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*MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON: THE POSSIBILITY OF POETIC CINEMA  
IN MAYA DEREN'S FILM*

por

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For my mom, Laura.

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What else one could one say? Thank you all of you who have patiently stood my complaints and interminable cries for help. Thank you for hearing me and mocking me when I was too awkward to be called a friend. Thank you for sharing, laughing, teaching, bearing with me. Thank you for the support and good bottles of wine, while eating out, watching sun and rain, and for all the times you have said I would make it, whether in the cinema or in a supermarket queue, sharing bohemian or non-bohemian moments, do thank you my friends!

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**Figure 1 - Maya Deren - 1942**

I am not greedy. I do not seek to possess the major portion of your days. I am content if, on those rare occasions whose truth can be stated only by poetry, you will, perhaps, recall an image, even the aura of my films. And what more could I possibly ask, as an artist, than your most precious visions, however rare, assume, sometimes, the forms of my images.

– Maya Deren

**ABSTRACT**MAYA DEREN'S *MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON* OR AN ALTERNATIVE FOR  
POETRY IN HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

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This thesis examines the work of the filmmaker Maya Deren in the light of the aesthetics proposed by her main writings —“An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film”(1946), “Cinema as an Independent Art Form” (1946), “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality”(1960) —, as well as its relations to her first short film *Meshes of the Afternoon*, placing it among the numerous aesthetic and film trends in which it figured. Her writings depict a solid theoretic background, as well as her attempt to construct what she called “poetic cinema,” through the conjunction of various forms of artistic expression. Such an attempt is made no less evident in the analysis of *Meshes of the Afternoon*, whose dream-like narrative evolves from the peculiar combination of symbolic elements and is responsible for the poetic effect coveted by the filmmaker.

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## RESUMO

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo examinar o trabalho da cineasta Maya Deren, principalmente no que se refere à estética proposta por ela em seus principais escritos: “An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Film and Form” (1946), “Cinema as an Independent Art Form” (1946) “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality” (1960) — e à relação que estes estabelecem com seu primeiro curta-metragem *Meshes of the Afternoon*, situando-o em meio às inúmeras correntes estéticas e cinematográficas com as quais se relacionou. Seus escritos evidenciam uma formação teórica sólida, bem como sua tentativa de elaborar o que denominou de “poetic cinema,” através do encontro das diversas formas de expressão artística. Esta tentativa fica não menos evidente ao se analisar *Meshes of the Afternoon*, cuja narrativa de caráter onírico se desenvolve a partir de uma combinação peculiar de elementos simbólicos, responsável pelo efeito poético almejado pela cineasta.

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On Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, or an Unpretentious Proposal for an Introduction

A work of art is a skin for an idea  
— Maya Deren

Writing about Maya Deren is not a simple task, not only for the lack of academic material produced about her in Brazil, but mainly for the strangeness and uneasiness she might cause in her unprepared viewers and readers, who, for the very first time, are confronted with something scholars and theorists define as “Cinema of Poetry”<sup>1</sup>, and what is more, inserted in American territory.

Maya Deren, firstly known as Eleanora Derenkovsky, a Russian who had migrated to the United States at the age of six, and whose intelligence and hard work contributed to her being known and respected in the artistic milieu from the forties on, made me really willing to understand, and seek to make others understand, the reason of her importance. Watching her film for the very first time provoked in me a mixture of fascination and disturbance, for beauty, delicacy and subtleness coexisted with angst, fear and the constant eminence of death. I could not remain immune. Later on, when I started studying Maya Deren's films and aesthetic theories, I still did not understand why her films could be called poetic, but I *felt* why. Maya Deren commented about her first film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, in an interview with Alma Dettinger at WQXR Radio in January 1949, saying that rather than trying to explain *Meshes*, one should feel it deeply in order to understand it

I think one might understand[my] film without being able to tell a story about it in much the same way that one has understood a piece of music without being able to translate it into verbal terms and to make a story in the narrative sense out of it. I've been impressed by the fact that people who have come up to me and said “Well, I don't understand what this film is about. For example, what does this and this mean?” I was impressed by the fact that when I questioned them, what did they feel and what did they think it meant in feeling terms, they have been very

accurate and they felt exactly what they were supposed to feel. In other words, they understood more than they thought they understood (qtd. in Jackson 203-4)

From the sincere attempt to feel Deren's film, in order to understand it, as well as the extreme curiosity to perceive the ideas behind the camera, or her thoughts behind her images, I did discover a complete new universe in terms of filmmaking, for Deren's use of the camera was — and still is — unique, as her conception of rhythm, movement, her wise choice for objects to be figuring in her films and the effect these objects might cause in the spectator (one does not cease trying to find a plausible interpretation for the use of certain objects which appear on screen in order to grasp their meaning — and here I am citing the objects endlessly repeated in *Meshes of the Afternoon*: the key, the flower and the knife) encouraged me to seek for explanations.



**Figure 2 - Deren at work**

The little information I had about her, her past in Russia, her involvement with the Social League during her college years, her interest in poetry, her unsuccessful experience in attempting to become a poet, her involvement with her second husband, Alexander Hammid, a respectful filmmaker of the time, the years spent in Haiti, the practice of Voodoo and her strange ability to transform things and introduce all her art in films we might not even dream of their existence, all

of that made my curiosity increase and try to discover what was behind the legend, mostly created after her death in late sixties.



**Figure 3 - Maya Deren in the Greenwich Village studio**

About “Cinema of Poetry”, theorists such as Moira Sullivan refer to her work with film poetics as the beginning of a “new ‘revolution’ in film making.” According to Sullivan

Deren’s use of “poetics” embodies unique aspects and she used imagery to “spiritualize” film language as the symbolists. Her “poetic politics” expanded the avant-garde film and opened up a dialogue in the USA where the classical narrative was firmly rooted. She allowed room for conceptual expansion and evolution [...], public screenings of her films dwindled over time but by then a well-entrenched system of alternative distribution, film societies and a new generation of young filmmakers had emerged (182).

Bill Nichols, editor of *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*, an exceptional collection of essays on Deren not available yet in Brazil, comments that she “did not contribute to an existing film movement but galvanically launched a new one,”(5) and, despite the fact of

having a good number of predecessors, such as the Whitney brothers, Mary Hellen Bute and Sarah Kathryn Arledge, Nichols states that “only Maya Deren publicly and insistently proclaimed the need for a new art cinema, envisioned the conceptual and material means to build one, and actively saw to its implementation” (5). Deren’s struggle for the legitimization of a new cinema, which would be far akin the Hollywoodian ways of production, cast a new light to The New American Cinema of the fifties, and gave sustenance to the creative efforts of names such as Hollis Frampton, Stan Brakhage, Paul Sharies, Robert Frank, Morris Engel and Jack Smith. Together with John Mekas, Amos Vogel and others, Deren structured and formulated what would constitute the rules of independent cinema, which remains with us until the present moment. As Catrina Neiman mentions in the introductory pages of *The Legend of Maya Deren, vol.II – Chambers*, Deren “was the first to establish an alternative means of production and distribution for independent filmmakers” (4) Her *Meshes of the Afternoon*, initially made without the intention of a public audience in mind, was, in 1947, awarded the Cannes Festival 16mm “Grand Prix Internationale,” the first one given to an American, and more, the first one ever given to a woman. In addition to that, the first John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for “Creative Work in Motion Pictures” was given to her in 1946.

The experimental filmmaker James Broughton cites Deren as “the mother of us all” (qtd. Brakhage 13), alluding to her as the mother of all independent, avant-garde filmmakers. However, as Christopher Horak points out, “there were indeed quite a number of American artists making experimental films prior to [Deren’s] *Meshes of the Afternoon*, as well as the presence of film societies and art houses in the 1920s and ‘30s, where independent films were screened”(6). Thus, we shall not employ the title of Maya Deren as being “the mother of the American avant-garde” without the caveat that she could not be a mother without having herself

progenitors. Nonetheless, Deren's importance is due to the fact that she was, at the early forties, the only expressive figure among women — and even intellectuals as a whole, whose attempt to break with Hollywoodian patterns of filmmaking at the time, gave way to a whole generation of experimental directors, distributors, as well as theorists.



**Figure 4 - Deren and her multiple selves**

Bill Nichols cites that mainly her writings, including *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, “An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film”, and her essays such as “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality”, “represent a brilliant body of work comparable to that of Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Jean-Luc Godard, David McDougall, and Trinh T. Minh-ha” (7). He also mentions that other pieces of her work, including her brief and unpublished essay on fashion, “Psychology of Fashion”, would somehow address the kind of

analysis Roland Barthes would bring to our days with works such as *Mythologies*. Besides that, Renata Jackson points out that Deren's merit resides on the fact that she was not only a filmmaker, but also a film theorist, who functioned "as the expression of a woman's articulate voice in the realm of early film theory, when few women were in the field, and at a time when there was no precedent in the United States of theoretical writing of film by filmmakers" (9). By refusing narrative Hollywoodian film-patterns, Maya Deren had a very a clear thought of the kind of cinema she wanted to create. In "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality in Film Theory and Criticism", she comments

If cinema is to take its place beside the others as a full-fledged art form, it must cease merely to record realities that owe nothing of their actual existence to the film instrument. Instead, it must create a total experience so much out of the very nature of the instrument as to be inseparable from its means. It must relinquish the narrative disciplines it has borrowed from literature and its timid imitations of the causal logic of narrative plots, a form which flowered as a celebration of the earth-bound, step-by-step concept of time, space and relationship which was part of the primitive materialism of the nineteenth century. Instead, it must develop the vocabulary of filmic images and evolve the syntax of film techniques which relate those. It must determine the disciplines inherent in the medium, discover its own structural modes, explore the new realms and dimensions accessible to it and so enrich our culture artistically as science has done in its own province (*Daedalus*, 167).

Maya Deren was very clear about her position as an artist who fought for finding room beyond the boundaries of commercial films, mostly those ones of Hollywood, which she in great part despised. Thus, her writings and films suggest her desire to invade viewers with a more critical approach towards the cinema which was in fact produced at that time. She was, in fact, proposing the idea of a more interactive, not-so passive cinema, in which the spectators would assume a dynamic posture, by taking part in the process, criticizing it when necessary. According to Deren, a good filmmaker, should, above all, surprise the spectators mainly by avoiding formulaic patterns which prevented viewers from interfering — creatively— in the filmic

progression. As she cited in her essay “An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film”, in Hollywood “all is understood for [spectators], and [they] are deprived of the stimulating privilege of themselves understanding” (29). Regarding Hollywoodian methods of producing cinema, she argued

Hollywood fiction film has visual shorthand of clichés with which we have become so familiar that we are not even aware of the effort of transcription. As we watch the screen we continually ‘understand’ this gesture to stand for this state of mind, or that grimace to represent that emotion. Although the emotional impact derives not from what we see, but from the verbal complex which the image represents, the facility with which we bridge the gap and achieve this transcription deceives us, and we imagine we enjoy a visual experience (40).



**Figure 5 - Deren in *At Land***

Alexander Hammid, Deren’s husband who directed her first film production, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, dated from 1943, and whose ideas on cinema were in great part shared with Deren, mentioned that a spectator ought to avoid simply entering a projection room and watching the film. For Hammid, the connection established between the spectator and the film should be accomplished not only in rational terms. It should overcome the logical borders of interpretation and become somewhat a physical experience, or as he cites, “a *magic link* between the camera



and the eye of the spectator,” (qtd.in Nichols 129) and that connection would constitute the so expected poetical experience. In “New Fields— New Techniques,” he mentions:

The film, with its changing visual angle, its capacity for unlimited detail and significant elimination, involves the spectator physically in a magic world in which he seems to be taking personal part. The lens of the camera and its complement, the screen, are endowed with the unique capacity of becoming the very eye of each spectator, or even, as I hope for its development; the inner eye. When the film-maker has achieved the identification between the camera lens and the eye of the spectator, his basic task is fulfilled: he has established an intimate, direct contact with his audience. He has completed a circuit of communication between his and the spectator’s mind and heart (qtd. in Soussloff 119)



**Figure 6 - Deren and Hammid in their Greenwich Village apartment**

Moira Sullivan comments that by 1946, when Deren’s films had been shown in over 150 university departments of art and drama in also in a great number of art museums, theorists such as Rudolf Arnheim credited her as one of the few artists to keep alive the new medium in film and Joseph Campbell cited Deren’s work as a “visionary search for what has been lost to

contemporary life in creating a spiritually significant visionary language.” (qtd. Sullivan 80) Le Corbusier, the French architect, to whom “the goal of art [should not be] simple pleasure, rather it [should partake] of *the nature of happiness* (Harrison 236) commented on Deren’s poetic films

The camera of Maya Deren delivers us from the studios: it presents our eyes with physical facts which contain profound psychological meaning; it beats out within our hearts or upon our hearts a time which alternates, continues, revolves, pounds, or flies away.... One escapes from the stupidity of make-believe. One is in the reality of the cinematic fact, captured by Maya Deren at that point where the lens cooperates as a prodigious discoverer.

(electronic < <http://www.bringinithome.co.uk/deren.htm>>)

As Moira Sullivan points out, Deren’s films have been nominated as experimental, avant-garde, surrealist, Freudian, poetic and abstract. However, the inclusion of her work with the “New American Cinema” — and this “new” is a term constantly used to designate world cinemas and ethnic cinemas nowadays — is far more common, though. This inscription began to gain territory after Deren’s death, mainly with the diffusion of the so-called *underground* cinema, term which stands for non-commercially distributed films.



**Figure 7 - Deren, the filmmaker**

Finally, in 1949, at a screening in the Provincetown Playhouse Deren herself entitled her films as “avant-garde.” Concerning the idea of what constituted poetic films, or the films that figured under the title of “Cinema of Poetry,” Deren recommended

My films might be called poetic, referring to the attitude towards these meanings... My films might be called choreographic, referring to the design and stylization of movement which confers ritual dimensions upon functional motion... My films might be called experimental, referring to the medium itself... I am addressing myself not to any particular group but to a special area and definite faculty in every or any man — to the part of him which creates myths, invents divinities, and ponders, for no practical whatsoever, on the nature of things... the important truth is the poetic one. (qtd. in Azerêdo 24)

Whether poetic, avant-garde, experimentalist, underground, independent, abstract or Freudian, Deren’s film should be seen as a reflection of her dedicated work as a filmmaker who was engaged in a movement towards the creation of this “new” cinema , not only by promoting events, but also by spreading ideas while working as a film theorist. Her 1946 essay “An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film,” organized her ideas in relation to film theory and practice and cast a new light in terms of what has been produced by theorists until then.



**Figure 8 - Deren in *At Land***

In fact, Deren's experience with the movie camera gave continuity to her initial project of turning into a poet, as she mentions during a lecture-demonstration at Smith College in April, 1961

Well, I was a poet...and I was very poor poet, because I was putting into words, or trying to translate in verbal terms, concepts, images, ideas, which were essentially visual in their nature. From the time that I got a camera, it was no longer necessary to make this peculiar transcription, do you see? I went exactly from the idea to the thing. Instead of going with indirection through words...from the time I started making motion pictures, my imagination worked directly, instead of trying to find a verbal equivalence, and so on, because I wasn't really thinking verbally, ever. I was thinking visually in the first place, and since I had no camera, and I had no means of making visual statement, I pushed them into verbal terms which were never quite satisfactory, and that was why I was a bad poet. I went from being a bad poet to, I think, a pretty good filmmaker. That's the development, if you want to put it that way (qtd. in Jackson 172-3).

Undoubtedly, Maya Deren's experience as a writer, at least in academic terms — she had, in a short period of twelve months, finished her master's degree including an impressive thesis on Symbolist and Imagist poets and their influence upon American literature of her time — would give her familiarity with words, but that would not give, as she herself agreed, certification of her becoming a great poet.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, her poetic practice would give superior results when she decided to dedicate herself completely to the cinematic experience. Sullivan comments that

In order to develop a “vocabulary of filmic images” and “syntax of filmic images,” Deren worked with poetic structure in filmmaking which became her mother tongue. She explained that although she had tried to write poetry, the film camera and editing gave her a language. The camera was taken to its limitations as she began working with the “building block” of the art instrument—the photographic image whose “verity ...exercises an authority comparable in weight only the authority of reality itself” (140).

As Vèvè Clark states, “her images [would] communicate much more directly and economically the complex emotions she had tried to capture in writing” (2:17). Annette

Michelson points out that Deren's work should be analyzed in a much larger scale than simply dealing with her films as an extension of her failing attempt to write poetry.

A full-length study of Deren would seek to place her within the cultural production of her time, that of the twenty years following World War II. Deren's film work, when casually surveyed, offers evidence of her presence within the intellectual milieu of New York and Los Angeles. John Cage, Anaïs Nin, Erick Hawkins, to name only a few, were chosen as collaborators in her major films. And her writings demonstrate her familiarity with poetry, choreography, and music at the period of avant-garde. Her theorization of a cinematic grammar demands, as I shall claim, to be analyzed in relation to the linguistic model then being developed by Roman Jakobson (22).

Maira Sullivan observes that "with the notable exception of chapters to anthologies and numerous essays on Deren, major studies on Deren which incorporate the spectrum of her cross-disciplinary work and/or film theory are rare" (16). In addition to that, the unavailability of material on Maya Deren in our libraries or bookshops results in the almost complete ignorance of the subject in our university environment. Hence, the purpose of my work is twofold: to state Deren's importance as a filmmaker and an artist and to establish a connection between her film production, in special her first film *Meshes of the Afternoon* from 1943, and the so called "Cinema of Poetry," proposed firstly by Jean Cocteau in the manuscript of *Blood of a Poet* (1930) and largely discussed by Pier Paolo Pasolini, at the Pesaro Film Meeting in 1965.<sup>3</sup> This connection between Deren's film, *Meshes of the Afternoon* from 1943, and the "Cinema of Poetry" will be related to Pasolini's, Cocteau's and Buñuel ideas of what this modality of cinema may be, but it will be mostly associated to Deren's own ideas of "poetic cinema," depicted by her essays "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film" and "Cinema as an Art Form." This is basically what is going to be studied in the first chapter.

The second chapter is an attempt to examine the poetical effects created in Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*, also present in the aesthetic models suggested in some of her writings,

including “An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film,” and “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality.” Thus, I will propose a close analysis of the film, drawing attention, mostly, to the symbolic elements presented in the film: the key, the knife, the flower and the mirror in the light of Deren's ideas and also as my personal interpretation of the film. Finally I will conclude by relating the theory exposed in the first chapter, mainly in terms of Deren's aesthetics and poetics, connecting it to my reading of *Meshes of the Afternoon*.

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<sup>1</sup> Theorists such as Jean Cocteau, who had mentioned the term in the brochure of "Blood of a Poet", 1930, Pier Luis Buñuel at Mexico University, 1955 and Paolo Pasolini in Pesaro, 1965, were the first ones to mention the term.

<sup>2</sup> Some authors, such as Bill Nichols in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*, allude to her as a legend. Others, like Vèvè Clark, Millicent Hodson and Catrina Neiman have actually published books whose titles made direct reference to Maya Deren as a legend. See *The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Bibliography and Collected Works. Volume I, Part Two: Chambers (1942-1947)*.

<sup>3</sup> Not only Pasolini, but also other theorists, such as Mirzoyan, Agel and Rosi, had mentioned the relation between film and poetry, and not coincidentally, great parts of these theorists were film directors.

*Meshes of the Afternoon* or the Mythical Return to the Dreamland of Cinema of Poetry

The task I am trying to achieve is above all to make you see — D. W. Griffiths

[M]ore than anything else, cinema consists of *the eye for magic* — that which perceives and reveals the marvelous in whatsoever it looks upon —Maya Deren

*Meshes of the Afternoon*, first Deren's film production in collaboration with her then husband in 1943, was born under the sign of the Second World War, giving place to a new refinement in terms of aesthetics, making use of cinema not only as a narrative instrument, but also as a lieu for spiritual and poetic exploration. It is important to mention that Maya Deren drifted between New York and Los Angeles intellectual circles and she lived among artists such as Michel Duchamp, Anaïs Nin, John Cage, Erick Hawkins, to name only a few, who were chosen as collaborators in her main films. Others, like Galka Scheyer, a former student of Bauhaus school, and who was known as the American representative of "The Blue Four" painters – Klee, Kandinsky, Jawlenski and Feininger, introduced her to modern arts. Her second husband, Alexander Hackenschmied, (for Deren, Hammid Sasha Hammid), was a Czech artist who studied architecture, photography and set design in Prague before working in film. Herb Kline, who worked with Hammid in *Crisis* (1938) mentioned that "he was the equal then and now, of the best professional cameramen in the world", and Kline had worked with no one less than Henry-Cartier Bresson, with whom he had just completed *Return to Life* (1937). Kline asserted that "Cartier-Bresson and Hammid are two of the greatest talents I've ever worked with. And I have worked with James Wong Howe, Lee Garmes, Douglas Slocombe, and I would say they're all of the same level. Their eyes could do no wrong" (qtd. in Clark et al 2:20).

In April, 1943 Alexander Hammid and Maya Deren decided to shoot with a 16mm camera their first film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, within a very short period of two and a half weeks, with meager resources, using as the scenario their own home, playing the main roles, with no script included. This film is considered, by many, as Deren's best film, an intriguing sample of "poetry of motion" (Clark et al 2:2) and it is undoubtedly due to Hammid's cinematography and editing. At this stage Deren was only an apprentice, and as she mentions, her approach concerning filmmaking was more "cerebral" than she may have wanted; it was rather "too full of ideas."<sup>4</sup> Deren, on the other hand, pays homage to Alexander Hammid by saying that he was responsible for the utterance of the "poetic idiom" presented in the film. In a letter to James Card, dated from 1955, Deren mentions *Meshes of the Afternoon* as her point of departure

*Meshes of the Afternoon* is my point of departure, I am not ashamed of it; for I think that, as a film it stands very well. From the point of view of my own development, I cannot but be gently proud that that first film — that point of departure — had such relatively solid footing. That is due to two major facts: first, to the fact that I had not been a very good poet up until then, and the reason I had not been a very good poet was because actually my mind worked in images which I had been trying to describe in words: therefore, when I undertook cinema, I was relieved of the false step of translating images into words, and could work directly so that it was not like discovering a new medium so much as finally coming home into a world whose vocabulary, syntax, grammar, was my mother tongue: which I understood, and thought in, but like a mute, had never spoken. The first speech of a mute is a hoarse, ugly, virtually unintelligible. If *Meshes* is not that, it is because of the second fact, namely that Sasha Hammid contributed to the mechanics (and I use this in the largest sense) of that speech. It is because of him that O sounds like O, and not like A, that the sibilants hiss when they should, that the word emerges in single whole and does not stutter. My debt to him for teaching me the mechanics of film expression, and, more than that, the principle of infinite pains, is enormous. I wish that all these young filmmakers would have the luck for a similar apprenticeship (29).

When Deren and Hammid created *Meshes of the Afternoon*, they had no particular audience in mind. Yet, as Vèvè Clark mentions, "[this] short, silent, cine-poem [had] the power to tap the viewers responses with a success that few films achieve."(2:79). According to her,



Deren's ability with poetic language, allied with Hammid's work with the camera impelled the viewers to make part of a nightmare which was far too similar to reality. She observes that *Meshes* figures as one of the best examples of the cinema's capacity to reconstruct the real experience, and forgetfulness of dreaming. She mentions that the film succeeded in that way because, alike dreams, it made use of architectural imagery, which was mostly encompassed by Deren's concern with the interior space as a metaphor for consciousness, allied with Hammid's eye for architecture<sup>5</sup> in this representation of "the interior experiences of an individual"(2:79).

Clark suggests that

[a]rchitectural imagery serves throughout Deren's early films as a dominant visual metaphor for the realm of consciousness she was exploring via cinema. In many of her writings, as late as 1960, she often evoked the image of a room — its windows, thresholds and supporting pillars — to describe the mind or the structure of her own thinking (79).

Maya Deren herself explains in "Magic is New," January 1946, that *Meshes of the Afternoon*, was "concerned with the inner realities of an individual and the way in which the subconscious will develop, interpret and elaborate an apparently simple and casual occurrence into a critical emotional experience" (qtd. in Clark et al 1:20). In a 1946 release of her films Deren mentions that by "using cinematic techniques to achieve dislocations of inanimate objects, unexpected simultaneities [*Meshes*] establishes a reality which, although based somewhat on dramatic logic, can exist only in film." (qtd. in Jackson 22).

In Deren's earliest program note, dated from 1945, she comments that the use of cinematic technique, would create a world, which consisted of "put[ting] on film the feeling with a human being experiences about an incident, rather than accurately record the incident."(Sullivan 8) Moira Sullivan remarks that recording this very same incident over and over is an exercise that "stands somewhere between the narrative and the art film by a

confrontation of both (86). Notwithstanding, Deren refused the narrative plot in her films, as she mentioned in another film release, because of the “earth-bound, step-by-step concept of time, space and relationship which was part of the primitive materialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (qtd. in Sullivan 86-7). Sullivan mentions that the distinction between the temporality of *Meshes* and the classical narrative lies on the *cadence* of the film, which is exposed by the "movement of interior experiences through dislocations and similarities, giving it resemblance to dramatic logic." Nonetheless, the fact that the images are being displayed to the spectator, who can put the contents together, and according to their own preferences can interfere in the film, and confer to it a personal meaning , as Moira Sullivan suggests, is what "defies absorption into a diegetic world" (87).



**Figure 9 - Deren in *At Land***

Renata Jackson alludes to Deren's films as being oneiric, for they are able to reproduce the irrational space-time of our dreams

Often in our dreams temporal complexity or ambiguity reigns, as any distinction between past, present, and future tends to collapse; characters within our dreams. Often in our dreams may be understood as projections; we may move with ease between locations of that could not logically be contiguous; we may have a sense of floating or flying, or conversely our movements may seem thwarted or controlled by some unknown force. These are the sorts of bizarre space-time structures, along with the overriding ambiguity or complexity of character (often doubled, tripled or otherwise multiply split), that Deren imitates in the form and content of *Meshes*, *At Land*, and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*" (194-5).

Others, like Parker Tyler would consider them, and particularly *Meshes*, as "masterpieces of poetic language." According to him, *Meshes of the Afternoon* would describe the domestic universe in the realm of a woman's mind, governed by her dreams and exposing its consequences in the film as we can see;

[Her] films depict an unmistakably everyday world: a private home, a love affair, the woman's fantasy life. Here the immediate world of the lovers becomes subject to the laws of dreams; objects are transmuted into symbols; physical laws are transcended and implemented by filmic devices: slow motion, weird angles, magical mutations and transitions (3).



**Figure 10 - Deren and the chess board in *At Land*    Figure 11 - Dream-like reality, also in *At Land***

Deren herself referred to her films as "documentaries of the interior." (Clark et all 2:2). In a letter to James Card, dated from 1955, Deren comments about the experiences she had had while showing her films to her friends in their early days. She mentions that in a very particular

scene of *Meshes of the Afternoon*, where one of the women strides firstly on the beach, then on grass, afterwards on pavement and finally on the living room rug; she imagined a door, which took to another place, probably a different world, like the one of dreams and hallucinations

It was like a crack letting the light of another world gleam through. I kept saying "The doors of this room are solid except right there. There's a door leading to something. I've got to get it open because through there I can go through to someplace instead of leaving here by the same way I came in"(qtd. in Sullivan 89)

In *Meshes*, the spectator is encouraged to take part in the process since the very beginning. The film in itself is a collection of doors and mirrors which will lead the spectator to a different place depending on his intention for a destination, whether he is willing to take a destination or not. The door Deren mentions above can be clearly pictured as a looking glass, similar to Lewis Carroll's tales, where Alice traverses the boundaries of imagination and actually moves to the other side.<sup>6</sup> Deren does so by juxtaposing reality and dream, which are intimately connected, and like a superimposition of mirrors reproduces a dream inside another dream, which will be repeated endlessly. Adam Sitney mentions that "*Meshes*" explicitly simulates the dream experience by the way in which events and objects of the day become potent and transfigured within a dream, so much so that the dreamer may realize he/she is in a dream or may dream (within the dream) that he/she wakes. According to him, "[Deren has] telescoped the experience of an obsessive, recurrent series of dreams into a single one by substituting variations on the original dream for what would conventionally be complete transitions of subject within a single dream" (13).

*Meshes of the Afternoon* reproduces a domestic event, in which a woman gets to the house and, apparently, falls asleep. There is nothing new with that. A person who dreams in a film or a person who has dreamed he/she has actually dreamed, either. The novelty of Deren's film, however, stands on the *way* she showed and reproduced this dream experience. By the

repetition of various objects in the film (a flower, a key, a knife, a phonograph), or actions (a black mirror-faced figure disappearing on the bend of the road, the woman constantly pursuing this black figure, getting the key, trying the door, and struggling to climb the stairs) each one of these objects in a different location from where they had been shown before, or actions presenting a variation in their resolutions; gave not only force to their possible meanings, as conferred to them unusual symbolic values.

She draws attention to what she named as "verbal image." These "verbal images" according to her, are literary art-objects, which "give rise to an emotion or idea" (27) and lead directly to meaning. As an example, she mentions that a chair in Flaubert's novels is not only a symbol; it is a verbal image, for it is a result of "the exercise of his art instrument — language"(27). That is to say, it is irrelevant if the chair in the novel existed or not in reality. Instead, what Flaubert managed to create, in verbal terms, as the equivalent experience he had in spatial reality, is what counts. Flaubert's statement "L' idée n'existe qu'en virtue de sa forme", or, the idea that an object cannot exist without its form stands to what Deren considers as "a prime example of an [...] accurate description of reality"(26). This "accurate description of reality" should also be extended to art as a whole, which, according to her, should function as "an emotional and intellectual complex, whose logic is its whole form"(24). Renata Jackson points out that a true art-work for Deren should involve three components, not be neglected, in order to preserve the art-work:

[the] interaction of (1) the artist's imaginative and intellectual faculties, (2) material reality, and (3) one's chosen medium (the "art instrument"). The film-artist, then, must employ the "two separate but interdependent" instruments of the motion picture medium (the camera and the editing bench) in order to manipulate creatively elements of reality (space, time and color) and thereby fashion new space-time relations (84).

Jackson points out that Deren's program notes for the screening of her six films (*Meshes of the Afternoon*, *At Land*, *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, *A Study in Choreography for Camera*, *Meditation on Violence* and *The Very Eye of the Night*) at the Bleeker Street Cinema in February of 1961 and at the Living Theatre in March of the same year, were entitled "Chamber Films" and subtitled "Choreographies for Camera" (174). In "The Ethics at Form," Maureen Turin suggests that Deren's "chamber films" would figure as the musical composition written for a small ensemble compared to full-scale orchestral symphonies. She mentions that in doing so, Deren "is drawing an analogy that not only echoes her championing the "amateur" film over the large-budget film produced by the industry but also advocates compositional order" (Nichols 83). Deren explains her use of the term "chamber film," contrasting with other currently employed to designate her films

...since terms such as "mainstream," "shorts," "feature-length," "experimental," "art-theatres"[...] have contributed to a formidable semantic confusion to the obstacles already confronting the development of film as an art-form, I hereby propose the recognition of *Chamber Film* as a form analogous to chamber music, which is not a minor or tributary form; [the] massive budgets, monstrous equipment, multitudinous personnel, etc., -- which is normally associated with "professional" film production is as irrelevant and superfluous to such chamber films as the presence of a 90-piece orchestra is to chamber music; ...economy of means is of the essence of such form and certainly not understood as a unfortunate limitation on creativity or profundity (qtd. in Jackson 175).

The essence of chamber music, as a form, is that it is economical in its statement, rather than elaborate; it is lyric in its emotional tone, rather than dramatic; it is abstract in its structure, rather than narrative in its structure, that is, it deals with the essence of ideas rather than the incidents in which those ideas may be manifest sometimes; and it above all requires a thorough and very virtuoso exploitation of a chosen instrument (idem).

Jackson observes that similar to chamber music, Deren's films are not narrative, evoking ideas and emotions more abstractly, making use of melody, harmony, rhythm and tonality. Deren also would claim her films are not narrative, stressing that ideas and emotions would be more accurately demonstrated in lyrical terms, through the form of music and dance. Jackson notices

that Deren's films, however, are not to be conceived as mere recordings of dance and music; instead, she says, her films consist in the interaction of three elements:

first, the referents' stylized movements; second, aspects of filmic recordings (what she calls the "performance" of the camera: whether static or moving; whether at normal speed, fast, slow, or reverse motion; what angle of vision whether in positive or negative, etc.); and third, the shot's total editorial reorganization (176).

By 1961, in "Art of the Moving-Picture," one of Deren's last promotional brochures for her lectures and films, she provides, as Jackson suggests, both a "concise summary of her thoughts about her work and a succinct affirmation of her enduring aesthetics":

#### METAPHYSICAL — POETIC — CHOREOGRAPHIC — EXPERIMENTAL

Labels and classifications serve their purpose only if they are accurate or refer to so familiar a form that the term, however inaccurate, has been given precise meaning by common consent and usage. The films described herein do not have this latter advantage. The heading above is therefore an effort at accuracy. The customary term "avant-garde" puts too much emphasis upon the historical; "experimental," "choreographic," or "poetic," alone, would mislead.

In calling this films METAPHYSICAL, I am referring to thematic content. It has required millenniums of torturous evolution for nature to produce the intricate miracle which is man's mind. It is this which distinguishes him from all other living creatures, for he not only reacts to matter but can mediate upon its meaning. This metaphysical action of the mind has as much reality and importance as the material and physical activities of his body. These films are concerned with meanings — ideas and concepts — not with matter.

In calling them POETIC, I am referring to the attitude towards these meanings. If philosophy is concerned with understanding the meaning of reality, then poetry — and art in general — is a celebration, a singing of values and meanings. I refer also to the structure of the films — a logic of ideas and qualities, rather than of causes and events.

In calling them CHOREOGRAPHIC, I refer to the design and stylization of movement which confers ritual dimension upon functional motion — just as simple speech is made into song when affirmation or intensification on a higher level is intended.

In calling them EXPERIMENTAL, I refer to the use of the medium itself. In these films, the camera is not an observant, recording eye in the customary fashion. The full dynamics and expressive potentials of the total medium are ardently dedicated to creating the most accurate metaphor for the meaning.

In setting out to communicate principles, rather than to relay particulars, and in creating a metaphor which is true to the idea rather than the history or experience of any one or several individuals, I am addressing myself not to any particular group but to a special area and definite faculty in every or any man — to that part of him which creates myths, invents divinities and ponders, for no practical purpose whatsoever, on the nature of things.

This is an area in which few men spend much time and in which no man can spend all of his time. But it is this, which is the area of art, which makes us human and without which we are, at best, intelligent beasts.

The intent of those films, then, is to create a mythological, poetic experience.  
(qtd. in Jackson 208-9)

Deren chooses a variety of adjectives to classify the employment of creative methodology, purpose, formal structure and its application in the thematic content of her work. She favors "experimental" films to designate the films she had produced so far, instead of labeling them as "avant-garde" films. In Vanderbilt Symposium, held at Smith College, in April 1961, Deren criticized the postulation that the avant-gardes were a receptacle for "free-flowing" imagery, and claimed that her films took time to plan with specific formal intentions. Renata Jackson points out that Maya Deren prefers the use of "experimental" rather than "avant-garde" for Deren considers "experimental" a term that better captures her concept of method: she mentioned in *Anagram* that a *proper* film makes use of creative manipulation of space and time "through all means available to the camera and the editing bench"(210).

Following Paul Valéry's statement that "A work of art is never completed, always abandoned", Deren named her program note for screening at Provincetown Playhouse, Feb.18, 1946 as "Three Abandoned Films" (see it at the appendix), in which were included *Meshes of the Afternoon*, *A Study for Choreography in Camera* and *At Land*. In the program, she mentions:

Man cannot duplicate the infinite intricacy of the living architecture of the wheat stalk...In his art — whether architecture or poem — he does not reproduce a given reality; nor does he simply express his immediate reactions of pleasure and pain. He starts with



elements of that reality – the stone, the city, the other man – and relates them into a new reality which, no sooner achieved, becomes itself an element in his next manipulation (qtd. in Clark et al 2: 363).

In her program notes, Deren mentions that *Meshes of the Afternoon* deals with "the relationship between the imaginative and objective reality" (qtd. in Clark et al 2: 628), by elaborating a casual incident into critical proportions. That is to say, the whole is created by elements of reality — people, places and objects — whose combination can give form to a new reality, or a new context which can define them according to their inner function. The *whole* is a form accomplished with the creative use of the film, which includes camera and editing, whose inner logic "is a function of such concepts as dislocations of inanimate objects, the reiteration of singular events, and other such film realities" (qtd. in Clark et al 2: 628). However, the recurrent symbols appearing in *Meshes* are not symbols related to some meaning or possible value outside the film, to be interpreted according to some "established system of psychology," as Deren states, or in terms of subjective or private associations they may suggest. According to Deren, they are images "whose value and meaning is defined and confined by the actual function in the context of the film as a whole" (qtd. in Clark et al 2:628).

In "Notes, Essays, Letters," Deren cites that part of the achievement of *Meshes* consisted in the use of cinematic techniques in order to "give a malevolent vitality to inanimate objects" (1). Thus, she refused the classical Freudian interpretation of the objects presented in the film, for the reasons mentioned above; there was no use of interpreting these objects outside the context of the film. In a lecture held in Toronto November 6, 1950, while asked about the symbolic significance the objects in *Meshes*, Deren suggested that her audience should avoid falling into the trap of assuming that the succession of images in films was "censored and changed...by some unconscious logic... since the succession is shaped by non-psychological

sensors [too] (qtd. in Clark 2:268). In a transcript on file at Anthology Film Archives she comments on the flower's claimed "symbolic significance":

The problems of that... were very simple: there wasn't much money to be spent, so there couldn't be a fresh flower everyday. It had to be a false flower from day to day, and that was quite simple. So I went to the nearest five and ten cent store, and said, "Where's your artificial flower department?" And he pointed me down to the basement somewhere, and I went down and said, "What is the largest flower you have?" Now it had to be large in order to register graphically... It just turned out that in that particularly five and dime the largest flower they had was a poppy. So I paid my money for the poppy and brought it home with me. Well, I have never heard the end of that false poppy and the psychoanalyst bit... And that you could see how much one could make of it by simply ignoring that [the film-making process] is not an unconscious flow. This selection of that particular flower was determined by the events described to you. As you could see, there's nothing psychological about it. Goodness, it is all very practical [...] And yet, much was made of just that. And yet in the film it as used as a flower in general abstraction, not particularly as a poppy, whatever that might mean. I don't exactly know what they're worried about, but they seem worried. (*Laughs*)  
(qtd. in Clark et al 2: 106-7)

### *Deren and Surrealism*

In film, I can make the world dance.  
-- Maya Deren

Besides the frequent association of *Meshes* within a psychoanalytical perception, critics like Vève Clark mention that it has also been cited by film historians as being "derived from or directly influenced by specific films, particularly of those of the Surrealists"(2:101). She cites that *Meshes* is often compared to Jean Cocteau's *Blood of a Poet* (1930), mainly because, alike Maya Deren, Cocteau was a poet and visual artist, whose craft consisted in "dramatiz[e] the mythical struggle to reconcile the inner and outer reality"(101) in his films. In *Blood of a Poet* the story takes place within a subjective time and space of a poet's mind, and many of the images we see on it are later referred in Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*. On the description of *Blood of*

*a Poet* and its comparison to *Meshes of the Afternoon* and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, Deren's second film from 1944, P. Adams Sitney comments:

The events of *Le Sang d'un Poète* bear a general resemblance to the trance film: a single hero, the poet, finds that the painted mouth he wiped from a canvas continues to live in his hand. It talks to him; it stimulates him sexually as he runs his hand along his body. Finally, with great effort, he transfers the mouth to a statue, which comes alive. The metamorphosis of statue into muse is attended by an alteration of the space in which it occurs; for in its process the door and window of the poet's chamber disappear. His sole exit is through the mirror. So he plunges into a realm of fantastic tableaux which seem to exist solely for his inner education. Two of the four tableaux in the Hotel des Folies-Dramatiques depend upon the mechanics of the camera for their magic: reverse motion and illusory defiance of gravity. His initiation into these mysteries leads to a symbolic suicide.

Back in the chamber, the poet destroys the statue and in so doing is changed into one himself. In the subsequent episode, a group of young students break up the statue to use as fatal ammunition in a snowball fight. Over the bleeding body of a slain student, the muse and the poet, both in the flesh, play a game of cards, which culminates, again, in his suicide.

In its climax, where the imagined death becomes reality, and in the complexity of its episodic variations on the trance film type, *Le sang d'un Poète* forecasts *Meshes of the Afternoon*; in the mixture of allegory and ritual, with its enigmatic images, it anticipates *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. Ultimately it is closer to the later Deren film in its conception; both are theoretical films in which a vision of the fusion of arts (poetry and film for Cocteau, dance and film for Deren) becomes the subject of the invented ritual (36).

Whereas in *Blood of a Poet* the mirror represents a passage to another dimension, it appears in *Meshes* as an opening to the sea. Apart from their apparent difference in meaning, they both convey the "unknown forces to which one is susceptible in the psychological realm" (Clark et al 2:101).

In *The Diary of Anaïs Nin – June, 1945*, Anaïs Nin mentions that the influence of Jean Cocteau in Maya's *Meshes of the Afternoon* is visible; however, regarding the early surrealist films, she would favor Maya's film to the formers for its "absence of artificial effects." She

would allude to Maya's films as "just simple following threads of fantasy"(qtd. in Clark et al 2:105).

Nonetheless, we shall bear in mind that filmmakers such as Maya Deren, did differ from Surrealists, if not distinguishable in her practice, in the ideas behind its conception. Her films, thus, are not to be analyzed as a mere conjunction of images jotted down randomly<sup>7</sup>. Renata Jackson suggests that "she, contrary to early surrealist directors, and also contrary to what she wanted to expose, did have a 'painstaking pre-planning' for the execution of her films (5). Besides that, she shall consider not only the pre-planning, but also the result of the film on screen. Some critics, as Whitney Chadwick, refuse to accept the so-spread idea that the American avant-garde produced in U.S. needed necessarily to be linked, with visceral bounds, to the surrealist movement

Buñuel and Dali wanted to describe the play of unconscious thought, so they borrowed the devices it uses: displacement, condensation, disregard for time, space, time and causality. But they used these devices as means to an end, to manifest the latent dimension of thought in libidinous, tragic, violent images. [...]Critics who insist on pursuing the purely academic question of the surrealist influence — surrealism thought to have expired at the outbreak of war in 1939, on say, the American avant-garde of the 1940's and after (Maya Deren, Curtis Harrington, Kenneth Anger, through to Stan Brakhage and others) are straining after a gnat (181).

Martin Jay remarks that image to surrealists, in special photography, was crucial for their reshaping of vision, mainly because of the film's direct contact with the outer world; to whose access allowed the manipulation of photograph so much so they would function as representations of reality (qtd. in Matthews 188). It was in this sense, thus, in the attempt of creating a *new reality*, different from the pre-established patterns from *seeing* and *perceiving* reality, with the disruption of the logical association versus the object presented , that we see a

clear dialogue between what the surrealists wanted to convey in visual terms with what Deren proposed through her art-films.

In *Cinema as an Art Form*, Deren explains: "when we agree that a work of art is, first of all, creative, we actually mean that it creates a reality and itself constitutes an experience..."(4). This experience, also, bears a strong resemblance to the *extra-ordinary* that the Surrealists wanted to produce. As a clear example of that, in the Surrealist realm, we see Magritte and other painters trying to defy the veracity of the optical experience. Victor Brauner, a Romanian-born painter, had decided to paint with his eyes closed, Magritte, on the other hand, confronted speech and thought with the inclusion of his betraying titles.

The ideal that Magritte and other surrealists wanted to achieve was to re-establish the idea of the "innocent eye," something that Deren had once mentioned regarding her audience—"the audience for art is limited not by ignorance nor an inability to analyze, but by a lack of innocent receptivity." Maya Deren suggested that in order to fulfill the filmic experience, spectators must have a certain naiveté, in other words, this innocence which would protect the viewers from a more "cerebral" interpretation of her films, which could, somehow, "corrupt" the understanding of a film-art ( as she conceives her film) in its whole.<sup>8</sup>

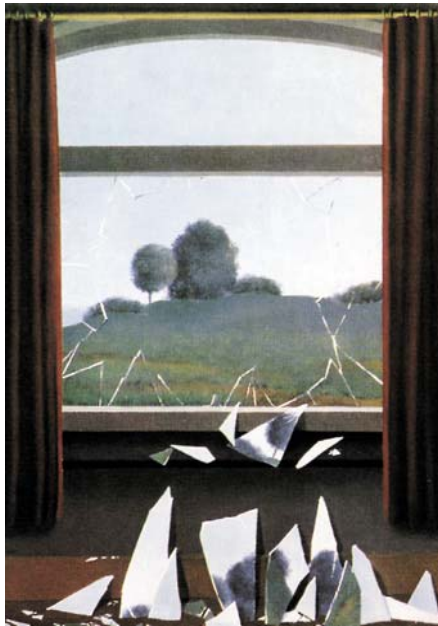


Figure 12 - Renée Magritte's *La Clef des Champs*-  
1936<sup>9</sup>



Figure 13 - René Magritte's *La Clef des songes* - 1930

The "innocent eye", as Martin Jay suggests, consists in "a violent disturbance to the ordinary, habitual way of sight [that] might lead to the pure visionary wonder of childhood" (qtd. in Matthews 186), which was another aspect present in Maya Deren's concept of film. This eye was, in its organic nature an essential element not only for Maya Deren, but also to her contemporaries, alike Stan Brakhage, a personal friend who was at that time making films. In the opening paragraph of his first book, *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage, wrote

Imagine an eye unruléd by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of 'Green'? How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye? How aware of variations in heat waves can that eye be? Imagine a world alive with incomprehensible objects and shimmering with an endless variety of movement and innumerable gradations of color. Imagine a world before the 'beginning was the word.'(qtd. in Mast 71)

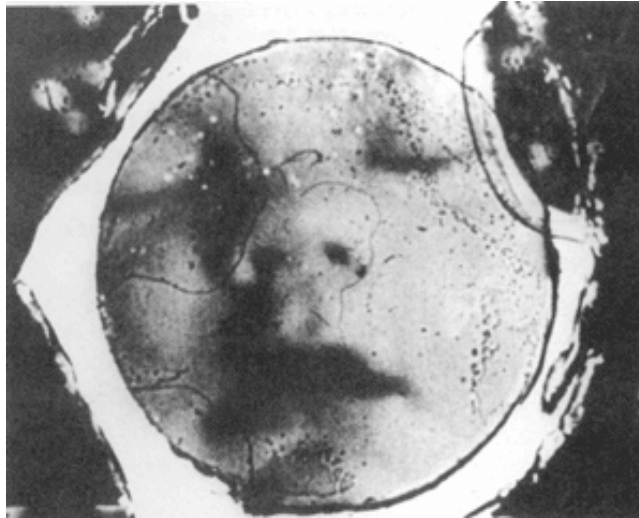


Figure 14 - Stam Brakhage's *Dog Star Man*

When Brakhage mentions a world before the "beginning was the word," (as a reference to *John 1:1*), he relates somehow to a world before we had a linguistic connotation to certain visual or "real world" aspects, as Martin Jay observes (qtd. in Matthews 34). That characteristic, in fact, was extended to the practice of a large circle of artists, including painters such as Renée Magritte and Salvador Dali and a wide range of filmmakers such as Man Ray — *Emak Bakia*, *L'étoile de Mer*, Germaine Dulac — *The Oyster and the Clergyman*, Jean Cocteau — *The Blood of a Poet*, *Orphée*, *Le Testament d'Orphée* and even Luis Buñuel — *Un Chien Andalou*. These artists, Deren included, wanted to transmit their ideas *beyond the text* and *towards the eye* throughout painting and photography at the same time they wished for a new definition of these types of media. "Painting the impossible" meant to Magritte, "precedence to poetry over painting." (qtd. Matthews 34).

Deren, on the other hand, to whom film, "by its very nature [was] a poetic medium" (*Poetry and the Film* 179), paraphrasing Magritte, sought to "film the impossible," which in this case was poetry. Poetry in its essence, however, at least to Deren did not need, necessarily to have a single or specific meaning. Thus, she insisted on the fact, as we have seen before, that her

work should not carry a *very* meaning. When she refused to explain, for instance, in Freudian terms, the meanings of the elements referred in *Meshes of the Afternoon* she would equal Magritte's: "My painting is visible images which conceal nothing; they evoke mystery and, indeed, when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question 'What does that mean'? It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable"; she would find equivalence in Buñuel's explanation of the meaning of his first film, *Un Chien Andalou* : "Nothing in the film symbolizes anything" (30); and she would dialogue with Cocteau: " I don't like the idea of poetry, I like poetry itself. Poetry that creates itself, without anyone's involvement" (bonus track of *Le Sang d'un Poète* or *Blood of a Poet*). Deren herself not only avoided the common, ordinary interpretation of her films, but also rejected any sort of comparison to any sort of movement; she did not want to be inserted in a surrealist scenario, nor did she want to figure among the members of the avant-garde.

On the surrealists Maya Deren would comment: "[they were] self-avowedly dedicated to externalizing an inner reality whose original integrity has been devotedly preserved" (*Anagram* 22). Nonetheless, as she would mention later in "Cinema as an Independent Art Form," she would not feel herself at ease when compared to the early surrealist such as Man Ray, Germaine Dulac and Buñuel:

Surrealism [...] claims the objective validity of the logically irreconcilable and severs the connecting link between the subjective of the real meaning and the objective level of logical implication. This results in shock effects which destroy confidence in the validity of the world which they create and frustrate the potential participation of the spectator in it (qtd. in Clark et al 2:348)

Vève Clark comments that Deren rejected the association of *Meshes of the Afternoon* with Surrealist films for they "exploited the imagination more for its confessional shock value than for its meaningful, though mystical *rationale*" <sup>10</sup>(2:104). P. Adams Sitney acknowledges



that the difference between these two films is mainly observed according to their tone and structure.

In *Un Chien Andalou*, there's unquestionably a pursuit of madness, an evocation of sadism and a general tendency to show the subconscious in eruption. In *Meshes of the Afternoon*, on the other hand, what we have is *primarily* a highly complicated and paradoxical quest for the self. Chance does not operate here; we see six carefully controlled stories. Each of these stories follows the same plot outline....*Meshes of the Afternoon* draws its sources from the oneiric cinema of 1920's, but instead of using dream as explosion, as an internal bomb, *it tries to fashion out of the dream a form* (67, emphasis added)

In Vanderbilt Symposium, Deren criticized the postulation that the avant-gardes were a receptacle for “free-flowing” imagery, and claimed that her films took time to plan with specific formal intentions. In "Notes, Essays, Letters", she adds that *Meshes of the Afternoon*, "is still based on a strong literary-dramatic line as a core, and rests heavily upon the symbolic value of objects and situations"(1).

Regarding the Surrealist filmmakers such as Buñuel and Cocteau, who are often related to "Cinema of Poetry", and also labeled as avant-gardists, we might say they did converge with Deren's film practice concerning the imagistic application in their films. However, as we could realize, structure for Deren was crucial, as we can observe in her writings, mainly in *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, where she mentions in detail, for instance, the utilization of the camera as an instrument for poetry, a subject which will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter.

*The Camera as an Eye*

Cameras do not make films. Filmmakers make films  
 — improve your films not by adding more  
 equipment and personnel, but by using what you  
 have to the fullest capacity. The most important part  
 of your equipment is yourself — your mobile body  
 — your imaginative mind, and freedom to use both.

— Maya Deren

Oh, transparent hallucination, superimposition of  
 image on image, mirage of movement, heroine of  
 thousand nights[...], you obstruct the light, *muddie*  
 the pure white beaded screen (it perspires) with  
 your shuffling patterns...

— Stan Brakhage, *The Camera Eye*

When Dziga Vertov started his experiments with the camera in the early twenties, he celebrated in a manifesto the discovery of the camera working as an eye:

I am eye. I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, am showing you a world, the likes of which only I can see. I free myself from today and forever from human immobility, I am in constant movement, I approach and draw away from objects, I crawl under them, I move alongside the mouth of a running horse, I cut into a crowd at full speed, I run in front of running soldiers, I turn on my back, I rise with an airplane, I fall and soar together with falling and rising bodies. This is I, apparatus, maneuvering in the chaos of movements, recording one movement after another in the most complex combinations. Free from the obligation of shooting 16-17 shots [sic] per second, freed from the frame of time and space, I coordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I may plot them. My road is towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I decipher in a new way the world unknown to you (qtd. in "The Factory of Facts and Other Writings" 109-10).

This 1923 manifesto, I daresay, was almost as potent and incisive as Whitman's "Song of Myself", when celebration was taken to its maxim potency through the human body itself. Vertov, however, highlighted the camera, a non-human element, as the instrument of vision similar to an eye — the camera is/as an eye. In 1922, when Robert Flaherty released his *Nanook*

of *the North* in America, Vertov started his Kino-Pravda (which in literal translation means “film-truth”). His practice was done in ordinary places, which favored to illustrate *real life*. People were filmed in bars, schools, markets, instead of more *bourgeois* places, as he mentioned.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes he would use the hidden camera, filming people without their previous consent. For him, it would serve as the best manner to capture “film truth” — that is to say, he would organize fragments in order to provoke a stronger effect than the eye itself could without the camera aid, or better, that reality would be presented, as he says, with a *deeper truth* than the naked eye could see. This statement is best illustrated by the two Vertov’s credo “life as it is” and “life caught unawares.” In the commentary track of *Man with the Movie Camera*, Yuri Tsivian mentions

for Vertov, “life as it is” means to record life as it would be without the camera present. “Life caught unawares” means to record life when surprised, and perhaps provoked, by the presence of a camera. This explanation contradicts the common assumption that for Vertov “life caught unawares” meant “life caught unaware of the camera.” All of these shots might conform to Vertov’s credo “caught unawares.”<sup>12</sup>

What Vertov wanted to convey was showing reality not only as it *was*, but preferably *more real* than it was, which was achieved, in great part, with the command of the camera’s *kino-glass* (cinema eye). When he mentioned “my path leads to the creation of a fresh perception of the world I decipher, in a new way, a world unknown to you”(109) he was somehow opening ground to Deren’s future practice as a filmmaker. This world, as he mentioned in the opening of his 1929 *Man with the Movie Camera* would guide viewers to see his cinema as an “experiment,” a search for “absolute language in cinema, based on its total separation from the language of literature and theater,” a language with its own “rhythm, one lifted from nowhere else,” which he could “find it in the movements of things” (idem).



**Figure 15 - Vertov's *Man with a movie camera***

Alike Dziga Vertov, Maya Deren exhaustively explored the relation camera-eye and spectator. Reflections of Vertov's ideas are also present in her writings when she proposes the creation of a *new reality*, or *truth*. Most of her reflections upon the function of the camera as a poetic element revealing truth were presented in *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*:

The most immediate distinction of film is the capacity of the camera to present a given reality in its own terms, to the extent that it is accepted as a substitute proper for that reality. A photograph will serve as proof of the "truth" of some phenomenon where either a painting or a verbal testimony would fail to carry weight. In other art-forms, the artist is the intermediary between reality and the instrument by which he creates his work of art. But in photography, the reality passes directly through the lens of the camera to be immediately recorded on film (30).

This "truth" claimed by Vertov and later by Deren, as we can observe, also echoes some of the "commandments" of the Surrealists, such as the attempt of creating a new reality embodied in film. Interesting to say that there is an enormous communication between Deren, Vertov and Surrealists in their struggle to create this new reality by innovating, reinventing and,

to quote Vertov, "decipher[ing], in a new way, a world unknown [to the spectators]" (109). According to Deren, it is the artist responsibility to transform this "so-commonly seen world" into a different thing, which would somehow function to spectators as a discovery of a new invention:

the film artist must not simply reveal a pre-existent reality but rather must use the capability of the motion picture medium to manipulate temporal relations in order to create a "new, man-made reality", not merely as a work of *l'art pour l'art*, but (in like fashion to the ancient artist/shaman performing his or her depersonalized rituals) for the greater goal of helping people understand their contemporary conditions (*Anagram* 6).



**Figure 16 - *Man with a movie camera***

However, whereas Vertov emphasized a much more crude cinema, which sounded somehow like a manifesto , a propaganda of Soviet workers, filmmakers and society, Maya Deren was more concerned with art itself, with the use of the camera not as a socio-political element; instead, camera would be the reflection of the inner realities of the self, of the unconscious mind, the personal, individual, psychological conflicts of a universe which only a sensitive eye (and here I am not seeing Vertov as insensitive), the one of the director, would be able to capture. By choosing the camera as the vital element for the production of poetry, she

sought to create a subjective atmosphere that was determined to avoid the “artificiality” created in mainstream films, mainly in Hollywoodian films, which she, in great part, abominated.

In an article published in 1946 she comments on her attempt to provide a new status to the camera: “I started by thinking in terms of a subjective camera, one that would show only what I could see by myself without the aid of mirrors and which would move through the house as if it were a pair of eyes, pausing with interest here and there, opening doors and so on” (“Magic is New” 263). In her 1946 program note, entitled “Three Abandoned Films,” Maya Deren states that what constitutes the difference within this process is not *the eye* behind the lenses, but rather, *the mind* which is capable of transforming ideas into effects and images.

The mechanism behind the lens, like the brain behind the eye, can evaluate the objects before it, can decide them attractive or repulsive, casual or surprising. Above all, the analogy must be extended to understand that the strip of film is the memory of the camera. Just as man is not content to merely reconstruct an original chronology, but in his art, conceives new relationships between remembered elements, so the film-maker can create new realities by the manipulation of the celluloid memories at his disposal (qtd. in Clark at al 2: 363).

She observes that the theory of the camera as a registering eye should not only work in order to produce a *creative* means to which films belong , but also, and mainly, it should constitute, somehow “the *oneness* [created] between form and instrument [as well as] the poem and the typewriter”:

Nothing can be achieved in the art of film until its form is understood to be the product of a completely unique complex: the exercise of an instrument which can function, simultaneously, both in terms of discovery and of invention. Peculiar also to film is the fact that this instrument is composed of two separate but interdependent parts, which flank the artist on either sides. Between him and reality stands the camera...with its variable lenses, speeds, emulsions, etc. On the other side is the strip of film which must be subjected to the mechanisms and processes of editing (a relating of all separate images), before a motion picture comes into existence (*Anagram* 46).

By stating that the relationship between the camera and the filmmaker should be similar to the one of the poem and the typewriter, she proposes an almost visceral rapport between *creator* and *creature*. The camera, among the innumerable functions it may comprise, and the infinite possibilities it can create, is capable of pulling the trigger of imagination:

The camera can create dance, movement and action which transcend geography and take place anywhere. It can also...be the meditating mind turned inwards upon the idea of movement, and this idea, being an abstraction, takes place nowhere, or, as it were, in the very center of space. There, the inner eye meditates upon it at leisure, investigates its possibilities, considers first this aspect and angle, and that one, and once more reconsiders, as one might plumb and examine an image or an idea turning it over and over in one's mind (qtd. in Sullivan 141).

In her article "Cinema as an Art Form," Maya Deren declares that "the entire excitement of working with a machine as a creative instrument rests in the recognition of its capacity for *a qualitatively* different dimension of projection." In "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality" she notices that "inasmuch as the other art forms are not constituted of reality itself, they create metaphors for reality. But photography, being itself the reality or the equivalent thereof, can use its own reality as a metaphor for ideas and abstractions." In this sense, her camera would function, then, as a means to produce poetry.

### *Cinema of Poetry*

Music, feelings of happiness, mythology, faces worn by time, certain twilights and certain places, want to tell us something, or they told us something that we should not have missed, or they are about to tell us something; this imminence of a revelation that is not produced is, perhaps, the esthetic event. — Jorge Luis Borges.

Jean Cocteau, who figured as one of the most renowned poet-filmmaker of his time in Europe, added to a screenplay of his 1930's film production *Blood of a Poet* the following remark: "With the cinema, death is killed, literature is killed, poetry is made to live a direct life. Imagine what the cinema of poetry can be." Following this remark he mentioned that the aim of poetic films was to intensify or make unusual the formulas of conventional mainstream film. This claim has much to do, as we have mentioned before, with Deren's practice as a filmmaker, and it does seem to converge to the very same issue: however surrealistic, avant-garde, poetic a work of art might be, its essence lies on the fact that it is not, by all means, related to a predictable, ready-made, pre-established notion of the *thing*. That is to say, poetry would be made possible throughout the creation of a *new reality*, concept we have just seen in the previous section of this chapter. This new reality, in fact, was in great part related to the idea of *de-familiarization*, proposed by the Russian formalists.

In an essay entitled "Art as a Technique," (qtd. In Harrison and Wood 275-8) Viktor Shklovsky exploits this idea of *de-familiarization*.<sup>13</sup> According to him, the purpose of art is to convey the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. Removing objects from the automatism of perception, increasing its difficulty and length is a way of "experiencing the artfulness of an object." As he mentions later, "an image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it (277)."<sup>14</sup> What he states, in fact, bears much resemblance to what the Surrealists and avant-gardists meant with their work. More than that, we can also extend the ideas of Shklovsky to the ones proposed by the precursors of "Cinema of Poetry." More important that that, yet, is the interconnection that these ideas have with Maya Deren's conception of *poetic cinema*.



When I refer to Deren's films — and, in particular *Meshes of the Afternoon* — as representatives of “Cinema of Poetry” I do not mean to insert Deren's cinema only within the scope of Pasolini's “Cinema of Poetry,” who, in my opinion, explored the term much more in linguistic terms, and whose ideas were also rather contradictory.<sup>15</sup> Although Pasolini struggled to define this modality of cinema, the concept or idea of it — at least in my opinion, — still remains, to a certain extent, wide-ranging in its essence. So, I shall state that the “Cinema of Poetry” I propose for Deren's in this work is perhaps as likely broaden as Pasolini's — when it gathers elements from the most various trends of arts and when it dialogues with Surrealism and Experimentalism —but it does differ from Pasolini's cinema, as well as it differs from Surrealist and Experimental cinemas, for Deren's poetic cinema is grounded in a solid-based theory, “in [its] reference to other disciplines and forms of artistic practice”(Michelson 27), exploited mainly within “Anagram,” which served not only to give her support within her film practice, but also helped to understand the importance of her aesthetics, deeply exploited in *Meshes of the Afternoon*.

Deren's aesthetics in *Meshes of the Afternoon*, and mainly the poetics she proposed throughout this film was in great part reflected by her use of the camera, which would work as an eye ( a quite distinguishable, sensitive one, which differs from Vertov's Kyno-Eye, in its attempt to provoke *sensations, emotions and tensions*), this inner eye that “meditates upon [the camera] at leisure, investigates its possibilities, considers first this aspect and angle, and that one, and once more reconsiders, as one might plumb and examine an image or an idea, turning it over and over in one's mind”(Deren “Chamber Films”36). This camera would also work as a poetic vehicle while capturing emotions through framing.

Deren mentions that the filmmaker should make his/her film according to what he/she wants the audience to feel about it: “only by submitting every element of a sequence the choice of lens, the framing, the pace, the scene, slicing one shot to another — to the test of whether it will look like he feels about it, can a filmmaker evoke emotion [or/and] tension from his audience”(qtd. in Sullivan 147). In *Meshes* Deren managed to cause emotion and tension throughout the whole film, conferring, at the same time, beauty and delicacy through her shootings, as well as aggregating anxiety throughout her narrative,<sup>16</sup>making use of elements, such as a flower, which could grant, simultaneously, aesthetical pleasure and terror. In this sense, besides Deren’s enormous familiarity with the movie camera, she did know how to achieve certain effects through the evocation of specific, desirable emotions, and that was mainly what constituted for her, “creative filmmaking”<sup>17</sup>:

“whatever the camera does — whether it moves or stands still...it will be effective only if each technical device is employed for a real purpose...It should always convey in visual and cinematic terms the emotion or idea which is required at the just the precise point in the pan of the film”(qtd. in Sullivan 148)

When Deren mentions the creative use of the camera as an eye, regarding its appliance as a creative and emotional tool, she also refers to cutting as a fundamental element for the production of certain effects within the film:

If the function of the camera can be spoken as the seeing registering eye, then the function of cutting can be said to be the one of the thinking, understanding mind. By this I am saying that the meaning, the emotional value of individual impressions, the connections between individually observed facts, is, the creative responsibility of cutting (qtd in Sullivan 148).

The strongest poetic impression could be accomplished, in great part, through what she considered as being the “economy of creative effort,”<sup>18</sup>reducing poetic language to the smallest possible amount to what was really considered important and essential. Maya Deren, in “Anagram,” affirms:

...to the form [of film art] as a whole, such techniques [those of spatio-temporal manipulation through shooting and editing] contribute an economy of statements compared to poetry, where the inspired juxtaposition of a few words can create a complex which far transcends them. One of the finest films I have ever seen, "Sang d'un Poète"(Blood of a Poet) comes from Jean Cocteau who, as a poet, has had long training in the economy of statement. It is a film which has, incidentally, suffered immensely at the hands of "critics" for its condensation it contains enough springboards for the personal, creative interpretations of a convention of "analysts." And its meaning depends upon a good many immediately visual images and realities which the literary symbolists ignore either through choice or limited capacity (48).

Cocteau, for instance, made use of the most remarkable resources in order to achieve poetic effects in its film:

Often improvisation is very touching and very beautiful. And often when one does things in a trifling manner as I made in *The Blood of a Poet*...one doesn't imagine I used the seals' pool from the botanical gardens to shoot from the roof and when he enters the <sup>19</sup>mirror, he enters this pool. Actually, he seems to enter the mirror. But all this would have been easier had I been a professional, but I wasn't. What made this film worthwhile, or perhaps, remarkable, were its errors. Through errors we become more real. The errors need to have the force of a dogma so that they cease to be errors.

There are things that surprised the specialists, great errors. I didn't know that traveling shots ere made with a rail, so I placed the actor Ribeiro at night as he came back to the hotel, I placed him on a trolley. He was pulled with a rope, so as not to say the forbidden word. It's a very hesitant shot, very bizarre. Chaplin himself asked me how I made this traveling shot. So, I said "It's so silly, I just didn't know there was a rail".(*An Autobiography of an Unknown Artist*, bonus track of *Blood of a Poet*)

Likewise, Deren commented on the problems concerning the "shoestring production" of her first film

"[*Meshes*] was made in our own house and we practically got crowded out by the equipment, lights, and rented a 7-ft. electrical restaurant fan which we used as a wind-machine. In the scenes where Sasha and I appear together we did it by starting the camera and jumping in front of it...[This same restaurant fan] brought everything down in the house when it was turned on. The wiring of the house could not carry the current necessary for sufficient lighting, so all the mirrors in the house were placed outdoors strategically slanted to reflect the sun into the room [...]"(qtd. in Clark 2:98).

Rather intriguing, thus, is to imagine how poetry would appear in such an atypical scenario. In fact, one needed not to be poetic in order to produce poetry in film. In fact, much of

what has been said in terms of cinema as being a vehicle for confrontation to the large scale—Hollywoodian, predictable sort of—film, would figure concomitantly in avant-garde, surrealist and poetic cinema. It is agreed that all of them managed to produce in their viewers a new experience, which would take them to a new reality. Cinema would work as an instrument of both challenge and discovery. According to Cocteau, "[Cinema of Poetry] legitimizes this extraordinary phenomenon which consists of living out a piece instead of telling it, and moreover, helping to see the invisible, rendering the most subjective abstractions objective" (*An Autobiography of an Unknown Artist*).

*Cinema of Poetry*, at least the one Maya Deren was trying to produce,<sup>20</sup> does not seem to figure in any specific category. Instead, it mingles among various territories. It borrows elements from the Russian formalists, in its attempt to make its object of interests less predictable, by casting a new light to what seemed obvious and obsolete — and here I am referring to the ideas that Deren had concerning mainstream films —; it dialogues with surrealists when it enters the world of dreams and unconsciousness; it touches some principles of psychoanalysis; it is framed by an experimentalist nature that is eager to discover the new, irresistible world of technology, allied with arts can produce; it is undoubtedly related to the Russian avant-garde, for it borrows from them the comprehension of camera manipulation, experimentation and montage without dissociating completely from the other art forms; and, if it is related to poetry, it might be, somewhere, connected to literature, as Maya Deren suggests in her essay “An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film

Just as the verbal logics of a poem are composed of the relationships established through syntax, assonance, rhyme, and other such verbal methods, so in film there are processes of filmic relationships which derive from the instrument and the elements of its manipulations (48).

Accordingly, a definition of what this cinema might be, or the material by which it is constituted is not, in itself, evident. However, we can dare to suggest that the poetic nature of her films lies on the artistic means it engenders during their construction, attached by a logical, ordered and strong theoretical basis alluded within her writings. I will attempt, thus, throughout the analysis of *Meshes of the Afternoon*, to establish the connection between Deren's theory and practice, exemplifying and commenting on the presence of her poetic patterns and effects on the film.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Miriam Ashram, July, 1976. (qtd. in Clark 2:16).

<sup>5</sup> "In addition to having studied architecture and done set design, Hamid's second film, *Prague Castle* (1932), was a visual symphony of architectural imagery, as are many sequences in later films he worked on (*Zem Spieva* and *Crisis*). (Clark et al 2: 636)

<sup>6</sup> Alice before getting into the looking glass: "Let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it, somehow, Kitty. Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through." In *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, by Lewis Carroll. Project Gutenberg's on-line version at <http://www.cs.indiana.edu/metastuff/looking/ch1.html.gz>

<sup>7</sup> I am not saying surrealists "jotted down images" in their films. What I mean to say is that Maya Deren meticulously fabricated her films, thinking on every tiny detail, although some of her films might seem to have a *lose* aspect.

<sup>8</sup> Lucy Fisher, in "The Eye for Magic", mentions that "her magic was proposed not for the filmgoer's diversion" (Nichols 199) but to help the viewer, as Deren stated, "meditate upon the common experience which is the origin of the human effort to comprehend the human condition" (Divine Horsemen 24).

<sup>9</sup> Notice that this picture of Magritte bears strong resemblance to one of the shots of *Meshes*, where the broken glasses open space to another reality. Coincidence or not, they both talk about that *other* reality.

<sup>10</sup> When it comes to the issue of "meaning," it is important to explain, Deren rejected the comparison of her films to Surrealist films or refused Freudian analysis of the objects that appeared in *Meshes*, regarding the "ordinary" assumption or connection these objects might have with a *single* or *exclusive* meaning. She did not, on the other hand, avoid the symbolic meaning of these objects appearing on the film. For instance, the flower which could easily symbolize the woman's sexuality in *Meshes*, was perceived by Deren with a more profound gaze, which gave that flower a new status of "thing," differing from "the current loose, casual meaning of the word *symbol*." Deren's words: "[It] would seem important to re-ascertain its more explicit meaning. In speaking of the direct, immediate meaning of an "image", I do not intend to exclude the process of generalization. On the contrary, the individual moment or image is valuable only insofar it ripples spread out and encompasses the richness of many moments; and certainly this is true of the work of art as a whole. But to generalize from a specific image is not the same as to understand it as a symbol for that general concept. When an image induces a generalization and gives rise to an emotional or idea, it bears towards that emotion or idea the same relationship which an exemplary demonstration bears to some chemical principle; and that is entirely different from the relationship between that principle and the written chemical formula by which it is symbolized. In the first case the principle functions actively; in the second case its action is symbolically described in lieu of the action itself. An understanding of this distinction seems to me of primary importance (Anagram 27, emphasis hers).

<sup>11</sup> See his essay "The Man with a Movie Camera"

<sup>12</sup> Dziga Vertov In *Man with the Movie Camera* DVD, 16:04 on the commentary track.

<sup>13</sup> Idea that dialogues not only with the ideas spread by the Surrealist artists, but also with Vertov's formulation of *new reality*. As we can perceive, *de-familiarization* was present in the work of the Russian formalists, in Vertov's *Kynoeye* as well as in Cocteau's, Buñuel's and Pasolini's ideas of "Cinema of Poetry."

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<sup>14</sup> Shklovsky points out that there are two aspects of imagery that must be examined: “imagery as a practical means of thinking, as a means of placing objects within categories; and imagery as poetic, as a means of reinforcing an impression.”(Harrison 276)

<sup>15</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, at the Pesaro Film Meeting in 1965, in a conference entitled “Cinema of Poetry”, mentioned the term for the very first time to a large audience. Until then, with rare exceptions, no one had dealt with the subject in formal circumstances, or at least tried to establish a connection between what had been done so far in terms of film production and what would constitute the basis for this “Cinema of Poetry.” Actually the term “Cinema of Poetry”, when announced by Pasolini in Pesaro was taken as a tendency that certain films of the time presented, and whose search for amplification in terms of artistic expression within the cinematographic narrative settled ground for a whole generation of filmmakers. For Pasolini, each image would assume a double nature, being simultaneously concrete and oneirical. Not only Pasolini, but also Buñuel, stated that the oneiric potential of cinema, which allowed viewers to go beyond the pre-established meaning suggested by an image, would, at the same time, offer spectators a new reality and demand from them a more elaborated intellectual level of interpretation, forcing them to be committed with the unusual construction in order to find his/her personal interpretation.

<sup>16</sup> Here again, when I mean narrative, I mean Deren’s particular non-linear description of events, which is empowered by the repetition of these very events, which can itself be claimed as an instrument of poetry. Similar to poetic language, where we do not necessarily need to have a linear structure, the film, in spite of the fact it does not follow a traditional narrative pattern, has a logic, for it has a plot and contain a *story*.

<sup>17</sup> Again, we shall bear in mind that, apart from the fact that Deren’s films figured among surrealist, avant-garde, underground or independent films, which for some critics could represent a lack of ‘formal intentions’, throughout Deren’s writings, even within a single title-“Ana Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film-(emphasis mine)-we can observe a clear reference to film form.

<sup>18</sup> Idea also largely diffused by Russian Formalists. See Shklovsky’s “Art as a Technique,”(qtd. in Harrison 275-8)

<sup>19</sup> In a Publicity Copy, enclosed to a letter to Sawyer Falk, March 3, 1945.

<sup>20</sup> Renata Jackson draws to the fact that “Deren does indeed champion as distinctive the capabilities of the film medium and does counter pose them to the structural characteristics of other art-forms; she does often argue her points in purist terms of aesthetic integrity; she does privilege historical precedence as a means of distinguishing one art-form’s “essential” expressive means from another; and she does set forth a very preferential mode of film practice in the name of true film-art”(169).

*Meshes of the Afternoon or The Inn Where no Man Rests*

My house is full of Voices. I come upon them everywhere: in the crevice near the desk, arranged in an orderly two-month succession in a magazine rack, piled in a stack at the dining table, fallen between the bed and the night table. They are, to various degrees, yellowed with time, chewed at the corners by teething kittens or slightly shredded as a scratching-post by the parents, stained by spilled coffee, buckled from a dip in bubble-bath, embroidered with doodles during phone conversations, or disfigured by the pathetic arithmetic of low finance. They have become untidy and even ugly, yet I can neither file nor throw them away, but must continue to leave them out on top, accessible, among calls to be made, things to be done, among all the real pulsating urgencies of daily life....

— Maya Deren, 7 September 1961<sup>21</sup>

When Deren mentions this house full of voices, we can clearly imagine ourselves being projected to the house we see in the sequences of *Meshes of the Afternoon*. That house, which in fact was Deren and Hammid's house, impregnates not only innumerable voices, but is also echoes them to the spectators who are somehow familiar to that place, for they have seen it before, or imagined it before, or have felt it before in their land of dreams. When we see the house and the constant repetition and dislocation of the objects in the film, even if we believe we have not grasped its meaning and thus, we are not enabled to explain it verbally, in a way, as we *sense* it, we can *experience*, as Deren suggested to the viewers of her films, the intention behind it.

Jorge Luis Borges, Argentinean writer, mentions in *La Pesadilla (Obras Completas 3:225)* that we cannot remember, or at least not *tell* dreams as they in fact happen because there is a huge difference between the facts that occur in successive life and those which inhabit our oneiric life. That happens because our dreams do not follow the narrative structure we are commonly used to apply while telling a story or describing the events of a day to a friend, or a member of the family, for example. Since dreams do not have continuity or do not follow a “classic” narrative structure, while reporting a dream to someone, or even while trying to

remember this dream, we tend to give a narrative form to it in order to organize it in a logical, comprehensive manner.

As Borges mentions, in this attempt to order and explain what has been multiple, simultaneous, and diverse from our daily actions, we are, in fact, while giving form to this dream, as an allusion to the term he applies, *fictionalizing* it (OC 3:225). He gives the example of a simple dream we might have: we dream about a man and the image of this man. After that we see the image of a tree. As we wake up, we can confer to this dream a complexity which does not belong to it; for instance, we might think we have dreamed of a man which becomes a tree, or was actually a tree. That means we do change the facts present in our dreams, or, as he says, we *fictionalize* them.

When we *fictionalize* dreams, it is the impression caused by the dream experience that really counts, as it assumes a greater importance than the images presented in them. Borges mentions that, as a consequence, the dreams we are most affected by are consequently nightmares. In reality, some nightmares are so strong that we might think we have actually been there, in the dream reality, or in the nightmare reality, so much so that we are not able to tell the dream apart from outside reality. That is exactly what happens in Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Assuming the nature of a dream, or preferably, the nature of a nightmare, *Meshes of the Afternoon* does play a trick on the viewers who are not able to tell apart dream/nightmare from reality in the film.

Since the very beginning of the film we are exposed to this oneiric universe where dream and reality play hand-to-hand, puzzling any sort of analytical, unique explanation for the very meaning of the events presented there. As Deren suggests, in her film one should proceed as if he/she “understood a piece of music without being able to translate it into verbal terms and to



make a story in the narrative sense out of it.”<sup>22</sup> The impression caused by the dream, or nightmare, is effectively represented by the objects that figure in the film: the flower, the key and the knife, which are constantly repeated and dislocated, giving force to the oneirical nature of the film.

As a dream, Deren’s film does not have a linear form either, and it is broken in its inner structure as to represent, what, according to Borges, could not be told in words, and would, consequently need *fictionalizing*. The effectiveness of Deren’s oneirical narrative, thus, is empowered by the four sequences of events which are connected in an interchangeable, interdependent manner, as the elements in an anagram.

In the introduction of *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, Deren gives her own definition of one:

An anagram is a combination of letter in such a relationship that each and every one is simultaneously an element in more than one linear series. This simultaneity is real, and independent of the fact that is usually perceived in a succession. Each element of an anagram is so related to the whole that none of them may be changed without affecting the whole. And, conversely, the whole is so related to every part that whether one reads horizontally, vertically, diagonally or even in reverse, the logic of the whole is not disrupted, but remains intact (Preface for *Anagram*)

The relationship the letters have in an anagram is the same of Deren’s filmic elements in *Meshes of the Afternoon*. It is the anagram structure in the film that also confirms its oneirical nature. As Deren says, “in an anagram all the elements exist in a simultaneous relationship. Consequently, within it, nothing is first and nothing is last; nothing is future and nothing is past; nothing is old and nothing is new...except, perhaps, the anagram itself”<sup>23</sup> (*Anagram* 6). Given that in an anagram there is a constant rearrangement of the elements in their order, the same happens in the four sequences of Deren’s film, where the objects shown in the scenes, as well as the protagonist and her three *selves*, appear and reappear in a cyclical movement, where there is

not a very beginning or end for the dream experience, or for the film itself, although viewers are kept, after fourteen minutes of it, by the classical “the end.”

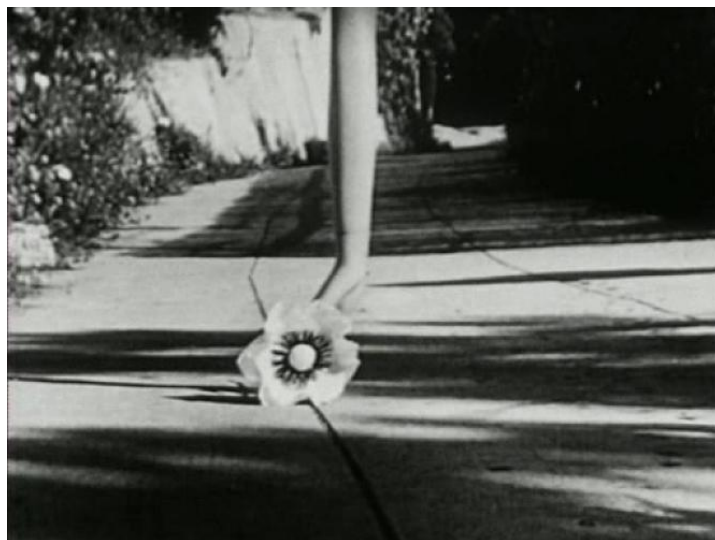
The anagram-like structure of the film is what gives of the film is what gives also support to the dream-like association of the film. It is the voluntary break of causality, or the deliberate use of sequences which present continuity up to a certain point and their repetition-with-difference, which will, at the same time, order and situate the spectator in the dream experience of the protagonist.

Genilda Azerêdo observes that the term “meshes” makes allusion to the intertwining of the film’s narrative and descriptive elements, by commenting, metalinguistically, on film’s construction” (24). In fact, the title of the film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, is a direct reference to the events which happen to the protagonist, who, during a certain period of the day, most probably the afternoon, experiences the intense effects of a dream, and these events imagined, according to Deren, “achieved, for her, such force that [this dream] became reality.”<sup>24</sup>

Moira Sullivan comments that the emphasis in *Meshes* does not lie in the progression of events, but rather, “in associations made by the representation of images.”(87) Actually, the images presented in Deren’s film served as the basis for her particular narrative, where she managed to reconstruct, simultaneously, the dream episode and produce superb examples of *poetic* shots. Her narrative was sustained by four similar sequences of events, where the protagonist interacted with the three main objects of it: a key, a knife, and a flower, and by which the events developed. Repetition, variation, dislocation and disappearance were present in the film, where the viewer is forced to gather its pieces to reconstruct its meanings.

Maya Deren structured the film into four sequences of scenes, where events re repeatedly grouped and take place, with a certain variation, and named the protagonist and her three *selves*

as Girl # 1, Dream Girls #1, 2 and 3, for she considered that the dream started by the time the first woman closed her eyes in the first sequence. However, I chose to use a different nomenclature for them, which I will later explain, and named the four women accordingly: Girls #1, 2, 3 and 4. In order to simplify the reading of this chapter, I managed to divide every sequence of the events, in which, I will at the same time describe the film shot-by-shot and give my personal analysis of it. Since the flow of ideas does not always follow a very linear sequence, there will be times in which I will need to break the continuity of events by inserting additional information to it.



**Figure 17 -The mannequin hand and the poppy in *Meshes***

*Sequence one:* beginning, end, dream or reality?

In the very beginning of the film, a mannequin hand places a flower— which is a poppy, in fact—on the ground. Later there comes a woman (Girl #1), whose role is played by Maya

Deren. She picks the flower and we see her shade, hanging the flower, projected on the wall (this is a magnificent example on how Deren plays well with photography).



**Figure 18 - The woman's shade on the wall**

Right after, this woman takes a glimpse of an androgynous figure bending the curve on the street. She pauses for a moment, as if wanting to follow it, but gives it up and starts climbing up the front door of a house, which we can presume it is hers or at least the house of someone she is intimate of, for she has the key of the place. Holding the flower, and at the same time opening a purse to get her key out of it, she lets the key fall through the stairs.



**Figure 19 - The key falling**

She goes down to reach it, climbs the staircase again and knocks at the door. When she does that, we can infer she was expecting someone to be there. Perhaps they have planned to meet, and we can also, after seeing the film for the thirtieth time, imagine that the person who leaves there, is, in fact, the androgynous figure who has just left by the curve of the street.

Giving sequence to this scene, the woman opens the door and looks at the room. The connection established between her gaze and the camera movements remounts to the notion of the camera functioning as an eye, and the eye functioning as a gate for the emotions to grow, which she managed to accomplish through the acute utilization of the camera. As the woman examines the place, spectators share with her *the vision*: in the living room, a cozy-like, domestic and fresh atmosphere—a fireplace, flowery curtains. Everything almost in the most perfect order, except for the newspaper spread open on the floor, and that knife poised, malevolent-like, on a loaf of bread. As she looks at it, the knife falls on the table, and the camera moves to the staircase, where a telephone off cradle rests. At that very moment, the camera depicts the woman's impressions on the scenario, and, we, spectators, besides sharing her visions, may presume that, somehow someone must have been there, for that knife seems familiar to her, as if she had been to that place before, and knew something was about to happen at that very moment. Hence, as the woman looks at the knife, the camera portrays the tension revealed in her face expression, who seems to know in advance the “malevolent nature” of it, or as Deren recalls, its “malevolent vitality” (“Notes, Essays, Letters”<sup>1</sup>).

Right there on the staircase, the telephone is found off the hook. The woman, however, does not make any effort to put it back to its place. Instead, she continues on her way upstairs, floating-like, where she looks at the bedroom and at the objects inside it. The bed is untidy and the window, open. The dark silk curtain blows with the wind, and again, the woman looks at the

things with a certain familiarity that suggests she must have been there before. She then notices that there is a record in the phonograph playing, what confirms someone has actually been there before, listening to that very record. In fact, since the phonograph is still playing, we can presume that the person has just gone out.

After that, she looks from the top of the stairs through the narrow passage, similar to a tunnel, which takes to the room downstairs, where an armchair faces a large window that takes to the street. She goes down the stairs and approaches the chair, sitting there while placing the flower on her lap, and as Deren suggests, "stars a languorous movement", caressing her body. At this very moment we have a close up of her eye, shutting as a suggestion for sleepiness and dream<sup>25</sup>, and we can perceive that, as her eye closes, a somewhat tunnel starts to form. This lunette-like tunnel, gives its end to the street in front of it, where a black figure walks.



**Figure 20 - Dream sequence: languid-like, eyes closed, tunnel-like eyes, the black figure.**

This black figure, which will appear repeatedly throughout the film—or “dream experience”—as Deren suggests, has a mirror instead of a face and carries the flower which is going to be pursued by the protagonist until the end of the film. Thus, it is by the presence of this black figure—whose gender we cannot tell—that the action itself will start to develop.

As Girl #1 starts dreaming, she sees this figure from the window carrying a flower and sees herself, or the project of herself—Girl #2—running after it. As the figure vanishes by the road, the girl stops by the house, where Girl #1 sleeps and repeats the very same action of climbing the front door staircase, which will close the first sequence of events and give place to the second one.

On the first sequence of events Deren comments:

The very first sequence of the film concerns the incident, but the girl falls asleep and the dream consists of the manipulation of the elements of this incident. Everything which happens in the dream has its basis in a suggestion in the first sequence- the knife, the key, the repetition of stairs, the figure disappearing around the curve of the road ("Notes, Essays, Letters" 1).

[...] A girl, on her way to the house of another person, finds a flower on the road and carries it with her. She arrives at the house, (glimpsing, for a brief second, a figure disappearing around the curve of the road nearby), tries the door and finds it locked. She takes out her own key, which slips from her hand and falls down the outdoor stairs so that she is forced to run after it and climb the stairs again before finally entering the house. She makes a tour in the room in search of the person who is supposed to be there, but although the still-turning phonograph, the receiver off the hook of the telephone, and other objects indicate that someone has just been there, the house is empty and she settles herself by the window to wait. Waiting, she falls asleep and in her dream the experience she has just had begins to repeat itself, but always in a strange and different manner. Now it is a tall woman in black, with a mirror face, who disappears around the curve of the road. She carries the flower which the girl had found, and although she walks slowly, the girl, running after her, can never catch her. The objects which the girl had noticed in the room are now in changed places. She watches herself come to the house three times, so that finally there are three of her, and herself sleeping in the chair as well. And from then on the event which was originally so simple becomes increasingly emotional and complex (qtd. in Clark 77-8).

*Sequence two: repetition of the same, with difference*

Where is the door? I don't remember climbing stairs; not whether at the corner I turn right or left...someone has changed the houses on the street.

—Maya Deren

The second sequence starts with Girl #2 climbing the very same staircase in front of the house and opening the door, slightly similar to what happens in sequence #1. However, she does not use the key to open the door, since the door is already unlocked. As she enters, she looks at the place and at the objects around it, as if to check if everything is exactly the very same way as it should be. It is not. At least it is not the same way as it was when she first got there: the telephone, which was then on the staircase has been now replaced by the knife.

Girl #2, however, leaves the knife there and goes upstairs in a movement that can be described more like a flight than anything else, for she does not step or climb through the stairs. She flows, exactly a dreamers do during their dream experience. This flight, nonetheless, is realized with such grace that it is better described as choreography than as simple floatation.<sup>26</sup> What is most curious, however, is that she gets to the room neither by the stairs, nor even by the door, as it was expected to happen. Instead, she enters by the window, passing through the silk curtains in a sensual and delicate dance. We can thus observe in this scene Deren's accomplishment in mingling lightness, delicacy and sensuality, producing what she considered to be a *poetic idiom*.





**Figure 21 - Flying over the staircase**

Poetry in *Meshes*, however, is not evident. It comes in flashes, like in this last one, and it is not simply in its lyrical, calm form. On the contrary, it is always interwoven with tension, as in the example above. The woman, however beautiful and gracious she might seem to be, has this fearful gaze, as if suspecting something evil is about to happen to her. She is always on the verge of this revelation—she knows what is going to happen, but she does not recall it, and, if she does so, she does not know what to do in order to prevent *disaster* to happen.

A good example of it becomes visible in the subsequent scene: as she gets to the room and looks around it, she gives the impression of knowing in advance the objects would be placed in a specific order, as if in a déjà-vu experience. We can infer that by the manner she looks at them, scared, and also by the way she moves and manipulates these objects. For instance: she repeats the action of turning off the phonograph and as she looks at the bed and sees the telephone, she places the hook back to its place—something she has not done before in the first sequence of events, where the telephone lied on the stairs—and removes the blanket as if

knowing the knife was to be there. This puzzling sequence thus is connected to the previous one in sequence #1, by the location and interchange of the two elements: the telephone and the knife. The telephone which was firstly placed on the stairs, is now by the pillow on the bed; the knife, which occupied the telephone's place on the stairs, is now under the bedspread.

After the woman enters the bedroom, sees and manipulates the objects, she moves backwards through the window curtains curiously giving to the staircase where she was before. There she loses balance and starts falling down, screaming, as if asking for help. She starts in a frantic, spiral movement, similar to a flight, a low one, though, from which she has a view of the room above. She glances at the phonograph—which is not in the bedroom as it was before—and turns it off again. She observes Girl #1 sleeping on the armchair on the inferior floor and moves towards her.

Again, she does not walk, but flies through the other's direction. The first woman—Girl #1—does not have the flower on her lap any longer, and since the recurrent scene of a woman following the black figure demonstrates that the very flower is on the black figure's behalf, it confers to the story a certain logic which makes us believe dream and reality are closer than we have expected.<sup>27</sup>

The second woman, Girl #2, approaches the sleeper and stops by the large window. As Girl #2 looks through the window, she sees the black figure with the flower disappear and again the woman, Girl #3, running after her, but as she cannot reach the other, she gives up her pursuit.

This scene, which is a reference for Deren's poetic idiom, is largely commented by the critics as being Deren's best demonstration of *poetry in motion*. It was conceived by Anaïs Nin as “the Botticelli scene” and by Alexander Hammid himself as “the Botticelli shot,” as an allusion to Sandro Botticelli's painting entitled *La Primavera*.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 22 - Deren's *Botticelli* shot



Figure 23 - Excerpts from Botticelli's *La Primavera*



Figure 24 - *La Primavera* in Close Up

In fact, many of Deren's shots would bear resemblance to important masterpieces of painting or photography. In the previous sequence, when the girl is about to close her eyes to sleep, we have a clear dialogue between Deren's shot and Man Ray's *Crystal Eyes*



Figure 25 - Deren's drowsy eye



Figure 26 - Man Ray's *Crystal Eyes*

*Sequence three: the black figure in the house*

I, somnambulist in seaweed gowned float  
 down the green, the doorless corridors,  
 leading myself at arm's length by the mirror  
 where I pursue the parent and the lover  
 — Maya Deren, Untitled Poem

Girl #3, exactly as the two other girls, climbs up the stairs. However, she does not open the door with the key, nor enters the house without a tool. She opens the door and then takes the key from her mouth, holding it on her hand. Instead of the objects we were commonly used to seeing, which are not there anymore, neither in the living room, nor on the stairs, there is a strange item in attendance: the black figure. It starts up the stairs with the flower and Girl #3 follows it upstairs, moving with great difficulty, dizzy-like, disturbed—languid, though.



**Figure 27 - The key and the mouth**

As the black figure advances, the passage to the second floor becomes more and more complicated for Girl #3, who struggles towards the other, hopelessly. She *stumbles* as the other reaches the room, placing the flower on the pillow, exactly where the telephone was placed before. Meanwhile, Girl #3 tries to call the black figure, and it looks back, showing its mirror

face. She looks at the figure and tries to utter a sound again, in a second attempt to call the other in the room.

There is the camera close-up on the black figure, which shortly after disappears. Girl #3 is on the stairs, and alike the other, she disappears and reappears in different places of the staircase, sharp and fast. There is then a beautiful close-up of her face looking down while he glimpses the knife which was previously on the bed, in the living room, beside the armchair where Girl #1 sleeps—this scene must not be overlooked, mainly because it can already figure as a reference to the future murder or *suicide*, which is about to happen. Girl #3 looks at her and then goes to the window where she notices the black figure walking with the flower. Again, Girl #3 sees Girl #4 pursuing the black figure, moving towards it in a fraught run. She tries to reach the first, and again she cannot catch it. She then stops by the house and that is the end of sequence three.

*Sequence four: games and play, gambling for death*

After Girl #4 stops by the staircase, she goes upstairs and enters the house. She repeats the very same gestures of the previous scene, opening her mouth and taking the key from it. However, as it follows, we see the key on her hand and this key becomes a knife. The key *is* in fact the knife and so the knife is the key. That is to say, the key is at the same time key and knife, in a faithful description to what in fact happens to dreamers. As I have mentioned before, it was not merely the key or the knife which would cause terror in the dreamer. Instead, according to what Deren wanted to convey, it was the idea of *malevolence* engendered by them that would authorize their effect in the dreamer, and, in case of the film, in their viewers.

So, when Girl #4 enters the house, and it is not only the fact that she is holding the knife what scares the spectators, it is what she will do with it that matters. Thus, as we have observed in the previous sequences, not only the knife, but also the other elements together, they would be constantly suggesting the idea of death behind them, so that tension will remain present from beginning to end; as if preparing the viewers to the upcoming *tragedy*. Nonetheless, as Deren suggests, we may infer that the woman is going to kill herself, but we cannot be certain of it.

In this fourth sequence, which I consider to be one of the most influential in the film, there is the scene in which Girl #4 sees Girl #2 and #3 at the table and they exchange gaze, as if an invitation to the ritual which is about to start.

When the three of them exchange gaze, a somewhat pact initiates, and, as if following the rules of a game, all of the three are ready to take up their position and set it up. After the fourth girl places the knife at the table and turns into a key, Girl #2 caresses her neck, as in a suggestion for her impending death. She takes the key from the table and puts it in her palm faced up. It is still a key. In the subsequent shot we see the key again on the table. The third girl repeats the same movements and we see the key on the table once again.

However, as Girl #4 looks at both women and takes the key from the table, her palm becomes black and the key in her hand turns into a knife. Similar to Russian roulette, where the bullet decides who is going to die, the “multiple images of Maya confer and decide that one must kill the woman sleeping, the one who dreamed them into existence and who thus control their fate.”(Clark at al 2:17)

As Girl #2 and #3 protect themselves from the attack with their hands, the boldest of these selves—Girl #4—stands up, holding the knife and ready to attack. Then, to what Catrina Neiman considers as one of “the most memorable sequence in any of her films”(17), she takes

four violent strides—across sand, mud, grass and pavement—to stop in front the image of herself sleeping on the chair. Girl #4 has these two huge metal eyes, and as she takes the fourth stride, she approaches Girl #1, ready to kill the other.

Deren wrote of this sequence that she meant to convey the idea of “you have to come a long way to kill yourself” (“Notes, Essays, Letters”70). We shall notice that during all the table game with the key and the knife, and also while Girl #4 takes the four strides, Girl #1 moves relentlessly in the armchair, as dreamers do while having a nightmare. What she is experiencing not only seems to be a dream, but rather, a very strong nightmare. While we have this extreme close-up of the sleeper’s face and neck, we can perceive she is to be killed at any moment. Deren is not predictable, though.

When we urge to see the woman killed by her clone with the knife and metal eyes, and Girl #4 is about to strike the other’s neck with he weapon, Girl #3 opens her eyes at once, and instead of a woman with the knife, we see a male figure, who looks at her uttering something. This would be, thus, one of the possible endings of the film. The woman wakes up from a terrible nightmare and is then saved buy her hero.



**Figure 28 -The woman’s lover in *Meshes***



The woman, however, still under the effect of the “murder”, sets her hand against her face, as if to protect herself against him. The so-charming man looks at her and draws her to himself, offering his arms. She holds his hand, as princesses who are saved in fairy tales, but does not look happy at all. Instead she follows him mechanically through the stairs and the objects which were constantly placed and replaced before, as in a seven errors game, are now at the very same place they were in the sequence of events, where according to Deren, she remained awake.

Girl #1 looks at the table as she first glimpsed it: a cup and a saucer, the loaf of bread untouched and the knife on it. Nothing to fear, perhaps... Yet, the flower which was usually in the black figure’s hand is now at the male lover’s power, what makes us realize that he and the black figure are the very same persons. The revelation, hence, is not completed in itself, for we will see in advance, when she goes upstairs followed by Girl #1, that he is to repeat all the black figure’s gestures. On the way to the room, however, he puts the telephone hook back to its place, as to be certain he is the one in power of both objects and actions. He is the one who guides and she is the one who follows. He is the “owner” of the place, as Deren suggested in her description—“[...] a girl, on her way to the house of another person”( qtd. in Clark at al 2:77-8)—he is in charge of the house and of the objects contained in it, and, as a result, he is also in charge of the events which happen inside that place and why not say, he is the one in charge of people who might inhabit it, the woman included. Consequently, he is the one who will lead Girl #1 to his room, placing the flower over the blankets as a guarantee, or a veiled pact, that the intercourse shall happen.

By the time the woman follows him, gets to the room and sees the flower, she glances at a mirror, which instead of projecting her reflection, gleams the man’s face. That is when we finally discover that he and the black figure *are* in fact the same person, as he turns the mirror

faced down, as if to prevent *truth* to be revealed. As the woman lies down beside the flower, he comes closer, looking at her mouth, which is depicted by the camera in detail: her huge, sensuous lips invite him to advance.



**Figure 29 - The woman's sensual lips**

The woman, however, looks at the flower, as if wondering what she would make of it, and the flower immediately turns into a knife, which she throws at him, and instead of an injured face, we spot a mirror, scattered.

As we watch the pieces of broken glass, we can see “behind” the mirror, and those broken pieces of glass fall on the sand and are soon carried by the sea tide, as if in a nother reality, the same one Girl #4 was when advancing towards the woman sleeping. We can infer, thus, that this reality is a recurrence to dreamland where she had been to before.

*Fourth, fifth sequence, return to reality or beginning of dream?*<sup>29</sup>

After Girl #1 throws the knife at the man, we do not know for certain what has actually happened to the man. What we have, in fact, is his return to the house, repeating all the same

gestures had made. He stops by the door and there lays the flower. He looks at it, and by this gaze and by the flower itself, we can sense *malevolence*. He opens the door and checks the setting: the newspaper on the floor, pieces of broken glass—and the woman dead. That is the end of the film. The woman, however, is not only dead, but also scattered with seaweed, which means she had been to the place she had dreamed about—that *other reality*. As Deren suggested, she indeed “[had] to come a long way to kill [herself]” (“Notes, Essays, Letters”70)

*Have I dreamed reality or was it just a dream?*

Deren, in her earliest program note, meditates upon this fourth sequence, commenting that the film “is culminated by a double-ending in which it would seem that the imagined achieved, for her[the woman], such force that it became reality”(qtd. in Clark et al 78). This double ending, thus, is present as the woman wakes up, which means she was only dreaming, and from the moment she wakes up the problem is solved; or even: the dream she dreamed about was so much real that it actually became reality, culminating with the woman’s death.

Renata Jackson comments that *Meshes of the Afternoon* was conceived as containing a dream episode, for we see the woman, Girl #1, enter the house and sit on the chair closing her eyes to sleep. However, as Jackson suggests, “there are images in *Meshes* that defy description as a rational diegetic reality”(194). The image of a mannequin hand that mysteriously descends to place the flower on the sidewalk, vanishing abruptly afterwards, is one, for instance.

Another image is the one in which the woman goes upstairs and instead of walking, she floats. According to Jackson, this sense of floating in second sequence is only one of various oneiric elements appearing in *Meshes*, “whose structure of theme-and-variation, or repetition-

with-difference, has often been marked upon” (195). As an example of it, we can take the woman’s entrance, which is repeated by Girls #2, 3 and 4; the disposition of the objects within the house (telephone, phonograph, flower and knife), which is altered in each new entrance; Girls #1,2,3 and 4 constantly pursuing this black, mysterious mirror-faced figure by the time it gets to the house; and finally, its last entrance which coincides with the first one, performed by the woman. This structure, as Jackson remarks, is what “[bestows] order to the chaos of the unsettling events” (196).

Another important aspect of this anagram-like film is that if we take it as a dream, it does not necessarily need to have a beginning or an end. Thus, like a letter takes part in a palindrome<sup>30</sup> or in an anagram, the scenes are intertwined as in a dream, where we do not have a proper ordered sequence.

As Sitney remarks, Deren and Hammid “have telescoped the experience of an obsessive, recurrent series of dreams into a single one by substituting variations on the original dream for what would conventionally be complete transitions of subject within a single dream”(13). That can be explained through various scenes where the woman gazes at the objects and manipulates them, with a certain familiarity that we might deduce she has, in fact, been in contact with those objects and situations before. When was *before*, then? If we take the first sequence of scenes, for instance, was it the real beginning?

The mannequin arm setting the poppy on the ground, for me, was a symbolic reference to a dream, mainly because it does not cope with the rest of Deren’s “narrative,” if we take the first scene as being part of “reality,” where the woman would be still awake. Also, if we consider this mannequin arm as an “acceptable” element by the woman who later picks the flower on the

ground, she does not seem to find odd a mannequin arm figuring the landscape, which would, in my perspective, characterize a dream experience per se.

In fact, the woman does not show any sort of human feeling throughout the whole film. She interacts with the objects through a mechanical, almost insensitive manner. She is somehow the apathetic figure who wanders all the way through the dream. A somnambulist robot who, in spite of all the tension produced in her surroundings does not utter a sound. She does not cry or smile, she does not even seem to be alive. She screams as if asking for help, but she has no control upon her voice. In reality, she has no control upon any aspect of herself, as she seems to be totally controlled by the dream events. Her decisions are made from the objects' perspective, that is to say: she decides which object she will manipulate and so on.

Nonetheless, this apparent lethargy is enlightened throughout the film. When we see the woman, constantly repeating the same gestures: opening the door, grabbing the key, looking around, she is in fact, exercising what Deren calls "the eye of the memory." Although Deren does not explain this expression at all, we could borrow it in order to clarify, at least, the woman's attitude towards the events. We can infer, thus, that this woman is trying to remember what happened before the incident, which could be conceived as her own death. So much so that she constantly revisits the places and tries, somehow, to reconstitute the *scene of the crime*.

Besides the woman's constant effort to remember things, and touch things, as to assure herself that those objects could confirm her identity—which was somehow inhibited by the male presence—the protagonist would develop with these objects, as well as with her other three selves, a relationship towards the inner parts of herself, or, as Deren stated, her "inner realities" ("Magic is New"2:39). Thus, the protagonist would "develop, interpret and elaborate an apparently simple and casual occurrence into a critical emotional experience" (idem).

Maureen Turin draws attention to this relation of the protagonist with the objects, also as a reference to the world of dreams:

If objects in *Meshes* fall down or trip, they do so across careful edited frames, creating a visual rhythm that the female protagonist watches with a gaze that implies her interiority, as if these events in her house were somehow a part of her, as one might look at figuration in one's own dreams (85).

The dream also takes form when the objects appear in the most various and non-logical places—knife on the staircase, then on the bed, after that beside the woman who sleeps—and then the woman does not seem to bother with those illogical events, for she is, in fact, in Morpheus' realm.

Actually, the oneiric presence prevail throughout the whole film, haunting the woman's and the spectators' minds, and if the whole film is the representation of a single dream or a dream that is intermingled with reality that is not essentially the main point. What matters is Deren's novelty lies on the fact that she managed to construct her own fragmented narrative, similar to a dream experience. In *Meshes*, sleepiness and vigil interact, in a way that viewers cannot establish a clear-cut, rigid relation from where the dream experience has started—although Deren suggests it commences from the moment the woman's eyelids closes—as well as the audience cannot know for certain whether the woman woke up or has killed herself.

### *The objects*

The reality from which man draws his knowledge and the elements of his manipulation has been amplified not only by the development of analytical instruments; it has, increasingly, become itself a reality created by the manipulation of the instruments.

—Maya Deren in *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* (underline in original)

Throughout the whole film we have the presence of three main objects: the flower, the key and the knife, besides the phonograph and the mirror. The flower, which is initially on the woman's behalf, goes then to the hands of the black figure and is finally taken by the man. As we have observed, after the woman enters the dream state she will not take hold of the flower in any moment. Instead, she will start a constant pursuit, in order to recover what was once a personal object.

More than an object, this flower, as well as the other objects, are depicted by Deren in a repetitive and almost caricatured manner. The exaggerations by which these objects are shown do serve to give them more than simple significance. It confers them force to sustain the dream structure. Since in dreams objects are conceived in the strangest and most unusual manners, Deren's objects are perceived in a dream as to empower their symbolic value of *thing*. That means that more than anything else in Deren's film, that flower will have its reference as being a flower *par excellence*. The knife will be *the knife* and *the key* will be *the key*.

The *malevolence* of the objects, thus, is acquired through the utilization of filmic techniques, where the camera not only works as the *eye* but also as the dream itself which selects and reorders images, as Deren mentions ("it reproduces the way in which the sub-conscious of an individual will develop and elaborate an apparent simple and casual incident into a critical emotional experience") ("Notes, Essays, Letters" 1).

The evilness present in them lies on the implied meaning they convey. A knife would be only a knife if it were not used to kill, the flower constantly pursued by the woman would not be more than a flower if it did not have its particular significance. In *Meshes* they were not *a knife*

and *a flower*, they were *the knife* and *the flower*. That happens because Deren went far beyond the ordinary significance a symbol might suggest.

We could fall into the trap of analyzing this knife as a symbolic representation for the *phallus* and the flower for its antipode. However, Deren's utilization of objects in the film surpassed the common patterns of comparison-contrast and earth-bound analysis. Regarding the so-common Freudian association of the flower as a reference to the woman's sexuality, Deren comments:

I cannot see what is to be gained by the current tendency to regard all the images of a work in terms of Freudian symbolic reference. A competent artist, intent on conveying some sexual reference, will find a thousand ways to evade censorship and make his meaning irrevocably clear. Even the incompetents of Hollywood daily achieve this; should we deny at least a similar skill in our most serious artists?...

...When an author is delicate in reference to love or sex, it very well may be that he intends it as a delicate experience (as contrast and deliberate counter-point to other experiences in the work); or, as an artist, he may prefer to leave such lyric, exalted experience to the imagination of the audience, rather than confine and limit it by the crudities of his technique. And what right have we when then to shout out that which he intended to have the qualities of a whisper; or destroy his counter-points; or to define that which he, in considered humility, found, himself, undefinable? To do so would be to destroy the integrity which he has carefully created- to destroy the work of art itself.

(*Anagram* 28)

So, when we see the woman's scared face staring at the objects we can realize they have a particular meaning for her which goes beyond the surface of the film. The spectators can *sense their malevolence* through the manner these objects are disposed in the film, and mainly through their interchangeability of roles and functions, which makes us believe, for example, that the key can convey the same *evilness* a knife does

The flower can be both knife and flower, the key can be knife and key simultaneously, as we could realize in the fourth sequence of the film, where the key becomes a knife, the knife becomes a key and the flower becomes a knife.



*Variation, Repetition, Games and Play*

Besides the innumerable, personal interpretations these objects may suggest, there is an internal ordered association among them, and similar to chess games, each piece has a specific position and function. Paul Valéry, a poet which Deren most admired, refers to the chess game as being the reflection of personal dreams:

Consider the case of chess players—all the pains their curious pacts cause them, the ardor afforded them by all the imaginary restrictions: they behold their little ivory horse invincibly held to a certain definite jump on the chess board; they feel magnetic fields and invisible forces unknown to physics. This magnetism vanishes with the game, and the excessive concentration that has so long sustained it is transformed and dissipated like a dream... The reality of the game is the player alone (qtd. in Sullivan 88).

We can take *Meshes* as an illustration of not only chess games, but all the possible board games and even childhood games. If we conceive the various complementary sequences of the film with their alternant objects, there are various games to play, as, for instance, "what's wrong with the picture" as an allusion to the seven errors game. Each time the girl enters the room, she will see objects displaced and replaced by others, so much so that by the tenth time we see the film we are tempted to repeat "what's wrong with the picture?" If we compare the first and the second sequences of the film up to the present moment and make a serious effort not to take them so seriously, we might observe there is also a ludic atmosphere apart its sinister tone depicted since from the very beginning.

Maureen Turin observes in "Ethics of Form" that Deren's utilization of childhood games functions not only as a reference, but as the arrangement for a filmic sequence. As Turin suggests, this choice for childhood games "tap[s] profoundly the structures of risk and win, venture and gain, struggle and pleasure that a game entails." She argues that games for Deren

"are not so much chance operations but ludic structures, puzzles whose fit orders one's life" (Nichols ed. 88). Besides the amusement these childhood games might provoke in her film viewers, they would, in addition, function as a ritual in its organization, as Deren suggests:

Certain of children's games can be regarded as the ultimate in original, secular ritual. Often they are created by the players themselves, but even when they are "learned," the tradition is not so much an inviolable authority for the form as it is a suggestion which may be modified, elaborated, combined with others, etc. What is important is that while the tradition is easily violable, the form, once established in its immediate terms, is as rigidly executed as if it had an exterior, traditional obligation ("Theme and Form: Thematic Statement" 14).

The objects in *Meshes*, as Moira Sullivan observes, are arranged by spatial and temporal tools, similar to the ones in a chess game. According to her, the emphasis does not remain in the meaning of the dream itself. Instead, what matters is the form of by which these objects are rearranged, so that the spectator is enabled to create and fulfill each "individual experience"(88). That means the chess game exists in the eye of every spectator while the game lingers impersonal.

Sullivan draws attention to the fact that the analysis of the symbols in their innumerable implications is what constitutes part of the reorganization of the film's form. This, in fact, following Deren's requirement for the poetic film, is "calibrated by each spectatori spectatorial experience", whereas the camera functions as the mediator for this dream, with "rocking sharp angles [of the staircase sequence, for instance], slow motion, superimposition, multiple personalities and centrifugal arrangements of shots and objects"(89).

Deren's poetics, thus, is justified by 1) the magnificence use of the camera lens and photography; 2) the anagram structure which gives form to the oneiric narrative, by making repetition, dislocation and variation possible; 3) Deren's acuteness in relating the anagram to poetic language.

As we have observed through the analysis of the film, several aspects related in the previous chapter regarding Deren's aesthetic patterns can be perceived: its connection with the camera as an eye, which engenders the poetic effect; its oneirical narrative which encompasses a somewhat surrealist structure; its poetical nature, depicted by photography and the protagonist's delicate movements; and finally, the anagram structure which will embody all the aspects previously related, enabling the spectators to select from a wide range of possible meanings their own, personal interpretation.

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<sup>21</sup> Deren's poem entitled *The Inn Where No Man Rests*

<sup>22</sup> Maya Deren, interview by Alma Dettinger, WQXR Radio, 19 January 1949; transcript in Maya Deren's file, Anthology Film Archives

<sup>23</sup> Notice the resemblance it bears with the introduction of T. S. Eliot in *Four Quartets*

<sup>24</sup> Deren's earliest program note (ca. 1945, reprinted in *Film Culture*, No. 39, 1965)

<sup>25</sup> This very eye which, according to Deren, will initiate the dream experience, is analogous to the well-known picture of Man Ray and also to this very scene of his film *Emak Bakia* (1926), where a woman's closed eyelids are painted like open eyes, as to suggest the existence of a parallel world while she sleeps.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to mention, therefore, that all the movements made by the protagonist in the film are to some extent, choreographic, as we can observe in the extension of this scene, where she "flies" through the stairs, pausing here and there to finally get to the room above.

<sup>27</sup> Suppose, for instance, as Deren suggests, the dream would commence at the very moment Girl #1 closes her eyes. The girl has not moved from the chair, as we can see—at least it is not shown in the film—and she dreams the black figure carries the poppy with her, thus, we get to the conclusion that dream and reality are intermingled, for the material representation of the flower is not with the sleeper anymore.

<sup>28</sup> Maria Pramaggiore in "Seeing Double(s)" comments on the window as a metaphor for both the camera lens and the film screen. According to her, the distortion provoked by the glass in the shot improves the camera's soft focus, which transforms Deren's face into something more abstract than individual. That is to say, she looks more like a painted woman than a real woman by the window. Pramaggiore notices that this visual effect "speaks to the depersonalizing process of merging self and not-self, of encounters between and among spectator, camera, and actor in the transparent depths and surfaces of lens and screen" (Nichols ed. 237-8). Apart from that, needless to say, this still depicts Deren's outstanding capacity of capturing art through the eye, accomplishing with photography a painting effect.

<sup>29</sup> I chose to insert this sequence as the fifth one, following Deren's idea of this "double-ending" to the film: the woman has killed herself/she was just sleeping. Deren, however, albeit mentioning this "double-ending", has not divided the film into five parts, as I did. Maria Pramaggiore in "Seeing Double(s)" mentions that "The subversion of coupling and multiplication of self and other in the film are connected with Deren's subversion of narrative. Without sequential reference points, the film cannot proceed according to cause-and-effect logic. Deren does not resolve the woman's victimization at the hands of dangerous doubles or a dubious lover by establishing a choice between self (liberatory solitude) or other (the lover, a double). The atemporal quality of the oceanic references and the protagonist's quasi-death merely confirm the importance of circularity and repetition: the dreamer may be dead and within the endless and therefore timeless cycle that the ocean waves evoke. At the very least, she is inaccessible to the reality represented by the lover's final (and perhaps only) entrance" (ed. Bill Nichols, pp. 247)

<sup>30</sup> "A palindrome is a word or a phrase that is the same whether you read it backwards or forwards, as for example, the word 'refer'" (*Collins Coubild 1035*).

## Possible conclusions about Deren's poetic cinema

We have not reproduced reality but have created an illusion of reality...I believe that this reality, which lives only in the darkness of the movie theater, is the thing that counts. And it lives only if it is convincing, and that does not depend upon the fact that someone went to the great trouble of taking the camera to unusual places to photograph unusual events, or whether it contained professional actors and native inhabitants. It lies rather in the feeling and creative force with which the man behind the camera is able to project his visions.

— Alexander Hammid

When, in 1943, Alexander Hackenschmied and Eleanora Derenkovsky, or simply Sasha Hammid and Maya Deren had the courage to produce their first film with a 16mm camera, they have probably not envisaged what was about to come after it. As Alexander Hammid mentioned above, he and Deren managed to "project visions" (Anagram 35) with a movie camera, and more, these were not simple visions, so to speak. They were from the order of *poetry*. Since the very beginning I have attempted to situate Deren's work along with has been produced in terms of "Cinema of Poetry." However, as we have observed along the development of this work, and mainly in the first chapter, which dedicates a whole section explaining what this "Cinema of Poetry" might be, we have realized that such idea does not constitute itself a simple issue. The term "Cinema of Poetry," as I have mentioned before, is not an institutionalized concept. I would rather say it was the product of a poet's fruitful mind (Jean Cocteau's), and poets are good for saying things, since their words usually sound so much more beautiful than if they were said by the mouth of others. Thus, when Cocteau, a filmmaker— also a poet—and mainly a visionary creature, included in *Blood of a Poet* the term "Cinema of Poetry", one understands he suggested

by the term the creation of a different modality of cinema, which sought to "produce a new reality"—notice that the search for this "new reality" was the key element in Deren's work.

It is quite complex trying to state what Cocteau meant by his "Cinema of Poetry" in depth, for we only have some fragments of what "Cinema of Poetry" meant to him. Apart from the 1930 brochure in *Blood of a Poet*, little has been said about the term, most specifically by him. When he mentioned: "With the cinema, death is killed, literature is killed, poetry is made to live a direct life. Imagine what the cinema of poetry can be," he was in fact proposing— as not only Maya Deren did, but also other filmmakers, including the Surrealists— a modality of cinema which was not in itself evident. Cocteau, who was also considered by some as a Surrealist,<sup>31</sup> shared with artists as Buñuel the intention of creating and transforming reality of mainstream cinema into something more complex, into a somewhat reality, earlier proposed by Vertov, more real, or at least better than "the reality" which was being created until then in conventional cinema .

As a consequence, it results in a complex task untying "Cinema of Poetry" from Surrealist and European avant-garde films or U.S. independent cinema from the forties, mostly encompassed by Deren's cinema, in intentional terms. That is to say, regarding these "intentional terms", I mean it is not simple to separate "Cinema of Poetry" from avant-garde, independent or Surrealist cinema and also from the Russian cinema proposed by Vertov and Deren's poetic films, for they seem to communicate in several points: 1) in the attempt of creating this new reality; 2) in proposing a different posture to their viewers, who, confronted by this "new reality" were forced somehow to participate in the filmic process, whether filling the gaps left by the director, or by assuming a more active role in the construction of filmic meaning.

However, if I intend to situate Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* in this broad territory, I may say that besides all the aspects mentioned above, her film also includes the oneiric universe proposed by the Surrealists; it applies the experimentalism of the camera suggested by the Russians and it gathers this experimentalism through the association of the camera as an eye; it drinks from the "Cinema of Poetry" waters when it makes "poetry ...to live a direct life"(Cocteau, *Blood of a Poet*) and, moreover, it figures among art-films for it not only creates poetry, but it also embodies aspects so-long exploited in plastic arts as photography and painting. In addition to that, Deren's large experience with choreography brings to her other films movement, dance, rhythm and musicality.

Thus, as Deren suggested, her films would figure as "CINE-POEMS...*neither to entertain nor to instruct, but to BE that experience which is poetry...*" (Deren's film rental catalogue from 1951, qtd. in Jackson 172), in which poetry was made present in the magnificent effects engendered by photography, or in the delicate, dance-like movements of *Meshes'* protagonist, as well as in the direct allusion to photography-like-painting in *Meshes'* "Botticelli scene". Therefore, Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* creates poetry through the various means above mentioned, and if it is to figure among the members of "Cinema of Poetry," or to appear side by side with experimental, avant-garde films, it must be recognized as a "unique" film in its complex and extensive nature.

Her reflections upon filmmaking, mostly enlightened throughout her essay "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film," served as the basis for the creation of her own *poetics*. Thus, we can state that if we are to insert Deren's film within "Cinema of Poetry" we may do so by saying that she figures among other cineastes of poetry (Buñuel, Dalí, Cocteau and Pasolini) but she has her own particular aesthetics, in great part engendered by the film theory produced by

her in *Anagram*. There are, indeed, in her film practice—in *Meshes*, particularly—points that go beyond theory and cannot simply be explained through her film analysis, as I have attempted to show in the second chapter of this work.

Analyzing Deren's first film was for me, as I have previously mentioned, initially a challenge, and afterwards an addiction, for the more I revisited Deren's film, the more I sought for a new discovery to take place. The richness of Deren's work, which was in great part connected to her large array of interests including painting, sculpture, literature, poetry, dance, choreography and music, allied with her formal, academic background were outstandingly applied in the production of poetry within *Meshes of the Afternoon*.

Deren managed to produce poetry while choosing the right angle and the perfect light, resulting in what she called "poetic shots," as it happened in the "Botticelli scene," where the woman's representation by the window, constituted itself a *tableau*. Many other shots, "spoke (poetry) for themselves," I would say. They would be poetical in their art while conferring delicacy, lightness, subtleness and beauty, represented by Deren in the film when the woman passes through the window curtains, or when she floats through the windowsill; delicacy by the woman's movements while she touches herself in her preparation to sleep; subtleness in her gestures, or in some special close-ups, captured by Deren's camera and *sensitive eye*.

In addition to the artistic value of these poetic shots, Deren managed, at the same time she produced beauty and delicacy, to insert tension, anguish and fear in the film. The beauty of the woman, thus, would carry this certain *malevolence*, which was presented in a certain gaze, or in an abrupt movement. This *malevolence* would be exploited to the exhaustion while the woman manipulates the key, which turns to a knife and vice-versa; when she sleeps and moves uneasily

as in a nightmare, or when she returns, over and over to the places she has already been to, to cite only a few examples.

Not only the interconnection of beauty and tension in the film—which were, in my opinion, responsible for its poetic insertion and justification—but also the interchangeability of the key-flower-knife, as well as their repetition and dislocation, constituted poetry in *Meshes*.

In this sense, poetry was present, similar to a childhood, cyclical riddle, when the three women sat by the table and played with the key-knife, as deciding which one was to kill the woman sleeping. This particular scene of the fourth sequence, with the manipulation of the knife-key/key-knife reminded me, poetically, of childhood rhymes; and reminded me, curiously, throughout the whole writing of this work, of Gertrude Stein's "A Rose is A Rose is A Rose is A Rose", and I mentally sung "A knife is a key is a rose is a key" and so on, as to justify the multiple and interdependent role played by these objects.

This interchangeability of meanings and roles of the objects chosen by Deren (key-knife-flower) gave them an anagrammatically—to cite Deren's *Anagram*—force and value: that is to say, an anagram subverts the order of the elements without diminishing their semantic strength. At the same time that the objects in *Meshes* had their individual importance, they could not exist without the others' presence. The key was the key and also a knife, the flower was the flower and also a knife, and although key and flower were not key *and* flower, the key needed the flower to *signify* and the flower was always side-by-side with the key, to *mean* something.

If I am to describe *Meshes'* importance and value thus, I ought to say it lies in the realm of the "Must be Seen" or "Unforgettable Films for Ever" for Deren accomplishes with mastery the intermingling of intelligence and logic (within the game structure or the repetition-dislocation of objects, or in the anagrammatically arrangement of sequential scenes and objects),



organization ( as she stated before, she took a long time in structuring the film)—what means she was broadly aware of the effect she wanted to create—and art.

Maya Deren, to whom “each film was built as a chamber and became a corridor, like a chain reaction”(Letter to James Card, April 19, 1955; in *Film Culture* 31), mentioned about these "Chamber Films" in Sound Recording ( the same that appears in the opening of *Meshes of the Afternoon*)at Living Theatre, New York, February, 1959 the following statement:

I am not greedy. I do not seek to possess the major portion of your days. I am content if, on those rare occasions whose truth can be stated only by poetry, you will, perhaps, recall an image, even the aura of my films. And what more could I possibly ask, as an artist, than your most precious visions, however rare, assume, sometimes, the forms of my images (qtd. in Sullivan 182).

If I am to finish with Deren's words, then, I may say that I have attempted throughout this challenging (but passionate) and sometimes painful work—to cite Deren: "the distinction of art is that it is neither simply an expression of pain, for example, nor an impression of pain but is in itself a form which creates pain" (Anagram 17)—to make Deren's reality, the one that "lives only in the darkness of the movie theater"(Hammid qtd. in Anagram 35), a bit more available and accessible in Brazilian academic context. I shall say that this work constitutes in itself a tiny seed among several which must grow and be spread with the aid of future researchers, mainly because, as I could observe, serious material published on Deren is rare. With the exception of the publication of three doctoral dissertations—Alain-Alcide Sudre: *Dialogues Théoriques avec Maya Deren: Du cinéma expérimental au cinéma ethnographique* ( France, 1996), Moira Sullivan: *An Anagram of the Ideas of the Filmmaker Maya Deren* ( Sweden, 1997) and Renata Jackson: *The Modernist Poetics and Experimental Film Practice of Maya Deren(1917-1961)* (U.S., 2002)—there is not, as far as I am aware, until the present moment, much substantial academic material regarding the subject abroad (and any, if I am not mistaken, in Brazilian

universities) apart from the recent publications of Bill Nichols, Vèvè Clark et al and P. Adam Sitney on Maya Deren as well as a few articles figuring among film magazines.

I daresay this work may possibly open ground—and hopefully—inspire other peers to give continuity to my research, promoting a larger debate concerning Maya Deren's work as a filmmaker, film theorist and artist, by making it known and recognized in its academic—and artistic—importance. As a suggestion, future works may comprise the analysis of other Deren's films and documentaries<sup>32</sup>, as well as Deren's insertion in Haitian footage or even an exclusive, in-depth study of *Anagram*.

Deren suggested in *Anagram* that

[it]is not only the film artist who must struggle to discover the aesthetic principles of this first new art form in centuries [cinema]; it is the audience too, which must develop a receptive attitude designed specifically for film of the critical criteria which have been evolved for all the older art forms (43).

In this sense I believe her films and theories have much to contribute to literature, cinema, anthropology, arts, feminist studies and so on, as I sincerely believe the seriousness and vigor by which she lead her work do have much to say and teach future generations of academics, filmmakers and eager, inventive, curious-like, intelligent spectators.

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<sup>31</sup> See *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1945*

<sup>32</sup> *Witch's Cradle*—with the collaboration of Marcel Duchamp(1943),*At Land* (1944), *A Study for Choreography in Camera*—also known as *Pas De Deux*, as an allusion to the ballet movements, *Ritual in Transfigured Time*—with the participation of Anaïs Nin (1945-6), *Meditation on Violence* (1948),*The Very Eye of the Night* (1952-'59) as well as some other films which have not been completed ( *Medusa* (1949), *Ensemble for Somnambulists*(1951), *Haitian Footage* (1947-'55) and *Haiku-film project*(1959).

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## ABBREVIATIONS FOR SHOOTING SCRIPTS

CU	Close up
MS	Medium shot
LS	Long shot
MCU	Medium close up
MLS	Medium long shot
WA	Wide angle
SM	Slow motion
L	Left
R	Right
G	Girl
fps	Frames per second

"MESHERS OF THE AFTERNOON"  
SHOT LIST\*

1	MS	Road: hand deposits flower, disappears.
2	MS	Shadow of girl arrives, her hand picks up flower.
3	MCU	Flower dangling beside girl's legs walking.
4	MS	Girl's shadow walking, stops, smells flower.
5	LS	Distant figure disappearing around curve of road, pan back to girl's shadow arriving at & up stairs.
6	MCU	Girl's shadow on door, hand knocks, tries door.
7	CU	Hands get key from purse, key slips, falls.
8	CU	Feet, key dropping on ground, bouncing away.
9	CU	Hand, reaching for key, misses, key bounces away.
10a	MCU	Key bouncing down stairs.
10b	MCU	Key bouncing down stairs, followed by feet pursuing.
11	CU	Hand finally catching key.
12	CU	Feet going up the stairs again.
13	CU	Hand with key unlocks door, pushes it open.
14	CU	Girl's feet stepping into the room.
15		Long panned view around room, from newspapers on floor to table with coffee cup, knife in loaf of bread.
16		Dolly approach close to cup and bread.
17	CU	Knife falls out of bread, pan away to bottom of stairs, with phone off cradle resting there; girl's feet start up stairs.
18		Dolly view moving up stairs, around corner of stairs, to view of unmade bed in bedroom, black curtain blowing behind it.
19	CU	Pan from pillow of bed, to record playing on phonograph, girl's hand lifts needle, stops phonograph, pan away.
20		Dolly view moving back down stairs right up to chair in front of window.
21		Girl's feet approach chair, she sits down in chair, puts flower on her lap, hand starts languorous movement.
22	MCU	Her hand in languorous caress of body.
23	CU	of her eye, closing with sleepiness.
24	LS	View of the road through the window.
25	CU	of eye, getting dimmer, sleep coming.
26	LS	View of road, getting dimmer.
27	CU	of eye, settling into sleep.

\* This list was made by Deren in 1959 for the purpose of adding the sound track, a musical score by Teiji Ito. The original chart from which this list is taken included columns giving the number of feet, frames and seconds per shot. Ito's notes included additional columns for indicating the entrance and duration of the various instruments.

Although Deren frequently uses the term "dolly" to refer to the moving camera, it should be noted that this does not refer to a mechanical dolly shot, as the entire film was shot hand-held.

A FILM BY  
MAYA DEREN  
AND  
ALEXANDER HAMID  
HOLLYWOOD 1943

MESHES  
OF THE  
AFTERNOON



Shot no. 1



Shot no. 2



Shot no. 4



Shot no. 8

Stills from *Meshes of the Afternoon*, selected and enlarged by Deren.

- 28 LS of road, dims, then camera pulls back as if receding through dark tunnel, road seen as if through circular tunnel, dark figure\* enters there, stops, begins to turn.
- 29 MS Darkly draped figure turns to camera, reveals mirror face, is holding flower.
- 30 Shadow of girl on wall (as in 4) raises hand, to stop mirror figure.
- 31 Mirror figure turns away, starts up road.
- 32 Girl's shadow, then feet, starting to run after mirror figure.
- 33 Mirror figure, slow motion, gaining distance; pan back to girl pursuing.
- 34 Mirror figure, very distant, disappearing around curve of road (as in 5).
- 35 Mirror figure, starting up (as in 5).
- 36 Girl's feet arriving at stairs, over edge of stairs, comes up stairs.
- 37 Girl's face appearing, *for first time*, enters, stops, looks around.
- 38 MS View from inside, door opens, girl enters, pulls back cover, reveals knife.
- 39 Long panned view around room (as in 15) From newspapers to knife resting on stairs where phone had been.
- 40 CU of knife, feet enter, pass knife, start up stairs (as in 17) slow motion.
- 41 CU Girl's feet from below climbing stairs, extreme slow motion.
- 42 MS from above, girl comes up stairs, looks around stair angle, falls away.
- 43 black bedroom curtain blowing, girl comes through it, slow motion.
- 44a MCU Girl gets through curtain, looks around room, apprehensive, looks down.
- 44b CU Telephone on pillow (as in 19).
- 45 CU Girl's face looking down, she bends towards it.
- 46 CU Telephone on pillow, girl's hand enters, pulls back cover, reveals knife.
- 47 CU of knife, girl's face reflected in it.
- 48 MS Knife, girl's hand draws cover over it quickly, puts phone back in cradle, then falls back away from it, and out of room, through the black curtain.
- 49 Girl falling back down stairs, agonized movements.
- 50 Fall continued.
- 51 Fall continued.
- 52 Fall now as if floating against ceiling of stairs, in space.
- 53 MS From below, girl floats down through top arch of stairway, stops, looks down into living room.
- 54 LS Pan from above around room, arrives at sleeping girl in chair.
- 55 MS Phonograph, record playing on it, beside the chair.
- 56 MS From below, girl at ceiling arch looks down, reaches down.
- 57 MS Phonograph, hand reaches in, stops record.

\*On her earlier list of stills from *Meshes Deren* always referred to the dark figure as "Black Woman."

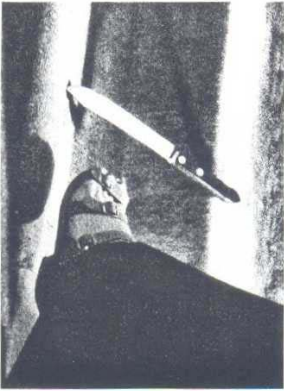
88



Shot no. 14



Shot no. 32



Shot no. 40



Shot no. 43



Shot no. 46



Shot no. 49

Stills from *Mashes of the Afternoon*, selected and enlarged by Deren.

- 58 MS Girl looks up at chair from beside phonograph, starts to rise.  
 59 MS Sleeping girl in chair, with 1st dream girl rising beside it.  
 60 MS Window; girl comes to panic, looks out into road.  
 61 MLS The road, mirror figure walking up it carrying flower; pursued by dream girl no. 2.  
 62 MS 1st dream girl looking through window, seen from outside (Botticelli shot).  
 63 LS of the road, mirror figure walking up, disappears; then dream girl no. 2 pursuing, arriving at stairs to house, starting up them.  
 64 CU Dream girl no. 1 drawing house key from her mouth.  
 65 CU Her hand holding out the key.  
 66 MS Dream girl no. 2 enters door, looking back at mirror figure, then around room.  
 67 Pan view around room, catches up with mirror figure, carrying flower, starting up stairs.  
 68 Dream Girl no. 2, at bottom of stairs, looking up after mirror figure, stairs tilted.  
 69 Legs of mirror figure disappearing around turn of the stairs (seen from below).  
 70 From above, dream girl no. 2 at bottom of stairs, starts up stairs, with tilt and rock from side to side.  
 71 Mirror figure's legs arriving top of stairs, walking into bedroom.  
 72 Girl no. 2 trying to continue.  
 73 Mirror figure (from below) continuing into room, turning to bed.  
 74 Girl no. 2 trying, being tilted away.  
 75 Top of stair, her hand grasps banister, pulls herself up.  
 76 Mirror figure deposits flower on the bed.  
 77 Girl straining up.  
 78 Mirror figure straightens up.  
 79 Girl straining up.  
 80 Mirror figure.  
 81 Girl straining up.  
 82 Mirror figure, standing, then disappears.  
 83 Girl, as if released from pull, because back to position on stairs.  
 84 Another position back, bounced back and back.  
 85 Another position back and back (7 shots, total).  
 86 Another position back and back.  
 87 Position forward.  
 88 Position forward.  
 89 Position forward.  
 90 Position forward.  
 91 Position forward.  
 92 Position forward.  
 93 CU Girl's face.

8



Shot no. 59



Shot no. 63



Shot no. 64



Shot no. 64



Shot no. 65



Shot no. 67



Shot no. 70



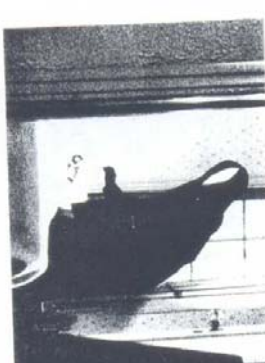
Shot no. 70



Shot no. 70



Shot no. 75



Shot no. 76



Shot no. 77

94	CU	Knife on bed-sheets.
95	CU	Girl's face, then she looks up.
96		Pan from knife on bed-sheets up to sleeping girl in chair, beside it.
97		Dream girl no. 2 arising by window, looking out.
98	LS	Road, mirror figure walking up it, pursued by dream girl no. 3.
99	LS	Road, mirror figure disappears, dream girl no. 3 runs up, stops at stairs, starts up stairs (as in 63).
100a		Girl no. 2 draws key from mouth.
100b		Her hand holds out key; key changes to knife.
101		Girl no. 3 enters room carrying knife looks around, slightly aggressive.
102		Girl no. 2 arriving at dining table where no. 1 is already sitting.*
103		Girl no. 3 walks towards table, preparing to put knife down on it.
104	CU	Knife being put down on table.
105	CU	Knife changed to key on table.
106		Girls no. 1 and 2 look up apprehensively from knife to girl no. 3.
107		Girl no. 3 sits down, signals them with glance, looks down at key.
108		Girl no. 1, CU her hand in languorous movement over face.**
109		Her hand reaches key on table, turns it over as if drawing a card, key reappears on table, camera pans up to Girl no. 2, in gestures like no. 1.
110		Her hand reaches key on table, turns it over, key reappears on table.
111	CU	Girl no. 3 looking from one to the other contemptuously, then down.
112		Girls 1 & 2 looking at her apprehensively.
113		Key on table, Hand of girl no. 3 enters, picks up key, turns over black palm with a knife in it.
114		Pan from Girl no. 1 hand to face with fear, to Girl no. 2, same.
115		Sleeping girl in chair stirring as if in nightmare.
116	CU	Girl no. 3 turns toward chair, revealing her round, mirror eyes.
117		Sleeping girl in chair stirs again.
118		Girl no. 3 rises from chair.
119		Girl no. 3 head rising into sky, as if she were monstrously tall.
120		Her feet take stride on beach, against sea in back.
121		Another stride in grass.
122		Another stride on pavement.
123		Another stride on rug.
124		Dolly up on sleeping girl.
125		Dream Girl no. 3 approaching with knife ready to plunge in sleeping one.
126	CU	Sleeping girl's mouth slightly open; knife plunging as if into it.
127	CU	Sleeping girl's eyes opening suddenly.

\* On her list of stills Derrin referred to this scene, in which the three dream selves sit at the table, as the "conference."

\*\* Referred to on the list of stills as "self-carass at conference."



Shot no. 84



Shot no. 106



Shot no. 112



Shot no. 113



Shot no. 116



Shot no. 119

Stills from *Meches of the Afternoon*, selected and enlarged by Derrin.

128 Man, face rising away from her.  
 129 CU Girl, hand over face in fear (as in 114).  
 130 MS Man, reaching out hands to help her up from chair.  
 131 Girl, reassured, rising from chair (being drawn up).  
 132 Man walks to stairs, replaces phone (at foot of stairs) in cradle, starts up, carrying flower.  
 133 Girl follows, pauses at foot of stairs to look at table.  
 134 Table, knife not stuck in bread.  
 135 Girl starts up stairs.  
 136 Girl (from above) starting to come up stairs.  
 137 Man (from below) as his legs disappear around bend of stairs (as in 69).  
 138 Girl registers this, pauses, follows up.  
 139 Man leaning over bed, putting flower on it (as in 76).  
 140 Girl enters bedroom, looks down at flower.  
 141 Pan from flower on bed to shaving mirror behind reflecting man's face, man turns it away.  
 142 Girl lies down on bed, her face next to flower.  
 143 Man sits down beside her, his hand reaching to caress her.  
 144 Man's hand caressing her body.  
 145 CU Girl's mouth parting slightly.  
 146 Man's face leaning towards her.  
 147 Girl's face; the flower beside it changes to knife.  
 148 Her eye moving from him down to knife beside her.  
 149 Girl's face with knife beside it, softness gone.  
 150 Man's face over her.  
 151 Girl's face, her hand reaches for knife, throws it.  
 152 Man's face, a mirrored reflection, is shattered. Sea is visible through hole.  
 153 CU Wet sand, pieces of shattered mirror falling into its wave.  
 154 Wave washes over mirror pieces; pan up to view of sea.  
 155 Man walking up outside road (same angle as 98), turning in to stairs.  
 156 Man reaching top of stairs, picks up flower.  
 157 Man's shadow across door (as in 6), hand unlocks door.  
 158 View from inside, man's feet enter door (as in 14).  
 159 From inside, man's head looks around room.  
 160 LS Pan around room from newspapers, following trail of broken mirror on floor to chair with girl in it, covered with shattered mirror, seaweed.  
 161 CU Girl's face, eyes closed, dead, with bits of broken mirror and seaweed, and a little blood running from the corner of the mouth.



Shot no. 120



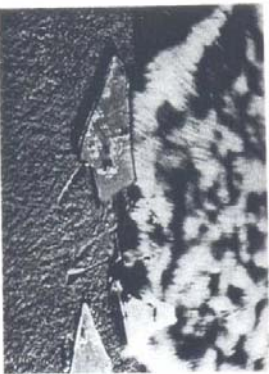
Shot no. 124



Shot no. 126



Shot no. 132



Shot no. 154



Shot no. 160



Man cannot duplicate the infinite intricacy of the living architecture of the wheat stalk. Nature is best capable of its own forms and of the complex inevitabilities which result in such marvelous phenomena. Man himself is such a phenomenon; and the marvelous in man is his creative intelligence, which transcends nature and creates out of it un-natural forms. In his art—whether architecture or poem—he does not reproduce a given reality; nor does he simply express his immediate reactions of pleasure and pain. He starts with the elements of that reality—the stone, the city, the other man—and relates them into a new reality which, no sooner achieved, becomes itself an element in his next manipulation. In his effort to achieve form he may produce monstrous or divine; but his proud ambition is to create, in the image of his own intelligence, a reality man-made.

In cinema, such a concept of creative action has been neglected. The analogy between the lens and the eye, based on the physical similarity between them, has led to a recording of the forms of reality and those of literature, drama and painting. But cinema, to be creative, must do more than record. The mechanism behind the lens, like the brain behind the eye, can evaluate the objects before it; can decide them attractive or repulsive, casual or surprising. Above all, the analogy must be extended to understand that the strip of film is the memory of the camera. Just as man is not content to merely reconstruct an original chronology, but in his art, conceives new relationships between remembered elements, so the film-maker can create new realities by the manipulation of the celluloid memories at his disposal.

The labor to achieve inspired, intelligent form is a single continuity, a work in progress which is eventually interrupted when the dynamic consciousness which it reflects ceases. From time to time one may pause to give integrated shape to a stage of one's progress, in order to best pursue it further. And so these films have each been brought to an end, in order to be better abandoned.

MAYA DEREN

P R O G R A M :

### MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON

by Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid (1943)

A film concerned with the inner realities of an individual and with the way in which the subconscious will develop an apparently casual occurrence into a critical emotional experience.

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Together, the dancer and space perform a dance which cannot exist but on film.

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A film in the nature of an inverted Odyssey, where the universe assumes the initiative of movement and confronts the individual with a continuous fluidity towards which, as a constant identity, he seeks to relate himself.

# FILMS

*in the*  
**Classicist Tradition**

Including the films previously presented as  
"Three Abandoned Films" and a new film,  
**RITUAL IN TRANSFIGURED TIME**

**Tuesday and Wednesday Oct. 22 and 23**  
**Monday and Tuesday Oct. 28 and 29**

at the PROVINCE TOWN PLAYHOUSE, 133 MacDougal St.,  
New York. Program repeated at 8, 9 and 10 o'clock (no one  
admitted during running of films). Tickets \$1.00 incl. tax. Ad-  
vance purchase recommended; write M. Arsham, 69 Perry St.,  
New York 14 (CH. 2-7350). Indicate preferred date and hour.

Program for Provincetown Playhouse Screenings, October, 1946.

The outstanding success of performances of three of these films last spring was gratifying evidence of a sincere public interest in film as an art form. Those audiences came with the understanding that these films aspired to create an experience comparable, in nature, to that of poetry and the other art forms, as distinguished from the entertainment film—the equivalent of the popular novel—and the documentary film—the equivalent of the essay reportage.

The new film which has been added develops even further the special emphasis upon form which governed, to an increasing extent, the previous films. It has become necessary to provide this new clarified emphasis with at least a tentative name, for any recourse, out of sheer expediency, to such current, familiar terms as "surrealist" or "abstract" might inhibit understanding of the films themselves by prejudicing the anticipations of the spectator and distort his perception by fixing attention (and so confining it) upon some single aspect which, when isolated, might bear superficial resemblance to films of another nature.

These films employ elements of reality—people, places and things—and so are unlike abstract films which may also, at times, employ such elements but primarily for their plastic values. They are equally distant, if not more so, from the surrealist method of spontaneous self-expression. The term "classicist" is advanced precisely because it does not define according to the elements of the content—factual, fictional, abstract or psychological. It is a concept of method: a controlled manipulation of any or all elements into a form which will transcend and so transcend figure them. In this period of art, when so many works labor to achieve a sense of tragic weight through the painful accumulation of the agencies of a self-conscious personality, classicism represents that dedication to the creation of form where tragedy confers upon an unsuspecting—even unsuffering—individual the heroic stature of a tragic personage. In this sense form becomes not an esthetic problem but a moral one; the form is the physical manifestation of an abstract moral structure.

Moreover, since this form is realized by the exercise of an art instrument, it is a function, in its real, physical aspect, of the creative capacities of that instrument. Such a concern with the nature of the instrument prohibits any transcription from one medium into another, and consequently these films bear no resemblance to the manifestations of classicism in poetry or drama. In their effort to create film form out of the total temporal and spatial resources of the film instrument (an effort whose development from film to film seems clearly apparent), they aspire to achieve its manifestation in film.

—MAYA DEREN

John Simon Guggenheim Fellow—  
(creative work in motion picture—1946)

# FILMS

## IN THE

### CLASSICIST TRADITION

When these films were first offered to universities, art museums, and cultural groups over a year ago, they were not sponsored by any recognized institution nor attended by any "advance publicity." They were announced simply by a circular which advanced the principle of film as an independent art form, as distinct from the entertainment, the documentary and the educational functions which film had, to varying degrees, already fulfilled. The response and interest which this statement of principle aroused exceeded all expectations and the subsequent circulation of the films themselves made possible the completion of a new film, now added to the original program.

Above all, such an interest reflected an encouraging development of discrimination between the various functions to which the film medium could be put. Like language, it could educate with more or less inventive devices for holding attention; it could appeal in behalf of some very worthwhile cause with greater or lesser rhetoric, eloquence or bluntness; it could narrate with varying degrees of psychological insight, humanity, sensationalism; but just as a poem differs from all of these uses of language neither in subject matter nor even in emotional impact but in the formal function of language itself as a creative art instrument, so film could also create filmic form—a poetry of filmic vision—out of the very nature itself of its marvelously dextrous, unexploited instrument.

Such a development had been retarded by the fact that it apparently sufficed, unto the public majority, to make films which were increasingly polished in the execution of the most obvious technique, and so seemed unnecessary to labor towards the extension and development of the form of film itself. The enthusiasm for their new-found medium which inspired the early film makers to imaginative and inventive essays has given way to a cynical professionalism which is content with the easiest

Flyer, Fall, 1946 ("1946-E").

tried and true methods and a division of labor which substitutes, for that intimate relationship between the artist and his work, the competent mediocrity of assembly-line anonymity.

The lens of the camera, with its refined, perfected optics, is like a super-eye; the film strip is like a super-memory—inerradicable and incorruptible. Obviously such a combination invited its use for recording—whether a contrived theatrical drama, a poignant social reality, or a scientific phenomenon—almost to the exclusion of all other uses of the camera. But to record any reality which owes nothing of its actual existence to the film instrument is not the same as to create an experience so much out of the very nature of the instrument as to be inseparable from its means.

Since the camera stands between the artist and reality, it is thus distinguished from all other art instruments in its capacity to render real objects and persons in their own terms, directly. In this use of photography, these films are unlike abstract films, which use elements of reality primarily for their plastic values only. Neither are the images here combined according to the spontaneous, sub-conscious system of sur-realism.

The term "classicist" is advanced precisely because it does not define according to the elements of the content—factual, fictional, abstract or psychological. It is a concept of method: a controlled manipulation of any of all elements into a form which will transcend and so transfigure them. In this period of art, when so many works labor to achieve a sense of tragic weight through the painful accumulation of the agonies of a self-conscious personality, classicism represents that dedication to the creation of form where tragedy confers upon an unsuspecting—even unsuffering—individual the heroic stature of a tragic personage. In this sense form becomes not an aesthetic problem but a moral one; the form is the physical manifestation of an abstract moral structure.

Moreover, this form is a function, in its real, physical aspect, of the creative means of the particular art instrument by which it is realized. Film is a time-space medium. It can manipulate temporal and spatial relationships, as the airplane does in transportation, the radio in communication, the theory of relativity in physics and as the growing awareness of these relativisms does in geography, sociology, ethics, etc. The contemporaneity of these machines and ideological tendencies is not accidental. Nor does the capacity of film to make of time a solid reality (by the use of slow-motion, stop-motion, recapitulations of singular incidents, and other such means) remain a fantastic exercise if compared to the correlation between speed and weight which has recently been illuminated. On the contrary, an art form conceived in terms of the film instrument would seem eminently appropriate as a cultural equivalent of our scientific developments.

Such a concern with the nature of the instrument, while an essential part of the classicist esthetic, prohibits any transcription from one medium into another; consequently, these films bear no resemblance to the manifestations of classicism in poetry or drama. In the desire to create a form out of the total temporal and spatial resources of the film instrument (a desire which has been increased and clarified with each successive effort) they are directed towards its manifestation on film.

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MAYA DEREN  
John Simon Guggenheim Fellow —  
(creative work in motion pictures, 1946-47)

## MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON

by Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid (1943)

15 MIN.

## AT LAND

Conceived and directed by Maya Deren; Technical assistance: Hella Heyman and Alexander Hammid (1944)

16 MIN.

## A STUDY IN CHOREOGRAPHY FOR CAMERA

by Maya Deren and Talley Beatty (1945)

3 MIN.

*and a new film:*

## RITUAL IN TRANSFIGURED TIME

Conceived and directed by Maya Deren. Photographed by Hella Heyman. Choreographic collaboration: Frank Westbrook. Principal performers: Rita Christiani, Frank Westbrook (1945-1946)

16 MIN.

*These films were photographed with a BOLEX camera on MMSCO 16 mm reversible film.*

For information concerning the rental or purchase of these films which are 16 mm, silent, write to

MAYA DEREN, 61 MORTON STREET, NEW YORK 14, N. Y.

"... Of all the work of young artists that I had the opportunity of seeing, I have come upon few who show such promise..."

JEAN BENOIT-LEVEY

"All films of lasting value have been made by artistically independent individuals, who derived the realization of their ideas from the traits of the new medium. Maya Deren is among the very few who in this country keep alive this tradition."

RUDOLF ARNHEIM, author of "Film," Member of the Psychology Faculty, Sarah Lawrence College.

"Maya Deren is, I believe, the only poet working in motion pictures today. Although it is simple enough to point out historically that she is in the tradition of the Avant-Garde school of the early twenties in Paris, she is so much further advanced technically and psychologically that historical allusions are for scholastic values only..."

ROBERT GESSNER

Chairman, Dept of Motion Pictures  
New York University.

"... Maya Deren's ability to demonstrate how the medium can be used perfectly normally and naturally, according to its own nature, to communicate ideas and stimulate creative thinking was so clearly demonstrated the other evening... We were fortunate to have the opportunity to study, for a short while her work, which I believe to be of supreme importance."

ROBERT D. FEILD, Director, School of Art Tulane University.

"One had been stirred, excited and strangely satisfied... the subtle appeal of it all seemed to elude definition, to sidestep analysis. One had not felt just this way since first witnessing, as a boy, 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.' But it is astonishing how the Maya Deren achievements appear to have been evolved out of almost nothing at all, so to speak; no lavish setting, no elaborate costumes, no costly props, no expensive cast, no Technicolor, no sound. To do everything with nothing requires an artist..."

JOHN GARTH

In THE ARGONAUT, San Francisco

"The cinema of Maya Deren delivers us from the studios: it presents our eyes with physical facts which contain profound psychological meaning; it beats out within our hearts or upon our hearts a time which alternates, continues, revolves, pounds, or flies away... One stands before spatial events and within the value of their time. One escapes from the stupidity of make-believe. One is in the reality of the cinematic fact captured by Maya Deren at that point where the lens cooperates as a prodigious discoverer. This renewal of the contact between cinema and an essential part of its means and ends opens up so much out of which intelligence, sensibility and inventiveness can create poems. Poetry, after all, is the feast which life offers those who know how to receive with their eyes and hearts, and understand."

LE CORBUSIER

"RITUAL IN TRANSFIGURED TIME is the exciting product of Miss Deren's previous experiment in combining cinematic with choreographic interests. The film is conceived and executed in terms of continuous dynamic movement which enhances dramatic values in the psychological narrative. This is dance in its first meaning; its manifestation on film strikes with the impact of a discovery."

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"... In the films of Maya Deren, the images are chained to each other on the level of emotional, visual and logical implication with the same compelling inevitability which governs the development of the underlying subconscious drama. Thus, once the spectator surrenders to the logic of her universe, it emerges as a consistent, ordered, and above all, a powerfully convincing reality..."

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Ritual in Transfigured Time
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Each program is repeated at 8, 9 and 10 o'clock.

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