

BARBARA STERNBERG

It's overwhelming to realize how much work goes into making a film. Sometimes I feel audiences should see a film several times, in slow-motion and with footnoted information sheets just to not miss all that's there! Especially with films like Bruce Elder's that are so visually and aurally dense – and so long. ("What? Is 12 hours long? How long do you spend reading a novel? The first time I read the *Cantos*, I took three weeks off in the summer – so what's 12 hours?")

I was speaking to Bruce just after he'd been pre-mixing sound tracks and he wondered aloud if anyone would notice the eight different car crash noises he'd laboriously been producing and combining with eight different backgrounds to appear in eight different situations throughout the film. The film in progress is *Consolations (Love is an Art of Time)*, a 12-hour film in three parts: "The Fugitive Gods," "The Lighted Clearing," "The Body and The World."

I asked Bruce first about the title's references and how this film relates thematically to its predecessor, *Lamentations: Monument to a Dead World*.

"*Lamentations* was lamenting the loss of the sense of the Holy which has been overwhelmed by the tortured life of Modernity. Modernity is a period characterized by man-made mass death, systematic extinction. It is an age which denies what is so essential to humankind; namely, to live with some sense of redemption, a belief in Grace. We rationalize such behaviour and conditions.

"One of Modernity's most deleterious features is that it has altered us, transformed all thinking into reckoning, or reckoning is the only type of thinking we recognize as valid. We have lost the sense of the importance of contemplative modes, prayerful thinking. Those very experiences that might have given meaning to the life of the ancients, can't be integrated into our life view. For the five years of making *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, *Illuminated Texts* and *Lamentations*, I could not have believed but that the anguish around was the convulsive death throes of Being – all of reality had become image, there was an utter loss of reality. That's why so very dear to me during work on *Consolations* are the writings of Simone Weil. She reminds us that God's love is an anguished love – that through all that anguish there is love – that God can suffer.

"Christianity is not only 'God is Love', but also the Crucifixion. *Consolations* is an attempt to grasp, see into, be grasped by, the anguished love of God amidst all this torment. *Consolations* makes use of time in a different way than *Lamentations* (hence the subtitle *Love is an Art of Time*). When one abides gently with things, allows them to come into the open and accept them as gifts, then there occurs a gentling of the soul, a tenderness which can only be called Love.

"The temporal character of *Consolations* – a lingering with things – allows one to feel how both what we are and what we perceive come into existence together. That makes for a kind of thinking that is a kind of prayer. It involves an overcoming of boundaries – a Romantic thought.

I'm thinking that the conceptual paradigm on which Modernity has rested has been that of dichotomies (subject/object, mind/nature, real/ideal) with value residing on the side of the consciousness – what's 'out there' has no value in itself. Romanticism was the first thrust against the dominance of that paradigm. I hope I have found some way of getting across the sense that beings and ourselves come into being together, mutually."

Is there a relation between art and prayer, I asked? "Almost fundamentally!" *Consolations* is part of a cycle of films. Bruce mentioned that he hopes that if people see the whole cycle, they'll be changed somehow – not just partake of a bit of entertainment outside of themselves.

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