

AND DIETRICH BOSCHUNG

ASTRO CULTURE

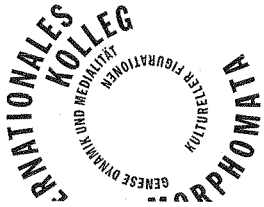
Figurations of Cosmology in Media and Arts

MORPHOMATA

EDITED BY GÜNTER BLAMBERGER

AND DIETRICH BOSCHUNG

VOLUME 17



WILHELM FINK

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GEFÖRDERT VOM

Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

unter dem Förderkennzeichen 01UK0905. Die Verantwortung für den Inhalt der Veröffentlichung liegt bei den Autoren.

Bibliografische Informationen der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek: Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte Daten sind im Internet über www.dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

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© 2014 Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München
Wilhelm Fink GmbH & Co. Verlags-KG, Jühenplatz 1, D-33098 Paderborn
Internet: www.fink.de

Lektorat: Semra Mägele, Thierry Greub
Gestaltung und Satz: Kathrin Roussel, Sichtvermerk
Printed in Germany
Herstellung: Ferdinand Schöningh GmbH & Co. KG, Paderborn
ISBN 978-3-7705-5617-5

META (ASTRO) PHYSIK / META (ASTRO) PHYSICS

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SONJA A.J. NEEF—HENRY SUSSMAN

THE GLORIOUS MOMENT OF ASTROCULTURE

Introduction

I ASTROCULTURE: CONSTELLATION CAVALIER

The present volume is an incitement to the discourse of Astroculture as the dominant and unavoidable language transcribing the impact of space and its exploration, as well as the history, archaeology, and rhetoric of astronomy, within the evolving record of cultural critique. The array of responses to the phenomenon of Astroculture as it is currently experienced encompassed by the present volume is as broad as the bandwidth of impacted academic disciplines. Among these surely number Astronomy, the History of Science, Art History, Cultural Studies, Media Studies, contemporary critical theory, and psychoanalytical theory. We believe that the following volume is representative both of the crisis and the opportunity for sustained, innovative critical response presented by the Astroculture phenomenon.

The inauguration of a learned discourse of Astroculture coincides with an occasion: a conference, *Astroculture: Dialogues between Cosmology and Cosmopolitanism*, under the auspices of the International College for Advanced Study in Cologne. There is an inherent link between the nascent discourse of *Astroculture* and the *morphomata* that serve the International College as its fulcrum and focal point. In the College's 2009 inaugural position-paper, Günter Blamberger and Dietrich Boshung explain that the term *morphomata* derives from Greek and refers to something like shape, figure, form, or design, in German *Gestaltverdung* or *Gestaltbildung*. Morphomata include the whole set of artifacts in which an idea, either rational or aesthetic, becomes sensually perceptible, as Blamberger specifies in his Introduction, *Gestaltverdung und ästhetische*

**META (ASTRO) PHYSIK /
META (ASTRO) PHYSICS**

PATRICIA PISTERS

A METAPHYSICAL STAR WAR? Celestial Consciousness in Contemporary Cinema

Celestial consciousness in cinema started with 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. Compared to previous outer space narratives, Kubrick's film took the genre of science fiction to a metaphysical level, transporting questions about life and death quite literally into the galaxy, with the 'star child' born at the end of the film as its iconic image. I will investigate this cinematic 'astrometaphysics' further through an analysis of two more recent films, *The Tree of Life* and *The Fountain*, arguing that these films are two different expressions of celestial consciousness in contemporary cinema that continue in new ways the galactic philosophical quest of modern cinema that was started by Kubrick.

A QUICK TOUR THROUGH GALACTIC CINEMA

Science fiction and voyages to other planets have been part of cinematic imagination since George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), when actual space-travel was still considered as pure fantasy. In the 1950s when aeronautic space exploration became an element in the cold war, outer space and alien invasions appeared as metaphors for the dangers of communism and nuclear attacks in cult films. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951) and *War of the Worlds* (Byron Haskin, 1953) are but the two most noticeable of these cosmic cold-war allegories. While Stanley Kubrick gave his own satirical take on the cold war in the black comedy, *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb* (1964), a couple of years later he took the genre of science fiction

to an entire new level. The beautiful composition of every image of 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968) as well as the meticulous craftsmanship of the special effects of spaceships and the solar system elevated the aesthetics of the genre as a whole. The realistic portrayal of state of the art space technology and knowledge about orbital conditions in the early 1960s added a scientific dimension. Before men actually landed on the moon in 1969, Kubrick's space travelers coped with zero gravity and floating objects. But most importantly the film introduced metaphysical questions of men's relation to technology and to the vastness of the cosmos. Of course these questions were not new in the 1960s, but the way they obtained a new cinematographic expression marked the beginning of more philosophical cosmic investigations in film history.

Andrej Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), for instance, is another film that brought a metaphysical dimension into Outer Space narratives. In this film an astronaut traveling to the planet Solaris is confronted with the materialization of his unconscious thoughts: his deceased wife who keeps on appearing inside the space ship. In this way Tarkovsky's film questions human consciousness in a cosmic perspective. Within commercial Hollywood cinema of the time, George Lucas with his *Star Wars* trilogy of the late 1970s and early 1980s, transported the classic genre of the Western into space, which becomes the new frontier, where the traditional Western battle between 'good' and 'bad' continued extra-orbitally. In spite of their enormous differences in modes of narration, the cinematographic cosmic explorations of all these films that reinvented the science fiction genre are related to actual space-travel. They all show characters that explore galactic space extensively by literally leaving the planet earth, with varying degrees of metaphysical depth.

In twenty-first century cinema, the cosmic continues to be an important reference-point for metaphysical investigation, and has become an even more profound dimension of contemporary cinema. An important difference, however, is that actual space-travel is no longer an absolute condition for cosmic consciousness. The cosmos has become part of our consciousness even without literally leaving the terrestrial orbit. In any event, the relation between Earth and the other planets tends to be explored intensively rather than extensively. This is by and large due to the phenomenon that in most recent cinema we no longer look through character's eyes, but we experience their brain worlds, feel their affects, and enter their imagination and layers or fragments of memories more directly. In a longer project related to this essay, I define contemporary

cinema as "neuro-image."¹ The neuro-image is part and parcel of contemporary neuroculture, related to findings in neuroscience and translocated quite literally on screen as brain worlds: frequently we experience characters' mental landscapes, entering their neuronal networks directly. The neuro-image is also profoundly occupied with an intensive cosmic consciousness different from the space explorations in the previous generation of films mentioned above. As such, astrometaphysical questions can be expressed in many different ways. Let me give a few examples of more recent cosmic cinema that clarifies this point.

The Spanish film *Earth* (Julio Medem, 1996) is an early example of this new intense cosmic cinema. The main character, Angel, is a woodlice fumigator on a Spanish island. Dressed in a white fumigator suit, standing in the red stony landscape of the island, though, he looks like an astronaut on Mars. Throughout the film suggestions are made that he is an angel that descended from heaven; or, that he suffers from schizophrenia and thinks he is an angel that descended from heaven. The narrative keeps his actual status ambiguous. In any case, Angel seems to be a mental space traveler. He regularly refers to the mysterious and awesome complexity of both the brain and the cosmos. On Earth we never leave the planet, and yet we travel into the cosmic dimensions of the universe through the mental journey of its main character. Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011) is another case in point. This film is the expression of pure affect, a pure intense and inner experience. It is an apocalyptic story where the Earth is hit by another planet, Melancholia. But more than that, the planet Melancholia is the expression of depression and fear, embodied by Justine and her sister Claire. While in *Solaris* the main character had to travel to another planet to confront his fears related to memories of his deceased wife, in *Melancholia* we neither leave the earth nor can we make the distinction between what is real and what is imagined: Every image, every sound in the film is the expression of pure cosmic affect.

James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) could be considered the *Star Wars* of the digital age. Of course there are many differences with *Star Wars*, but *Avatar* is closest to the action genre of science fiction in a battle between Good and Evil that (still) involves space-travel. But even in this action genre we experience the whole adventure (this time quite literally) on the brain screen of the main character who needs to be

hooked up to a cerebral machine to enter the planet Pandora. Each of these films demonstrates a changed relation to the cosmic that deserves analysis in their own right. But for this moment, most important is that the cosmic consciousness that Kubrick brought into cinema by leaving the earth and traveling into space, contemporary cinema translates intensively, traveling into the mind, and, as we will see momentarily, traveling in time.

To explore this new cosmic awareness more deeply I will focus on two films that each in its own way is indebted to the metaphysical cosmic explorations of 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. Like Kubrick's film, *The Tree of Life* (Terrence Malick, 2011) and *The Fountain* (Darren Aronofsky, 2006) investigate the metaphysical dimensions of men in relation to the problem of life and death in light of the vastness of the cosmos. But in contrast to the focus on technology and actual space-travel, both films of the new millennium investigate Inner Space in relation to Outer Space through the myth of the tree of life. *The Tree of Life* and *The Fountain*, while they devote serious attention to the problematic of life and to one of its enduring mythological figurations, present two different kinds of cosmic metaphysics. While saying that the films engage in a metaphysical star war might be too strong, they show us at least two different astrocultural objects that connect to different traditions in philosophy.

COSMIC BEING IN *THE TREE OF LIFE*

The Tree of Life presents the childhood memories of Jack (Sean Penn), who works as an architect in the highly modern downtown area of an American city (Atlanta). He remembers his father, mother, and two brothers, one of whom died at the age of nineteen. However, these memories are not presented in a straightforward way. The events are recollected as non-chronological fragments and are starting points for reflections on much bigger issues, profound questions about the wonders of being that resonate with the work of Martin Heidegger. Malick's films have often been connected to Heidegger's phenomenology.³ As Kaja Silverman has argued in respect to another Malick film, *The Thin Red Line*, it is not a matter of illustrating Heidegger in film:

"Malick's concerns are philosophical rather than conventionally narrative, and philosophy here manifestly means 'phenomenology.' But *The Thin Red Line* is more than a philosophically oriented film. It does philosophy, every bit as much as a text like Heidegger's *On the Way to Language* might be said to do. Like the Heidegger of this disclosive text, moreover, Malick is not content merely to speak about Being: he also shows it to us."³

In a similar way, we can argue that *The Tree of Life* shows to us is how 'being' relates to much larger question of Being. Heidegger defines being as life as presence, as the ground of being; life that we share and that is intelligible as our 'being-in-the-world'. Heidegger also refers to being as 'thrownness'. As we are born and grow up, we find ourselves thrown into the middle of a language and way of life that we have not chosen, but that, in a sense, has chosen us. Heidegger's being is always human-being dependent, subjective. In *The Tree of Life*, this 'subjectivity' of being is related to Jack's memories—we are traveling in his memories—and his imagination. We see Jack in his presence as architect in a big but empty modern city. And we see him in his childhood with his brothers, with his father and mother.

But being-in-the world is also always more, it conceals aspects of Being that we cannot know, but that, if we pay attention, we can think about, imagine, sense, believe. "An understanding of Being is always already contained in everything we apprehend in beings. [...] Being cannot be defined by attributing beings to it."⁴ Being is the mystery, the wonder of the universe, the miracle of life but that is concealed in being. According Heidegger we lost much of that sense of wonder in the destitute emptiness (think of Jack's world of empty buildings) of the modern and technology saturated world. *The Tree of Life* points to reconnecting to that sense of wonder by referring to the powers of creation of God that manifests its greatness in glimpses, a ray of light, rustling of trees, a newborn baby. At least this is how its search for disclosure is translated in the life of the human beings that we encounter in the film: "This is where God lives," the mother tells her baby son pointing to the sun in the sky. At these moments *The Tree of Life* opens up a cosmic perspective and returns the question of Being to the genesis of life on earth. At the beginning of the

³ Silverman 2003, p. 324.

⁴ Heidegger 1993, p. 43–44.

² See Cavell 1979; Critchley 2002; Furstenuu / Mac Avoy 2003; Silverman 2003; Davis 2009.

film, we see the mother mourning. She has just heard about the death of her son, a terrible message she received in a letter. While she desperately wanders in the forest, and she looks up to the trees and the sky, and we hear her whispering in voice-over: "Lord where were you? Did you know? Who are we to you?" There is no 'clearing', no sense of b/Being that is revealed here, but the question resonates at the background of all other images that follow.

After this scene and the mourning mother's questions, the film proceeds to a long sequence in which we witness the emergence of life on earth: from a little flame turning into the big bang, lava streams transforming itself into cells, fish, and finally dinosaurs. The sequence is musically accompanied by *Requiem Lacrimosa 2*, composed by Zbigniew Preisner for Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski (whose film *Three Colors: Blue* (1993) is also about a mother in mourning, searching for some light). Because of the dramatic music and angelic voices of the requiem, the cosmic visualization of the genesis of the earth inspires an almost religious awe and is perhaps the moment where we see Pure Being expressed as a sublime celestial consciousness.

After this cosmic sequence, the film then shifts to a more coherent (albeit still fragmentary) reminiscence of Jack's youth in the late 1950s where his being (lower case) is articulated as a (metaphysical) struggle between the Way of Grace and the Way of Nature, which was from the start of the film indicated as the two choices people have as the way through life. At the beginning of the film this is explained by the voice over of the mother:

"Grace doesn't try to please itself. It accepts all things. It does not mind being slighted, forgotten, disliked, insulted, or injured. Nature, on the other hand, only wants to please itself. It finds reasons to be unhappy and wants to lord over others, have its own way, and finds things to dislike when all else around them is shining with glory."

The film thus sets up a binary opposition between Grace, the Way of the Mother, and Nature, the Way of the Father. Mother (Jessica Chastain) is like an angel, she is the perfect mother, who plays happily with the children as soon as the authoritarian gaze of the father is absent. Moreover she is presented as the way in which God deconceals his Being as Jack's voice-over tells us: "You spoke with me through her, from the sky, the trees." And when he asks "When did you first touch my heart?"

we see an image of his mother in soft summer light. Father (Brad Pitt), on the other hand, is the monarch; he loves his children but wants them to be strong and disciplined. It is a classic image of the family that Malick takes as he is zooming in from 'translating' divine Cosmic Being to being-in-the world. Jack's family is also a classic Oedipal family, demonstrating the Freudian complex quite literally, where at some point Jack actually says he wants to kill his father and shows that he is clearly in love with his mother. A complex that is resolved when Jack acknowledges that he is much more like 'him' than like 'her' (these are the words he uses). In modern film theory the oedipal structure of all classical Hollywood cinema has been analyzed extensively as ideological and patriarchal.⁵ And there is no doubt that *The Tree of Life* subscribes to this ideological framework in the strict binary division between Grace and Nature that can be questioned on the level of Being. But the cosmic dimension of the film transcends the oedipal triangle when it touches directly on the profound questions of Being. Throughout the film we are continuously reminded of these bigger questions, not only because of the sequence of the genesis of the earth, but also because of the light, the wind, the flowers, the grass, the trees are filmed not as ordinary light, wind, flowers, grass, trees but as beings that reveal something of the concealment of Being.

And also because the film constantly reminds us of our being-toward-death, another important Heideggerian notion that finds narrative and poetic translations in the film. According to Heidegger, understanding how each being is always already part of its death, reveals something important of Being. The anticipation of death as the possibility of the 'no-longer-being-able-to-be-there' is the authentic truth that reveals the ultimate non-relationality of Being: Death is the most individual moment of being that reveals the universality of Being.⁶ At the end of the film, Jack finds himself in a deserted landscape. He is reunited with his family and his former self (as well as many other people) on a beach. His mother thanks him for bringing back his brother by remembering him. Mother who at this point in the film is reunited with Jack's deceased brother and accepts his death (by way of Grace): "I give you my son," she says to God while the boy walks through a door into a white deserted landscape. Then we hear Jack saying in voice-over: "Brother, mother—it was they who

⁵ See Mulvey 1975; Silverman 1988.

⁶ Heidegger 1962, p. 294.

led me through your door." At the end of this sequence he falls on his knees while we hear the *Agnus Dei*: an acknowledgment and acceptance of being-towards-death. It is not entirely clear if this is the end of Jack's being (he might have died and entered heaven) or if he finally accepted his being-towards-death in the acceptance mortality, not in a distant future, but in the here and now.

The Tree of Life started with a quote from Job 28: 4-7 that speaks about the genesis of the earth: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." The references to the *Cosmos* are related to God as the creator of heaven and earth. In this sense, *The Tree of Life* proposes Being as a transcendental force in a manner that is distinctly Heideggerian:

"Being is no sort of genus of beings; yet it pertains to every being. Its 'universality' must be sought in a higher sphere. Being and its structure transcend every being and every determination of beings there might be. Being is the transcendence pure and simple [...] Every disclosure of Being as the *transcendens* is transcendental knowledge. Phenomenological truth (disclosedness of Being) is *veritas transcendentalis*."⁷

From the beginning of the universe, the film presents being as the wrestling with this transcendental knowledge as a religious choice between the two Ways that God has proposed to us: Grace or Nature. Jack whispering voice tells us at the beginning of the film: "Mother, Father, always you wrestle inside me, always you will." But Being is also the wondering about the ways in which God speaks to us, touches our heart, when Being uncovers itself in the mysteries of love, life and death. The poetic cinematography of Malick's *Tree of Life* is a visualization of the ways in which our being-in-the world can give us glimpse of the mysteries of Being by bringing us in the mental space of the main character, Jack. Its cosmic dimensions are expressions of Being that in Malick's world is clearly connected to God as a transcendental force, revealing itself in "all things shining" if we have the grace to accept its truth.⁸

CELESTIAL DUST AND DIFFERENCE AND REPETITION IN THE FOUNTAIN

Like *The Tree of Life*, *The Fountain* too, presents the mental landscape of its main character and asks the same big questions about life and death. What does it mean to live? What does it mean to die? What would it mean to live forever? These questions are enfolded in a singular love story offered up in three variations that return throughout the film and occur throughout history. Moving between three layers of time (sixteenth-century Spain, twenty-first-century North America, and a twenty-sixth-century somewhere in outer space), *The Fountain* is essentially the story of the same couple, performed by Hugh Jackman and Rachel Weisz. In the twenty-first century, Tommy is a brain surgeon who tries to find a cure for his wife Izzy, who has a brain tumor. This story unfolds into the past where conquistador Tomas wants to save Spain (and his Queen Isabelle) by finding a holy tree in the New Spain; and into the future where astronaut Tom travels through space in a biospheric 'bubble-ship' (he lives with and under a large tree that clearly is a living organism) and tries to deal with the previous stories. In these futuristic sequences, bulbs, spheres, and lights float in and out the frame from all directions, an effect which is repeated in the *mise-en-scène* of the lights in other parts of the film. Many elements in the composition of the image tend to return, which make that the three stories are also visually related: they are repetitions with differences. *The Fountain* is not Heideggerian in that it does not show us an individual being-in-the world and transcendental moments of unveiled Being in the way *The Tree of Life* does. But in its audiovisual address of metaphysical questions, *The Fountain* certainly is another film that *does* philosophy. More specifically, it can be argued that Aronofsky's film sets on virtual display the temporal philosophy of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze's profound and complex philosophy of time.⁹

As in *The Tree of Life*, the metaphysical questions of life and death are triggered by the confrontation with the death of a loved one. Izzy (in the twenty-first century) is dying of a brain tumor. But where in Malick's film the characters turn to God to find an answer, the cosmic metaphysical trajectory of *The Fountain* leads to a different type of spiritual experience

⁷ Heidegger 1993, p. 85.

⁸ Silverman 2003, p. 341.

from in Malick's more religious explorations. Let me briefly point out how *The Fountain* expresses its metaphysical quest by referencing to the cosmos.¹⁰

It is important to understand the way in which the film proceeds to unpack the thoughts and affects connected to the problem of life, love and death by repeating the same story in different layers of time in audiovisual resonance with Deleuze's conceptual philosophy of time. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze departs from the Bergsonian thesis that we live by way of a synthesis of time. On the most basic level this can be understood by seeing how in recalling and anticipating we can act, think and feel in the present. Each little moment consists of such passive synthesis that occurs in the mind. Deleuze distinguishes three different ways of synthesizing time. The first synthesis is the habitual, sensory-motor present, a little stretch in the living present, which is the basic foundation of time. The second synthesis is that of memory, it gives us the grounding of time in the past, the co-existence of all its layers and its most contracted degrees. And the third synthesis of time is the future, the ungrounding of the eternal return. The third synthesis of time cuts through time, re-assembles and repeats all other layers serially. The third synthesis can repeat the past and the present. It repeats them with a difference—but, only that which is intense enough to be repeated returns.¹¹

Deleuze's philosophy of time in *Difference and Repetition* is as complex as Heidegger's *Being and Time* and I cannot do justice to the richness of either of these metaphysical systems. But I do think it is justified to argue that that the three layers of time in *The Fountain* can be understood in terms of the syntheses of time explained in *Difference and Repetition*. The story of the twenty-first century is the foundation of time, the present of the first synthesis; sixteenth century Spain is the ground of memory of the second synthesis; and the cosmonaut in space is situated in the third synthesis of the future. In the third synthesis, moments of the first and second synthesis are repeated, to select this intensity of what can be repeated, his love for Isabelle/Izzy: "You pulled me through time," Tom says in his cosmic bubble-ship. From this cosmic perspective of the third synthesis of the future time is played out in "strange loops," repeating and differentiating in a sort of culminating or vertical movement of all times. Only in the future do we see the 'Historical Isabelle' from the Before

and 'Present Izzy' from the During re-appear in Tom's hallucinations and repeated feedback loops, leading up to Tom's final decision to end the other two times by choosing the eternal return in becoming a dying star. As paradoxical as it may seem, but in line with the demands of the third synthesis of time, the eternal return happens by accepting death and returning to the cosmic dust. I will return to this point momentarily.

It will first prove useful to examine the example of a scene that is repeated in feedback loops that explains how the film is told from this cosmic perspective of the future. Most striking, perhaps, is the scene, three times repeated, where present-day Izzy appears, dressed in a white winter coat and a white knitted cap, to ask Tommy "Take a walk with me." The first time he replies from the future as Tom (in each layer of time his appearance is different), saying "Please Izzy," as if he wants her to leave him alone, and we actually see her also appearing in her white winter coat in the space bubble. The second time the scene plays out it is Tommy (in the present) who replies "Please Izzy," and explains (while we remain in the layer of the present) that his colleagues are waiting for him for an operation. We move more deeply into the twenty-first century time-layer, discovering the predicament of her imminent death, and finding out how Tommy is obsessed with curing her fatal illness to the point that he wants to define death as a curable disease. With the third iteration of the scene, at Izzy's invitation to take a walk with her, Tommy changes his mind and does follow her into the snow. This will lead to Tom/Tommy's final decision to complete the story of the conquistador in the past (a story Izzy was writing and repeatedly asks him to finish), to finally die in the future (Tom dies climactically in the nebula of a dying star and becomes a celestial particle) and accept her death by planting a seed on her grave in the present time.

The final image of the film is another repeated scene from the present: in extreme close-up, Tommy whispers in close to Izzy's neck "Everything is fine." Throughout the film the *mise-en-scène* has strongly suggested that Isabella/Izzy is the tree of life: In sixteenth-century Spain, Isabella's dress is tree-like, and the hairs in Izzy's neck are identical to the fibers of the tree that we see in close-up when Tom talks to the tree in his space ship; when Tommy finally accepts her death, he plants the seed of a tree on her grave. All this suggests that she has become part of the cosmos with her death. Just as Tom, when he dies, returns to stardust. Life on earth is a stretch of borrowed energy that will return to its cosmic status—and its particles will be reborn with a difference in a cycle of eternal return.

¹⁰ Also see Pisters 2010.

¹¹ Deleuze 1994, p. 70–128. Also see Williams 2011.

In this way we see that this version of cosmic metaphysics could be characterized as immanent, albeit an immanence in the most elementary (or even transcendental) form of "star dust." In connection with this type of immanence, it is also important to note that creation is not so much the creation of God (even if a belief in such transcendental entity is not at all rejected). It is, rather, related to artistic creation here. Deleuze explicitly relates repetition and the synthesis of time to art:

"Beyond the grounded and grounding repetitions, a repetition of ungrounding on which depend both that which enchains and that which liberates, that which dies and that which lives within repetition [...] Perhaps the highest object of art is to bring into play simultaneously all these repetitions, with their differences in kind and rhythm, their respective displacements and disguises, their divergences and decenterings; to embed them in one another and to envelop one or the other in illusions the "effect" of which varies in each case. Art does not imitate, above all it repeats; it repeats all the repetitions, by virtue of an internal power."¹²

In *The Fountain*, therefore, it is significant that the genesis of the earth is related to the myth of the fountain of youth and to the desire to create, to write stories. While the scientific search for the creation of life (or the "cure of death") that Tommy strives for is impossible, Tommy can finish Izzy's story and in that sense keep her alive in an artistic way that repeats itself in an internal return by intensity and immanent force. Accepting death in artistic creation.

COSMIC INTENSITY: IMMANENT TRANSCENDENCE AND TRANSCENDENTAL IMMANENCE

Let me conclude by making a few further comparative differentiations between the two films that I have been presenting as the legacy of Kubrick's astrometaphysics. Less concerned with the actual possibility of space-travel, both films refer to the cosmic genesis of our creation as part of our celestial consciousness. *The Tree of Life* endows this creation with the celestial creative powers of God as the concealed dimensions of Being in

our being-in-the world sometimes disclosing itself when we pay attention, or when a filmmaker makes us see this dimension in a work of art. *The Fountain* proposes on a metalevel that art itself has the creative potential to conserve something of love and life, while love and life themselves are repeated in an eternal return. Aranofsky's film presents another kind of spirituality than a religious one, another kind of belief and acceptance of life and death than the vision presented by Malick.

It is possible to argue that *The Tree of Life* presents us with an immanent transcendental metaphysics where being-in-the world conceals Being; in which man depends on God, is made in the image of God, and is determined in an eternal cycle of the same structure of the choice between two ways: Grace or Nature. *The Fountain* gives us a transcendental immanent metaphysics, where mankind returns not so much in binary structured cycles but in feedback loops with differences through time; where man is part (or even just a particle) of the universe to which he returns in its connections to everything non-human and eventually to formless stardust.¹³ Both films can be considered as neuro-images that show us, by way of expressing a mental universe that is fully embodied, different metaphysical traditions expressing a different relation to the Cosmos. Malick's cosmic dimension restores to us the awe of Being and of God, while going toward the end of time (as being-toward-death of human subjectivity). Aranofsky's film makes us aware of our immanent relation to the cosmos, which is, ultimately, our future reconciliation to it. Love will be able to pull us through time, even if we might not return as human beings. I would regard both films as neuro-images, in that they have transformed the extensive conquest of Outer Space, into an intensive relation with the Cosmos as Inner Space (the brain world). In spite of their different metaphysical points of view, the films meet where we recognize the shared and universal problems of life, love, and death. And, ultimately, in both cases the future of our planet is at stake. Where Inner Space and Outer Space touch (*The Tree of Life*'s "God, When did You first touch my heart?") or are enfolded into one another (*The Fountain*'s layers of time and looping stories), these films arrive at their most profound cosmic intensity in conveying what strike us as cosmic metaphysical truths.

¹² Deleuze 1994, p. 293.

¹³ Also see Williams 2010.

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