Adams Sitney so ably demonstrates in *Eyes Upside Down*, 2008). In the second part of the paper, I outline the crisis in European epistemology to which this strain in American art and thought responded, in order to highlight its special attributes. In the final part of the paper I suggest the relations between this American conception of the role of art and the phenomenon of cinema and its key characteristics.

The Emersonian Tradition and the Relation of the American Interest in Particulars to the Conception of Energy

Most know that the composer John Cage took great interest in the New England Transcendentalists, and especially in Emerson and Thoreau. So it should not be surprising that he developed similar idea to theirs. In *Silence*, his famous statement of his aesthetic credo, he wrote

. . . [O]ne may give up the desire to control sound, clear his mind of music, and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments. . . . And what is the purpose of writing music? One is, of course, not dealing with purposes but dealing with sounds. Or the answer must take the form of paradox: a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play. This play, however, is an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.

Many artists have associated their interest in direct perception with the belief that language imposes the deadening weight of tradition on experience, and only the raw, unformed experience of the natural body has an authentic relationship to the immediate conditions of living (*i.e.*, related to what, in Williams’ sense of the word, is “local”). Concern with direct perception

also leads to the stress on the individual, autonomous existent and denial of the reality of relation – to the belief that only individual sensations are real, to the uncompromising positivism that Leonard B. Meyer, in his great, classic work, *Music, the Arts and Ideas*, called “radical empiricism” or “transcendental particularism.”

These ideas resonant through the American avant-garde film. The doctrine that “That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him. . . . Every great man is a unique. The Scipionism of Scipio is precisely that part he could not borrow” is precisely the ground of the individualist tone of Stan Brakhage’s artistic credo. Brakhage’s ideas on art and artmaking have their roots in the conviction that immediate experience is the ground of all truth and all value, and that constructing narrative relations between events depletes the experience of the concrete particular of intensity and, what is perhaps as bad, misrepresents the truth about reality. In this, Brakhage’s aesthetic theories are consistent with that cluster of beliefs that Meyer terms “transcendental particularism.”

Stanley Cavell’s brilliant exposition of the parallels between the philosophies of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Ludwig Wittgenstein brings the Emersonianism of the American film avant-garde comes into clear focus and sharpens our understanding of its profound significance. Wittgenstein’s *Philosophische Untersuchungen (Philosophical Investigations)* arises out of Wittgenstein’s feelings that the “deep disquietudes” reflected in philosophical thinking are the result of the attempt to extend ordinary language beyond its proper province. Cavell suggests that this disquietude is the result of violence done to the ordinary by refusing or forcing its everyday order.

Cavell’s analysis of the parallels between Emerson’s philosophy and that of Ludwig Wittgenstein even illuminates the core ideas of the American artist’s refusal to accord artistic form the status of a transcendent. Cavell asserts that for Emerson and Wittgenstein, the move away from the ordinary is not an ascent towards the heavens, but, rather, an act of violence – the impulse to refuse the ordinary is a form of violence towards the everyday. Emerson, especially, believed that the bond that ties humans to their immediate circumstance is organic. The implications of this view Emerson expounded in “Worship.”

And so I think that the last lesson of life, the choral song which rises from all elements and all angels, is a voluntary obedience, a necessitated freedom. Man is made of the same atoms as the world is, he shares the same impressions, predispositions and destiny. When his mind is illuminated, when his heart is kind, he throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and does, with knowledge, what the stones do by structure.

What motivates the propositions this passage offers is a neutral monist conception of reality on which everything, from stones to ideas and impressions, is composed of the same “stuff.” The usual reason for adopting neutral monism is that does away with the problem of dualism, which sees human consciousness as isolated from nature. Neutral monism, because it maintains that consciousness and matter are composed of the same “stuff,” offers a way of understanding how matter affects the mind and mind affects matter.

This is the grounds for Robert Duncan and Charles Olson’s ideas about composition. The theory of field composition proposes that artistic form is the result of the activity of the field (Emerson’s “world”) acting on the maker, who is thereby impelled to action, and those actions, in their turn, leave a trace in the field (the “world”) that originally impelled them. The shape of this trace we call “artistic form” (“the choral song which rises from all elements and all angels, is a voluntary obedience. . . . When [a person’s mind] is illuminated, when his heart is kind, he throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and does, with knowledge, what the stones do by

structure.”) The view was current among action painters in the 1940s and 1950s: the action painters open herself to a field of circumambient influences, and their effects would impinge on her, impelling her to act in her turn – to perform a particular gesture, and the gesture leaves a trace, in the paint stroked or dripped or poured on the canvas. The form in the paint reveals the actions of the painter, and the actions of the painter manifest the influence the field exerted her. At no point does this circuit of energy exchanges break with the world of matter/consciousness, to attain the status of a transcendental. A work of art imitates nature in the manner of its operation (as John Cage, following D.T. Suzuki, used to say), so its form never rises above nature.

The belief that all reality, mental and physical alike, is constituted by energy exchanges among basic “particles” (*cf.* Emerson’s “atoms”) is also associated with the view that the world is made up not of stable, enduring objects, but of events – these events are the “stuff” of reality. The most profound expositor of a metaphysics that views reality as made up of events is Alfred North Whitehead (from whom Duncan and Olson derived their ideas about “field composition,” but the view can be found in Emerson’s writing.

There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid. Our culture is the predominance of an idea which draws after it this train of cities and institutions. Let us rise into another idea; they will disappear. The Greek sculpture is all melted away, as if it had been statues of ice; here and there a solitary figure or fragment remaining, as we see flecks and scraps of snow left in cold dells and mountain clefts in June and July. For the genius that created it creates now somewhat else. The Greek letters last a little longer, but are already passing under the same sentence and tumbling into the inevitable pit which the creation of new thought opens for all that is old. The new continents are built out of the ruins of an old planet; the new races fed out of the decomposition of the foregoing. New arts destroy the old. See the investment of capital in aqueducts, made useless by hydraulics; fortifications, by gun-powder; roads and canals, by railways; sails, by steam; steam by electricity.

The reality of this process metaphysic provides Emerson with yet another justification for advocating close attention to the immediate particular, for in a world in which everything changes moment by moment, inherited knowledge (and, for that matter, memory), is of little use. The only tutor we can employ is the immediately present:

Life is a series of surprises. We do not guess to-day the mood, the pleasure, the power of to-morrow, when we are building up our being. Of lower states, of acts of routine and sense, we can tell somewhat; but the masterpieces of God, the total growths and universal movements of the soul, he hideth; they are incalculable. I can know that truth is divine and helpful; but how it shall help me I can have no guess, for *so to be* is the sole inlet of *so to know*. The new position of the advancing has all the powers of the old, yet has them all new. It carries in its bosom all the energies of the past, yet is itself an exhalation of the morning. I cast away in this new moment all my once hoarded knowledge, as vacant and vain. Now for the first time seem I to know any thing rightly.

From such a metaphysic, Emerson deduces a phenomenology that explains well the poetics of

abstract expressionism, with its emphasis on immediate experience, lived wholly in the vital, pulsing, present (and so, too helps us understand the films of Stan Brakhage):

. . . Life is a series of surprises, and would not be worth taking or keeping if it were not. God delights to isolate us every day, and hide from us the past and the future. We would look about us, but with grand politeness he draws down before us an impenetrable screen of purest sky, and another behind us of purest sky. 'You will not remember,' he seems to say, 'and you will not expect.' All good conversation, manners and actions come from a spontaneity which forgets usages and makes the moment great. Nature hates calculators; her methods are saltatory and impulsive. Man lives by pulses; our organic movements are such; and the chemical and ethereal agents are undulatory and alternate; and the mind goes antagonizing on, and never prospers but by fits.

Not only does Emerson here expound the value of living in the immediate present, without regard for past or future – the value of a mental state in which all experience is consolidated in the present, in the acts of perception and, perhaps, of apperception, free of any taint of retention or expectation – but he also connects that idea with spontaneity. A work of art imitates nature in the manner of its operation, and “nature hates calculation.” Accordingly, artworks must come into being through a similarly saltatory and impulsive manner.

Emerson's interest in spontaneity, and his belief that human creativity (and artmaking) imitates nature in the manner of its operation led Emerson to remark on the importance of chance.

The ancients, struck with this irreducibility of the elements of human life to calculation, exalted Chance into a divinity; but that is to stay too long at the spark, which glitters truly at one point, but the universe is warm with the latency of the same fire.

Emerson developed this idea along lines that the abstract expressionists (including Stan Brakhage) would also have found familiar:

. . . All writing comes by the grace of God, and all doing and having. I would gladly be moral and keep due metes and bounds, which I dearly love, and allow the most to the will of man; but I have set my heart on honesty in this chapter, and I can see nothing at last, in success or failure, than more or less of vital force supplied from the Eternal.

Emerson recognized that one of the most radical implications of his phenomenology of time consciousness: if in certain experiences, our attention is consolidated in a single moment, in which retention and expectation play no role whatsoever, then each moment is experienced as isolated, and time itself as discontinuous. Emerson accepted this as a phenomenological description of the intensified consciousness. He described how fascinating ideas grip us:

. . . When I converse with a profound mind, or if at any time being alone I have good thoughts, I do not at once arrive at satisfactions, as when, being thirsty, I drink water; or go to the fire, being cold; no! but I am at first apprised of my vicinity to a new and excellent region of life. By persisting to read or to think, this region gives further sign of itself, as it were in flashes of light, in sudden discoveries of its profound beauty and repose, as if the clouds that covered it

parted at intervals and showed the approaching traveller the inland mountains, with the tranquil eternal meadows spread at their base, whereon flocks graze and shepherds pipe and dance. But every insight from this realm of thought is felt as initial, and promises a sequel. I do not make it; I arrive there, and behold what was there already. I make! O no! I clap my hands in infantine joy and amazement before the first opening to me of this august magnificence, old with the love and homage of innumerable ages, young with the life of life, the sunbright Mecca of the desert. And what a future it opens! I feel a new heart beating with the love of the new beauty. I am ready to die out of nature and be born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the West.

Stan Brakhage and the abstract expressionists also proposed that the belief that ideas, and the forms of artworks, are discovered rather than invented by the thinker/artist and the belief that thinking is ecstatic (in the sense that it carries one outside oneself).

But that is not the most radical implication of this passage from Emerson's "Experience." For Emerson also describes the feeling that "every thought is initial, and promises a sequel." The phrase is oxymoronic: each moment cannot literally commit to having a sequel if each represents a new beginning. Temporal events cannot be, at once, continuous (in the sense that one event leads to another, its sequel, to which it loans its character) and discontinuous (each one "initial"). Of course, oxymoron can be an interesting literary device, insofar as it disrupts conventional thinking; but I don't think that Emerson really intended that we take the oxymoron as representing a deep truth about the irrational nature of temporal succession. It is more likely that he meant us to construe the passage as intending the feeling that each moment seems so replete as to be pregnant with the future; but that no successor emerges from the womb of the present; rather, the next moment erupts as though *ex nihilo* – as though by autogenesis, and lacking any forebears. It emerges as the next in "a series of surprises."

Emerson applied this idea to the self as well. Another virtue of Cavell's commentaries on Emerson is that he points out the most radical implication of Emerson's idea of the self is that the self is discontinuous. We are continuously arriving at a new self, and leaving behind the self that existed a moment before. This is not to say that the self is never fully realized. Quite the contrary: what Emerson implies (as Cavell points out) is that each state of the self is final, perfected. If it has no issue, it is because whatever is final, whatever is perfected, cannot produce a successor that would be anything but deficient when compared with itself. Emerson proposes similar views about the universe:

These appearances indicate the fact that the universe is represented in every one of its particles. Every thing in nature contains all the powers of nature. . . . Each new form repeats not only the main character of the type, but part for part all the details, all the aims, furtherances, hindrances, energies and whole system of every other. Every occupation, trade, art, transaction, is a compend of the world and a correlative of every other. Each one is an entire emblem of human life; of its good and ill, its trials, its enemies, its course and its end. And each one must somehow accommodate the whole man and recite all his destiny.

The self is flux, but always taken by surprise. With every new experience, the self that formerly was dies and another self is born. But the experience of each moment is complete and perfect in itself. Consider how well this passage from Emerson describes the sense of the continuously altering self which a Brakhage film elicits, or that we have we follow the conflicts

and variations within a skein of paint in a Pollock canvas. Brakhage, to be sure, claims to have developed such views by reading the writings of Gertrude Stein, and no doubt he reports his own apprenticeship accurately. Nonetheless, we can discern the roots of Stein's practices in Emerson.

The American Interest in Particulars as a Reaction to a Crisis in European Epistemology

The origins of photography and film lay in a crisis in perception that became forcefully evident in the early years of the nineteenth century and became ever more troublesome across that century. Change accelerated and the truism that the world is flux impressed itself more forcefully on consciousness. What is more, it became ever more clear that the senses were incapable of apprehending all details of flux. The evidence of the crisis in perception is plentiful: but one cogent piece is the celebration of the camera as a prosthesis for vision – the writings of early film theorists, Jean Epstein, Béla Balázs, and especially, Dziga Vertov all offer arguments that the camera enhanced the power of human vision. Indeed all lapse into anthropomorphizing, for they argue not only that camera can enable humans to see better, but that the camera itself sees better. (The disparagement of the human visual apparatus implied by that position is a symptom of the syndrome thinkers saw plaguing vision.)

By the nineteenth century, the divorce between the world as the senses represent it and the reality that science describes was nearly complete (and the prestige that science had acquired had the effect of encouraging people to take the scientific description of reality as reality itself): science, as Alfred North Whitehead pointed out in *Adventures of Ideas*, describes reality as colourless, odourless, tasteless – as pure energy in state of continual flux; the senses, on the contrary, report a sensuously variegated world, populated by solid objects that undergo only gradual change. Science taught the nineteenth century that physical reality is altogether different from our experience of it; the sensory qualities of our everyday perception do not exist “out there” in the world – they are, rather, the product of human perception.

Thus, near the beginning of the twentieth century, the scientist and philosopher Ernst Mach (1838-1916), in a lecture entitled “Space and Geometry,” proposed the distinction between geometrical space and physiological space. Euclidean space (*i.e.*, geometrical space) is “everywhere and in all directions constituted alike; it is unbounded and infinite in extent.” In sum, it is abstract space – as abstract as the qualities of nineteenth century science. The space of our visual experience (*i.e.*, physiological space) “is found to be neither constituted everywhere and in all directions alike, nor infinite in extent, nor unbounded.” Mach goes on to say that “[p]hysiological space, thus, has but few qualities in common with geometric space.”

The claim lays the Renaissance idea of space to ruin: the Renaissance artist (who, often, was actually an artist-scientist) strived to unify geometric space and the space of human perception – indeed the effect of the perspectivalism of Renaissance was to impose Euclidean space as the space of experience. With the rise of perspectivalism, space became an abstract notion – but not space alone. Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-94), an intellectual giant of the late nineteenth century, gave scientific validity to a point that David Hume had made centuries before, for he showed that all features of our perception reveal more about the character of the sensory mechanism than they do about the external world: heat and light physically are similar: they are vibrations in the aether; only the nerves that mediate sensation determine that the vibration is experienced as light, or as warmth, or as a pitch. Light becomes light only when it meets the eye. The sensation that we experience is no more than a “sign” of the external factors that affect our perceptual apparatus, but it is not an image (*Abbild*) of the ultimate, external

cause – it does not possess a “sameness” (“*Gleichheit*”) with the object to which it refers. The effect of such assertions – and they constitute an important theme of late nineteenth century thinking – was to drive a wedge between sensation itself and the objects to which the sensation refers. The artistic response to this was twofold: some strived to reintegrate sensation and external reality – and one means of attempting this was to invent a device that would give us an objective image of perception (that is, the camera). Others despaired of putting that sensation and objective would put back together, and argued that art should not try to give us any picture of the world as it is – we should simply accept the necessity to detaching painting from objective reality.

If nineteenth century art, through the Romantics, with their interest in landscape, and the Impressionists, with their interest in the contingencies of the urban scenes and, especially, with the fleeting effects of light and air, displayed an increasing interest in what is accidental, what is fleeting and what belongs to mundane realm of matter, it was in part because people’s grasp of the everyday appeared ever more insecure. As our grasp of the contents of the mundane, material world appeared ever more insecure, the standards of art change to accommodate the fleeting, the contingent, the quotidian. Previously the role of art was understood as the elevation of the human mind to the contemplation of the higher, *i.e.*, spiritual, things (the transcendent status of traditional painting’s subject was often indicated by the use of idealizing devices). Nineteenth century art eschewed idealizing constructions and transcendent subject matter (and subject matter that was so remote in time that it seemed to belong to another realm) and made way for material reality.

The Frankfurt School philosopher and cultural theorist, Siegfried Kracauer, pointed out that science eliminates the concrete particular and substitutes for it the generalized, mathematized objects the regularities of whose relations to one another scientific laws describe:

The truly decisive reason for the elusiveness of physical reality is the habit of abstract thinking we have acquired under the reign of science and technology. No sooner do we emancipate ourselves from the “ancient beliefs” than we are led to eliminate the qualities of things [i.e., things’ colour, odour, taste]. So the things continue to recede. And, assuredly, they are all the more elusive since we usually cannot help setting them in the perspective of conventional views and purposes which point beyond their self-contained being. Hence, were it not for the intervention of the film camera, it would cost us an enormous effort to surmount the barriers which separate us from our everyday surroundings.

Film renders visible what we did not, or perhaps even could not, see before its advent. It effectively assists us in discovering the material world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera. And we are free to experience it because we are fragmented. The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality. Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life.

The use of perspective, as we have noted, was conceived as a means for re-uniting the worlds of science and perception. Its effect was not that, however. In fact, perspective played a key role in the aetiology of this crisis. The development of perspective marks the beginning of the end for participatory modes of consciousness (that form the basis of Aquinas’ epistemology, for example), modes of consciousness in which the subject and object of experience are not utterly separate, in which the object absorbs the subject even as the subject assimilates the

objects. The development of the perspectival system of representation was one of a coordinated ensemble of factors that put an end to a world-view that presumed that participatory modes of consciousness were veridical. The development of perspective marks the withdrawal of the subject from its absorption in the object, as the implied spectatorial position is lifted out of the represented space. The suppression of these absorptive modes results in a de-eroticisation of the objects of perception (the very contrary of that “lust of the eyes” for which St. Augustine chastises himself).

Along with the spectator’s withdrawal from the painting’s represented space is the diminution of what Norman Bryson, in *Word and Image*, calls the “discursive function” of painting and the increase in its “figural function.” Painting had traditionally depicted *istoria*, ennobling stories that purportedly were intended to edify those for whom written tales were inaccessible. The rationalization of space that occurred with the development of perspective, which created a geometrically isotropic, rectilinear, abstract, uniform space, increasingly turned painters’ interests towards the rendering of objects within space – to an abstract, quantitatively conceived space and to arranging objects within that space. The historical, religious or allegorical import the objects carried became proportionately less important.

We can, in fact, be more precise about the history of this increase in the importance of painting’s figurative dimension. The painters of the Italian Renaissance, who developed linear perspective continued to use painting to tell stories: Leone Battista Alberti’s *De Pictura* (*On Painting*, 1436), and other writings of the pre-eminent theorist at the time when linear perspective was developed, extolled the moral value of *istoria*. In *De Pictura* (or *Della Pittura*, for Alberti first wrote the book in Latin, then translated it into the Tuscan vernacular, which he championed in its contest with Latin as a language of letters), Alberti not only applied Euclidean geometry to painters’ methods for producing perspective: he also argued that portraits make the absent present and bring the dead back to life; that a portrait of a living person in a painting draws all eyes to it; that a painting is like a transparent veil drawn through the rays going from the eye to the object; that corpses should look dead right down to their fingertips; that living bodies should display hair and limbs in movement and drapery blowing in the wind; and that bodily motions give evidence of motions of the mind. Alberti suggested that a great painting should be well-composed and populated with no more people than one would invite to a dinner party, all of whom would be arranged in dramatic action. Though the artists of the Italian renaissance attached greater value to the accurate (that is, accurate according to principles of geometric optics) presentation of mundane reality than previous artists had, it would be hyperbole to suggest that they broke completely with the allegorical and literary traditions that had been so important in previous eras; this was, after all, the era that proclaimed the principle “*ut pictura poesis*.”

Brunelleschi carried Alberti’s idea to their conclusion. A famous story illustrates the point: Brunelleschi drew an image of San Giovanni with great care, delicacy and precision. He then placed a burnished silver where the sky would be. Then he cut a hole the size of a lentil bean through the painting, and invited viewers to position themselves outdoors, in front of the church, and to peer through the hole – at a mirror held opposite the painting’s front. The image was astonishingly lifelike – the blue of the sky above, with its clouds, reflected in the painting’s silver trim (so nature herself painted a part of the painting). There was a trick, of course: the hole through which the viewer viewed the painting was at the painting’s “vanishing point.” By placing the viewer’s eye at this point, Brunelleschi’s could provoke a beguiling illusion.

Illusions are traditionally connected with conjuring, and conjuring is traditionally connected with alchemy. So Brunelleschi’s adversaries accused him of harbouring alchemical interests (which, of course, at the time would have been heretical) Giovanni di Gherardo da Prato challenged him to an exchange of insulting sonnets. Part of da Prato’s sonnet read “Oh

you deep fountain, pit of ignorance,/You miserable beast and imbecile. . . / There is no substance to your alchemy. . . /Surely you are mad..” Brunelleschi’s responded with a more elegant sonnet stressed the artists responsibility for inquiring into secrets: “For the wise men nothing that exists/ Remains unseen . . . / Only the artist, not the fool, /Discovers that which nature hides.

The unity of the Brunelleschi/Albertian picture has a relation with the “external observer” status of the painter/viewer who is situated at the apex of the perspectival viewing cone. It is as though the painter/viewer commands the appearance (both in the sense of its coming-to-evidence and of its ‘look’) of the world within the frame. As well as his writings on art, Leone Battista Alberti was also the author of several pieces on the fickleness of fortune and on meeting adversity and prosperity – but consider how Brunelleschi’s devise had exposed viewers to earthbound grasp of life’s processes and life forms, to life’s ambiguity and haphazard circumstance. The human became the measure of the all things – Alberti even pointed out that the ancient sage Protagoras had claimed as much; anticipating a claim that instituted the regime of the visual, Protagoras had claimed that perception is truth. So realism became more valuable than ever. Up to that time, painters had been concerned with creating a harmony of parts (a harmony that, admittedly, still possessed a measure of vitality). But things were changing. The stress is shown in Alberti’s social and ethical thought, which still recoiled from the awareness that chance plays such an important role in life, and his ethical writings therefore expound a morality founded on the value of work, duty and action. Despite the Stoic provenance of the literary forms that Alberti used to present his thoughts, his ethical writings present the very non-Stoic ideas that virtue arises not out of serene detachment but out of striving, labouring, producing. But Alberti’s ideas on such matters were typical of the Quattrocento – the ethic of achievement was commonplace in that era. Applied to the arts, the ethic of achievement resulted an assimilation of the creative role of the artist to that of the Creator; the deepest meaning of so-called “Renaissance humanism” was that humans arrogated to themselves what formerly had been the privilege of the Divine. Italian artists of the Renaissance commanded the world of the picture into presence, and assured its order. The way the scene appears is determined by and for the external, disembodied eye to which it is presented.

It was left to the Protestant painters of Northern Europe in the seventeenth century to break with the allegorical and literary traditions that had dominated earlier painting. It has been a commonplace of cultural theory since the time of Max Weber (and his book, *Protestantism and the Rise of Capitalism*) that Calvinism turned human’s attention towards the goods of this material world; material possessions were a mark of God’s bounty, and of an individual’s having been chosen by God to receive them. Northern European painters stressed description over narration; and that changed their painting. Their painting emphasizes the world of objects, and not the role of the spectator, in uncovering those objects and in revealing their truth. The object matter the painting depicts is conceived as having a higher degree of independence from the human spectator; and, certainly, the constitutive role of the subject is highlighted less than it was in Italian renaissance painting. A sign of the greater independence that Northern European painters of seventeenth century accorded their objects, and of the concomitant reduction of the constitutive role of the spectator, was that boundary of the painted space is more provisional in Northern European painting than it was in Southern Europe: no longer is the painting organised as series of resonances of the bounding form. There is no ontological distinction between the world within the frame and the world beyond the frame – the world inside the frame purports to be continued beyond the frame. The boundary-edge is not supposed to be a line of ontological rupture, dividing illusion and reality. Thus, the common analogy developed that presents a painting as a window on the world. So, for example, Dutch painting of the seventeenth century anticipated photography in many ways: in the provisional nature of the frame; in the concomitant

belief that what appears within the frame is only a fragment of a world that continues beyond the frame; and in the desire to eclipse the constitutive role played by the subject, so that the representing object might come forth as a product of Nature, in the forming of which human being played no role.

However there is an historical irony in the way Northern European painting depicted the objects of nature. Northern European painting, we have noted, was associated with Protestant beliefs. Consider Troeltsch's commentary on Calvinism, one of Protestantism's most rigorous forms.

Calvinism, with its abolition of the absolute goodness and rationality of the Divine nature, with its disintegration of the Divine activity into mere separate will-acts, connected by no inner necessity and no metaphysical unity of substance, essentially tends to the emphasising of the individual and empirical, the renunciation of the conceptions of absolute causality and unity, the practically free and utilitarian individual judgment of all things. The influence of this spirit is quite unmistakably the most important cause of the empirical and positivist tendencies of the Anglo-Saxon spirit, which to-day find themselves in it as compatible with strong religious feeling, ethical discipline, and keen intellectuality as they formerly did in Calvinism itself.

The painters of the Italian renaissance equated the rationalized, harmonious space of the created world, the stasis the painter created, with the changeless realm the Divine brings forth; identified the distanced vantage point, whose gaze stills the flux of phenomena, with the eye of Divine; and identified the enduring quality of the representation with the eternal moment of presence disclosed to that eye. Representation, in short, was based in a world-view consistent with that synthesis of the Classical and Christian thought that St. Thomas Aquinas had produced. But that world-view is not the world-view of Protestantism: the Protestant world-view, epitomized in Calvinism, does not commit to absolute goodness and rationality based in the Divine. The Divine is not some eternal order the nature of which the intellect can discern; rather, the Divine is an enduring principle that acts, but acts according to no inner necessity. With only a slight bit a parody, one could cast the change in conception from the Catholic to the Protestant view of God as the change from a God of reason to a God of will.

To believe there is no unity to the divine substance, to believe each of God's acts arise out of no inner necessary, but are arbitrary, and have no necessary connection one with the others, is to deny that objects of the mundane realm are grounded in the necessities of the Divine Being. It depletes of them of reality. It turns them into objects whose status is not unlike the phantasmagoric elements. This is surely why philosophers who have adopted the critical stance that Troeltsch's remark implied, and proposed that knowledge is based on the scrutiny of observable particulars, ended up taking the step that George Berkeley and David Hume took: of denying that we have any reason to suppose the existence of an external world. The acknowledgement of the constituent role of the subject, the discovery that the existence of the objects depicted in consciousness depends on the subject's vantage-point, and the recognition that possible vantage points proliferate, all cooperated in relativising objects, and so in their ephemerization.

Concomitant with the spectator's retraction from the painting's represented space is a reduction of painter's carnal involvement with the flesh of the painting: Northern European painting is remarkably illusionistic. This too contributed to ephemerizing the represented objects. When painters recognized the relation between their illusionistic techniques and the ephemerization of the world of objects, they were prompted to reaffirm their carnal involvement

in the act of painting, by foregrounding painting's rough texture and by emphasizing the brush stroke.

Another response to this recognition was to try to restore the legitimacy of the Renaissance perspectivalism, which the distinction between geometric space and physiological space had left in ruins. The means invented to reestablish this legitimacy were photography and cinematography, whose representations conform to the principles of geometric optics that undergirded Renaissance practices. These means of stressing the artist's involvement in the depicted scene might seem opposed to the emphasis on the painter's carnal involvement (through highlighting the painting's facture) – after all, photographically produced images have pretty nearly the qualities of precisionist art, the antithesis of art that foregrounds its making. The discrepancy is only apparent, however: the camera naturalizes the image seen by the “outside spectator” by reintegrating it into the order of nature.

The epistemology with which this ensemble of co-ordinated factors was associated (and likely had some role in producing) was representationalism. René Descartes is usually cast as the bogey-man of representationalism, responsible for exploding the providential order of creation and for bringing on most of maladies of modernity. But the artistic practices of Quattrocento painting (formed more than two hundred years before Descartes), founded in geometric optics, also played a major role in constituting the spectator as an outside observer; and those practices only gave expression to the new scientism that was already shaping European culture.

Even as the spectator was being consigned to the position of an “outside observer,” changes were occurring in the way that the people conceived of light. As Plato's philosophy (and even better, the philosophy of the neo-Platonist, Plotinus) highlight, classical philosophy understood light to represent a higher principle: Plato likened it to the Good, through which all things have their being, while Plotinus' emanationist metaphysic spoke of a primary light from which all existents arise. The status of light was downgraded in the modern era: the mathematician Christian Huygens (1629-1695), for example, published a treatise on light in 1690 which proposed that light is simply a form of energy – an undulation of material particles whose movements stimulate the optical nerves.

Michelangelo is said to have offered this assessment of sixteenth-century Flemish painting.

In Flanders they paint with a view to external exactness or such things as may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill. . . . They paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes, with many figures on this side and many figures on that. And all this, though it pleases some persons, is done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skilful choice or boldness and, finally, without substance or vigour.

To allow the picture's structure to succumb to the order of material reality was to forsake the higher reality of a work of art. Such paintings lack a ‘purpose’ – there is no principal motif to which all the elements of the painting are subordinated. Thus the ontological status of the art object becomes derivative, secondary to that of the material world. The Albertian principle of “*ut pictura poesis*” had been based on the notion of the legibility of painting – a legibility the condition of which was that every pictorial element be treated as a signifying element within a unified form; with the emergence Northern European painting in the fifteenth century, this order was brought into question.

Northern European painting accepted the priority of the material reality; it accepted that

the world rendered in the painting pre-exists the painting. Northern European painting represents a world in which there is no a priori hierarchy or apodictic ordering principle: the look of the painting is conformed to that of the world, for there is nothing higher for it to conform to. Northern European painting accorded primacy – both axiological and ontological – to the contingent world of matter; it is the represented world, in all its contingency, that truly matters. The spatial features of representation are indexically related to the spatial realities of the represented object matter. The way the scene appears is not determined by and for the external, disembodied eye to which it is presented, as it was in Italian painting of the Quattrocento; rather the scene absorbs the viewer into the world it represents. What is more, it represents the act of seeing as something that the subject is subjected to – something that occurs beyond one's control. The viewer is no longer primary. Photography and film extend the representational regime that Northern European painting inaugurated.

In a brilliant study of the origins of the photographic apparatus entitled *L'Oeil interminable: cinéma et peinture*, Jacques Aumont, developing remarks that Peter Galassi offered in his monumentally influential essay, "Before Photography" offers the view that photography

came into being as the incarnation of the mobility that the technologies of the nineteenth century had made available to people. An important feature of the regime of representation based on the mobile viewpoint was that, unlike *trompe l'oeil* painting that implicitly denied the presence of the spectator, it assumes the presence of the spectatorial gaze. Consider the many "panorama" films of the first decade of the century, films in which, because the pictorial elements over which the spectator has no control move past the spectator (as the viewer was transported through the scene): the viewer's position is determined by conditions beyond his or her control – that the status of the spectator has become secondary, determined by exigencies over which he or she has no control, is made evident by the spectator's being required to catch events as they roll past, and she or he cannot reframe them (or, through his or her desires, cause them to reappear). But the camera's moving through the scene contributes to the absorptive effects through which the interpellated spectator is incorporated into the space of the representation.

Aumont points out another implication of the new regime of representation is that the status of nature has undergone a change. We have already pointed out that Alberti's principle of "*ut pictura poesis*" was based on the notion of the legibility of painting – a legibility the condition of which was that every pictorial element be treated as a signifying element within a unified form. Northern European painting brought this principle into question, just as cultural paradigm was emerging that accorded axiological and ontological priority to matter, in all its contingency. Aumont points out that the art associated with the mobile vantage-point no longer attempts to read nature as a book – nature is no longer conceived of as a text. When the object cannot be read as a sign, there develops, as a result, a hunger to see the object itself – to observe it closely, despite its contingency.

The ideas of appearance as the ground of truth, of the importance of reaching down to that ground of truth, of seeing a thing for what it is in itself, apart from any imposition on it, and of the corporal involvement of the observing spectator in the observed scene are ideas that we associate with phenomenology. The inauguration of the mode of representation to which the advent of photography and film and the development of phenomenology testifies to a new involvement with things themselves. Phenomenology and film alike – and the new regime of representation (whose origination preceded both the coming-into-being of both phenomenology and the cinema) – convey the sense that existents are contingent, finite, ungrounded and without warrant for their existence. Reality has lost its compact and certain meaning. The belief in the panlogism of reality (a belief that stemmed from a conception of the role of the Logos in

bringing reality into existence), which undergirded the hierarchical ordering of the Albertian picture and assured its legibility, has been shattered. Associated with this, and reflected in the interest in the position the observer's body occupies in space, is the recognition of the contingency of the observer: all our experiences embody chance – not only that chance that resulted in our being at this particular place at this particular time, when just this event happened to be unfolding, but the chance that resulted in one's being assigned the particular body that one has. We did not come to be here, at this place, and in this time, through any free decision of our own; nor did we choose our particular constitution and way of being in the world. Our place, our time, our constitution was assigned to us, without our choosing.

When the meaningful totality has broken up, we derive our sense of a ground only through a resolute attention to the particularities of our immediate experience – its limits notwithstanding. This was one of the discoveries of the Cartesian philosophy, and it was an idea that phenomenology rediscovered. However contingent the circumambient world may be, however unmeaningful the totality, we can be certain of the immanent content of experience – in the fact of experiencing, and of our experience being what it is felt to be. However absurd our existence, we can take some consolation in the fact of experience. Thus Camus reported in *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*), that what he found so appealing in Husserl's thinking was that it renounced all totalistic explanatory principles and provided for describing the world in all its irregularity and diversity. "Thinking is learning all over again how to see, directing one's consciousness, making of every image a privileged place." Jean-Paul Sartre reports on the excitement he felt in being introduced to a method that allowed one to philosophize about everyday realities – about this cup, this spoon I use to stir its contents, this chair, my relation to this waiter who takes my order. So in 1930, Sartre travelled to Berlin to learn about the method. Later he would write about phenomenology: "[F]or centuries we have not felt in philosophy so realistic a current. The phenomenologists have plunged man back into the world; they have given full measure to man's agonies and sufferings, and also to his rebellions."

European art had long attempted to transcend reality, to escape into the realm of pure form. Reality seemed too contingent, too disorderly, to claim a place in the perfect aesthetic form. But by the nineteenth century, the contingency of reality had come to seem too extreme, and human's certainty about perceptual knowledge too questionable. Finding a ground became an important issue. And America was teaching the value of the everyday, the commonplace, the quotidian.

The Vortex of Cinema and its Peculiar Origins

I point out, first, that we can think of the medium of film as an ensemble of machines. The first component of this ensemble, and arguably both the most intricate and least considered, is a light-processing machine built of molecules—we know it as film emulsion; another is the machine whose material basis are the chemicals that alter the response of molecular machine that film emulsion constitutes—at one time, only film laboratories worked with film chemistry, but now, increasingly film artists have turned their attention to this part of the film machine. Other elements in this ensemble are: the camera apparatus—this component, it should be pointed out, is dispensable, for cameras are only sometimes used in making a film, and recently filmmakers in increasing numbers have chosen to make camera-less films; and, finally, the editing table, which encourages the filmmaker to process the molecular images that the chemical machines produce in rhythms analogous to other inventions of the machine-age.

Filmmakers who have thought about the machine ensemble that constitutes the medium of film have responded to it in a variety of ways. However, most of these responses fall neatly

into one of two major categories. Some filmmakers (Stan Brakhage is the exemplar here) see the machine as antagonistic to the filmmaker's efforts to embody his vision in dynamic, but nonetheless material, form and capable of thwarting, at every turn, the filmmaker's poetic aspirations. The unrivalled power of Stan Brakhage's filmworks, and the vigour of his written and oral expression, have made his ideas on poetics reasonably well-known.

By deliberately spitting on the lens or wrecking its focal intention, one can achieve the early stages of impressionism. One can make this prima donna heavy in performance of image movement by speeding up the motor, or one can break up movement, in a way that approaches a more direct inspiration of contemporary human eye perceptibility of movement, by slowing the motion while recording the image. One may hand hold the camera and inherit worlds of space. One may over-or under-expose the film. One may use the filters of the world, fog, downpours, unbalanced lights, neons with neurotic color temperatures, glass which was never designed for a camera, or even glass which was but which can be used against specifications, or one may photograph an hour after sunrise or an hour before sunset, those marvelous taboo hours when the film labs will guarantee nothing, or one may go into the night with a specified daylight film or vice versa. One may become the supreme trickster, with hatfuls of all the rabbits listed above breeding madly. One may, out of incredible courage, become Méliès that marvelous man who gave even the "art of film" its beginning in magic. Yet Méliès was not witch, witch doctor, priest, or even sorcerer. He was a 19th-century stage magician. His *films* are rabbits (from *Metaphors on Vision*).

On this view, only the most resolute and imaginative of makers, driven by the intensity of their vision, can prevent the machine from betraying their artistic drives.

The second sort of response views the machine as far less threatening. As a matter of fact, there are two major sub-varieties within this category, each animated by its own dramaturgical principle. The first of these subcategories relies on discerning those structures for which the machine-system has affinities and on using these structures in making films. That subcategory rests on the proposition that the self gets in the way of aesthetic experience, which has an impersonal character. Makers who take this view of the machine often devise machine/systems to generate their works: that is, they create conceptual machines to carry out the task of producing the work. Here the role of the machine/system is to release the art object (and so the spectator's response) from the vicissitudes of personal experience. By deploying the machine-system, the self is set aside—the machine itself carries out processes analogous to thinking and assumes the burden of form-making. Sometimes this principle is extended to the point of becoming transcendental, and when it does it becomes a dramaturgical principle concerning the self's need to empty itself. Then the machine-system assumes the role of the Transcendent through whose grace the little self is put aside, to allow the Beyond to enter the space the self evacuates. (It is remarkable how many artists who, because they embraced this view, have adopted the language of transcendence to explain the dynamics of aesthetic experience.)

A second subcategory also considers the relation of self and machine dramaturgically, but here that shape of the drama that unfolds between self and machine resembles that which unfolds in the famous Master-Slave passage in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Makers committed to this position tend to view the relation between self and other as the crucible in which the self is formed. Such makers often maintain that the self continually experiences

revelations about its character through the forms that the machine generates.

The Other that the machine represents is understood variously by different exponents of this position. One common view of this sort we can come to understand through the section in Karl Marx' *Grundrisse* titled, "Fragment über Maschinen ." There we encounter the concept of the "general intellect," which Marx took from the Master Thinker of his age, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. We know Marx reflected at length on the notions took from Hegel; we know, too, that, after much reflection, he modified them, usually by transforming them radically. Marx treated the general intellect no differently. His transformation of this concept followed the same general pattern as his transformation of other Hegelian notions: to what was ideal in Hegel he gave a material form. Marx maintained that the knowledge the general intellect possesses is incarnated in the machinery of productive labour, but also in the collective subjectivity that arises largely as a result of the machinery of the age. (If this idea seems extravagant insofar as pertains to the previous era, when heavy manufacturing was at the cutting of social transformation, consider how commonly we hear it said that at present consciousness is undergoing a transformation as a consequence of the new digital technology.)

This notion of an intelligence embodied in the machine suggests that the task of the maker charm his way into participating in the cinema's molecular intelligence. For this reason, it behoves us to be vastly more specific about this matter of a machine-embodied collective intelligence. That issue, one might be sure, lies right of the core of the processes that Carl Brown's films unleash.

There are many notions about how the individual creative mind participates in any form general intelligence, whether embodied in a machine or not—and some of these notions have a long and venerable history. That history can be brought to bear on the phenomenon of an individual intelligence participating in the intelligence embodied in the molecular machine that we know as film emulsion. We therefore must explore that history (however briefly).

So far as that topic bears on the cinema, no one has thought more deeply about the relation between the individual intelligence and the general intelligence than Hollis Frampton. Frampton drew his understanding about general intelligence, and specifically the general intelligence that is latent in film, from Ezra Pound. Frampton's ambition was to circumnavigate the sphere the knowledge, to exfoliate the axioms that underlie each different type of knowledge, so as to know its essential character. This was Frampton's way of achieving what the poet in Dante's *Commedia* achieved as he, on his journey, encountered the figures from the past and so came to keep company with the great intellects (and visionaries) of the past. That was what Pound, too, accomplished as he too, through his intellectual adventure, came to keep company with the greatest intellects of an esoteric tradition he strived to keep alive. Pound has been an especially rich source of ideas about the general intellect. Inquiring into sources of his ideas on the matter leave one staggered. Pound's interest in general intelligence derived partly from experiences of what psychologists generally call "retro-cognition," but common speech often refers to as "déjà vu." A peculiar book that was much read in England at the time when Pound's ideas on poetry were being set, recounted experience of retro-cognition.

In *An Adventure*, published in 1911, Anne Moberly (1846-1937), who served as Principal of St. Hugh's College, Oxford, from 1886-1915, and Eleanor Jourdain (1864-1924), who filled the same role at St. Hugh's from 1915-1924, recounted that on August 10, 1901, they were visiting the Palais de Versailles; they decided to go in search of the Petit Trianon and, strolling through the Versailles gardens, felt an oppressive gloom.

We walked briskly forward, talking as before, but from the moment we left the lane an extraordinary depression had come over me. . . In front of us was a wood, within which, and overshadowed by trees, was a light garden kiosk,

circular and like a small bandstand, by which a man was sitting. There was no greensward, but the ground was covered by rough grass and dead leaves as in a wood. The place was so shut that we could not see beyond it. Everything suddenly looked unnatural, therefore unpleasant; even the trees behind the building seemed to have become flat and lifeless, like a wood worked in a tapestry (Elizabeth Morison and Frances Lamont (pseudonyms for Ann Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain), *An Adventure*: 41).

A decade's research in the French National Archives led them to believe that they had been transported back almost a century and a quarter, that all that they saw that day took place not in 1901 but in 1789, that the "man" Moberly saw by the terrace was actually Marie Antoinette, and that they were actually telepathically experiencing Marie Antoinette's perception of the events of a day in that year, specifically, October 5, 1789. On that day Marie Antoinette was sitting outside the Petit Trianon when she first learned that a mob from Paris was marching towards the palace gates. Jourdain and Moberly decided that Marie Antoinette's memory of this terrifying moment must have somehow lingered and persisted through the years—perhaps maintained in its existence by the usual energy it possess, the index of which was the intensity of the original experience. It was into that memory that they had inadvertently stumbled. This explained the sensation of dark depression they had felt at the time.

An Adventure was published in London in 1911. It elicited enormous interest: by 1913 it had sold 11,000 copies. W. B. Yeats had an enormous enthusiasm for the work. This odd book became an important touchstone for Pound, too, as he was working out for himself the theme his friend, Thomas Stearnes Eliot would make central to his critical approach, of tradition and the individual talent. Pound understood this question as that of an artist's relation to the spirit of his ancestors. In *The Spirit of Romance* Pound drew on Plato's *Phaedrus* to frame the fundamental statement of his belief: "And this is the recollection of those things which our souls saw when in company with God—when looking down from above on that which we now call being, and upward toward the true being" (*Spirit of Romance*:140-1).

Pound claimed to have had two experiences with retro-cognition and he insisted on their importance to him. Pound recounted these experiences in his essay on Dolmetsch (1914): "So I had two sets of adventures. [Note the word!] First, I perceived a sound which was undoubtedly derived from the Gods, and then I found myself in a reconstructed century—in a century of music, back before Mozart or Purcell, listening to clear music, to tones clear as brown amber" (T. S. Eliot, ed., *Selected Essays of Ezra Pound*: 433). Of both experiences, Pound, like Jourdain and Moberly, believed that he had apprehended a memory (a field of energy) that had lingered—that had become eternal. He describes the first experience more expansively—indeed, his essay begins with a description of his first "adventure":

I have seen the God Pan and it was in this manner: I heard a bewildering and pervasive music moving from precision to precision within itself. Then I heard a different music, hollow and laughing. Then I looked up and saw two eyes like the eyes of a wood-creature peering at me over a brown tube of wood. Then someone said: Yes, once I was playing a fiddle in the forest and I walked into a wasps' nest. Comparing these things with what I can read of the Earliest and best authenticated appearances of Pan, I can but conclude that they relate to similar experiences. It is true that I found myself later in a room covered with pictures of what we now call ancient instruments, and that when I picked up the brown tube of wood I found that it had ivory rings upon it. And no proper reed has ivory rings on it, by nature. . . .

Our only measure of truth is, however, our own perception of truth. The undeniable tradition of metamorphoses teaches us that things do not remain always the same. They become other things by swift and unanalysable process (Eliot 431).

The belief that “our only measure of truth is our perception” grounds Pound’s interest in the dynamics of consciousness. For Pound, reality is not much more than a diaphanous film in which the mind creates/perceives forms. In the presence of beauty, it perceives the gods of a higher realm. These gods are no less real than the tables and books and wine-glasses and all the other objects that constitute the furniture of the everyday world.

Let’s believe it . . .
No, take it all for lies
I have but smelt this life, a whiff of it,
The box of scented wood
Recalls cathedrals. Shall I claim;
Confuse my own *phantastikon*,
Or say the filmy shell that circumscribes me
Contains the actual sun;
confuse the thing I see
With actual gods behind me?
Are they gods behind me?
How many worlds we have! If Botticelli
Brings her ashore on that great cockle-shell—
His Venus (Simonetta?),
And Spring and Aufidus fill the air
With their clear-outlined blossoms?
World enough.
(From an early draft of the first *Three Cantos*, published in *Poetry*, June 1917, 120-21)

Pound, then, believed that visionary experiences are the enduring memories of paradisiacal experiences earlier thinkers had had, presumably when they were in a state of ecstasy. Consider these passages from an early draft of the *Cantos*:

And the place is full of spirits.
Not *lemures*, not dark and shadowy ghosts,
But the ancient living, wood white,
Smooth as the inner bark, and firm of aspect,
And all agleam with colors—no, not agleam,
But colored like the lake and like the olive leaves
(*Three Cantos*, *Poetry* June 1917, 116).

And

Tis the first light—not half light—Panisks
And oak-girls and the Maenads
Have all the wood. Our olive Sirmio
Lies in its burnished mirror, and the Mounts Balde and Riva
Are alive with song, and all the leaves are full of voices

(*Three Cantos*, Poetry June 1917, 118).

The vision is concrete, definite, specific—he actually sees Maenads, Sirmio, Mount Balde and Mount Riva. That is, he actually sees the past.

In the second Canto, he sees the Dordogne Valley, with a centaur and nymphs, greeting him from out of the past:

So the murk opens.
Dordogne! When I was there,
There came a centaur, spying the land,
And there were nymphs behind him.
Or going on the road by Salisbury
Procession on procession-
For that road was full of peoples,
Ancient in various days, long years between them.
Ply over ply of life still wraps the earth here.
Catch at Dordogne (from *Three Cantos*, Poetry July 1917, 182).

In *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*, Pound propounds the modernist belief that the special virtue of a work of art is to provoke aesthetic experience—and the conviction that aesthetic experience is transcendental in character. In Section 16 of that work, in which Pound comments on artists who were in the forefront of the new movement, Vorticism, he asserts this about the power a work of art can have to lift our spirits out of the realm of troubles and worries and raise it to the world of pure form.

A clavichord or a statue or a poem, wrought out of ages of knowledge, out of fine perception and skill, that some other man, that a hundred other men, in moments of weariness can wake beautiful sound with little effort, that they can be carried out of the realm of annoyance into the realm of truth, into the world unchanging, the world of fine animal life, the world of pure form.

That view, as I noted, is pretty much the core conception what we now call “modernism.” But an association he makes with the idea of pure form can astound us: “And John Heydon, long before our present day theorists, had written of the joys of pure form . . . inorganic, geometrical form, in his “Holy Guide.” (157). Who was that writer of so long ago? John Heydon was a Neo-Platonist and Rosicrucian—a Neo-Platonist/Rosicrucian of the wildest and woolliest stripe. His book, *The English Physicians Guide: or a Holy Guide* is generally reviled as a stew of occult ideas. Thus, in *The Real History of the Rosicrucians* (1887), A.E. Waite characterizes Heydon’s thought in the following way:

The philosophical principles of John Heydon need hardly detain us long. That Typhon is the adversary of Beata Pulchra, that Hyle is the spirit of the cold and dry earth, that Beata Pulchra is the vivifying spirit of Nature, that the bodies of the dead rebellious angels became a fruitless and unprofitable chaos, are matters which will scarcely interest the serious student. His alchemical theories and experiments belong to the lowest dregs of this much degraded science, except in those parts which are bodily stolen from Eugenius Philalethes; and all that is of value in his numerical mysticism, geomantic revelations, astromancy, and investigations of spiritual mysteries, is derived from anterior writers. His medical

treatises are disfigured by his gross superstition and credulity; but the unheard of experiments and recipes which they occasionally provide make them extremely curious reading. Très rares, très curieux, et recherchés des amateurs, his books, one and all, command large prices in the market, and the republication of his marvellous Rosicrucian reveries and romances, is a venture that deserves well at the hands of all students of the byways of occultism (332).

This is the thinker to whom Pound turns to buttress his conception of the noetic value of aesthetic experience! The frequency with which Pound refers Heydon impresses on us the esteem in which Pound held him. Pound closes that section of *Gaudier-Brzeska* with an admonishment to read “John Heydon’s ‘Holy Guide’ for numerous remarks on pure *form* and the delights thereof” (*Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*. 167). Heydon appears on the later *Cantos* as well.

to ascend those high places
wrote Heydon
stirring and changeable
“light fighting for speed” (Canto 91: 616).

Here Pound condenses Heydon: Heydon’s *The English Physicians Guide: or a Holy Guide* had stated: “if God would give you leave and power to ascend to those high places, I meane to these heavenly thoughts and studies” (26). Two pages later Heydon wrote

for God, when he cast his upon the building of the world, he went to make a beautiful and goodly work, meet for Power, Wisdom and Pleasure of such a Builder, and therefore a *stirring and changeable* work, because there might be no cunning shown, no delight taken in one ever like or still thing: but *light fighting for speed*, is ever best in such a ground: let us away, and follow.

By so briefly citing Heydon’s text, Pound reveals that his intellect has apprehended the same truth that Heydon’s had.

In *The Cantos*, Heydon keeps company with Ocellus, Erigena, Mencius and Apollonius. Heydon’s conception of transcendental experience is central to *The Cantos*—nonetheless, the very that ideas that Heydon thought, other thinkers thought too. One of my favourite passages in *The Cantos*, is

From the green deep
he saw it,
in the green deep of an eye:
Crystal waves weaving together toward the gt/healing

Light *compenetrans* of the spirits
The Princess Ra-Set has climbed
to the great knees of stone,
She enters protection,
the great cloud is about her,
She has entered the protection of crystal . . .

Light & the flowing crystal
 never gin in cut glass had such clarity
 That Drake saw the splendour and wreckage
 in that clarity
 Gods moving in crystal
 ichor, amor
 Secretary of Nature, J. Heydon
 Here Apollonius, Heydon
 hither Ocellus
 (Canto 91, 611)

In this passage, the Princess Ra-Set has ascended to the high places that Heydon wrote about. There, in that crystalline clarity, she experiences the light *compenetrans* of the spirits, or the GREAT CRYSTAL. People like Plato, like “Pithagoras,” like Apollonius, and like Heydon, as Pound put in *Guide to Kultur* (p. 44), “have caused man after man to be suddenly conscious of the reality of the *nous*, of mind, apart from any man’s individual mind, of the sea crystalline and enduring, of the bright as it were molten glass that envelops us, full of light.” That is, they have brought people to a realm of perfect form in which the gods moved. (This realm, of light, is also the realm of which film’s molecular intelligence vouchsafes awareness—that is the secret of the film alchemist.)

Like Jourdain and Moberly, Pound maintained that experience that is powerful enough endures and is available at all times. Others can enter the same experiences—the same force field— that thinkers of earlier eras had.

“Ghosts dip in crystal,
 adorned”
 . . . A lost kind of experience?
 scarcely,
 Queen Cytherea,
 che ‘l terzo ciel movete
 [who give motion to the third heaven]
 (Canto 91 617)

Queen Cytherea is Aphrodite, goddess of love; thus, it is love that gave motion to the third heaven.

Among the key terms in Pound’s poetics is “*phantasikon*.” The term connects with his ideas of general intelligence; so we are in now in a position to understand it. Myths are “real” for “those people to whom they occur,” Pound asserted. Pound regarded myth as part of the “vital universe,” the “universe of fluid force”:

Man is—the sensitive physical part of him—a mechanism. . . rather like an electric appliance, switches, wires, etc. Chemically speaking, he is *ut credo*, a few buckets of water, tied up in a complicated sort of fig-leaf. As to his consciousness, the consciousness of some seems to rest, or to have its center more properly, in what the Greek psychologists called the *phantastikon*. Their minds are, that is, circumvolved about them like soap-bubbles reflecting sundry patches of the macrocosmos. And with certain others their consciousness is “germinal.” Their thoughts are in them as the thought of the tree is in the seed, or in the grass, or grain, or the blossom. And these minds are the more poetic. (*Spirit of Romance*, 92)

Pound attempted to clarify his conception of the *phantastikon* in a letter he wrote to Harriet Munro in April, 1913. "It is," Pound wrote, "what Imagination really meant before the term was debased presumably by the Miltonists, tho' probably before them. It has to do with the seeing of visions."

The idea that the sensitive part of a human being can link with a consciousness beyond the limits of his/her skin undergirds Carl Brown's interest in the machine (and especially in the molecular machine that film emulsion constitutes). The body/mind's energy can enter the energy of another field of force—and energy, like that of a current of electricity, assumes a form for a seer. Cavalcanti was such a seer, Pound claimed, so that "natural philosopher" would have found "this modern world full of enchantments; not only the light in the electric bulb, but the thought of the current hidden in air and in wire would give him a mind full of forms."

Pound thought of reality as mind-created. His interest in the activities of the mind as it forges a mind-created reality lends a phenomenological cast his interest in the dynamics of consciousness—and on whatever reasonable criterion we apply, consciousness' dynamic, thought's movement, would have to be deemed Pound's principal topic. The elliptical and paratactical constructions in his work reflect the associative leaps that characterize consciousness' movement. Those associative connections are the syntax, not of finished thought, but of a mind discovering what it might be thinking.

The idea of energy shaping form recurs frequently in Hollis Frampton's writing as well. In his most widely-read paper, 'A Pentagram for Conjuring the Narrative', Frampton expresses what might be called a vaguely Heraclitean worldview, according to which all things are in flux. The mind, primarily through language, orders this flux by imposing on it the illusion of fixity.

A waterfall is not a 'thing', nor is a flame of burning gas. Both are, rather, stable patterns of energy determining the boundaries of a characteristic sensible 'shape' in space and time. The waterfall is present to consciousness only so long as water flows through it, and the flame only so long as the gas continues to burn. The water may be fresh or salt, full of fish, colored with blood; the gas, acetylene or the vapor of brandy.

You and I are semistable patterns of energy, maintaining in the very teeth of entropy a characteristic shape in space and time. I am a flame through which will eventual pass, according to Buckminster Full, thirty-seven tons of vegetable . . . among other things. Curiously enough, then, I continue to resemble myself (for the moment at least). (*Circles of Confusion*: 11)

Form derives from patterns of energy—stable patterns that, if not completely unaffected by time, at least in some way more immune to its corrosive effects. Entities, matter, may pass through this pattern as water molecules pass, one after the other, through the currents and eddies in water—or, as Frampton framed the idea by forging another, yet more striking metaphor, as pound after pound of vegetables *etc.* pass through the form that my body assumed so many years ago. Of course, Pound, too, took great interest in how energy shapes form. Central to metaphysics that Pound derived from Bergson (by way of T.E. Hulme) was that conviction he propounded in the essay on Dolmetsch: "metamorphoses teaches us that things do not remain always the same[, that they] become other things by swift and unanalysable process (T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of Ezra Pound*, 431).

Pound began as a Vorticist; and as he began, so he remained: the pattern held. In aesthetic terms, the vortex designates the work of art as a dynamic field in which the elements move or are held in tension by their intrinsic energy. As for Frampton, he maintained, as most

thinking artists do, that the art object provides a model for understanding reality. It is at once a form in which elements are held in a dynamic tension (as in a “Prince Rupert’s Drop”) and a dynamic field in which the through which elements move, a flame or a waterfall).

The algebraic equation ‘ $ax + b = c$ ’ is our name for a stable pattern of energy through which an infinity of numerical tetrads may pass. A story is a stable pattern of energy through which an infinity of personages may pass, ourselves included.
(CC:12)

A mathematical formula can be thought of as an abstract pattern which be instantiated in a number of forms: let x be the calories per ounce of a piece of uncooked rib-eye steak, b the number of calories in the garlic-oil which just minimally covers bottom of skillet (all of which are absorbed in the cooking), x be the number of ounces I shall cook for myself tonight—then c represents the calories I will ingest eating the rib-eye steak tonight. Or let a represent the average number of bullets that Valery Fabrikant pumped into each of the engineering professors he believed to be inappropriately taking research credit, b represent the number of bullets he discharged that did not strike any engineering professor, and x be the number of professors he believed to have taken credit for research they did not do—in this case c is the number of bullets that Valery Fabrikant fired in Concordia University’s Engineering Building. Or again, let a represent a represent the slope of a line, b represent the distance of the y-intercept from the x-axis, x represent the distance of any point along x-axis of a Cartesian grid—then c represents where the point falls along the y-axis. A mathematical formula is thus permanent form, through which can pass, calories, bullets, points—and an infinitude of other entities. Its mathematical precision makes it a radiant node, from which and into which ideas are rush. It attracts associations such as I have made with the simple linear equation given above; it is a system of energy, drawing in whatever comes near.

A mathematical equation is strictly timeless—as timeless as Plato’s forms. The formal relations it maps out obtain for all time. The objects in the world instantiate such patterns and, though the particular instantiations come into and go out of being, the patterns perdure. These patterns constitute the true reality. Entities, person, events, beings will come into existence and pass away, but the patterns that holds all together remain, changeless, in a realm beyond time. According to a venerable epistemological proposition propounded by no less a philosopher than Plato, apprehending these patterns constitutes real knowledge. Doubtless Frampton associated it with another of his favourite writers, Jorge Francisco Isidoro Luis Borges (24 August 1899 – 14 June 1986).

Theologians define eternity as the lucid and simultaneous possession of all instants of time and declare it to be a divine attribute. Dunne, surprisingly, presumes eternity already belongs to us, as collaborated by the dreams we have each night. In them, according to him, the past and the immediate future intermingle. Awake, we pass through successive time at uniform speed: in dreams we may span a vast zone. (“Time and J.W. Dunne,” *Other Inquisitions*)

Thus, Borges elevates the timelessness of Freud’s primary process to a theological principle.

Frampton had arrived at his thoughts on time as simply phenomenal, and without reality in the enduring realm of relations, as early as 1962:

There is no such thing as time. Time is a set of conventions for bracketing qualitative variation. E-flat does not exist ‘in time’ relative to B-flat, before or after

it: we hear them as they are sounded, which is always here and now. The adverbs *firstly* and *secondly* are pegs we use in our sentences when we wish to emphasize that those sentences imitate actions. [*Circles of Confusion*: 13]

To reject the existence of time is not to deny that we experience change, process or passing events; rather it is to affirm that at a purer order of being, of pure relations, exists. Frampton understood that it no more makes sense to say we do not experience things in time (indeed, organizing events in time is part of his task as a filmmaker) than it makes sense to deny our experience of perspective or foreshortening. At the same, perspective foreshortening has only phenomenal existence: it pertains only to experience of space, and not the order of space itself. Similarly, events that the filmmaker organizes in time are all have simultaneous existence on a long but narrow band (space). The film medium itself, as a physical object, as compared with the conditions through which we experience it, exists all at once, all together in a single moment of time; that comparison suggests that succession might be nothing but an illusion that belongs to order of experience, not the order of the real (projection converts a spatial order, in which all events are simultaneous, into a experiential succession). There is another domain in which gives evidence of the same temporal duality. The paragon of succession is surely the natural numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, . . . ; yet, those numbers, as we have seen, exist in relations that are eternal, unchanging, beyond. It is the same with film, with physics, and with order of numbers: the same pattern holds.

Time, experienced as succession, is only one order of time. We can experience another order of time. Frampton writes of this other order of time as erupting upon consciousness, and setting it agog. In "Incisions in History/Segments of Eternity" he concocts a fable of that William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of the negative-positive process (which allowed paper prints to be made), while making a drawing at Lake Como (a common avocation of Englishmen of his time), experiences a longing for a natural image to impress itself upon paper

when, with no warning at all, he sees, for its own qualities and for the first time, the very thing that has been before him all along, and that has been his secret fascination: he realizes, in one piercing instant, that the 'image' that he had sought to make is already there. But more: the emergence of that image somehow sufficiently mimes the extraordinary moment when, time out of mind, the unspeakable, primal IMAGE became the first gift Talbot's mind gave itself. And then: after the merest interruption, thready and insistent as the drone of the brain's *theta* wave, faintly overheard in an anechoic chamber, comes the accustomed reminder of mortality.

But for one instant, attenuated to the limits of his energy, Talbot has escaped Time, the Evil. For an ecstatic moment, time is not. We may presume that Lake Como, along with everything else, persists in dropping 'natural images,' like ripe fruit, into the lapses of the beholder.

Notice the phrase, dropping 'natural images,' like ripe fruit, into the lapses of the beholder. The idea that natural images are akin to fruit or vegetables is familiar from Bazin: "Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a snowflake or a flower whose vegetable or earthly origins are inseparable from their beauty." (André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," *What is Cinema*: 13). The idea that photography is simply a means of collecting these natural images is also Bazinian. But what about that marvellous hiatus in the sentence, the claim that natural images are dropped into the "lapses" of the beholder? That splendid pun suggests that when true image appears, it momentarily removes the self, the

subject from the scene—the images are dropped into the lapses of the beholder.

Attentiveness to the cinema's molar character suggests something quite extraordinary.: every cinematic image, all the cinematic images that have existed, proposes a sort of non-differentiated singularity (each event in the film is truly singular, since it is a collocation on the screen surface of the space of representational images and non-space of unique, never to be repeated molecular incident—yet the impression is of an unfolding surface whose forms are not marked off on from another in any sort of gestalt order; so, despite the absolute singularity of each and every form, these events seem massively repetitive) to experience an ecstasy. What the cinema unleashes is elemental, as elemental as the dance of molecules, which, after all, is at the heart of the cinema, the condition that makes its imagery possible.. Moreover, it provides a demonstration of the persistence of patterns (that's one implication of the "repetition" I referred to), that become a sort of visual.

The ecstasy the cinema invites us to experience derives from the basic material conditions of the cinema (from the machine that the cinema is); moreover and accomplishes exactly what Pound (as we have seen) suggested that great art does.

A clavichord or a statue or a poem, wrought out of ages of knowledge, out of fine perception and skill, that some other man, that a hundred other men, in moments of weariness can wake beautiful sound with little effort, that they can be carried out of the realm of annoyance into the realm of truth, into the world unchanging, the world of fine animal life, the world of pure form. And John Heydon, long before our present day theorists, had written of the joys of pure form . . . inorganic, geometrical form, in his "Holy Guide" (*Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*. 157).

It does so because it unleashes the intelligent force that resides in the molecular machine that makes film possible..

Hollis Frampton will have the last words.

Whatever is inevitable, however arbitrary its origins, acquires through custom something like gravitational mass, and gathers about itself a resonant nimbus of metaphoric energy. (*Circles of Confusion*: 61)