

suggestion of the subversion of the couple that bisexuality can, but does not necessarily, offer.

20. The shot of the autoerotic caress also fragments the protagonist's body, but the camera angle hints that we are sharing her point of view as she looks down at her own body, not that she is looked at from a distance, as the lover's caress shot suggests.

21. See Linda Williams, "A Jury of Their Peers: Questions of Silence, Speech and Judgment in Marleen Gorris's *A Question of Silence*," in *Multiple Voice in Feminist Criticism*, ed. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice Welsh (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 432-44. Williams discusses the problem of assuming that "women's ways of knowing" permit women to form instantaneous and "natural" communities.

22. This animation of objects recalls several moments in *Mesbes* when keys and knives seem to move of their own accord.

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Barbara Hamme

Maya Deren and Me

Maya Deren's films, critical writing, and exhibition and distribution strategies have greatly influenced both my filmmaking and my professional life enormously.

I was a late bloomer of thirty when I entered film school at San Francisco State University. I'd tried many different vocations: bank teller, juvenile hall counselor, and playground director, but none of these fit. Recognizing that something inside wasn't being expressed, I decided to be an artist. Instead of painting, which I love dearly, I chose film, because the discipline included aesthetics as well as philosophical inquiry and politics.

In my film history course there were only a few women, but as budding feminists we were outspoken. Connie, Veronica, and I always sat together and criticized the ongoing academy of male filmmakers whose work we saw day in, day out. My arm grew tired of asking the questions: Where was Pudovkin's mother? Were there no women on Vertov's film train? And, why, oh why, was Lillian Gish portrayed as helpless?

Finally, toward the end of the course, there appeared on screen the black-and-white 16mm films of one Maya Deren. Something was radically different. The screen was filled with images that were created from a different sensibility, an aesthetic I intuitively understood. For the first time, a woman's cinema filled the screen in this dark, cavernous lecture hall. Until then, this "history of cinema" screen had been blank from a woman's point of view. I knew for certain that I would make film.

The physicality of Maya Deren's films impressed me. I could feel the director's energy in her presence behind the camera and in her movement on screen as an actor. Her invention of the concept of "creative geography," montaging vast expanses of time and space through the unifying image of a woman walking, impressed me.

Constrained by the limits of the rectangular film frame and screen projection, I created a more liberated space for my film *Available Space* (1978). Similar to Deren, I am the protagonist in the *mise-en-scène*, but instead of walking from space to space, I am seen literally pushing the edges of the window frame, the film frame, and spatial frame in eight different scenes. I built a table with wheels and a circular, rotating top for the 16mm projector and dubbed it an "active Annie" instead of a "lazy Susan." I moved the projections around the architectural space of the theaters and sometimes out of doors or windows, depending on the space. Not only was I able to place the film image within and around the corners, ceilings, floors, and walls of the room selectively, but I was also able to move my audience physically. They had to turn their heads and sometimes leave their seats to follow the projection. I believe that an active audience engaged perceptually, intellectually, and physically with cinema encourages its members to become more politically active in the world.

My film *Bent Time* (1983), a visual path across the United States beginning inside a linear accelerator in California and continuing through the Ohio Valley Mound sites to the Brooklyn Bridge, was also inspired by Deren's concept of "creative geography" as she walked from sand to weeds to pavement to a living room rug. Instead of using a single shot as Deren did, I used one frame of film per foot of physical space, bending time and space with an extreme wide-angle lens as I traversed locations of high energy.

Maya Deren's critical work as a theorist of her own cinema encouraged me to think deeply about my images and the formal manner in which I used them. The public humiliation she received from the male authorities (Dylan Thomas in particular) at the Cinema 16 film and



Figure 37. *I Was/I Am* (Barbara Hammer, 1973). Hammer's homage to *Mesbes of the Afternoon*. The key, in this case, is to Hammer's motorcycle. Courtesy of Barbara Hammer.

poetry symposium angered me, and I identified with Deren's indefatigable commitment to continuing her theoretical explanations in the face of degrading put-downs. Her explanation of a "vertical cinema," a poetic cinema of feeling built by creating emotional layers and depths rather than linear stories, made perfect sense to me.

I entered avant-garde filmmaking at a time when structural cinema was the dominant aesthetic. I wanted to use some of the concepts of demystifying the apparatus and material used in filmmaking, but I also wanted to reenergize this rather academic approach by putting emotion back into film. In *Optic Nerve* (1985), I begin the film with images of the filmstrip itself, demonstrating the vertical nature of the projection system by pulling the filmstrip through the gate, with sprocket holes and frame lines showing. Through optical printing and editing I layered and manipulated present and past images with my own deliberate and repeated

hesitancy in pushing a wheelchair in which my grandmother was seated through the door of a nursing home. Working intuitively with the printer, I found a way to communicate the emotional devastation of the act.

In 1978, at a conference on sexuality at York University in Canada, a representative of the Provincial Censor, Mary Brown, threatened to seize my film *Multiple Orgasms* (1977) if I projected it as scheduled. Not wanting to lose my print I devised a tactic that I believe would have made Maya Deren proud. At the microphone in the large auditorium I spent the seven minutes of what would have been screen time for the silent film to describe shot by shot the multiple vaginal contractions seen in the film.

Similarly, when a projectionist at the University of Florida, Orlando, turned off the projector in the middle of *Double Strength* (1978) because he was uncomfortable with the nudity, I entered the projection booth and in a controlled and assertive manner gave a minilecture on democracy and censorship to the poor fellow, who after some hesitation finally resumed the projection.

Maya Deren began the exhibition and distribution practices from which I have benefited. The college circuit still continues to be an excellent exhibition site, providing audiences and income for experimental filmmakers. I relish the opportunity to present my films and aesthetic views and to be adequately reimbursed in university settings. This gives me a chance to show my work as an experimental, but also lesbian-feminist, filmmaker to an audience often unfamiliar with experimental film. Education is one of the keys to preserving this maligned and underrated art form. I have shown my films to a third-grade class of eight-year-old children and found their reception of avant-garde cinema remarkable. I advocate the teaching of film in all its genres (experimental, documentary, narrative) in elementary schools.

In the late 1970s I didn't know that Maya Deren had confronted Jonas Mekas for his 1955 homophobic attack on experimental cinema when he named it "a conspiracy of homosexuality" in *Film Culture*, issue 3. I did know that Mekas had selected only two women, Maya Deren and Shirley Clarke, for his elite circle of important filmmakers called Essential Cin-

ema. As a young woman filmmaker, I was aghast that a circle could be named, and once named would be so gender restrictive. I wrote Mekas a letter that today seems quite naïve in which I suggested that I could help him with his research to include more women in his circle. I remember mentioning the names of Sara Kathryn Arledge, Germaine Dulac, and Marie Menken. I never got a response.

Returning to my beginnings as an experimental lesbian-feminist filmmaker, I remember one of my first invitations to screen on a college campus. Professor Jacqueline Zita invited me to Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. After the projection, Zita asked to borrow the films to study them for an essay she later published in *Jump Cut* (March 1981). This was the first time someone had written about my films critically. Early in the morning I walked down the stairs from the second floor guestroom in Zita's house to the music of the soundtrack from *Dyke-tactics* (1974), my second 16mm film. I had the strange sensation of retracing Maya Deren's footsteps down the stairway of *Meshes of the Afternoon*. These past thirty years have been an ongoing love affair with the moving image, a love affair, that, along with a Ukrainian heritage, I share with Maya Deren.