

De Profundis I Film Stills by Lawrence Brose
It is always twilight in one's cell as it is
always twilight in one's heart. And in the
sphere of thought, no less than in the sphere
of time, motion is no more.

—Oscar Wilde, 1895

(De Profundis, as written in prison)

Unswerving in its opening frames and throughout the sonata like movements that follow, Lawrence Brose's *De Profundis* breaks loose into mesmerizing filmic ideas propelled by rhythms of original or found and recycled footage, solarized and chemically-treated to create ultra-kinetic reverberating fields of all-over patterns, both graphic and micro-organic. Throbbing brazenly in radioactive patinas, with repetitions fixed or irregular, Brose's stunning composition is an assault on sensation, a troubling of the conventional structures assigned to image-sense, and a reflection on the contours and limits of the medium itself—a sustained, unapologetic visual argument in an hour-long duration.

Composed in 16mm, with music by Frederic Rzewski and additional arrangements by Brose himself and Douglas Cohen, *De Profundis* begins with a prologue that is relevant to this exhibition of large-format Iris prints drawn from a filmwork that, in the words of its maker, explores the “transgressive aesthetics of Oscar Wilde and contemporary queer culture.” As if from beyond the delirious moving foreground, a voiceover recounts a sexual experience displaced in terms of time now, as once for the interviewed subject in terms of location. Just as homoerotic pleasure can take place in a non-queer public arena, so can filmic space in *De Profundis* be trespassed, and time transmogrified into repetitions, reverse-action movement, and slow-motion, so that the categories of motility are inverted or queered by Brose in such a way as to beg redefinition. Therein follows a phantasmagoria exploring further reversals of the socially already-inverted, with footage culled from an early home movie depicting sexually-ambiguous males who apply suntan lotion to each other's backs on the deck of a pleasure boat. This is interfused with sailor-daydream pornography and sexually ecstatic faces are surfacing in overlapped or duplicate motion. A creepy chorus intones certain aphorisms of Wilde's (“The only way to rid of temptation is to yield to it”) in male voices sound-looped into timbres fiendish or demonized, effeminate or sissified—a veritable black mass of cathedral whispers and limp-wristed rapture performing the ambiguities that exist between the individually willed and the socially settled. Brose's sexual politics are at the far other end of any normative identity as it embraces the deviant or embarrassing against the pathology of

sameness, as also countered by the radical, the outlandish, the transgender, and the unwittingly homo.

In terms of these prints, this is staged as the difference between levels that are formally solarized and metaphorically sodomized. There is more to this than mere rhetorical resemblance.

Home movies are to pornography as the slash-mark acid-burns of a practicable field—be it cinematic or wordly—are to the less visible meanings of the space laid bare between men when lubricated by that protective skin balm of the social. In terms of the contrast between the moving-image and print-versions of *De Profundis*, this is the difference between the parasitical contingency of renderings in visual space's real-time and the crystallized but always virtual nature of the still—with the transit between the two a liquid perspective from which such ghostly figures swell and are erotically hardened into single or multiple intervals.

The film and prints from *De Profundis* are invested in processes that violate the transparency of cinematic illusion but that nonetheless celebrate the material underpinnings of the medium.

After the found or original footage has been transferred by Brose from super-8 or 16mm to high contrast stock—obtaining movement effects that toy with real speed or reverse action—the gradual, painstaking labor of the method involves treating the film in fragments at a time. Alternately and repeatedly immersed, first into bleach, then into toners and reprocessed, the sections will often emerge seemingly devoid of any residue or as though effaced of all modification. Brose himself affirms this: “One could readily suggest that my work is about latency itself—cultural, sexual, and structural. In the course of hand processing, the film surface appears of a sudden expunged of all traces. But they remain there in a dormant stage on the emulsion of the high-contrast stock, to be awakened again in the alchemy of methodical progress, from a kind of formlessness into graphic and chromatic significance.” This is further reflected in the photograms to be printed from the film. Brose chooses general areas of the footage, scanning them into digital formats that allows him to discover the proper equation between the painterly meanings of foreground against the continuous background of the watercolor paper.

One of the work's many values at the level of ethics and aesthetics is how Brose extracts a force from the work of Wilde and not just from the figure of legend often ossified into a deactivated symbol of sexual defiance. Like Jorge Luis Borges before him, Brose historically relocates Wilde as a profound thinker also of time and valuation. Borges uncovers how for Wilde in *De Profundis*, “to repent of an action is to modify the past, or that (...) there is no man who is not at each moment, all that he has been and will be.” For the time is also a matter of public policy, especially when one considers those in the present,

like Wilde in the past, who experience in unspoken daily levels of physical constraint their visible markers—sexual, cultural, and otherwise—as categorical prison houses not entirely of their own making. From the absolute abandon of his cell, Wilde wrote the following passage cited in the second movement of Brose’s *De Profundis* and relevant to both this present exhibition and to the world writ large: “One can realize a thing in a single moment, but one loses it in the long hours that follow with leaden feet. We think in eternity, but we move slowly through time. And how slowly time goes for those of us who lie in prison, I need not tell.” Ideology is eternal; a politics in time endures and demands.

One can only wonder whether Wilde would have revised his quip about art having no influence upon action, during these times troubled by the current state of the globe—where the difference is gravely threatened by anxiety manufactured now in the name of an overarching national identity and the beckoning ideology to unite. These prints by Lawrence Brose from his film work *De Profundis* is a challenge for us all to consider the repercussions of being socially marked and potentially targeted—hence vulnerable to profile and censure. It is the task of difference now to proliferate, both as represented in art or as braved in society; imperative still to render human relations complex and in creative collision with that impetus of the same whose sole imagination is to deem dangerous all things that lie beyond its claims on the visible.

- Roberto Tejada