

**The Charity of Erotic Experience: R. Bruce Elder's Cinematic Re-reading of Saint Augustine's *Confessions***  
Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof

R. Bruce Elder insists that the artist's task is to revitalize life through art. Art has the ability to transform the present human condition of alienation and emotional numbness, and to attune humans to one another and to the world they inhabit by granting them contact with the primordial experience. Therefore, art, according to Elder, is the only hope that human beings have today in returning them to a more accepting, respecting, and loving community. In other words, art has both ethical and moral implications for culture, especially today for the Western culture that alienates people from real experience and, hence, from each other. However, in this culture art has also suffered. Art has become confused with entertainment and its transformative potential has been subdued by being appropriated by an entertainment industry, which diffuses art's revolutionary potential into an assembly of amusing distractions. These distractions, in turn, further alienate people from real experience, real life and, consequently, from "what we are fitted for" as human beings, to use George Grant's words. This is the reason why Elder takes on the task of bringing art into closer proximity with *poiēsis*: creation as a mode of presencing or of bringing, leading forth in a sort of "blindsight" into unconcealment. In order to accomplish this, in a culture that prises open every mystery and leaves nothing—in its darkness, in itself—for the imagination but instead turns every being on this planet into an object or a "standing reserve," requires a movement in the opposite direction: the return to the mysterious and to the joys (and sometimes pains that also teach us important lessons in attunement) of carnal flesh and love.

Elder learned from the great poets about the spiritually edifying potential of art and, thus, its revitalizing force in human life; Dante Alighieri and Ezra Pound have been especially important to Elder's project. Elder's epic film cycle *The Book of All the Dead* (1975-1994) and its tripartite structure are inspired by Dante Alighieri's epic poem *The Divine Comedy*. *The Book of All the Dead* is, thus, divided into three parts: *Lamentations*, *Consolations*, and *Exultations*.<sup>1</sup>

These roughly correspond with *Hell*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise* in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. In Dante's epic readers are led by its hero (Dante the poet) on a spiritual journey, by first descending into the pit of hell and finally ascending to heaven towards God. The viewers of Elder's film epic also follow its hero (the filmmaker-poet) in a pilgrimage of "spiritual education," through the three parts of the cycle: first descending towards the state of lament when entering *Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World* (1985) through the films preceding it that form *The System of Dante's Hell* (1975-1982), culminating in the horrors produced by our technical mode of thinking in the eighth film *Illuminated Texts* (1982), then moving through the three parts of *Consolations: Love is an Art of Time* (1988), and finally ascending to *Exultations: In Light of the Great Giving* (1990-1994) and towards the Wholly knowledge as "the insight that everything given in experience truly is a gift" (Elder 456).

Being inspired by the transformations of consciousness in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Elder composed *The Book of All the Dead* to present nine stages in the transformation of consciousness; from the "ordinary waking consciousness," in the first stage, to "aspiring to the exalted knowledge of the Love that permeates all things and sustains all things in their being," in the ninth stage (Elder 455-456). But *The Book of All the Dead* does not merely present the nine stages of transformation; in fact, it triggers transformations in viewers' consciousness through the film-viewing experience. In the course of the cycle Elder deploys both form and content of the twenty-one films that *The Book of All the Dead* comprises in moving viewers away from the analytic and technical mode of thinking, and returning attentive and willing viewers to the mode of thinking as prayer; the activity that humans are fitted for, as it opens us to contemplation of the meaning of the world. Elder asserts that "In prayer, we empty our minds of abstract thoughts and give ourselves over wholly to perception, to seeing a thing for what it is. ... It consists in

allowing the concrete particular to fill the mind entirely and in giving ourselves over to wonder that is has come to be” (Elder 465).

Elder’s film epic draws into itself, re-reads, and re-makes numerous texts and cultural artefacts of the West. In this process, it re-discovers new connections and meanings that arise in the experience of this film epic in its parts and, especially, as a whole. This is why, I believe, *The Book of All the Dead* is the single, most important cinematic monument to have been erected out of and on the fragments of the greatest literary, philosophical and aesthetic achievements of the West, as well as its dark history. In order to investigate the intricacies and the scope of Elder’s cinematic re-writing of those texts would require a book-long exposition. In this paper, I will take a more modest approach. I will focus on the final film sequence (of approximately ten-minutes in duration) in *Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World, Part 1: The Dream of the Last Historian* (1985) in R. Bruce Elder’s *The Book of All the Dead*. In this sequence Elder juxtaposes a choral rendition and voice-over narration of the famous conversion passage that appears in Book VIII, Chapter 12 of Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* with images of lovemaking, which Stan Brakhage declared the most “beautiful rendering of lovemaking in the history of cinema.” What is the significance of this peculiar juxtaposition of the conversion passage with images of lovemaking?

The title of this film *Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World, Part 1: The Dream of the Last Historian* already provides us with some clues as to what this part of *The Book of All the Dead* film cycle wants to reveal to us or attune us to. The first part of the title, *Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World* suggests the desperate state that Elder finds himself amidst the Godless world of the West. After all the Gods have fled from our lives, all that is left is the dead world spiralling, ever so quickly, into darkness. This spiritual darkness is where Elder, the hero of the epic, begins his journey. His epic adopts the allegory of the darkness (dark wood) from

Dante to present the crisis that one finds oneself in the middle of life's journey, reflecting on his own mortality and spiritual darkness that surrounds him. The same allegory of darkness, "the darkness of doubt," is also present in Augustine's *Confessions* and, like for the other two, it makes itself present at the middle point of Augustine's life, in his thirties.<sup>ii</sup> Elder's choice to work into this part of the film cycle Augustine's conversion passage from *Confessions* underscores this experience of crisis as the central theme of his epic. It also helps in drawing our attention to the various manifestations of this theme in Western thought, ultimately uniting people through the commonality of this experience; even those separated by space and time, like these three authors. The second half of the title, the subtitle *The Dream of the Last Historian*, suggests perhaps a more hopeful note. The words "dream" and "historian" imply time. They imply a sense of time that has been undermined and, to a large degree, eradicated by Modernity, along with dreams and history. Dreams have been undermined because they appear as "nonsensical" and history because it has no place or use in a culture that values progress. Dreams imply the immemorial time of oceanic fusion when one's self (ego) did not exist; therefore the negated self in the dream-state. Further, dreams conceal repressed wishes (erotic wishes to be sure); hence they hold the key to the concealed history of each individual. Much of this film, and in fact the entire film cycle, relies on the type of composition (visual and temporal) that bears close resemblance to the mental process responsible for dream composition, the primary process. This process and its methods have correspondences with many artistic techniques and aesthetic methods developed by artists, especially by the avant-garde in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>iii</sup> The compositional structure of this film, despite several sections proceeding according to conceptual logic and narrative progression, tends towards collage and polyphonic composition (methods closely aligned with the primary process), employing poetic devices and engaging associative thinking that overturns rational thought. Thus, the two words (dream and historian) hold possible

clues to the way out of the current human condition in the “Dead World” and the filmmaker (the last historian) shows us the path through his *The Dream of the Last Historian*.

Before dealing with the lovemaking sequence, I would like to provide a brief sketch of another sequence at the beginning of this film, also roughly ten-minutes in duration, for it has resonance with the last sequence, or is a prelude to the more profound experience that we encounter at the end of the film. In the sequence at the beginning of *The Dream of the Last Historian*, the filmmaker ventures into the foreign land (the Old World, or Europe) and encounters the otherness of this world. He opens to it, is taken over by it, permits it to permeate his being, and reveal itself in the visual composition of this sequence. We catch glimpses of various monuments and statues (of gods, saints, and poets) that have been erected in Europe over several centuries. We see fragments of buildings, castles, old church towers, interiors of a baroque church, windows, city buildings, a park, a lake, a snow-covered field and trees, sky, religious iconography, trees at sunset, and neon signs at night, just to name a few. Elder’s camera-work is performative; we feel his every vibration, every hesitance and every delight at the world he encounters through the pulse of his filming. The dynamic movements of his camera (horizontal, vertical, and diagonal pans, sometimes even serpentine), coupled with superimpositions of architecture spinning in the clock-wise and counter clock-wise directions, prevent us from fixing, ordering and, in some instances, even naming what we are seeing. They aim at dispersing and momentarily dissolving visual representations of the world’s fragments and rendering them experientially present for us, in us. At the same time, the rhythms created through the camera work and superimpositions throw us back to our childhood memories; those barely accessible memory traces of seeing the first snow, marvelling at its whiteness and its glistening crystalline flakes, and the horse-drawn sleigh that we imagined when our parents read us fairytales. All these images, which seem so distant to us, flash in our mind’s eye and

become vivid; they become experientially present for us. They are truly gifts, presents given to us by the filmmaker in the aesthetic experience. Elder aims at attuning us to the world and to one another in the self-less letting go and flowing with the experience of this sequence. However, this world, in spite of being marvellously translated into a poetic form, no longer holds the same resonance for us as it once did. Modernity has irradiated its potency along with our childlike wonder at its marvels and our ability to engage in deep contemplation. These images of the world create only momentary lapses in the rigidity of our egos while opening us towards experience. However, they do not stir us enough for this experience to reach deep within us and to transform us, to affect us, on a more profound and lasting level. The first sequence ends with a transition to Elder's home in Canada, with the footage of a woman fully dressed standing alone in front of a window. One might guess that she is the one who appears again in the final sequence of this film, in the nude and with her partner making love. Is it possible that what Elder is looking for he finds "HERE," at home, in (within) the body and its potential for erotic encounter with the other?

Elder insists, "Erotic images are a metaphor for true creation."<sup>iv</sup> He contends that this is the last thing that Modernity has not been successful at eradicating. Although, it constantly aims at distorting erotic images and desensitizing us to them by proliferating our lives with plastic bodies and pornography through mass media, which is devoid of the erotic and driven by the will to exercise control over the other. So far modernity has not succeeded in reducing the potency of erotic images. These images still affect us on deeply emotional and bodily levels, and therefore hold the potential to effect transformation in our lives because they reconnect us with the primordial most directly. Erotic images speak to Eros (Love) and to creation as poetics, as a mode of making or bringing forth in "blindsight" when the self gives itself (in a blind faith) to the other, i.e. becomes self-less in being attuned to the other. In the first sequence of *The Dream of the Last Historian*, the filmmaker creates by giving himself over to the experience of the world

(treating it as an encounter with the other) and being attuned to its natural rhythms; moving along with them and losing or dispersing himself in this experience. This notion of self-abnegation is even more profound in the final sequence of Elder's film and leads the way to even greater gifts, to love as the greatest and most profound knowledge.

We enter the lovemaking sequence through a sequence composed of landscape and of castle ruins in Europe with the following text superimposed on the images: "You are no closer in the foreign land you have journeyed." This sequence ends with a pan towards the sky: perhaps suggesting the heavens (the abode of the Gods) as the final destination of this journey, of this film, and of the longed for spiritual transformation. However, it immediately cuts to the footage of the body. The quality of this footage echoes the smooth pans across landscape in the preceding sequence. As we begin to settle into this new sequence, the previously seen footage throughout the film (of landscape, architecture and nature) begins to flash in our mind's eye and we become aware of the various anthropomorphic relationships that Elder, with his camera, has brought out for us in this film. The curves of the female body echo the arched windows and the arches supporting the buildings. The roundness of her breasts brings to our mind's eye the rounded rooftops of the old European architecture. Elder's vertical pans with the camera over her body remind us of the previously seen vertical pans in this film amidst the man-made structures (dwellings, streets, and cities) and natural environments that we inhabit. It is through movement that he is able to create a resonance within us, a visual rhyme between what we are presently experiencing with what we previously saw. This resonance, I would argue, goes even deeper into the past than the duration of the film. It aims at re-establishing ethical ground for the long-lost connection between the experience of the body and the world we dwell in as loving human beings. The superimposed text continues on the female body: "Than you were at home. What you seek is already near, no matter where you are." Indeed, Elder asks us to search within us and between us, for our bodies grant us the possibility of opening towards the other and what

we are searching for. The text continues: “What you seek is already near, no matter where you are. Nearness keeps what is immediately Present. At a distance it reserves them for wonder. You left home because of your inability to recognize what you sought after. THERE. You will not recognize it. HERE. For what you are looking for is familiar. ...You must learn to recognize it in what is near.”

The notion of nearness is central to the lovemaking sequence and Elder relies on various renditions of touch for its metaphor. In this sequence we see two lovers, close-ups of their faces (eyes and mouths), smiling and kissing while in each other’s embrace. There are close-ups of the woman’s breasts, which are tenderly touched by the man, and close-ups of the female and the male genitals, which they mutually caress. The emphasis in this sequence is on caress and on touch: touching and being touched. This emphasis suggests the intimacy of bodily knowledge and, ultimately, intimacy as the bodily knowledge that holds the possibility of opening one to love as “the knowledge”: as a form of knowing and being known. The presence of hands, nearly in every shot, and close-ups of them superimposed on other hands and on body parts, also suggest the sense of greater giving and of greater and more profound good (of mother? of God?). The close-up of a hand (so large and so close to us) throws us back to memories of the time when that hand was the world for us, providing comfort with its warmth, softness, smell and tender touch. Hands. Two hands, hers and his, which one is whose? Hands glide over the luminous flesh (of her body? of his body?). Where does she start and where does he end?

The filmmaker’s use of superimpositions extends the emphasis on touch from the content of this sequence to the form, engaging viewers in an activity that responds to this touching. Our eyes continually scan the surface of the screen, caressing it and the couple with our eyes, while moving along with the flow of images that emerge (come forth towards us, to encounter us, to touch us) and recoil into concealment. In this active scanning, we are



constantly feeling the image out with our eyes (and feeling with it) as we begin to move inward, into ourselves, and become emotionally immersed. After all, what we are seeing is the intimate encounter between two human beings at its most intimate, in lovemaking. It is, therefore, not surprising that we respond in such an emotionally and perceptually engaged manner to her and his body. We marvel at the intimate parts of their bodies and reflect on our own. We respond to the intimacy between the two lovers by being pulled into the sequence with each glance of our eyes. The intimacy between the couple is, thus, mirrored in our own intimate experience with this sequence, as the intimacy of the content and the intimacy created through the form pull us inwards (into ourselves, vivifying our perceptual and emotional experience) and outwards (towards the couple). This back and forth rhythm permits us to momentarily lose ourselves in feeling (sensation and emotion). In this state of self-dispersal, we are swept into the rhythms of the sequence, being taken over by them and becoming in-tune with them. We watch the images of the two lovers flow into one another in the superimpositions, like waves of water, and glide across the screen, like the clouds in the sky, at which shapes we marvel. It is at this point that we perceive the fourth body, the body of the filmmaker behind the camera whose experience while shooting and the intensity of his vision is inscribed into this sequence, in every twitch and every minute vibration, which is now being imparted on us. Thus, the erotic images of the couple mirror the form that accomplishes the experience of coupling in viewers with the couple and indirectly with the filmmaker.

The sound that accompanies this sequence is of a choral rendition and narration from Augustine's conversion passage in *Confessions*. The sound of the choral music, its flowing and sinuous harmony, helps us enter the rhythm of images in this sequence and flow along with them. In this choral music we perceive the overtones of the female and male voices that have been woven into a complex harmonic tapestry of a choric union, just as the images of the female and male flesh have been fused into one in Elder's cinematic composition. However,

occasionally this blissful flow is interrupted by the sound of a man's voice reading the conversion passage. This arrest in the flow, in our merger with the rhythmic pulse of images and sounds, is quite jarring and creates tension in our experience. It forces us to uncouple from this rhythmic pulse and to move away from the realm of deep sensual experience to the surface levels of cognition, engaging conceptual thought patterns rather than the deep associative flow and plastic connections between shapes, rhythms and sounds. The superimposed text, to some extent, also accomplishes the same tension between the deep associative thinking and the surface level cognitive thinking. The back and forth rhythm of this sequence, which Elder accomplishes through its formal treatment, engenders the experience of strife; the experience that ceaselessly moves us between order and that which borders on chaos, between the conscious and the unconscious mental processes. This experience of strife is present in the entire film and, in fact, in the entire *The Book of All the Dead*. This sequence, however, bears its strongest articulation and Augustine's text assists Elder in intensifying the force of this rhythm by means of its own tensions.

Augustine's text is filled with sincerity and passion, which is animated by Augustine's inner struggle with faith and the force of his desires. He is honest about his difficulty with having to make the decision to give up his lustful habits and give to chastity. In the paragraphs preceding his conversion, he writes: "I had no answer to give as you said to me, *Arise, sleeper, rise from the dead: Christ will enlighten you*, and plied me with evidence that you spoke truly; no I was convinced by the truth and had no answer whatever except the sluggish, drowsy words, 'Just a minute,' 'One more minute,' 'Let me have a little longer'" (Book VIII, Chapter 12, 12). Augustine humbly shares his weakness with us through a common human trait: giving in to the pressure of desire even when God calls out to him, delaying his conversion just "a little longer."

In the conversion passage of *Confessions*, Saint Augustine opens to God in the most vulnerable and deeply emotional state of his struggle with faith:

... I flung myself down somehow under a fig-tree and gave free rein to the tears that burst from my eyes like rivers, as an acceptable sacrifice to you. Many things I had to say to you, and the gist of them, though not the precise words, was: "O Lord, how long? How long? Will you be angry forever? Do not remember our age-old sins." For by these I was conscious of being held prisoner. I uttered cries of misery: "Why must I go on saying, 'Tomorrow ... tomorrow'? Why not now? Why not put an end to my depravity this very hour?"

I went on talking like this and weeping in the intense bitterness of my broken heart. Suddenly I heard a voice from a house nearby—perhaps a voice of some boy or girl, I do not know—singing over and over again, "Pick it up and read, pick it up and read." My expression immediately altered and I began to think hard whether children ordinarily repeated a ditty like this in any sort of game, but I could not recall ever having heard it anywhere else. I stemmed the flood of tears and rose to my feet, believing that this could be nothing other than a divine command to open the Book and read the first passage I chanced upon; for I had heard the story of how Antony had been instructed by a gospel text. [...] So he was promptly converted to you by this plainly divine message. Stung into action, I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting, for on leaving it I had put down there the book of apostle's letters. I snatched it up, opened it and read in silence the passage on which my eyes first lighted: *Not in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires.* I had no wish to read further, nor was there need. No sooner had I reached the end of the verse than the light of certainty flooded my heart and all dark shades of doubt fled away. (Book VIII, Chapter 12, 28-29)

It is in this state of openness and attunement, of giving over to the other (the voice of God) and completely surrendering his will, when Augustine's struggle with faith dissipates. This kind of attunement and selflessness is also present in love and in lovemaking, and Elder connects his film to this theme with its two lovers. In both cases, the good that love imparts is "the knowledge," the form of knowing and being known, the Divine. However, I believe that there is still more to this juxtaposition and that several conclusions can be drawn from Elder's use of this passage in the final sequence of his film.

Elder's juxtaposition of the choral renditions of Augustine's conversion in *Confessions* with the footage of two lovers is ironic, for the text that Augustine reads in the book of letters of the Apostles tells him that to ascend to the Grace of God he must not give to the sexual desires of the flesh. In fact, the images of the couple can be seen as the fulfilment of Augustine's desires, which he attempted to but could not completely sublimate in his prose. It also insists

that Augustine's struggle did not end with the conversion, for Augustine, at the time of writing *Confessions* (ten years after his conversion), was still struggling, as the overwrought quality of his prose clearly gives away. It is this incompletely sublimated desire and the overwrought quality of Augustine's prose that Elder draws into his film and, in the process, re-writes Augustine's conversion in cinema through irony. Irony, as a dissembler or as the masked other, is not too distant from the masks that repressed desires are forced to put on, through censorship, in order to make their presence in dreams and in poetics. The "other" speaking "*Je est un autre*"—to use Arthur Rimbaud famous phrase from his "Lettre à Georges Izambard"—is the voice of the unconscious, the crucible of that otherness within, which always directs and speaks through the conscious. This otherness, this uncontainable strangeness of the erotic and violent drives, is what we feel in Augustine's prose. This otherness is also amplified in Elder's sequence where the text, the narration, the choral rendition, and the images are a plurality of voices that do not coalesce but thrive in their difference and their strangeness. That plurality gives them their force through tension and makes them vivid for us.

R. Bruce Elder wants us to experience the force of this otherness and wants to make it alive for us through the contents and the polyphonic form of this sequence. The polyphonic composition is present in both Elder's and Augustine's works, where the other voices (authors for Augustine, and authors, philosophers and artists for Elder) are re-worked, re-discovered, and re-invented in new constellations. Patricia Hampl, in her "Preface" to *Confessions*, describes Augustine's polyphonic composition of his text as akin to music. "A text was a buzz and murmur of voices," writes Hampl, "literary chamber music, not solo performance. The call and reply between a writer's own voice and his memorized texts created a rich, polyphonic texture, an antiphony of language where leitmotifs of prized quotations suddenly wink and gleam from new prose settings" (XVIII). Polyphony, thus, asserts the presence of different voices rather than the sole voice of the author, and the reciprocity between the author's voice and these other voices

in the composition. Polyphonic composition is central in Elder's cinema. The entire *Book of All the Dead* is filled with a symphony of voices of authors, artists and philosophers resounding through the distance of time and space that has been annulled by Elder's ability to weave them together. These other voices, the various works (texts, songs, poetry, music, painting, cinema, etc.), he makes his own; they move through him, and thus through the content and form of his cinema. It is indeed not surprising that Elder chose to conclude this part of *The Book of All the Dead* with Augustine's *Confessions*, and, in particular, in its transformed structure as music: the choral rendition of the text. For music, and in particular polyphonic composition with its varied and plural rhythms, brings language and consciousness closer to the body: closer to the primary process thinking that operates according to the logic of pleasure and to its abode in the unconscious. Elder accomplishes polyphonic composition in the lovemaking sequence through the simultaneous juxtaposition of the superimposed images of the female and male bodies with the superimposition of text written by Elder and with the sound of a choral rendition of Augustine's conversion passage, which is already polyphonic, along with its excerpts being read by a man. He, thus, drops us a clue through Augustine, to re-think and re-member our first experience of language, of consciousness, of listening (to our mother's voice?), as being attuned to the other.

Strife, tension, and internal conflict are vital; they are what invigorates and animates this sequence and give it life. The presence of contrasting, opposing manifestations of erotic desire (its repression and its fulfilment) opens to tension. However, the erotic desire and the longing to fuse into a carnal union also has its own counterpart, which constantly aims at negating it: for love presupposes its opposite, death and separation. The lack of this striving is, thus, not life and love but stillness and death. Furthermore, what animates us is the impossibility of ever being able to fully fuse with the other, as well as the force of this coming to togetherness being underpinned by its opposite: the differentiated self, loneliness, and alienation. This active force,

this striving of otherness within, also calls us to surrender to the other without. And what is left to us in this Dead World, but this incessant assertion of life and Eros, longing to love and be loved. I believe that Elder wants to make us realize that in our Dead World we still have the ability to overcome our current condition in the erotic experience, and ultimately in love. For these experiences make us alive. They animate us through our desire for the other (our longing to be together), while prompting us to open and to follow “the knowledge,” rather than fall into the stasis, the complacency and indifference of our Dead World and its instrumental reason. These experiences are for us today what the scripture was for Augustine: a way towards the most profound knowledge. Thus, Elder’s choice to juxtapose these two elements emphasizes the good (the love) that underlies it, and renders erotic images, carnal pleasures, and nude bodies not sinful but as a way, the only way left for us today, to open to this most profound knowledge through selflessness and love to the other.

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<sup>i</sup> The following list includes the technical details and the viewing order of films in R. Bruce Elder’s *The Book of All the Dead* (1975-1994).

PART ONE: THE SYSTEM OF DANTE’S HELL

*Breath/Light/Birth*, 1975. Film. 16 mm. B&W, sound. 6 minutes.

*The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, 1979. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 55 minutes

*1857 (Fool’s Gold)*, 1981. Film 16 mm. Colour, sound. 25 minutes.

*Illuminated Texts*, 1982. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 180 minutes.

*Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World, Part 1: The Dream of the Last Historian*, 1985. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 195 minutes.

*Sweet Love Remembered*, 1980. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 14 minutes.

*Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World, Part 2: The Sublime Calculation*, 1985. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 240 minutes.

*Permutations and Combinations*, 1976. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 8 minutes.

PART TWO: CONSOLATIONS (LOVE IS AN ART OF TIME)

*Consolations (Love Is an Art of Time), Part 1: The Fugitive Gods*, 1988. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 220 minutes.

*Consolations (Love Is an Art of Time), Part 2: The Lighted Clearing*, 1988. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 220 minutes.

*Consolations (Love Is an Art of Time), Part 3: The Body and the World*, 1988. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 240 minutes.

PART THREE: EXULTATIONS (IN LIGHT OF THE GREAT GIVING)

*Flesh Angels*, 1990. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 110 minutes.

*Look! We Have Come Through!*, 1978. Film. 16 mm. B&W, sound. 12 minutes.

*Newton and Me*, 1990. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 110 minutes.

*Barbara Is a Vision of Loveliness*, 1976. Film. 16 mm. B&W, sound. 8 minutes.

*Azure Serene*, 1992. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 95 minutes.

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*She Is Away*, 1976. Film. 16 mm. 13 minutes.

*Exultations: In Light of the Great Giving*, 1993. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 90 minutes.

*Burying the Dead: Into the Light*, 1993. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 90 minutes.

*Trace*, 1980. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 1 minute.

*Et Resurrectus Est*, 1994. Film. 16 mm. Colour, sound. 135 minutes.

<sup>ii</sup> Augustine was thirty-two at the time of his conversion, and thirty-three when he was baptized as Catholic. Dante was in his thirties when he began writing his *The Divine Comedy*. Elder was also thirty when he began his *The Book of All the Dead* in 1979, with *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* film being the catalyst of his epic. Even though several of his short films, which he made several years prior, are included in *The Book of All the Dead*, it was not until he embarked on his 1979 film that the shape of his film epic had come to his view and he commenced his journey.

<sup>iii</sup> I have written on the correspondence between Sigmund Freud's concept of primary process thinking and Anton Ehrenzweig's notions of syncretistic vision and scanning attention, and how these are manifest in the compositions of various 20<sup>th</sup> century artists and avant-garde cinema. Particular focus is given to Bruce Elder's cinema. Please see "Chaos or the Polyphonic Vision of Artistic Imagination" in *La prolifération des écrans = Prolifération of Screens*, (Collection Esthétique). Louise Poissant and Pierre Tremblay eds. Québec, QC: Presses de l'Université du Québec; Toronto, ON: Ryerson University, 2008. 325-343.

<sup>iv</sup> From a conversation with R. Bruce Elder by Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof on the topic of erotic images in his cinema, Toronto, August 2008.

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