

## ***Art, the Revitalizing Force of Life: R. Bruce Elder's Poetics of Experience***

R. Bruce Elder insists that 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, such 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 entertainment industry that diffuses art's revolutionary potential into an assembly of amusing distractions. These, 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, a "standing reserve," requires a movement in the opposite direction, i.e. the return to the mysterious, to the despised feminine, and to the joys (and sometimes pains that also teach us important lessons in attunement) of carnal flesh and love.

In the opening of his essay “State/Intended: Some Reflections Parallel to *The Book of All the Dead*,” published in a catalogue on the occasion of his retrospective in 1988 of *The Book of All the Dead* (1975-1994) film cycle at the Anthology Film Archives (New York), Elder describes the current human condition, which his films address and attempt to remedy, in the following way:

Ours is a time that has experienced the darkening of the world, a spiritual decline that results from our having broken with both the earthly and the divine, i.e. with what is below and what is above us. The gods have deserted us, and we humans are in the process of being transformed from creatures of flesh into objects of metal. In our time, a gruesome hatred of everything creative has become so strong and all pervasive that the worst affliction that can befall a person in these times is to have an original idea. (The same hatred is expressed in modern culture’s abhorrence of the feminine.) Existence has lost its vertical dimension, and experience has been flattened out into a single plane.

...Our learning is not edification but indiscretion. Whenever a new pathway opens, our scholars explore it, even if it leads to the devastating understanding unlocked at Los Alamos. But our unrestrained curiosity is simply the most obvious (albeit generally unrecognized) symptom of our spiritual tedium.

We pay a high price when the mind’s demand for knowledge is not curbed by moral vigilance. The gift of reason, like the gift of love, required jealous guarding; as has become painfully obvious that, like love, it too can lead to corruption and sin. For reason, just as much as curiosity, can succumb to temptation, can be corrupted and can even, when sufficiently goaded by curiosity and unrestrained by wisdom, become complicit with evil. ...

We of today are the last men of our civilization foretold by Nietzsche, for what has, until recently, been the dynamic agent of Western civilization has come down to us in a depleted, weakened, terminal form. ...

...

Because we have forsaken knowledge of the Whole, we have come to understand reality only as heterogeneous fragments that, to practical reason, seem utterly incommensurate. We have lost what only love can disclose: the unity of reality, its coherence, its enduringness, the constancy of its structure—in short, its eternal order. We know only the practical and the accessible for we have turned away from the Mystery. In our hearts and minds we have reduced reality from a Mystery in which we are overwhelmingly involved to a problem that we can master. Indeed, we have reduced existence itself to a concept. Our souls have been taken over by the practicalities of the

machine and our panic helplessness has driven us to taking shelter in superior human intelligence. ... The technical frenzy that characterizes the *mondus vivendi* of present-day humanity has made us forgetful of the spiritual strength of the earth. The darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the transformation of humans from flesh to metal, the spread of the hatred of fertility and creativity are all processes that have gone so far that they sometimes seem irreversible. ... Our most valued form of thinking has declined from prayer to analysis, and analysis presumes what is false—that we stand outside of reality. It denies that we are immersed in reality and in denying our participation in Being, it is one of the causes of our spiritual malaise. We have been deformed by closing ourselves off from the Divine in existence. (Elder 1988: 13-14)

Since creativity and the feminine are despised and, therefore, repressed in Western culture, as is the body (the necessary dimension of human experience and the realm of both the feminine and the creative), then feminine aesthetics (an amalgam of the feminine, creativity, and the body) is one way, if not the only way, of initiating a process that might eventuate in a transformation to the present dire conditions in the Western culture. To be effective, that process would have to reconnect us with the knowledge of the Whole through real experience. It will do so by way of rebellion, by irrupting within the symbolic and challenging its (rational) order with mutability and energy—with energies unleashed by the sentient body coupled with the force of the primordial. These mutable energies are the domain of the repressed feminine. Elder's cinema wages such a rebellion, both through its content and, most importantly, its form.

Elder's films, in particular his *The Book of All the Dead*, make it apparent that he chose as his life's path (or the path has chosen him) the path of aesthetic rebellion, along with the task of reconnecting human beings with the lost knowledge of the Whole, and therefore with love. For, according to Elder, love is the ultimate knowledge that grants humans insight into the eternal order and our role in this order as human beings; a knowledge that we have tuned out from real experience (love) by abandoning ourselves in the pursuit of technological progress and its truths. In order to attune us to this knowledge Elder's cinema aims at reworking our

modes of perception and honing our ability to feel and sense: emotional feeling prompted by cues given by our senses that go out to and “feel” (sympathize) with the other; and sense as signification informed by our bodies, as our bodily immersion in the world. Elder’s films are, therefore, composed in such a way as to heighten viewers’ experience; he does so by exposing viewers to large, very complex and all-encompassing structures. Through such aesthetic experience, and preferably in the intended way of forty-two-hours of film viewing over the period of three days, viewers’ perception is transformed. Immediately following the screening, they begin to notice connections in their daily lives, which were previously unnoticed, between its disparate and fragmented parts. Moreover, they begin to gain sense of their lives as meaningful, for they question and contemplate their connection as mortal beings with other mortals, with the lived world and with the transcendent order. They do so by means of their bodily immersion and participation in the real world; they feel-out the world and infuse sense (significance) and emotion (empathy and even love for one another) into their lives that open them to the possibility of higher knowledge—knowledge of the Whole. But just as they begin to open to this mode of thinking, it begins to slip away. The clamour of daily routine, shaped by the pressures imposed by the system and its technical pursuits, drowns out their ability to dwell in this mode of attunement. However, this experience leaves a gap, a void they now know can be, and must be, filled—with love. Elder’s films, therefore, teach people to apply the same mode of thinking, which opens to them through the aesthetic experience, to their experience of life.

R. Bruce 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.<sup>i</sup> Elder’s epic film cycle *The Book of All the Dead* and its

tripartite structure are inspired by Dante Alighieri's epic poem *Commedia* (The Divine Comedy). *The Book of All the Dead* is, thus, divided into three parts: *Lamentations*, *Consolations*, and *Exultations*.<sup>ii</sup> These roughly correspond with *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* 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 in *Part One: The System of Dante's Hell* (1975-1985) towards the state of lament when entering *Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World* (1985) through several preceding films that culminate in the horrors produced by our technical mode of thinking in *Illuminated Texts* (1982); then moving through the three parts of *Part Two: Consolations: Love is an Art of Time* (1988); and finally ascending to *Exultations: In Light of the Great Giving* (1976-1994) and towards the Wholly knowledge as "the insight that everything given in experience truly is a gift" (Elder 2005: 456).

Both Dante and Elder began their epics at roughly the age of thirty-five. Dante's epic begins with the poet in the dark wood: in the middle of his life's journey, perhaps reflecting on his own mortality and spiritual darkness that surrounds him. Elder's epic adopts the allegory of the dark wood from Dante to present the crisis that one finds oneself in the middle of life's journey. Elder's epic begins approximately with his confrontation with death while critically ill, which is presented in the autobiographical style of *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* (1979). It then proceeds to the profound sense of vulnerability and helplessness that he experiences as he finds himself in the spiritual darkness of our age that culminates in the horrors of Auschwitz, which is depicted in *Illuminated Texts* (1982). It thus appears that both Dante and Elder create

their epics out of their own personal crises of existence, driven by despair when confronted with or made aware of their mortality—no longer being considered at 35 as invincible youth (oriented towards life), now the path towards the darkness and stillness of death is moving into their horizon and is the force that prompts their epics. Although death is the driving force at the origin of their work, their poetics is shaped by the energy of Eros and the search for Love.

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 2005: 455-456).<sup>iii</sup> But *The Book of All the Dead* does not merely present the nine stages of transformation; in fact, it triggers transformations in viewer's 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 2005: 465).

In shaping the content of *The Book of All the Dead*, Elder turned for inspiration to Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and his use of the paratactical method in this work. According to Elder, this method is appropriate to cinema, for cinema already operates on the basis of dissociation,

recombination and association of disparate elements. He contends that forms created using the paratactical method engender experience that approximates the mode of thinking as prayer; for prayer permits the disparate particulars to fill the mind completely and direct it inward (Elder 2005: 464-465). In the experience of structures created using this method, the mind does not rely on the logical thought patterns (it simply cannot); instead it moves, it drifts among the disparate fragments, and in this drifting intuits what connects.

The experience of drifting, which is produced by the paratactical composition of *The Book of All the Dead*, is propelled by the experience of multiple rhythms: the intricate rhythms created by the filmmaker within each shot, between shots, and in sound composition; and rhythms created by viewers in response to the experience of this work. Moreover, Elder relies on repetition to further induce the sense of inward movement. He accomplishes this in two ways. The first, by presenting viewers with a shot, a fragment of sound, or an idea from another part of the cycle or section of the film, while urging them to shuffle in their memory and to remember (“put members together” to use Stan Brakhage’s phrase) what the present percept calls forth. The second, by repeating the same image or sound within one sequence to the point of exhausting viewers’ conscious apprehension and the ability to anticipate progression or continuity; this induces thinking that relies on the methods of the primary process—the mental process operating in the unconscious. (One could say that the experience of *The Book of All the Dead*, by turning towards prayer as a mode of thinking, has some correspondence, although it is not identical, with the experience of praying with the rosary; the symbol of the feminine [Mother of the Son of God] in the Roman Catholic Church. The faithful can come into contact with the experience of the feminine by means of repetitive reciting of prayers and meditations on the

mysteries of the rosary [events in the life of Christ and Mary], which eventually transforms language into music, into song that reverberates with its sounds and rhythms at the core of their being. When it is recited out-loud in the church, which is usually done by women as responsorial recitations, the rhythmic repetition fuses the female voices and fills the space with its echoing sound.) Therefore, polyrhythms and repetitions create the pulse of Elder's *The Book of All the Dead* that pulls viewers inwards, towards the mode of thinking as prayer, granting them contact with the feminine—just as Dante's epic does with his Beatrice, “the embodiment of his experience of love” (Reynolds 51). This opens them to intimations of the most profound knowledge that is love.

Pound's and Elder's epics amass fragments of the greatest works that artists, poets and philosophers have produced over several centuries and even millennia in the Eastern and Western cultures. Their epics also include various styles of literature (Pound and Elder) and of cinema (Elder), as well as several languages. The paratactical method employed in these epics permits the numerous fragments (cultural artifacts) and styles to co-exist, by virtue of being juxtaposed with one another, and compels the viewer, rather than the artist, to make the links between them; to participate in the co-creation of meaning and form.

In Elder films, the viewers' participation is even more demanding. The visual and auditory complexity of the films renders it impossible for viewers to apprehend all the contents at once and in one viewing. This is further compounded by the fact that viewers cannot stop the film to think or search the source of a given quotation or of an artifact, or even to replay the section that produced some difficulty or remained in obscurity for them. The constant meter of the film projector (24 fps.) sweeps viewers into the rhythms of the film, forcing them to keep

moving, to flow with them. In this very fertile state of rational obscurity and bewilderment, when one completely loses oneself in the aesthetic experience, there are moments of profound revelation and illumination; forms and concepts momentarily cohere and create originary arrangements. This produces an acute feeling of pleasure, even joy; for one briefly merges with the filmmaker in this experience, i.e. the two processes of creation (filmmaker's and viewer's) overlap. Furthermore, with each additional viewing of Elder's films new forms and meanings are created, nothing remains the same, because something always slips past us; we always experience these films as new encounters. Concepts and forms, thus, become labilized and infused with new meaning, new significance, in relation to one another and to the overall experience of the film(s).

In "Further Reflections on the Violence of Art," one of Elder's several unpublished essays that make up *The Violence and Charity of Cinema* (an unpublished book of his collected texts), he comments on the disordering power of labile forms in his cinema and their analogy to the operations of the unconscious in language, which also explains his interest in employing the paratactical method and his preference for labile forms in his cinema.

Why should I want to maintain that labile forms, forms that shift and change with every phrase, are a sign of destructive element? For doesn't such lability contribute to a greater formal richness and complexity? My reasons for asserting that the primordial domain perpetrates violence against language lie in the analogy between the capacity of the unconscious to disrupt and dismember speech through what Freud (using the word differently) described as "parapraxis" and the capacity of primordial domain to lay simple gestalt form to ruin. Most readers will be aware of Freud's commentary on the way that the unconscious can disturb everyday speech, dismantle intentions and speak another, unrecognized truth. ... The effects that the disordering force of the primordial has on gestalt form are analogous to those which the unconscious has on language and behavior: it dismembers language and lays good form to rubble. And, just as the unconscious is that which lies under repression, and is refused representation in

consciousness, so the primordial element is the residuum that cannot be represented in language—and so it rises against language and representation, to undo them.

The time when we could confidently assert that we assess a work of art by its gestalt form has passed. That was the old conception of art, and it has wasted itself in its constant effort to repress the dynamic element left over from perception, to hold at bay that excess of unrealized possibility, to ward off the return of that which passes into nothing as a thought is configured, that which language consigns to silence; and to expel from sensation that excess which rises against language, against thought, and against representation, to destroy them. That view has exhausted itself in the constant passivity required of it ... in the face of the violence that is characteristic of the revenge of the repressed. That conception of art is spent; it has had its day. We must now measure the power of the work of art by its capacity to mime the character of the dance of the primordial. We must come to understand that form has two basic roles, one material and one regulative. Form serves first to embody the play of tension that imitates the dance of the primordial and, secondly, through its regulative function, to focus thought in such a way as to create an opening that enables us to respond to the violence the primordial unleashes. (Elder unpublished book: 145-146)

In his opposition to the passivity of viewers and to the closed forms of gestalt configurations, Elder employs the paratactical method and labile forms to create “open form” films that bring viewers into the process of their co-creation. “This compositional method,” Elder writes, “makes one’s life co-extensive with the quest that the work recounts, and so art and life become one, for it relies on the faith ... that in the form-making process, a subject does emerge—a voice that, while not the commanding authorial presence of traditional texts, nonetheless coheres” (2005: 463). This creative process and the evocation of the subject in process resemble Julia Kristeva’s conception of *sujet en procès* (subject in process/on trial): this subject emerges in the experience of those signifying practices (visual art, poetry, music, etc.) that are marked by *le sémiotique* (the semiotic modality) and its propensity for labilizing form and for prising open fixed and closed structures. (Kristeva elaborates in great detail on *sujet en procès* and *le sémiotique* in her 1974 book *La révolution du langage poétique*.) Elder does not make this connection explicit in any of his published writing, but, as the above unpublished passage

suggests, he arrived at similar ideas as Kristeva by studying the works of poets, filmmakers, and philosophers, and while making his films.

In *The Book of All the Dead*, as in his current film cycle *The Book of Praise* (1997-present), Elder aims at presenting another, more primal and poetic mode of thinking, which has been replaced in Western culture by monolinear sequence of abstract thought: “The monolinear sequence of logical thinking is only one way of knowing, and its prospects are narrowly circumscribed, as the attempts to model creativity with logical programming languages show. The mind’s natural way of knowing is to heap up an assortment of facts until, at last, it intuits what connects” (Elder 2005: 465). *The Book of All the Dead* aspires to return us to the more primal and poetic modes of thinking, where we rely on intuition and more rudimentary modes of thinking rather than logic. This is why Elder turns to the greatest poets who help him in leading us on a pilgrimage through the winding paths in the history of Western civilization and towards the transformation of the self through “poetry of experience.” For this experience inspires “emotional experience” that opens viewers to their oneness with others and the surrounding world, hence the profound knowledge of love. Elder describes this transformative process as follows: “Consciousness of the significance of the particular is enlarged until, at last, the poetry of experience is awakened, and an emotional experience is called forth that awakens one to our oneness with our ‘circumstance,’ i.e., that which ‘stands around’ us” (Elder 2005: 456). This journey of “spiritual education” through the poets and their devices (Virgil for Dante; for Elder Pound and Dante, along with film-poets Stan Brakhage and Ed Emshwiller, both film-poets of the cosmic order and feminine) is also a quest in search of love and for the repressed feminine

(and hence our first love). Elder is convinced that only through the poetic forms (methods of the unconscious and feminine aesthetics) can the primordial feminine be reached.

Like Dante who searched through the underworld for his Beatrice, “the embodiment of his experience of love,” Elder also searches for love by aspiring towards the feminine, the feminine aesthetics in his cinema; for through the experience of the feminine one encounters love. Barbara Reynolds notes that in Dante’s poem “Beatrice does not exclusively or specifically ‘stand for’ theology, the Christian revelation, heavenly beatitude, the light of glory or any of the abstraction. ... She is *the image by which Dante perceives such things* and her function in the poem is *to bring him to that state in which he is able to perceive them directly*” (Reynolds 50, my emphases). Thus the function of the feminine (Beatrice) in Dante’s poem is extended into Elder’s cinema, for we come into contact with the feminine through the form of his films, which transforms our mode of thinking to “poetry of experience” that opens us through “emotional experience” to love. Thus in this process we open to the repressed dimension (the feminine and the creative/*poiēsis*) and its gift of love, the most Wholly knowledge.

In *The Book of All the Dead* the protagonist (the filmmaker-poet) is not an “asexual angel” (Elder 2005: 462), nor is he a hermaphrodite, which is made up of two gender halves and not gendered wholes. The protagonist is bisexual, and the form and contents reflect these two gendered wholes. This bisexuality is also the domain of the feminine, as Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément have pointed out to us in their description of *écriture féminine* in *The Newly Born Woman*: bisexuality as “the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the nonexclusion of difference or of a sex, and starting with this ‘permission’ one gives oneself, the multiplication of the effects of

desire's inscription on every part of the body and the other body" (85). In Elder's cinema, the masculine are the fragments that figure as static wholes in the course of the film: the vignettes that employ narrative composition; some of the lengthier passages of voice-over narration that are not diffused by other sounds; some of the representational forms; static images; some of the inter-titles and subtitles. However, through the experience of the entire film these masculine elements become diffused, dissociated and associated through the paratactical method with other elements and themes of the film, and thus are transformed into feminine. The feminine elements abound in this cycle. They are as follows: emphasis on rhythm and repetition instead of narrative progression; polyphonic composition of images and sound; mobile camera; use of multiple superimpositions; use of single frame shooting that create visual staccatos; rendering representational forms abstract by diffusing them into (colour) tones and rhythm (rendering them acoustic); transforming language in text into pictorial forms; emphasis on tactility (use of close-ups, fast cutting, hand-held camera, superimpositions). To this, I would also like to add open-form as the disordering unconscious feminine, in contradistinction to closed-form, the imposition of gestalt (the conscious masculine).

The co-presence of feminine and masculine elements is further reinforced by the footage of nude female and male bodies. However, all the forms and even the content of the nude male bodies tend towards the feminine. For the goal of this project is to reconnect with the feminine, the repressed feminine and the creative, that will lead us to love. Hence the emphasis on poetry, *poiēsis* (creation as a will-less bringing forth, permitting the work to take its own course, in which the unified subject is negated and set into process of becoming, just as in the experience of pregnancy). The feminine and the masculine forms are present side by side, though *The Book*

*of All the Dead* accords more importance to the repressed feminine. Preserving the mystery (the feminine opens us to it) rather than treating it as a problem is the principle aim of Elder's project.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> R. Bruce Elder provides a detailed account in "Driftworks, Pulseworks, Lightworks: The Letter to Dr. Henderson" of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* being the key influences on his *The Book of All the Dead*. *Dante & the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of*

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<sup>ii</sup> It should be noted that *The Book of All the Dead* cycle includes ten additional films, eight short and two feature-length films. Six of them belong to *Part One: The System of Dante's Hell* and serve as preludes and interludes to *Lamentations: A Monument to the Dead World, part 1 and 2* (1985). The preludes include two short films *Breath/Light/Birth* (1975) and *1857 (Fool's Gold)* (1981); and two long films are *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* (1979) and *Illuminated Texts* (1982). The interludes are two short films *Sweet Love Remembered* (1980) and *Permutations and Combinations* (1976), the first appears between the two parts of *Lamentations* and the second follows the second part and creates a transition into *Part Two: Consolations (Love is an Art of Time)* (1988). The three long films that make up *Consolations* stand on their own. The short films are reintroduced in *Part Three: Exultations (In Light of the Great Giving)* (1990-1994); they include *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1978), *Barbara Is a Vision of Loveliness* (1976), *She Is Away* (1976), and *Trace* (1980). According to Elder, these interludes are intended to provide an alternate experience of time for viewers; the longer and more immersive experience when viewers are absorbed or swept into the unfolding time through the rhythms of the film (195 or 240 minutes in duration) is followed by a short and fleeting experience of time (13 or 1 minute short), which does not keep the viewer in the state of immersion but instead engenders a vivid impression—a surge. This juxtaposition of the two temporal experiences demonstrates to viewers, on the one hand, that different states of engagement and modes of thinking are, still, possible because they can be engendered through aesthetic experience by works that employ time as a key compositional variable. And, on the other hand, it opens the possibility of reconnecting with the displaced modes of thinking and experience in Western culture, i.e., attunement, accompanied by serenity.

<sup>iii</sup> The nine stages in the transformation of consciousness presented in *The Book of All the Dead* are as follows:

1. from ordinary waking consciousness (in *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, the title of which I keep misspelling in the credits as 'The Art of WORDly Wisdom' in order to suggest the conventional nature of the knowledge the film presents);
2. through the consciousness of the workings of the awesome Divine within ordinary life (in *1857: Fool's Gold*);
3. through the purging of our dreadful condition—i.e., from Hell into Purgatory (in *Illuminated Texts*);
4. to the comprehension of Pound's 'repeat in history,' i.e., the 'Purgatory of human error' (in *The Dream of the Last Historian*—for, after all, it is recognition of the historical repeat that puts and end to the terrible vector of history so eloquently described in the Henry Adams section of *Illuminated Texts*—and into parts of *The Sublime Calculation*);
5. and to the sporadic, faltering beginnings of the contemplation of the love that leads one out of Purgatory (in *Consolations [Love is an Art of Time]*), first in its mode of absence (in *The*

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*Fugitive Gods*), then in the mode of possibility-to-be-made-once-again-present (in *The Lighted Clearing*, and especially in *The Body and the World*);

6. and, finally, to the various stages of the Beatific Vision, beginning with an acknowledgement of the terrible powers of love (in *Flesh Angels*);

7. followed by the eschewing of intellectual love (in *Newton and Me*—a title intended both to disjoin us, as many people, including William Blake, have thought of Newton as the exemplar of Reason and Intellectual Contemplation of the Divine, and to join us, as Newton forsook that paradigmatic activity of reason to reflect on apocalyptic literature. I also intend the title of this section of *The Book of All the Dead* to suggest the beginning of a new and dynamic cosmology);

8. passing on to the peace of discovering the Divine Love in higher vision (in *Azure Serene: Mountains, Rivers, Sea and Sky*);

9. and aspiring to the exalted knowledge of the Love that permeates all things and sustains all things in their being (in *Exultations (In Light of Great Giving)*)” (Elder 2005: 455-456).