

*De Profundis*

A film by Lawrence Brose

Music: Frederic Rzewski,

with additional compositions by

Lawrence Brose and Douglas Cohen

U.S.A., 1997, 65 minutes

"The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it." – Oscar Wilde

If film no longer existed, *De Profundis* gives the impression that Lawrence Brose is certainly capable of reinventing it. Oddly enough, Brose would do so by stripping film down to visual components that are reassembled only as they are knitted to each other at their breaking points. Redacted.

But one must resist the impulse to talk only of how Brose – with controlled image manipulation and extremely experimental hand-processing techniques – has produced in *De Profundis* a film united by stress and diaphanous. *De Profundis* is more than an unconventional approach to filmmaking, though it would be a visual tour-de-force if it were only that. Taking its cue from Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* holds up a mirror to gay sexuality and plumbs the tensions reflected there.

Meshing images culled from home movies, drag performances, Radical Faerie gatherings, and vintage gay erotica with a piano soundtrack scored from Wilde's prison letter and a voice composition fashioned from the poet's aphorisms, Brose makes film itself into the protagonist of his exploration. With images and sounds constantly decaying and shifting and contaminating each other, film becomes a metaphor of the transforming self that Wilde prized for corrupting a sense of sexual normalcy. *De Profundis* embraces Wildesque deviance and cautions that the desire for normalization prevalent among contemporary gays threatens to contain it.

Serenity in sophistication is a triumph – like the deviance of *De Profundis*, which, achieved in an age too terrified to be deviant, lies in the film's unflinching honesty and terrifying beauty.

— John Palattella

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