MYTHOLOGY FOR THE SOUL

THE POEMS OF STORM DE HIRSCH

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Storm De Hirsch began writing poetry relatively late in life. Her first collection was published at age forty-four, and from the 1950s until her withdrawal from public life in the mid-1970s, she worked as a poet, a painter—and, finally, a filmmaker. While these facts are agreed-upon, her biography is otherwise riddled by fissures and fabulation. What is most easily verified about De Hirsch lies not in facts but in the strength of what remains of her creative work—her abstract paintings, hewn to the late modern, nonobjective ambitions of abstract expressionism; her films, which show imagination and invention, a constant formal evolution; and her poetry, which embodies opposites, mixing grief and outrage with the provocation and whimsy of onomatopoeia, contrasting horror against cheers to sing in a new age.

Her art corresponds with the mystical, shamanistic side of modernism; she was a student of those theosophical and spiritualist notions that had, from the end of the nineteenth century onward, influenced the directions of modern art. She followed in the order of mystics and mediums such as Madame Blavatsky, Ida Craddock, Edgar Cayce and the Fox Sisters, and her readings in mysticism formed her belief that the body was a conduit, a channel for spirits; that creative expression, be it speech or song or sex or cinema, was a communion with the metaphysical akin to mesmerism, spirit rapping or aura-sighting. This communion between the physical world and its esoteric other was most apparent in her fascination with astral projection and her claims to mediumship.[1] For her, theosophical understandings of

[1] De Hirsch's experiences in this area, and specifically, her claims to act as a conduit for an ancient Andean people, are offered in a transcribed "hypnosis session" published as she was transitioning from poetry into filmmaking. This session, between De Hirsch and an unidentified "Prominent American Scientist," Dr. W.L.M., includes notes on De Hirsch's own extensive transcriptions of her glossalalia, phrases gleaned in a trance state, assigned definitions in the style of De Hirsch's poetry. While the text is not lacking in a self-aware humor, it is a

paranormal wisdom were inextricable from creative action and the individuation of the artist. The artist's acts of creation were acts of nourishment and healing near to the arcane rituals of these esoteric orders. The heritage of these beliefs, forged in the haunted parlors, private chapels and public theatres of nineteenth century America, would combine in De Hirsch's era with eastern faiths and the expanded consciousness of dropping acid, synthesizing into the locus of a new psychedelic tribe of artists and philosophers.

Storm De Hirsch was born Lillian Malkin in 1912, though elsewhere her birthdate has been given as 1922. By the 1940s, she had settled into the Greenwich Village art and poetry scene. However, it was not until the 1950s that she became an active contributor and respondent to American poetry, writing columns of poetry journalism and publishing her own poems in little magazines. It has been reported that she adopted the name Storm, but that her last name came from her first husband, reportedly a painter named De Hirsch who died.[2] There is no public record of her creative work under the name Lillian Malkin; her life as an artist was lived under her chosen name.

De Hirsch began to publish poetry in American little magazines in the 1950s. Her work arrived in an epoch of New York poetry defined in large part by the east coast Beat movement, much of it by then concentrated in Greenwich Village, and while several themes common to the era dominate her work—emancipation from oppression, giving testimony and witness, a posture of cool detachment, and preoccupations with pantheistic, but primarily Buddhist, citations—she would excel at erotic mysticism. While the work of her younger peers would often integrate disciplined allusions, sensual exploration and social observation, De Hirsch focused largely on the ecstatic aspects of inner voice, a voice unbound from context. Her early poetry is not masterful in construction or expression, but it comes from honesty and from aural pleasures, conceived for speaking voices. As her work

testament to beliefs De Hirsch held dearly, and to those aspects of her character that convinced, among others, Jonas Mekas, that her psychic abilities were genuine. Storm De Hirsch. "Astral Daguerrotype." *Film Culture* 33 (1964), 9-13.

[2] The lack of specific detail on record for her first husband leaves open speculation that the entire name might have been an invention, inspired perhaps by the Greenwich Village bohemian De Hirsh Margules, a watercolor painter, a contemporary of Storm De Hirsch with whom she had mutual friends (Elaine and Willem De Kooning, for instance), and an eccentric whose character was inspiring comic strips in the era when Storm De Hirsch first emerged. If this is true, then the name 'Storm De Hirsch' is an act of total self-invention and a sign of the rare and arresting eccentricity that would be broadcast through her poetry. Margules was known as 'Baron De Hirsh,' the Baron of Greenwich Village, a title given him partly for its resonance with the Baron Maurice De Hirsch, a German-Jewish philanthropist esteemed for his foundations that supported Jewish education and immigration in the nineteenth century, but also to emphasize Margules' theatrical, larger-than-life personality and to place him at the center of a fellowship of struggling artists. To many he was an authoritative, earthly embodiment of the bonds and pleasures of the Greenwich Village art scene, a role that Storm De Hirsch would later assume for many in the American underground cinema.

matured, she would increasingly write in song forms with repeating, varying choruses.

By the time that De Hirsch began to write and perform poetry, she had also married Louis Brigante, an accomplished publisher operating under the imprints Intro, Brigant Press and Round Quarter. Today he is best remembered for his 1962 translation of Italo Calvino's *Italian Folktales*; for his affiliation with Jonas and Adolfas Mekas (as a participant in their early features *Hallelujah the Hills*, *Guns of the Trees*, *The Brig*); and as an editor of the magazine *Film Culture*, the primary forum of the American underground cinema. The pages of Louis Brigante's own *Intro Bulletin* magazine were dominated by interviews with authors, artists and musicians, announcements of publications, reviews, and commentary on music, literature and publishing. In this spirit, De Hirsch contributed a series of columns charting readings and author appearances at the New York City Poetry Center between 1955 and 1956. These columns featured critical responses to appearances and readings by, among others, Archibald MacLeish, W.H. Auden, Elizabeth Bowen, E.E. Cummings, Marianne Moore and Truman Capote.

The columns were an opportunity for De Hirsch to broadcast her perspective on the successful and unsuccessful methods of oral poetry performance, occasionally taking aim at the disengagement of her subjects, charging some with lifeless readings, and advocating for the use of professional actors for the elocution of verse, arguing that this would revitalize poetry by recalling a classical ideal. This was, in De Hirsch's words, a demand "for more critical standards in the formal presentation of public readings."[3] Her perspective was not solely one of advocacy for a separation of author and reader: she responded critically to what she believed were poor pairings. This belief in dramatic performance would loom over her own poetics, giving her work its shape and holding to her mysticism, oral poetry as an ancient thing, a kind of spell casting. Her sense of urgency in arguing for such standards for poetry performance also evolves from another, unstated cause: the form was finding new life in sound recordings, at a time when intellectual challenge and mainstream interest were not mutually exclusive things, and to champion the sound of poetry was linked inextricably to the promise of such recordings. Given the widespread appreciation of late authors such as Yeats and Joyce, these albums were as often read by professional actors as by poets themselves.

Such an argument might have set her apart in a fundamental way from other members of the New American Poetry, that third generation of American modernist poets who, while they bore the discipline of classics in their education on poetic structures, had embraced the drama of their own

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[3] Storm De Hirsch. "Poetry Readings at the New York Poetry Centre." *Intro Bulletin* 2:1 (1956), 3.

speech, in such a way as might renounce 'trained' readings.[4] In spite of the flexible wordplay of her own poems, De Hirsch believed in the propriety of reading, in correct and incorrect dramatic inflection, as a central dimension of craftsmanship. Poets like Gregory Corso, Frank O'Hara and Jack Kerouac, to name only a few, were embracing variations of speech and colloquialism as marks of distinction and were even developing the unique character of their voices based largely on the authenticity of their speech.

This was not an altogether modern departure: from Dante Alighieri to T.S. Eliot, poetry had enshrined colloquial speech for centuries. A willful flatness and detachment in public reading was not uncommon among the Greenwich Village poets and would stand in sharp contrast to the deliberated characterization that De Hirsch expected from performers. The methods that De Hirsch was advocating for were in keeping with a mainstream of dramatic poetry handed down from the Elizabethans and the verse dramas of Shakespeare and Marlowe. That her own poetry would little resemble this ideal, that it would in fact more closely resemble that of her peers in the New American Poetry, suggests a more complicated reasoning behind her interest in the dramatic reading. De Hirsch, having endorsed looser principles of speech in her poetry, is arguing in opposition to the tide of passionless or, in her view, self-congratulatory reading that had overtaken those poets and authors who represented a literary mainstream.

In 1955, De Hirsch issued her first collection of poetry, *Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo and other poems*, through Brigante's Brigant Press. The text contained thirty-three poems, ranging from historical fantasies, poems evocative of adolescence, serial poems with missing parts and poems that have a direct relation to children's songs, jazz and chamber music. Despite the evocation of music in De Hirsch's language, with poems titled "Dilemma for Horn and Strings," "A Tune," and "Jangle Box Blues," her work does not yet hold the complex motifs, call-and-response and chorus-verse structures that would drive her later poems. Nevertheless, the poetry in *Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo* is primarily sonic in its imagery; for instance, in "Comes a Hum," a series of linked images, augmented by sonic adjectives, depict a pooling resonance. This hum spreads its movement among wheels and forests and horns, a menacing hymn that is "rolling," "ascending," "hissing," to animate "hollow shells" and "a coughing rainbow." De Hirsch's frequent use of onomatopoeia is another means of introducing sonic language to extend imagery through the senses. In "Dilemma for Horn and Strings," such an invocation is present in one of the volume's few song structures, in a reoccurring couplet that pairs nonsense syllables with a fragmented question: "zum zum zum," "trum trum trum," "hmm hmm hmm, / what did the Queen?" De Hirsch's use of nonsense syllables has more in common with the spontaneous vocal riffs

[4] Recordings of many among the Beats demonstrate variations, improvisations and spontaneous responses to the audience, all parceled within the overall character of poetry.

of scat singing than the concrete, visual and lingua-aural methods of sound poetry—more Louis Armstrong than Hugo Ball—however, this aspect of De Hirsch's writing also resonates with her later claims to mediumship, to having ancient voices speak through her. Given these claims, her vocalizations become distinct from the whimsical affectation of scat singing, nearer in her poetics to rites and incantations.

The musically evocative language of *Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo* suggests a cuteness that is anomalous when paired with the violence and ritual magic that elsewhere dominates De Hirsch's verse. It is the terror of her poems that distinguishes them. In "The Shaman and the Wishbone," De Hirsch gives us a series of brutal stanzas, each initiated in action (draw; hear; weave; clutch) and followed by sequences of word association, mounting in tension and violence, climaxing in a puzzle: "Who cut the witch's tail / and made her leap into an empty giggle?" The final stanza gives both malevolence and indifference, as "the spittle son of a holy ghost" half-attends to "the sins of a sorry world." In "Portrait—II," De Hirsch offers a description of a woman in increasingly fantastic statements that seem caught between mythic parables and metaphors of grief ("All god's children / were offered her breasts / but her milk was sour"). "Moment in Time" conceives one of the fiercest of these mixings of myth & metaphor, with a "snake man" who "sells medusa curls / in hallways of the world / to charm / away / the torso's armless ache." These poems read as etchings of half-faded hieroglyphics; they are self-consciously ill-at-ease as transcriptions, their unconscious structures burdened by the poet's insistence that language and sensuality are the same ("To be embraced is to discover / the mother tongue"). They summon esoteric visions.

This aspect of De Hirsch's method, to mix ardent sensuality, grief and myth with stream-of-consciousness and nonsensical, incantatory language, opens the work to other forms of wisdom. De Hirsch is at once an obscurantist seer and a laughing docent, divided between a broad sorrow for the world and the wit and singularity of her mercurial voice. That voice is ever fluctuating between mysticism and whimsy. The poems in *Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo* demonstrate this varying scale in her perspective, aspiring at once to be a governing, omniscient eye to the foolishness of man and to play the fool in a witch's paradise. While the poems deviate in structure and voice, they are often uniform in illustrating a primal response to the vagaries of the senses, as in "Jungle Roots," where "sorrow's finger / pricked on horny thorn / and rose / screaming to the stars." Expressions that defy words—grunts and screams, of terror and pleasure, rage and delight—become a central motif, gathering her poems around the coarse ecstasy of a primal scream.

Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo circulated widely enough to attract a number of responses from critics. Don Geiger identified the book as a cycle recounting "a human love affair as seen from the perspective of a cockatoo," a literal interpretation of her imagery that disregards both the surreal imprecision of

that imagery—its looseness and ambiguity—and that obfuscates the book's fascination with language. Geiger, praising the author's "dream-drugged" language, nonetheless assigns it a more utilitarian, narrative approach than is evident in the text itself, which bears the messy constructions of consciousness, of wandering attention and insight. Further, Geiger saw De Hirsch's imagery as the text's aesthetic priority, but in addressing this imagery pointed away from its atavistic references, instead finding "an expression of fear, revulsion, and a desire to flee from man and his world ... imagery [that] celebrates the attractions of sex, seen in a nightmare."[5] Hilary Corke, writing in *Encounter*, was both more and less charitable, grouping De Hirsch as a graffitist ("scrawlers on public walls") alongside Hugh MacDiarmid, recognizing in De Hirsch "a sensuous nonsensical poet who doesn't give a damn."[6]

In retrospect, De Hirsch's poems belong to an American surrealist streak—playful, anarchic, discontinuous—a poetry in which potent unconscious imagery colors not only her personal poems but her later poems on specific political themes and occasions. It connects her to a lineage that includes Gertrude Stein, Philip Lamantia and Gregory Corso and which touches on a common thread running from William Carlos Williams to John Ashbery and beyond.

De Hirsch believed that an artist's subjectivity was inherently genderless, a notion that seemingly extended beyond her ideas of creative action. The individual could draw from masculine and feminine characteristics that existed within their soul—De Hirsch believed a soul to be neither male nor female—and creative action emerged through a total awareness of sexuality that was anchored not in gender typing but that passed through the broader gamut of experience. In the male-dominated world of modern poetry, critics were keen to misidentify De Hirsch, by the ambiguity of her first name, as a man; she was a victim of gender discrimination in the ambiguity of her own chosen name. In the late 1960s, at a time when she had all but moved on from poetry, De Hirsch would remember to Shirley Clarke:

> "I have had the experience of sending manuscripts to magazine editors and gotten back—usually rejections—but with a note enclosed saying, 'Dear Mr. Storm (De Hirsch) we are sorry…' but going into a very respectful kind of analysis of what it is they want, if I would revise it thus and so, etc., because fundamentally, they like the idea or they like the images or something. When they accept me, sometimes I've been very suspicious that I have been accepted sheerly (outside of the fact that I may think they have good

[5] Don Geiger. "Twenty-Three Poets." *Prairie Schooner* 32:3 (1958), 244.

[6] Hilary Corke. "Marginalia Graffiti and Texts." *Encounter* 5:5 (1955), 82.

> taste)—that same good taste somehow evaporates when it is Miss Storm."[7]

Indeed, her poetry was met with reservedly generous assessments from male reviewers only when she was mistaken for a man. For critics such as Geiger and Corke, "Mr. Storm" was a talented poet in the tradition of the surrealists; Ms. De Hirsch may have been afforded less generosity.

In January 1956, De Hirsch released an album, *Poems by Storm De Hirsch*, through Brigante's Round Quarter record label. The album collected readings of De Hirsch's poems both with and without musical settings, read by an ensemble of professional actors. The music included jazz arrangements, modal compositions for sitar, experimental sound compositions, even a spare, unaccompanied harmonica; some were improvised, others composed by De Hirsch or by trad jazz cornetist Jim Heanue. The album's jacket announced that De Hirsch's "theories and techniques on the aural presentation and visual performance of poetry … are being developed and correlated in a study to be published soon." Though her theories on the topic had been advanced in her *Intro Bulletin* columns, such a study was never published. The readings were given by four professional actors, some whose background was in theatre and television, one who was a professional poetry reader. The readers are never flat in their delivery, offering suitable, dramatic characterizations of the poems, often held against musical settings that bring welcome heft to the lightest of De Hirsch's lyrics, and appropriate menace and mourning to her most dramatic pieces.

The bulk of the album's contents were drawn from *Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo*, but a few texts, notably the opener, "Tread Softly, Guru," were never published, but feature elsewhere among existing tapes of De Hirsch's own readings. In the years following the release of her book and album, De Hirsch contributed to anthologies, cultural magazines, and to little magazines born of the mimeograph revolution, among them *December*, the *San Francisco Review*, and *Minority of One*. These poems extended the tone of magic and menace that had run through *Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo*, in particular her contributions to the *San Francisco Review*, which were among her strongest. For Daisy Aldan's anthology, *A New Folder*, De Hirsch wrote "Mythology for the Soul." Again, the author deals with medieval and mythic imagery, of soldiers and kings and corpses and misty grails, the verses tethered by running declarations of synthesis, where "mind will I take / and thought will / I fashion," "doubt will I take / and fear will / I fashion," and "sleep will I take / and sight will / I fashion." As with her other poems from this maturing period, image is finally in agreement with language, where the strength of her rhetoric, which increasingly resembles incantation, is no longer overwhelmed by self-conscious

[7] Shirley Clarke and Storm De Hirsch. "A Conversation." *Film Culture* 46 (1967), 48.

reflections on communication. Her imagery becomes increasingly vivid.

Such a reconciliation of language and object would continue as her poetry entered its mature stage. In 1964, De Hirsch published her second and final collection of poetry, *Twilight Massacre*, through Aldan's Folder Editions. Where *Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo* had a lightness and joy about it, which arrived in hand with an uneasy division between language and image, *Twilight Massacre* was much darker, protesting the widespread dehumanization and social corruption that surround war. While they engage viscerally with the present moment, summoning anxieties of the atom bomb, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, these poems remain the work of a mystic, concerned with magic, ritual and psychic life. The bulk of De Hirsch's poetry develops through stream of consciousness and word association; this aspect of her method remained unchanged in the decade between her books. However, as her poetry was tempered to restrain its self-awareness, her imagery became akin to a *Tulpa*, a mental projection of imagination, a dream made flesh, steadily unhindered by the veils of language. Having broken free of verbal language, her imagery could only move in the direction of what De Hirsch would call 'non-verbal language,' that is, toward the plastic arts and, in her case, the compositional and editorial functions of cinema.[8]

Concurrently, song structures had also assumed a greater role in De Hirsch's style following *Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo*; by the time that she published *Twilight Massacre*, her work was often using nonsense syllable motifs, call-and-response structures and choruses with variations. In this sense, new poems such as "Little Petrel," "In Deep Wells Forgiven," and "The Antlered Hours" had governing structures akin to "Dilemma for Horn and Strings." In contrast to the free association of their verses, motifs and choruses imposed a shape on the poems, a shape that, in the case of these new poems, enclosed the most aggressive, individual extrapolations of consciousness. This aspect of *Twilight Massacre* distinguishes the competing character of all of De Hirsch's poetry, which is divided between studied and spontaneous composition. This competition, which is felt in many if not all of her poems, is the cause of her sudden redirections of language, away from a casting of images, towards rhyme and wordplay.

The primal scream that defines much of the terror of her early poetry is tempered in *Twilight Massacre*, but her rage remains, unrestrained, and is now focused on injustices and horrors that, while vague, resemble modern warfare and American imperialism. Such rage is suggested in her reflections on the idea of 'zero' in "Countdown," a poem that studies the zero as an abstract idea, of nothing and absence; a destination, as in a countdown; and as an image, as a noose and a wreath. While this poem embraces De Hirsch's

[8] Storm De Hirsch and Sally Dixon. "Independent Filmmaker, Storm De Hirsch, Press Conference." Carnegie Museum of Art, April 15, 1971. Transcription of an audio recording held in the collection of the Carnegie Museum of Art.

sense of ambiguity, it does assign grief and loss and anger to this absolute. The titular poem, "Twilight Massacre," with its recurring, disingenuous, progressively morose authority, is tied to this same discontent, as its authority is cited with a rote, "the General said," a phrase that suggests the banality of evil, a phrase that even stands as an omen of the My Lai Massacre that, in 1968, would become terminally linked to the word 'massacre' in the American consciousness.

Harriet Zinnes would review *Twilight Massacre* with comments on De Hirsch's method, that her work draws upon free association to compound images, "the rapid movement of one strange image after another," in evoking a "lithe and surreal" world.[9] This aspect of De Hirsch's method had remained from her earlier work, but there were stark contrasts between *Twilight Massacre* and her earlier writings, primarily in the author's refinement of her talismanic symbolism; her spare use of nonsense syllables; and the despairing, apocalyptic aspects of her poems.

1964 also marked the beginning of Storm De Hirsch's career as a filmmaker. She had been exposed to the styles of art cinema in America and Italy, in part through her marriage to Louis Brigante and her long friendship with Jonas Mekas. Inspired by the open-ended character studies of the Italian new wave, her initial impulse was to make dramatic narrative films, films that could resonate simultaneously with the American independent film movement, as well as the broader international emergence of a difficult narrative art cinema, from out of the ruins of social realism. While her interest in artistic narrative filmmaking was short lived, ending with her feature *Goodbye in the Mirror* (1964), she had discovered in cinema an approach to making poetry that prized, above all, the image sequence. In sequencing, she recognized an analogy to the streams of vision that her strongest poems had by this time assumed. "To me, making poems and making films are one," she would later say, "and neither activity excludes the other."[10] Her work thereafter would reflect her engagement with the underground film community, and she would pursue a diverse range of styles: diaries, multi-screen projections, painted films, and films that used elaborate optical printing.

Her most widely regarded achievement as a filmmaker is the series titled *The Color of Ritual The Color of Thought*: *Divinations* (1964), *Peyote Queen* (1965), and *Third Eye Butterfly* (1968). De Hirsch described the series as "a film trilogy encompassing multiple voyages into buried continents of the Self, exploring out-of-bound areas of no-time, new space." That one of her first published poems was titled "Buried Continent" is no coincidence: her titles and annotations for her films often drew from the texts of her poems, or, when

[9] Harriet Zinnes. "Review: Bronk / De Hirsch / Jones." *Books Abroad* 40:1 (1966), 93.

[10] Shirley Clarke and Storm De Hirsch. "A Conversation." *Film Culture* 46 (1967), 46.

original, strongly resembled her published verse. De Hirsch would later admit that her writing had "always had a sense of violence about it," and that what she had done in film had "a related sense of violence."[11] The more immediate parallel between her films and her work in other media lay in her etching and painting on film, just as she had on canvas. The most prominent example of this, *Peyote Queen*, is a film that synthesizes erotic photography, pastel colors and violent gestures, both in rapid editing, subdivision of the frame (the quadrants of uncut 8mm) and palette-knife smears of paint. The collision of beauty and brutality, the titular suggestions of psychedelia and the third-eye imagery of abstraction mirror the aspirations to ritual magic found in De Hirsch's poetry. The film becomes a talisman.

De Hirsch's films were diverse in subject and style, and she labeled them as fable-fantasies, tapestries, journeys and sketches. There were films that had their roots in specific poems, for example, *Journey Around a Zero* is inspired by "Countdown," and *The Tattooed Man* is an adaptation of the poem of the same title. De Hirsch had a special affection for Super 8 film, and in this format she made what she would call *Cine-Sonnets* and *Cine-Songs*. These included films made in tribute to other artists such as Neil Ives and Kasimir Malevich, films of events such as *Charlotte Moorman's Avant-Garde Festival #9*, and films with visionary titles taken from her poems, such as *The Reticule of Love* (a lyric from "In Deep Wells Forgiven") and *Silently, Bearing Totem of a Bird* (a lyric from "Harangue the Night").

After the mid-1960s, De Hirsch's work as a poet receded, assuming a distant, supplementary role, as filmmaking consumed the bulk of her time. In the underground of American cinema, De Hirsch enjoyed a sense of community that she had never found in poetry, and found champions in Jonas Mekas, Sally Dixon, Shirley Clark, and younger filmmakers such as Gary Adelstein and Wheeler Winston Dixon. She was toiling in one of the primary geographic hubs of both poetry and cinema: as a filmmaker, she benefitted in her day from the respect and goodwill of her peers while her poetry was overlooked and undervalued by all but a few prominent advocates (Daisy Aldan, Richard Eberhart, Edith Hamilton). Her filmmaking fell out of sight as she became inactive, rarely circulating until after her death, and her poetry, by then a footnote to her career in filmmaking, would remain largely unknown and out of print for more than five decades.

In little more than a decade as a filmmaker, Storm De Hirsch shot countless films, finishing more than thirty. She had found her calling but it was in every sense an adaptation of a first calling—to poetry—and her films arrived in an era when the relation between these two forms was at its most apparent, as critics and filmmakers, De Hirsch among them, furthered the embattled discourse of poetic filmmaking by asserting anew that the

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[11] Ibid, 48.

forms of consciousness explored in ancient forms, in written and oral poetry, achieved its ultimate expression in this seventh art.

Following Louis Brigante's death in 1975, De Hirsch gave up her studio and retired from making films. She maintained a listed address in publishers' indexes of American poets until the early 1980s, but she had withdrawn almost entirely from cinema and poetry by this time, increasingly incapacitated by Alzheimer's disease. In 2000, she died in a Manhattan nursing home in which she had long resided. The tragic end of Storm De Hirsch, an artist with such distinct élan, jailed so long in the grip of a neurodegenerative disease, makes her loss all the more sorrowful: that an artist of such prodigious creativity would arrive so late to the forms in which she thrived, and would withdraw so long before her time. While her films remain prey to the contexts assigned their divergent impulses, the value judgments and categorizations that divide struggling communities, the arc of twentieth century poetry has simply abandoned her, to her benefit. For while her films might be distorted, contested and claimed through the competing histories of the New American Cinema, her poems remain apart, the primary inscriptions of her visionary aesthetics. They are the root of her cinema, both as raw material for her titles and annotations and as inspiration for the stylistic construction of her films. But these poems are also the point of origin from which she refined her blazing devotions, her astral projections, her Mysteries. Her images grew in strength until finally language could no longer contain her mythology. It had to become, as the *Tulpa*, a dream made flesh.