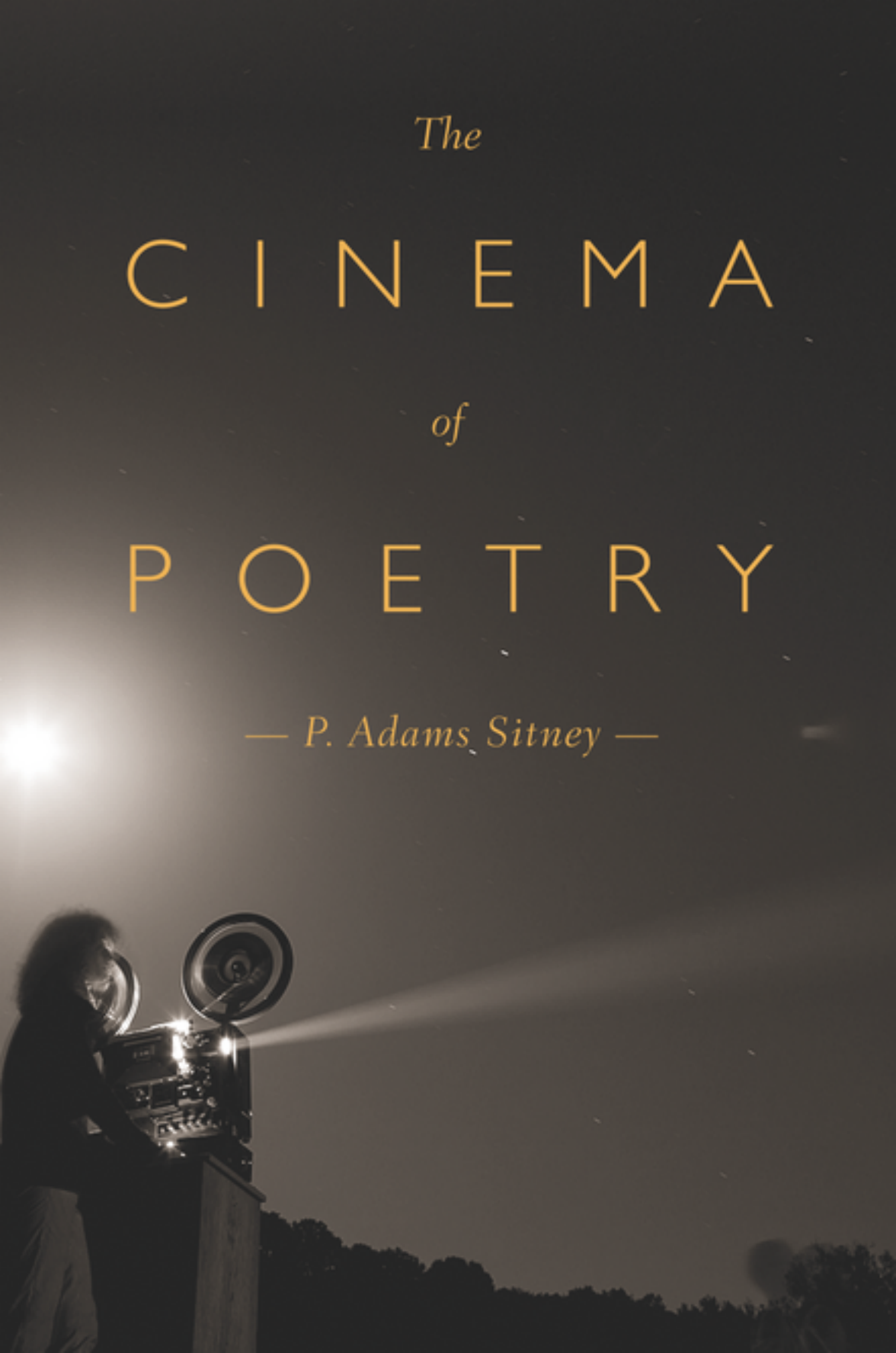
The CINEMA *of* POETRY

— *P. Adams Sitney* —



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In token
of my admiration of their geniuses
this book is inscribed
to
SUSAN HOWE
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{ PREFACE }

Just as my book *Eyes Upside Down* (2008) returned to the matter of *Visionary Film* (1974, 1979, 2002), some thirty-four years after the initial writing of that book, *The Cinema of Poetry* revisits the themes and issues of *Modernist Montage* (1992) twenty years later. Since 1961, when I began to write on cinema and to edit and publish the texts of filmmakers and critics, the relationship of film to poetry has been my central focus. In the term *poetry* I include the works of poets, dead and alive; the theory of poetry; the poetics of lyric, epic, and dramatic verse; and the poetics of cinema, especially but not exclusively as formulated by filmmakers. Of the ten filmmakers I discuss in detail here, six have been treated in my other books, although Pasolini, from whom I derive the title of the volume, previously appeared in and also provided the title for my *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema* (1995, 2012), the one book I have written in which poetry played almost no role.

Because I have been writing on poetry and cinema throughout my career, it is natural that this volume incorporates, in some of its chapters, texts I have published earlier in periodicals or anthologies. I am particularly grateful to Don McMahon, my editor at *Artforum,* who encouraged me to write on a number of the filmmakers discussed here and who has always given me superb editorial advice.

I wrote the bulk of *The Cinema of Poetry* in the spring of 2011 while I was the Anna-Maria Kellen Berlin Fellow at the American Academy in Berlin. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Gary Smith, its director, and Pamela Rosenberg, the dean of Fellows and Programs, for inviting me and for their hospitality, and to Susan Howe, Susan Stewart, and Leonard Barkin for supporting my nomination. The remarkable librarian of the Academy, Yolanda Korb, procured every book, article, and photocopies of manuscripts that I required with lightning efficiency. The hospitality of Daniel Heller-Roazen and Oleg Tcherny, Robert Beavers and Ute Aurand, and the constant support of The Institute for Cultural Inquiry (Berlin) made my research on Pasolini and Markopoulos efficient and remarkably pleasurable. It was my good fortune that my former student Beau Madison Mount was a fellow at the ICI during the period I was in Berlin. Through his efforts I was generously welcomed by the director, Christolph Holzhey; the associate director, Manuele Gragnolati; and Dr. Holzhey's academic assistant, Luca Di Biasi, while they were in the midst of an extended examination of Pasolini's achievements. That forum provided an invaluable sounding board for my speculations on Pasolini's film theory.

My study of Gregory Markopoulos's *Eniaios* would not have been possible without the generosity of Robert Beavers, who not only gave me access to the Temenos Archive in Zürich each time I could arrange to visit it but also patiently answered hundreds of my questions. The Stanley J. Seeger Hellenic Fund at Princeton University permitted me to attend the Temenos screenings in Lyssaraia, Greece, in 2004, 2008, and 2012. Likewise, Marilyn Brakhage and the Stan Brakhage collection in the archives of the library of the University of Colorado in Boulder (and its knowledgeable curator, Brad Arnold) considerably enriched my study of the filmmaker. But without the help of Don Yannacito I would not have been able to spend two months going through Brakhage's papers.

In addition to writing the chapters on Pasolini, Bergman, Tarkovsky, Brakhage, and Markopoulos in Berlin, I reworked during those months earlier essays I published on *Ménilmontant, Nostalghia*, Joseph Cornell, Nathaniel Dorsky, and Lawrence Jordan. Short essays I had published on Ingmar Bergman's films *Tystnaden* [*The Silence*] and *Visningar och rop* [*Cries and Whispers*] became my starting point for a longer study of his *Fanny och Alexander*. I also incorporated essays I had published on Stan Brakhage's "Faust" series and his Modernism in the chapter largely devoted to his Vancouver series. Don McMahon asked me to write an essay on Jerome Hiler's *Words of Mercury* soon after I returned from Berlin. Immediately upon completing it, I felt it belonged with the consideration of Dorsky's films in the penultimate chapter.

With the encouragement of my editor at Oxford University Press, Brendan O'Neill, and drawing on the generous comments of two unidentified readers of the manuscript, I wrote the autobiographical introduction and, in writing it, came to realize how long I had been nurturing this project. Robert Haller of Anthology Film Archives, Fred Camper, Marilyn Brakhage, Nina Zurier, Nathaniel Dorsky, Sebastian and Jonas Mekas, Jerome Hiler, John Borruso, Linda Levinson, and Richard Pilaro helped me make or acquire the illustrations. Valerie Borchardt at Georges Borchardt, Inc., deftly and kindly handled all the contractual negotiations for me.

The friendship of filmmakers and poets has inspired many of the pages of this book in ways they may not recognize. This book would not exist without the conversations of the filmmakers Nathaniel Dorsky, Jerome Hiler, Lawrence Jordan, Robert Beavers, Ernie Gehr, Peter Kubelka, and Saul Levine or the poets Robert Kelly and Susan Howe, and certainly not without the constant support of Jonas Mekas, who is both poet and filmmaker.

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"Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence* and the Primal Scene," *Film Culture,* no. 76 (June 1992): 35–38.

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"*Ménilmontant* de Dimitri Kirsanoff, figures et syntaxe de l'avant-garde," trans. Pierre Gras, in *Jeune, dure et pure!: Une histoire du cinéma d'avant-garde et expérimental en France*, ed. Nicole Brenez, Christian Lebrat, (Paris: Cinémathèque Française, 2001) pp. 138–140.

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"Idyll Worship: Gregory J. Markopoulos's *Eniaios*," *Artforum* (November 2004): 187–191; "Further Orders" [on Temenos 2008], *Artforum* (October 2008): 135–140.

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"Markopoulos and the *Temenos,*" *Framework* (Fall 2012): 331–340.

"Andrey Tarkovsky, Russian Experience, and the Poetry of Cinema," *New England Review*, 34, no. 3–4 (2014): 208–241.

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The Cinema of Poetry

Introduction

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ENTHUSIASMS

In completing *The Cinema of Poetry,* I have written a version of the book I wanted to read more than fifty years ago, when the magnetic attraction of the two domains, poetry and cinema, first seized hold of my attention. It was 1960. I was sixteen years old. The terms *cine-poem* and *film-poem* were still being used to identify the avant-garde cinema. *Film-poem* was nearly interchangeable with *experimental film.* But the nature and history of avant-garde cinema were not the only things that fascinated me. Larger questions, unanswerable but ineluctable, about film and poetry were regularly discussed in the pages of *Film Culture*, the journal I had just discovered and whose five years of back issues I read avidly, hardly dreaming that two years later I would be invited to join its editorial board.

I had heard that in 1953 Cinema 16 had held a round table on "Cinema and Poetry" in which Maya Deren, Parker Tyler, Willard Maas, Dylan Thomas, and Arthur Miller participated. I knew no one who had actually witnessed it, nor was I able to find a single written account of it. Instead, I read all that I could find by each of the participants, and I tried to imagine what they might have said to each other about cinema and poetry. My regret over having missed the panel was almost as intense as my fantasies of what it must have revealed.

I was not searching for a coherent theoretical formulation of the relationship between the two arts, or even a synthetic statement of positions on the subject. I wanted, instead, to know the range of what had been thought, especially by filmmakers, on the nature of poetry, on its place in cinema, and on its use in particular films. Fortunately, I had access to Yale University's Sterling Library, where I could find Maya Deren's pamphlet, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film* (1946), and her summa "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality" that had just appeared in *Daedalus* (Winter 1960). That same year, Parker Tyler published *The Three Faces of the Film*, containing eighteen essays on "The Art," "The Dream," and "The Cult" of cinema.

Issues of *Film Culture* between April 1958 and Spring 1962 (issues 18–24) nurtured the seeds from which *The Cinema of Poetry* eventually grew. Parker Tyler contributed short studies of avant-garde filmmakers in many

of these issues: Brakhage, Peterson, Maas, and one combining Markopoulos, Harrington, and Boultenhouse. When I started *Filmwise*, a mimeographed journal of which each issue was devoted to one or two filmmakers, Tyler graciously extended the series with new essays on Deren, Brakhage, and Markopoulos and allowed me to reprint the one he had given *Film Culture* on Maas. I always regretted that he did not continue in that vein after *Filmwise* came to an end in 1964. In a sense, my articles for *Artforum* (on Morgan Fisher, Peter Hutton, Saul Levine, Ken Jacobs, Nathaniel Dorsky, Jerome Hiler, and Lawrence Jordan—the last three of which have been reworked for this book) sought to exercise what I learned from those early studies by Tyler.

It was *Film Culture* yet again that led me to the theoretical work of Pier Paolo Pasolini. I served on its editorial board beginning with issue 24 (Spring 1962). In that number one of my coeditors, Louis Brigante, translated a text he titled "Literary and Stylistic Figures" (originally "Cinema e letterature: appunti dopo 'Accatone,'" initially published as the appendix to the script of *Accatone* [FM Roma 1961]). It was my first acquaintance with Pasolini's writings. Incidentally, it was also the author's preliminary venture into the film theory that would climax four years later in "Il 'cinema di poesia.'" In "Literary and Stylistic Figures" I discovered an enticing example of the very sort of speculation on the relationship of poetry to narrative cinema I had been hoping to find as a complement to the theoretical work of Tyler and the avant-garde filmmakers (especially Deren, Brakhage, and Markopoulos) regularly published in *Film Culture*. Without that anticipatory lure, I might never have seized upon "Il 'cinema di poesia'" just as I was learning to read Italian in 1965. I have been rereading it, and teaching it, ever since.

Pasolini's critical and theoretical opposition to the notion of the cine-poem, that is to say, to a cinema analogous to that of lyric poetry, commanded serious attention if one were to consider the full range of intersections between the theory of poetry and the theory of film. Yet for two decades his writings on cinema were eclipsed by the temporary triumph of his polemical agonists, the French semioticians and, immediately following their decline, the longer reign of Lacanian theories of spectatorship. Although they lacked the obscurity cultivated by Lacan's followers, Pasolini's arguments were anything but transparent. The labor of unpacking them waited for the scholarship of the turn of the twenty-first century. By then the films to which they referred and in which they were grounded had been forgotten or ignored. I have attempted to restore that context in my opening chapter. For him, the "cinema of poetry" was first of all a historical phenomenon, a rhetorical shift he observed in films by Antonioni, Olmi, Bertolucci, and Godard. As a historical phenomenon, it had a precise political dimension, which meant, for Pasolini, an orientation toward both class and language.

When I began this book, I set myself the task of explicating the context of "Il 'cinema di poesia,'" stressing its relevance in film history and applying it

to the films of Ingmar Bergman. Whereas Pasolini had attempted to interpret free indirect discourse in terms of class perspective, I read it psychoanalytically. Bergman too had turned to what Pasolini was calling the cinema of poetry in 1963 with *The Silence*, although Pasolini ignored the modification in his style; he preferred to cite Bergman's 1960 film *The Devil's Eye* as an example of an earlier mode of "poetic" cinema, before the dominance of free indirect point of view. But it was not until *Persona* (1966) that the shift in Bergman's stylistic system could not be ignored. For Tarkovsky, Bergman was already a crucial precursor. He made *Andrey Rublev* the same year as *Persona*, under the influence of earlier Bergman films, but it was with *Mirror* (1975) and the films that follow that he moved into the formal mode Pasolini called "the cinema of poetry." *Persona* itself inflects the imagery and theme of Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* (1983).

My interest in psychoanalysis coincided with my fascination with avant-garde cinema. When *Film Culture* published Sigmund Freud on "dream work" in issue number 21 (Summer 1960), between essays by Tyler and Luis Buñuel, I rushed to buy a paperback of *The General Introduction to Psychoanalysis,* from which Mekas had excerpted it. However, it was not until fifteen years later, when the psychoanalyst Dr. Leon Balter pointed me to essays on the primal scene by Freudians Jacob Arlow and Henry Edelheit, that my work on the poetics of Ingmar Bergman and Andrey Tarkovsky slowly began to take shape.

In reviewing the latent sources for this book, I was naturally surprised to realize how these formative influences have clung to my critical imagination and played out over half a century. But even more than that, I was astonished to find, in rereading Tyler's *The Three Faces of the Film* for the first time in fifty-two years, the stimulus of my entire critical project. For there I discovered *in nuce* the principles of the film analysis I have practiced over the past five decades.[1] I had forgotten that Tyler points his reader to the centrality of his essay on *Dead of Night*, "Film Form and Ritual as Reality" (orig. *Kenyon Review,* 1948). In that chapter he interprets the common elements of the frame story and its several embedded episodes as an allegory of filmmaking and film viewing:

> What I wish to point out about these independent minor plots is the significance of their *form* rather than of their *substance*. We can analytically identify their substance, as I say, with pathological mental phenomena. The peculiarity of their form in this movie, internally connected with the over-all plot (itself explicable on psychoanalytic grounds), is *that the supernatural element can in all cases be interpreted in terms of film itself, that is, in terms of its technical forms, its quality of illusion*.[2]

Then he reads the opening of a curtain and the view through a window, in one episode, as a metaphor for the film screen; a magical mirror, in a second

episode, as a declaration of the reflexivity of the screen; the ventriloquist's dummy, in the third and crucial episode, as the paradigm of a film actor; and the architect around whose dream the whole film circulates as representing the filmmaker.

It is no accident that the strongest critic of the avant-garde cinema of the 1940s and 1950s was also the first great psychoanalytic interpreter of cinema at large. However, it was Tyler's defense of the film-poem that brought me to reread his book after such a long time. In the chapter "Dream Structure: The Basis of Experimental Film," which he wrote specifically for *The Three Faces of the Film*, we find the following reflections on "the cine-poem":

> The orthodox criticism of so-called "Surrealist craziness" in these films is that, however ingenious or "pretty," this dominant element divorces itself from "reality." I would ask: Is a poem "real"? And answer: Yes, but it is seldom "realistic," even in narratives, for normally it uses many figures of speech, time-elisions (equivalent to a type of montage), and as a rule follows no rigid logical or temporal order. Modern poetry is especially complex and "irregular"; its basic order, like that of dreams, is the psychic order of association and suggestibleness. A "poem," one might remark, is what a cine-poem normally sets out to be.…[3]
>
> …It is a truism that the film camera is active as well as passive; that all we know as "film technique" is a product of cinematic inventiveness and manipulation formally parallel with the structural theory of actual magic. But cannot this widely known faculty of the camera to imitate magic, dreams, and hallucinations—cavalierly used by Hollywood as it pleases—be used to express reality primarily as *imaginative* reality, as poetry, and—in that visual style to which Experimental films give prominence—particularly a sort of dance ritual, a ritualistic pantomime? The only element the dream finds necessary to reach order is *rhythm*. Art supplies this.…[4]
>
> …[P]oetic creators in all media have perennially "dreamt strange dreams" as did Psyche of Greek legend, the subject of one of Gregory Markopoulos' films, and enriched vision with eternal ambiguity thereby. In dreams and spontaneous wild imaginings, man hunts down his innermost secrets, and by ritualizing this vein of the imagination, grows familiar with his inward, less conspicuous self.…On the contrary [to the dream sequence in Hitchcock's film of psychoanalysis, *Spellbound*], in the work of the Experimental film makers, the same sort of supernatural or magical condition as operated in the dream-sequence is used, without psychoanalysis, as the means *through which the protagonists are able to recognize their ultimate desires*. To know, as an audience, this supreme distinction, we must learn to interpret the symbols in Experimental films not as psychoanalytic, but as *poetic*, material.[5]

Toward the end of 1963 Jonas Mekas entrusted two issues of *Film Culture* (numbers 29 and 30) to me. The latter was entirely devoted to the first publication of

Stan Brakhage's *Metaphors on Vision*. The other contained everything I could assemble at the time relating to poetry and cinema: articles by Willard Maas, Sidney Peterson, Charles Boultenhouse, poems by Parker Tyler (who also contributed an essay) and Jonas Mekas, an essay by the poet Michael McClure on Brakhage, and above all the text of the Cinema 16 round table.[6] Amos Vogel had allowed me to borrow the precious wire recordings for one night. I typed and edited the first of the two sessions into one as I was listening to it. (My hasty, amateur transcription contains several errors. The symposium as a whole can now be heard on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HA-yzqykwcQ.)

Ken Kelman wrote "Film as Poetry" especially for that issue. He discussed the opening dream in *Sawdust and Tinsel* (aka *The Naked Night*): "In this, one of the greatest passages in all film, we are presented with an apocalyptic vision, in which a clown and his bear-trainer wife become transfigured into symbolic creatures of poetry."[7] Kelman's essay, together with Pasolini's remarks on *The Devil's Eye* in "Il 'cinema di poesia'" and Noel Burch's discussion of *Persona* in his *Theory of Film Practice*,[8] confirmed for me the relevance of Bergman's vision in a discussion of this matter, despite the filmmaker's silence on the question of poetry.

The present book is not merely an isolated return to the obsessive concerns of my initiatory period as a critic. Poetry and cinema have been central to all of my books except *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema*. Romantic poetry (especially that of Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley) plays a crucial role in *Visionary Film*. In *Modernist Montage* I wrote on Milton, Mallarmé, Desnos, Khlebnikov, Stein and Olson. *Eyes Upside Down* returned to the subject matter of *Visionary Film* with an emphasis on the American artistic and literary tradition, with massive doses of Emerson (on poetry) and Whitman and attention to Nin, W. C. Williams, the Language poets, and the French poet Paul Valéry. The relationship of *Visionary Film* to *Eyes Upside Down* corresponds crudely to one between *Modernist Montage* and this book.

It is likely that fewer readers will read this book from beginning to end than turn to individual chapters for the discussions of particular filmmakers and their films. This is to be expected, insofar as my work has always been centered on the interpretation of specific films and texts. Nevertheless, it might be useful for such readers to have an overview of a number of interlocking themes and theses that run through the book. So I shall set out in capsule form the gist of each of the nine chapters. In this distillation I have been greatly assisted by the reports on the manuscript by the two anonymous reviewers solicited by Oxford University Press. Their insights have generously given me perspectives on my project that I might otherwise have missed.

The argument of *The Cinema of Poetry* begins as a response to Pasolini's essay from which I take my title. There the filmmaker adapts the literary device of "free indirect discourse" (which accentuates the subjective point of view in "objective" prose narratives) to "free indirect point of view" as the signal

mode of ambitious narrative cinema in the early 1960s. In Pasolini's formulation the subjective perspective does not correspond to the point-of-view shot of earlier cinema but to a range of rhetorical tropes *indirectly* linking the whole film to the perspective of its protagonist. Consequently, the film spectator is drawn into the mental states and even the dreams of a character. Without intending it, Pasolini thereby broke down the conventional distinction between the self-conscious, montage-oriented, avant-garde cinema and the European realist cinema, as André Bazin theorized it, with its emphasis on the long take and depth of focus. Pasolini even privileged the sequence shot in his taxonomy of poetic tropes. The sequence shot is a long take, usually entailing camera movement, that incorporates the elements of establishing shots, close-ups, and medium shots without the breakdown of montage. At times, it even replaces shot-countershot exchanges, as, famously, in Carl Th. Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955) and *Gertrud* (1964).

The density and allusiveness of Pasolini's text requires careful analysis. He supports his radical case for the historical shift in narrative film style with extraordinary claims for the semiotic nature of reality itself. Gilles Deleuze was the only major theoretician of cinema to acknowledge the importance of Pasolini's position. He propounded a similar historical shift, locating it more than a decade earlier, from what he called "the movement-image" to "the time-image." Deleuze grounded his argument in an ontological claim (drawn from a fusion of Henri Bergson's and C. S. Peirce's writings) even more radical than Pasolini's: that light and movement are the primary factors of the material world and that perception precedes perceiving agents.

In subsequent theoretical articles Pasolini elaborated on principles inherent in "Il 'cinema di poesia.'" As I emphasize in "Poetry and the American Avant-Garde Cinema," he clarified the previously unstated idea that for him cinema has inherent affinities to narrative poetry and resists the lyric. Yet he introduces the notion of "a 'structure that wants to be another structure,'" which accounts for extended passages of lyric within a narrative film (among other structures). Although he never addresses directly the suggestion that the "stylemes" of the "cinema of poetry" can often operate on a barely conscious level, the attention he gives to nuances of color, reframing of an otherwise insignificant object, and the entries and exits of characters in the frames of *Il deserto rosso* might have escaped the notice of a less astute observer. To illuminate these implicit dimensions of Pasolini's text, I have discussed in more detail than Pasolini did the films to which he alludes. This exfoliation entails the speculation that passages in the work of Bertolucci and Godard exemplify structures "that want to be other structures."

The next chapter, on Dimitri Kirsanoff's 1926 masterpiece, *Ménilmontant*, challenges Pasolini's historical schema by showing how elaborately the tropes of free indirect point of view orchestrate this narrative of the life of two orphan sisters from rural France in lower-class Paris. The ambiguities

and ellipses in the cinematic narrative come to represent uncertainties and confusions in the perspectives of the sisters as they learn to negotiate the perils of urban lowlife after the traumatic loss of their parents. Kirsanoff's technique requires the spectator to attend closely to a range of innovative figures of montage whose meanings are frequently suspended until later in the film.

"Ingmar Bergman's Primal Scene," which follows, considers *The Silence, Cries and Whispers*, and *Fanny and Alexander* as examples of the "cinema of poetry." Bergman's model would be the dramatic poem rather than narrative poetry. This is most explicit in the extensive passages from *Hamlet* in *Fanny and Alexander*. But it is more subtly manifested in what the psychoanalyst Henry Edelheit called "libidinal theater": the variety acts and puppet play of *The Silence*, the magic lantern performances of *Cries and Whispers* and *Fanny and Alexander*, and the latter's climactic exploration of the puppets and magical curiosities of Isak's shop. Whereas the psychoanalytic current was latent in Pasolini's theory, it is manifest in Bergman's version of the "cinema of poetry." Thus I use psychoanalytic literature (Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*, Jacob Arlow's "The Revenge Motif in the Primal Scene," and Edelheit's "Crucifixion Fantasies and Their Relation to the Primal Scene" and "Mythopoeisis and the Primal Scene"—See notes 3 and 4 to Chapter 3.) to explore how Bergman marshals a cinematic indirect discourse to articulate the subjectivity of his protagonists. In the case of Bergman, Pasolini's historical argument is pertinent: in the early 1960s his cinema demonstrated a stylistic transformation in which oneiric and realistic elements merged; the domains of dream and reality ceased to be clearly circumscribed (as they had been in *Wild Strawberries* [1957]).[9]

Bergman rarely mentions poets or poetry. Yet from the few times he does we can glean that he associated poetry with the dissolution of narrative, as when he speaks of the pretitle sequence of *Persona* as a poem. Similarly, he writes in *Images: My Life in Film* of the failed plan for *Face to Face*: "it would have been a sacrosanct cinematic piece of poetry… Here, finally, all forms of storytelling are dissolved"[10] and of the genesis of *Cries and Whispers*: "I believe that the film—or whatever it is—consists of this poem: a human being dies, but, as in a nightmare, gets stuck halfway through and pleads for tenderness, mercy, deliverance, something… I believe this is the poem or the invention, or whatever you want to call it".[11] The freedom from storytelling that the poem represents for Bergman leads ineluctably to overcoming his "reluctance" to touch "on a number of my own inner conflicts…" (*Images*, p. 70).

In Bergman's films, the cinematic free indirect point of view is the site of the coalescence of autobiographical poetry with the perspectives of his protagonists. For Pasolini such a fusion can only mean that the filmmaker is confessing his identification with his "neurotic, bourgeois" characters. Andrey Tarkovsky, who was profoundly influenced by Bergman's art, did not share his precurser's "reluctance" to let fiction fuse with autobiography. In contrast to

Bergman, he had an intense and explicit relationship to poetry. So, in the final chapter of this book's first part, "Andrey Tarkovsky's Concept of Poetry," I draw on the filmmaker's writings to examine his claim that poetry is fundamental to the nature of cinema.

He wrote, "the proper viewing of film requires the spectator to organize the disparate elements of film by intuiting the poetic linkages of its construction, guided by the fundamental metonymy of cinematic images." For this filmmaker poetic thinking weaves an intuitive, associative web within the infrastructures of his films. More than projecting the indirect point of view of his protagonists (although it does do that as well), poetic thinking "sculpts time," revealing "otherwise indiscernible movements of Being." The primary influence on his concept of poetry was the work of his father, the poet Arseny Tarkovsky. In *Mirror* he not only offers a thinly disguised cinematic autobiography but also incorporates at crucial moments his father's voice reading his own poems.

He also incorporates documentary images to mark the passage of historical time. However, Tarkovsky's quarry is ontological rather than psychological. His preference for using sequence shots stems from his intuitive sense of a connection between the articulations of temporality available to a filmmaker and the nature of the poet's primal apprehension of reality. The factual time that cinema, alone of all the arts, is able to "imprint" on a film is a "cluster" that brings together the very linkages Pasolini reads as tropes of free indirect point of view. But for Tarkovsky, the temporality that cinema reveals is what dictates the rhythm and the editing of particular films, rather than the other way around. So, in chapter 4, I attempt to show what this poetics means for *Mirror* and *Nostalghia*.

The second part of *The Cinema of Poetry* proposes overviews of the careers of a number of American avant-garde filmmakers. In the prefatory essay, "Poetry and the American Avant-Garde Cinema," I return to Pasolini to show how his viewing of an exhibition of the New American Cinema challenged his account of poetry in film. He responded by denying the aesthetic viability of a cinematic analog to lyrical poetry. The chapters that follow describe the works of filmmakers who embraced the very models Pasolini repudiated. Each of these chapters marks the affinities of the filmmakers for particular poets: Joseph Cornell for French symbolists (especially Mallarmé), Federico Garcia Lorca, and Emily Dickinson; Lawrence Jordan for Robert Duncan, Michael McClure, and H.D.; Stan Brakhage for Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Robert Duncan, and Ronald Johnson; Nathaniel Dorsky for John Ashbery, George Oppen, and Jack Spicer; and Jerome Hiler for Ashbery and Shakespeare. For Gregory Markopoulos the poets of classical Greece were essential, as was the structure of the Greek language itself.

Unlike the four filmmakers of the first part of this book, I have known all those of the second part personally. Consequently, I have drawn on our

conversations as liberally as I cite and analyze what they have written. The first filmmaker I discuss in the second part of the book is the collage artist Joseph Cornell. He was an avid filmgoer, and he amassed a large collection of 16mm films, some of which he reedited into films of his own. He also employed filmmakers Rudy Burckhardt, Stan Brakhage, and Lawrence Jordan to photograph scenes under his direction. As an adult convert to Christian Science, he made artworks that instantiated Mary Baker Eddy's claim: "That which material sense calls intangible is found to be substance." His conception of cinema entailed various aesthetic mediations of visual experience to invoke the intangible. I discuss a scenario he wrote and illustrated with stereoptic plates ("M. Phot"), an essay he wrote about Hedy Lamarr, some of his collage films, and others that he conceived and directed. For Cornell, to encounter an object in fullness is to acknowledge its evanescent temporality, that is to say, its absence or its recession into the past. When he reedited Hollywood genre films and documentaries, he instilled the characters he found in them with what Pasolini thought of as free indirect point of view, transforming all the images he retained of the original drama into the character's dreamlike associations. Sometimes when he directed a film he organized the shots as if they were the impressions of a poet (Lorca, Dickinson) wandering through his favorite New York neighborhoods.

Lawrence Jordan, the focus of the sixth chapter, worked with Joseph Cornell, helping him give shape to several collage films and to incorporate lines from Lorca's "Your Childhood in Menton" into his *A Legend for Fountains*. That experience may have sparked Jordan to adapt H. D.'s "Hermetic Definition" to film. But unlike Cornell, Jordan did his major work in cutout animations. In both his animated and live-action films the filmmaker "transforms" his images into a dilation of time in which "the so-called Present moment is always the same moment." Whereas Cornell pushed his films toward evocations of evanescence, Jordan sought to manifest his trinity of "time/Moment/change" through the rhythms of editing and camera movement to a paradoxical image of "timelessness." I read his "alchemical autobiography," *Sophie's Place*, as a poem of his aesthetic education, or election, as an artist, particularly under the tripart guidance of Cornell, the poet Robert Duncan, and the collage artist Jess. Duncan's own "essential autobiography" instructed Jordan to accept his spontaneous thoughts and free associations as instruments for the discovery of "an enduring design" in his work. Later, in his *H. D. Trilogy,* he displaced the self from the center of his work through a version of "free indirect point of view" in which the words of H. D.'s poem, the perspectives of a woman wandering through Greek and Roman sites, and the perceptions of the filmmaker coincide and separate.

Stan Brakhage was a high school friend of and collaborator with Jordan. He, too, assisted Joseph Cornell and was tutored by Robert Duncan. His relationship to poetry was so intense and complex that the chapter devoted to

him, the longest in this book, is a mere sketch of its intricacy. After outlining the course of his early career and the massive influence of both Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound on his cinematic poetics, I concentrate on two serial projects, both tetralogies: the "Faust" films he made between 1987 and 1989 and the "Vancouver Island films" of 1991, 1994, 2000, and 2002.

Brakhage had made more than 200 films, the great majority of them silent, before the "Faust" series. So his employment of voice-over in the first, second, and fourth of them was a radical departure into narration and free indirect discourse. In turning to the myth of Faust, Brakhage was updating an abandoned project from his youth, originally inspired by Duncan's masque, *Faust Foutu* (in which Jordan played Faust). The dissolution of his first marriage had engendered a crisis in his work that brought him to reexamine his "election" as an artist in the series. Then his second marriage, to Marilyn Jull, a Canadian, brought him several times to Vancouver Island (where he eventually relocated just before his death). There he retraced, yet again, the iconography of his cinematic coming of age.

A prolific writer and theorist, Brakhage formulated the notion of "moving visual thinking" during these years. It is the culmination of his lifelong polemic against the priority of language in perception and thought. Although he never succinctly defines "moving visual thinking," he uses the formula to refer to both the moiling, granular field of liminally visible electrostatic charges that he takes to be the ground of all visual experience and to the perpetual scanning movements and refocusing of the eyes. According to Brakhage, peripheral vision, phosphenes, dream images, and noetic pictures all respond to the biofeedback and "synaptic" pulses of that ground. In an interview with Suranjan Ganguly, he described "moving visual thinking" as "a streaming of shapes that aren't nameable—a vast visual 'song' of the cells expressing their external life."[12] He told the audience of the Millennium Film Workshop: "There's thinking with words, numbers, symbols, which is essentially left-brain thinking; there's thinking musically, gestalt-composition which is right-brain thinking. Then, there are streaming of unnameable, or resistant to nameable, shapes, forms, even colors which I believe is the largest part of thinking. It is composed of the electrical synapting neuron feedback of the entire body. I am attempting to give as close to representation as I can get in the form of film of that kind of thinking. I believe that this is coming direct from the grid upon which all original vision is made."[13]

Despite the profound influence of Cornell and Duncan on Brakhage's thought, he always resisted mystical interpretations of a suprasensible universe beyond the parameters of human perception. Instead, he drew from the unlikely fusion of Gertrude Stein and Charles Olson a poetics of bodily dynamism. By the time he came to make the Vancouver tetralogy, he found a similar inspiration in Ronald Johnson's long poem *ARK*. Yet contravening Brakhage's ideological commitment to living poets, I argue that he found in Johnson's

poem a restatement of topoi they both inherited from Walt Whitman's sea chants.

The visual tropes of the "Faust" series reflect the filmmaker's earliest films, his psychodramas of the middle and late 1950s, while its theme recalls the poetic enthusiasms of Brakhage's youth: Goethe, Marlowe, Valéry, Duncan. The free indirect discourse of the soundtrack takes up the burden of aligning the concepts of "moving visual thinking" with the imagery of these films. In contrast, the Vancouver series are silent films; their photography, montage, and, in the final film, handpainting on celluloid *presuppose* the principles of the filmmaker's mature theories.

Nathaniel Dorsky and Jerome Hiler began to make films in the shadow of Brakhage's preeminence. Through most of the 1960s they showed each other, and a few other young filmmakers, the footage they were shooting and talked of making films in "open form" in which "the montage moves from shot to shot outside of any other necessities, except of course the accumulation of being." Dorsky was inspired by John Ashbery's poetry in this aspiration. In chapter 8, "Nathaniel Dorsky, Jerome Hiler, and the Polyvalent Film," I trace the evolution of Dorsky's cinema first to the point in 1996 at which he "found a way around Brakhage" (in the words of filmmaker Phil Solomon) with the achievement of that open form that he called "polyvalent film." This led him to a sustained period of productivity: the polyvalent form released and focused the energies driving the previous thirty years of his career. Then I discuss several of his most notable achievements. Hiler's cinematic evolution was as private as Joseph Cornell's. He had continued to shoot films and share them with Dorsky, but he had been loath to finish and exhibit them until enticed by the New York Film Festival in 2011 to complete and show *Words of Mercury*.

In Dorsky's films each shot is a monad; the editing sequence discovers a harmony latent among them. In his book *Devotional Cinema*, he calls the harmony a "balance point" and asserts that it "unveils the transparency of our earthly existence." Hiler, by contrast, works with superimpositions interlarded with monadic shots. There are subtle differences between their versions of open form: Hiler's film is elegiac, whereas Dorsky tends toward celebration.

At the start of their careers, both Dorsky and Hiler were mentored by Gregory Markopoulos to make films outside of the commercial system. He influenced their work, particularly as colorists. Markopoulos himself eventually abandoned the idea of making individual autonomous films. Instead, he reedited nearly everything he had made and shot massive amounts of new material to construct an eighty-hour-long film, *Eniaios*. Furthermore, he insisted that it be exhibited only in a designated site in the mountains of central Peloponnese, Greece, which he called the *Temenos* (the ancient Greek term for a sacred precinct). He was also a prolific writer of visionary film theory, diaries, and annotations of his vast reading, all of which is preserved in the Temenos archives in Zürich.

In the final chapter, "Gregory J. Markopoulos and the Temenos," I examine the filmmaker's reading of Plato and ancient Greek poetry and their influence on his final project in conjunction with an examination of his film theories. Because *Eniaios* has yet to be projected in its entirety, I discuss the various systems he proposed for its organization into twenty-two cycles and look closely at the eight cycles exhibited so far.

I applied Pasolini's ideas of a cinema of poetry to the films organized around the centrality of a protagonist in the first four chapters of this book. The allusions and associations of an entire film were grounded in the free indirect point of view of the betrayed sister in *Ménilmontant*, Johan in *The Silence,* the four women of *Cries and Whispers*, Alexander in *Fanny and Alexander*, and Alexei in *Mirror*. Because free indirect point of view imbued all the images and references in those films with resonant associations, the films were particularly responsive to psychoanalytical interpretation. Above all, the violence (manifest and repressed) and the enigmas figured by the cinematic tropes of Kirsanoff, Bergman, and Tarkovsky made the application of primal scene schemata fruitful.

Conversely, the disappearance of visible protagonists from the screen in many of the films of Jordan, Brakhage, Dorsky, Hiler, and Markopoulos displaced the free indirect point of view to the creative persona of the filmmaker behind the photography and editing (and, in some cases, the voice-over). Often the scenes of instruction and of artistic initiation played roles parallel to those I found for primal scene fantasies in the European narratives. Many of Cornell's films, especially his collage films, and the first two of Brakhage's "Faust" series occupy a transitional stage between these two poles. In all the examples from the American avant-garde cinema, I located a quest through cinematic tropes for a transcendent dimension inaccessible to direct representation. In Cornell's work, it would be called the intangible, Jordan names it timelessness, Brakhage "moving visual thinking," Dorsky (and implicitly Hiler) transparency, and Markopoulos "Eternity."

{ PART I }

Poetry and the Narrative Cinema in Europe

Bernardo Bertolucci: *Prima della rivoluzione* (1963)
Puck's ode to the River Po

{ 1 }

Pier Paolo Pasolini and "The 'Cinema of Poetry' "

Pier Paolo Pasolini delivered the initial version of his most widely discussed, and highly controversial, theoretical essay on cinema, "The 'Cinema of Poetry' " ("Il 'cinema di poesia' ") at a round table discussion on "Critica e nuovo cinema" during the First Mostra Internazionale di Nuovo Cinema at Pesaro, Italy, May 31, 1965. At that festival none of his colleagues addressed issues of style or semiology in a comparable manner, but in the two years following, the Tavola rotunda at Pesaro followed Pasolini's lead almost exclusively. On both of those occasions he offered extensions and refinements of his theoretical position, with renewed polemical vigor.

Part of the essay appeared in *Film Critica* 156–157 (April–May 1965). The art journal *Marcatrè* (9–20–21–22) included it when it published all the speeches at the Tavola rotunda in 1966. That year Pasolini himself appended the essay to his publication of the script for *Uccellacci e uccellini*. Then, in 1972, he collected his theoretical essays and brief notes on cinema as the concluding section of three in *Empirismo eretico*. The surviving typescript of "Il 'cinema di poesia' " is titled "Di un possible discorso libero indiretto nel cinema" ("Concerning a Possible Free Indirect Discourse in Cinema"). At Pesaro he called it "La mimesi dello sguardo" ("The Mimesis of the Glance"). Although it bears no title at all in the Tavola rotunda presentation in *Marcatrè*, by the time of the earlier *Filmcritica* publication, the essay was called "Il 'cinema di poesia,' " the title it has retained in all its subsequent publications. This history indicates both the centrality of the text for its author and the uncertainty, even for him, of its primary subject.

It has been by far the most elaborately studied of Pasolini's essays on the cinema. The most detailed reading, by John David Rhodes, claims that it is really a study of "art cinema" in the early 1960s. Rhodes's careful charting of the intricate twisting of the argument is impressive. I shall have occasion to refer to it again here. However, I cannot accept his reductive proposition that "poetry" is essentially a placeholder for a narrative genre, which he anachronistically aligned to David Bordwell's 1979 essay "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice." Long before Rhodes's open-minded and sympathetic engagement with Pasolini's text, a number of critics dismissed its use of semiology,