



## EXETER FILM WORKSHOP

### Report on Tour of Maya Deren's Work for South West Arts (June 1983)

I organised this tour, which visited South West Arts usual film tour venues during a week in June 1983. I was responsible for choosing the programme, liaising with venues, producing the booklet which accompanied the tour and organising publicity. The tour was subsidised by the ACGB and the BFI (Education Division). I accompanied the films, spoke about Deren's work, and chaired discussion at each venue. While organising the tour I worked from home and from Exeter Film Workshop and South West Arts paid my overheads and travel costs.

The tour programme was as follows:

- "Meshes of the Afternoon"
- "At Land"
- "Meditation on Violence"
- "Ritual In Transfigured Time"
- "Witches Cradle Out-takes"

The intention was to screen all of Deren's work which is available in this country. Unfortunately the BFI had to withdraw their print of "Study in Choreography for the Camera" some months before the tour. It was decided not to screen the reel of Out-takes from this film distributed by London Film Makers Co-op as this might not properly represent Deren's intentions. I would hope that future programmes could include "Study in Choreography for Camera" (a new print would have to be made) as it represents an important strand of Deren's work.

The tour venues were offered this programme at the subsidised cost of £25. My speakers' fees and travelling expenses were paid by South West Arts, and the tour venues found accommodation for me.

A booklet was printed to accompany the tour. This contained an article which I wrote, an extract from an article by P. Adams Sitney, a brief biography and a filmography. Five hundred copies were printed. Those which were not distributed during the tour have since been sold by S.W. Arts in response to requests from individuals and institutions. There are now no copies left but S. W. Arts are still receiving requests, particularly from students writing essays or theses about Deren, for copies.

The work produced for this booklet, suitably revised, could form the basis of documentation for an ACGB Programme. I am in possession of copies of Deren's original publicity leaflets for her films. These contain sequences of stills from the films, chosen by her, which could also be used in future documentation.

The tour attracted audiences interested in various aspects of Deren's work: those interested in avant-garde, artists and independent film; women interested in Deren's films in the light of subsequent feminist work; artists interested in Deren as an artist and also in her circle of acquaintances in New York in the 1940's; dancers interested in her use of dance and her concept of 'choreographing' film; people who had read her anthropological writings and Jungian theorists interested in the Symbolism she used. There were also martial arts devotees interested in 'Meditation On Violence' (: )

The tour visited community cinemas, arts centres, galleries and art schools, with subsequent (unsubsidised) screenings at similar venues outside the South West. At most of the unsubsidised screenings a shorter programme had to be screened, as venues could not afford the hire costs for so many short films and speakers' fees. A programme subsidised by ACGB would obviously alleviate this problem. I feel that screenings of such a programme could be held at similar venues; at filmworkshops (particularly those with womens groups); womens groups; dance centres and possibly film societies.

I enclose a report on the S.W. Tour and subsequent screenings and enclose a copy of the tour poster and booklet.

Judith Higginbottom  
Exeter February 1984

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SOUTH WEST TOUR - JUNE 20 - 24, 1983

Monday 20 June King Street Gallery, Bristol

(Screening organised by Bristol Film Workshop) Audience - 40

The discussion centred around feminist interpretations of Deren's work and the validity of these, and also covered her relationship to later American avant-garde work, and her subsequent position in film history.

Tuesday 21 June Falmouth School of Art, Cornwall

The screening was augmented here by a poetry reading by Penelope Shuttle. Audience - 35.

There was discussion about the similarities between Deren's work and Shuttle's poetry; both in terms of imagery and meaning. Deren's background in New York in the 1940s was also discussed, particularly her connections with European emigres such as Duchamp and Anais Nin; also discussed were her film and written work on Voodoo; her work with Gregory Bateson, and possible Jungian interpretations of her work.

Wednesday 22 June Plymouth Arts Centre

Audience - 35.

Here the audience were mainly interested in dance and therefore discussed Deren's use of dance in her work, and her concept of "choreographing" films. I had to answer a lot of biographical questions about Deren's life. Specific symbols in her work were also discussed; notably the sea (Meshes, At Land, Ritual) and a group of three women (At Land, Ritual In Transfigured Time) and connections were made between her use of these symbols and contemporary feminist work on symbolism.

Thursday 23 June Newent Centre, Gloucestershire

Audience 11 (!)

The audience were completely unfamiliar with anything other than mainstream commercial cinema and discussion therefore centred around the nature and history of avant-garde cinema. I supplied biographical information and read excerpts from Deren's writing about her working methods, and also her critiques of Hollywood Cinema.

Friday 24 June Spacex Gallery, Exeter

Audience 50.

There was a wide-ranging discussion touching on most of the major issues in Deren's work including: symbolism in her films; dance; her use of editing; her relationship to subsequent feminist work; her position in film history.

Subsequent Screenings

Since the tour I have spoken at screenings of Deren's work (usually the same programme as on the tour) in the South West and South Wales.

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September 1983 Penzance Arts Centre

The screening was held as part of a 12 week season of women's film organised by the West Penwith Women's Film Project. The programme was the one screened on the tour.

Audience 75.

The audience covered a wider age-range than at earlier screenings; many of the audience being 50 + (drawn largely, I think, from the large constituency of landscape and other artists living in West Cornwall) who had heard of Deren's work but never seen it. There was discussion on Deren as an artist (rather than as a film-maker) and her links with the New York artists' community of the 1940s. 'Witches Cradle' was discussed in detail. Also discussed were: the differences between Deren's work and that of the Surrealists; Anais Nin's writings about Deren, and 'Meditation on Violence'.

British Federation of Film Societies Viewing Session at Bath University, October 1983

The screening formed S.W. Arts' contribution to the BFFS event.

The programme was the same as that screened on the Tour.

Audience- 95.

The audience were extremely attentive and questioning. There was discussion on the actual form of the films; on Deren's working methods; her milieu in New York; reaction to the films when they were first shown; meaning and symbolism in the films, and the possibility of film societies programming Deren's work. Society members felt that an extension of the SW Arts Tour Scheme would help them, as hiring the films without some form of subsidy (especially if they wanted an accompanying speaker) would be beyond their budgets.

South Wales Women's Film Group, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, October, 1983

Audience - 25

This was not a screening open to the public, but specifically for S.W.W.F.G. members. The programme was: 'At Land', 'Meshes of the Afternoon' and 'Ritual in Transfigured Time' The South Wales Group are an independent film-making group whose own work is entirely documentary. They were very unfamiliar with avant-garde work, and particularly with an "individual" way of working such as Deren's. Discussion centred around this and her place in filmhistory.

Fine Art Dept. Newport Art College, December 1983

Audience - 52

Programme: due to economic constraints, only three of the films: 'Meshes of the Afternoon', 'At Land', and 'Meditation on Violence' could be shown. The audience (Art Students) were unfamiliar with Deren's work. There was a wide-ranging discussion of Deren's work in the context of avant-garde/artists film; the differences between her work and that of the Surrealists, and her relevance to women artists working now.