

## Flesh Angels Bruce Elder

Bruce Elder's new film, Flesh Angels, resumes a large cycle of films, called The Book of All the Dead, that was temporarily abandoned after Consolations (1987). The cycle as a whole traces the descent of consciousness from innocent paradise to horrid experience. Some parts are brief but the films completed during the Eighties expand in length exponentially. The fourteen-hour climax, Consolations seemed to a film about wisdom, as if some stage of synthesis had been reached.

In light of the four-film sub-cycle the much shorter Flesh Angels initiates, Consolations now seems more a purgatorial step toward another, "classical" wisdom. It is a film of levels organized in a very careful (indeed computerized) mathematical manner. One level of the imagery, made up of illustrations and paintings, pulse with light to make an ostinato for the whole work. Over this level, at times interrupting it, are superimposed layers of pixillated travel and nature images (about one fourth of the film) and images of nudes and love-making treated to slow motion (using the same video camera Snow uses for See You Later) and then run through computer-controlled image processing. Computer-generated imagery provides punctuation. These computer images use the exotic new mathematics of fractals and, cellular automata. As always in Elder, supertitles and voice-overs, while comparatively scarce in this film, provide some code keys to the film's intertexts, here Isaac Newton, William Blake, John Milton, Northrop Frye and G. W. L. von Leibnitz.

Elder associates Flesh Angels with De Stijl, the modern abstract movement that sought the purity of mathematical structures that could be used to reveal the underlying order of the cosmos. De Stijl could be construed as the modern resumption of the classical philosophy of the Pythagoreans. Elder coordinates this aspiration with its early modern philosophical avatars, Romantic poets and current mathematics. Flesh Angels is visually opulent and glitters with technical flourishes, and Elder has referred to it as a "comedy". It is high spirited and funny, but doubtless he also means comedy in Frye's deeper sense of a renewal and discovery of order, as in the later comedies of Shakespeare, Dante's Comedia and the Romantic poets' redemptive songs. Flesh Angels places the cycle still within Purgatory, but further along in the imagination's ascent away from Hell and toward the imagery of a Paradisio. (Bart Testa)