Spiral and Waves
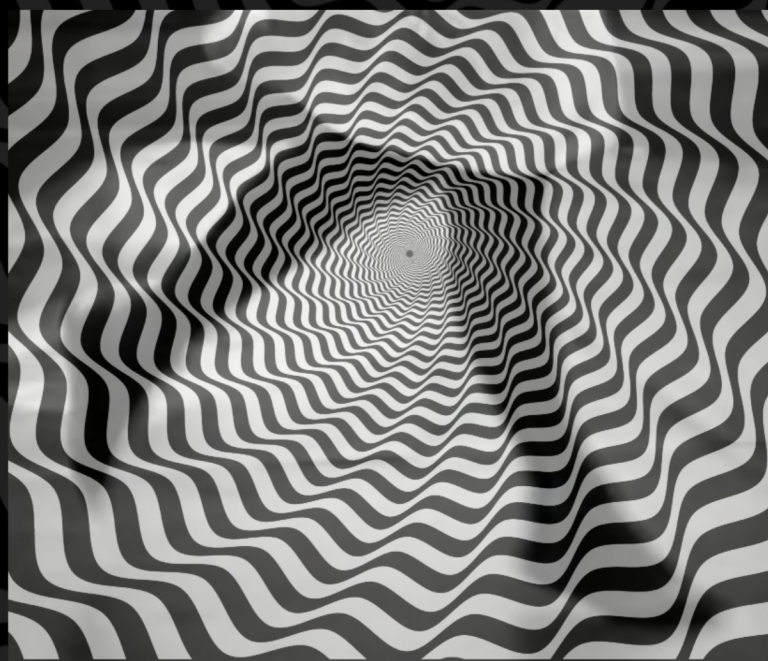# The Female Image and Identity in Experimental Films and Videos by Women Filmmakers,Choreographers and Performance Artists (1940s–1980s).

MA Thesis Revisited
Independent Film & Video
Central Saint Martins, London
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Preface

The thesis reflects my quest as a young artist and scholar attempting to interweave feminist film, performance and dance in practice and theory. As I wrote the thesis in 1989, there are certain terms that I no longer use. I kept the thesis intact as it was originally written but added a few images which were difficult to obtain in the past. Moreover, in line with the thesis' argument, my practice has evolved in new directions and a few theoretical propositions have since then matured and became recognised concepts and art forms such as the term, and practice of, screen dance. My purpose is, therefore, to clarify the thesis' relevance in this day and age especially for those who are interested in the evolution of art forms from a feminist perspective.

Evolving Art Forms

How do art forms evolve? How does innovation in the arts occur? In 1989 I wrote a thesis that pondered on these questions by analysing experimental films and videos by women filmmakers and performers. I was particularly interested in films and videos that challenged the notion of female identity and imagery and were concerned with female existence and dilemmas. My research has led me to the realisation that feminist theories and feminist film and dance practices share a common outlook and aims, and their interactions can result in radical and experimental aesthetics. I also observed that art forms evolve when different mediums such as film and dance are formally and thematically integrated. Furthermore, when both film and dance apply feminist principles through experimental film and dance practices, the outcome could result in new depictions of female identity and female images in general. These new images are aesthetic forms that redefine female identity and existence, criticise, and cancel-out Western patriarchal conventions in the practices of film, video, performance art and dance.

From Cine-Dance to Screen-Dance

The terms film and dance are used broadly in this thesis and include video, performance, installation, and film in conjunction with live performance. Traditional, theatrical and popular dance styles are discussed alongside modern and postmodern dance, performance and free-form movement. The formal integration of film/video and dance is addressed through the terms cine-dance, video-dance, and dance film. Screen-dance as a concept and as a recognised art form did not exist in 1989 and the first BBC television series entitled Dance for the Camera was released in 1994. Indeed, the timing of my thesis and my subsequent MPhi/PhD research coincided with questions that concerned filmmakers, choreographers, performers, including pioneers of cyber-performance, and theorists throughout the 1990s. In the last two decades of the 21st century, similar questions are being discussed in the contexts of screen-dance and cyber-performance as well as film, digital and screen-based art forms. I, therefore,

decided to return to this thesis in order to continue reflecting on the lineage and evolution of art forms especially screen-based and interactive performative forms.

Spiral and Waves: A Dynamic Timeline of Theory and Practice

For the purpose of discussing the relationship between practice and theory, I proposed a theoretical model in the shape of a spiral in motion in a historic space-time of imaginary waves. I divided the spiral into three areas: Core, Interior and Exterior on which I positioned women artists and theorists from the fields of film, dance and performance according to their historical timeline. A selected number of artists and theorists are discussed as examples of approaches to the female body, identity and imagery as well as exemplifying the vital relationship between theoretical articulation and artistic practice. The timeline ends in the late 1980s but the evolution of both practice and theory beyond it is stressed and elaborated upon. The spiral as a shape represents women's cultural productions that redefine their identities, roles and modes of representation. Metaphorically and subliminally, the spiral is associated with the feminine principle in numerous myths and rituals from ancient and tribal cultures to present day spiritualities. However, in this thesis, these subtle mythic interrelations are beyond the scope of the discourse.

Art Forms and Mediums

Women artists and theorists working in the 1970s and 1980s experimented with 16mm film, analogue video, installation and multimedia performance. They engaged directly with gender and feminist issues by focusing on the body and its treatment and representation. The body was further investigated through film, video and multimedia performance. In the 1990s the transition to digital video and cyber-performance was gradually gathering momentum. As I argue in the thesis, evolution in mediums or media occurs alongside innovations in the arts and vice versa. My own work as an artist evolved alongside a similar trajectory and has relied on access to emerging technologies. In retrospect, and following my PhD thesis, I can clearly identify the links in terms of aesthetics, technologies, as well as feminist theory, between the works discussed in this thesis to works made since the 1990s by women utilising video, performance, dance, and innovative forms such as installation, screen-dance and cyber-performance.

Reflective Theoretical Process

The construct of the spiral and other terms associated with it such as *leap*, *interference* and *mutation* evolved from a reflective process of theory building. The lack of stable theoretical concepts and constructs allowed me the freedom to envision and speculate beyond what was already available in terms of theory. At that point in time, critical writings on Maya Deren, for example, were sparse. Although lack of theoretical sources

could be regarded as a limitation in research, it functioned as a trailblazing force that set me on an independent discovery course. Maya Deren's editing of the dancer's leap in the film A *Study in Choreography for the Camera* (1945) became emblematic of innovation and evolution of art forms, representing the emergence of a new direction in theory and practice involving film and dance. I, therefore, utilised the notion of a *leap* upon the spiral structure as associated with neoteric developments in, and interrelations of, practice and theory. In addition, the dancer's impossible leap, from a terrestrial and physical perspective, is associated in this thesis with the notion of *interference.* The latter implies disruption in the way a phenomenon is experienced and observed, and its alteration, such as in the case of Deren's film. Therefore, in the thesis, interference also implies the emergence of new aesthetic mediums and forms integrating video, film, dance, movement and performance. Moreover, interference implies changes in awareness, cognition and ways of depicting, and thinking about, the world, which give rise to new theoretical formulations. Finally, the notion of *mutation* is the consequence of *leap* and *interference.* The three notions are interrelated and together demonstrate how radical aesthetics combined with technological mediums are born through a process akin to genetic mutation that interferes with conventional 'normal' forms of existence through sudden evolutionary leaps that manifest in 'abnormal' designs and creations.

Sources and Resources

There are a number of lengthy quotations in the thesis, which may be deemed unnecessary in the current telematically linked digital scholarly environment. However, in the late 1980s most of the publications mentioned and cited in the thesis were only available through a limited number of specialised libraries and bookshops. Most of the films discussed in the thesis were not available to the general public, thus citing texts from the film such in the case of *Thriller* (1979) by Sally Potter was preferable. Moreover, as a number of films mentioned in the thesis are not available online or can be purchased, any lengthy citations or explanations could be relevant and helpful to current researchers. Citations from historically significant publications such as: Film Culture, *The Legend of Maya Deren*, and Millennium Film Journal could be regarded as a contribution to scholarship as these publications are currently not available on open access.

Research and Artistic Practice

The thesis entitled: The Female Image and Identity in Experimental Films and Videos by Women Filmmakers, Choreographers and Performance artists (1940s -1980s) was written as part of my MA studies in Independent Film Video at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London (1989). I benefited enormously from Prof. Claire Pajaczkowska's expertise in gender studies and visual culture. Prof. and artist filmmaker William Raban, the film programme's director, encouraged me to pursue my

experimental work that combined film and live performance, and which eventually led to my PhD in Dance on Screen. Access to most of the films and videos mentioned in this thesis was made possible through Circles, a pioneering feminist women's film and video distribution organisation which was based in Bethnal Green. I also briefly mention my own practice in film, video and performance as my own practice was not the prime concern of the written research. Yet, my practice's position on the spiral defines its aesthetic and historical context. The thesis was submitted alongside my practice, which resulted in an experimental 16mm film (30 mins approx.) in conjunction with live performance. The film entitled *Traps — The Spirit and the Prisoner* was filmed in Covent Garden and a London scrap yard. I edited the 16mm footage at Four Corners in Bethnal Green, which was closely associated with Circles and other feminist organisations. *Traps* was projected in conjunction with a live performance. I performed the prisoner's spirit in the film and the live performance. The piece was screened and performed several times for the general public at The Window which was located in Covent Garden and was part of the film department's building of Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. The Window was indeed a large glass window wall facing the busy street of Long Acre. It enabled people passing by to casually encounter a performance or an exhibition.

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Image: Central Saint Martins,
Long Acre Street, Covent Garden, London

Image: *Traps – The Prisoner and the Spirit* by Lila Moore, 1989
The 16mm film and live performance integrated the window wall facing
Long Acre Street in Covent Garden.

Spiral and Waves: Introduction

The dynamic forces that constantly activate the spiral as a principle, idea and form transcend the following essay to dimensions of progress and evolution. The flexibility of the spiral as a concept allows the expansion and unity of ideas and forms in theoretical and practical ways. Therefore, the spiral is proposed as a structure, concept, and basis. It transcends layers of theory (film and dance theory) to areas of unity and multiplication. The constant circular and expansive movement of the spiral as a structure, complicates the ability to draw fixed points of time and space, as it were, on its moving and shifting curved lines. For this purpose, it is, therefore, recommended that we observe specific areas of the spiral: the interior, the core, and the exterior. (Image 1)

Before any further description can be made of the spiral's division into specific areas, it is important to declare its specialty and originality. The spiral is mainly a flexible diagram which illustrates the various trends exhibited in the works of women experimental film and video makers and observes their special interest and involvement in the field of dance. The principle of experiment as it is manifested in these experimental works is one of the dynamic forces which activate the spiral. The latter is interlinked with the four elemental forces of fire: creativity, water emotion, air: mind/intellectual capacity, and earth: material manifestation and practicality.

The spiral is, therefore, constructed as it is in motion, bringing to the works discussed vitality and influence. There is a focus on experimentation in the medium of film and video which integrates the medium of dance in its structure. This allows a number of works to be viewed as they abandon and criticise the traditional forms of their original medium. These works replace conventional formats with new forms of representation in various degrees of success and failure. It is, therefore, important to declare that the experimental direction of the spiral is motivated by a dynamic quest. In this exploration, new textual and contextual concepts and forms of representation are needed for the portrayal and explication of the female image and identity. For this reason, the principle of experiment in the medium of film and video and its various relations to the medium of dance is bridged and mediated by a body of theoretical writings. The latter consists of proto-feminist and contemporary feminist writings.

The aspect of practice is thereby set in conjunction with the aspect of theory. It allows us to perceive the total notion of the spiral as a dynamic experimental force; a visionary theoretical structure in search for new sets of practice and theory concerned with the female image and its forms of representation. The author has chosen to relate to specific selected writings in this essay envisioning their historical and critical positions on the structure of the spiral which allows development and expansion. Therefore, the total body of practice and theory concerning the chosen subject is set on the spiral's arms and its interior and exterior.

The spiral's interior is devoted to past sets of practice and theory. The starting point is 1792, dating the publication of A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft. The publication marks the proto-feminist era and its links to twentieth-century feminist writings. In the field of experimental film, the starting point is 1943, dating the film *Meshes of the Afternoon* by Maya Deren. In terms of practice, *Meshes* opened the gates for experimental film practice on a larger scale than ever, and led to the formation of the cine-dance concept (Leaf, 1988) as well as motivated women to create and take active roles within the experimental spheres. The durational distance between these two starting points in time is bridged on the spiral's interior and followed by a number of experimental works and theoretical writings made in the 1970s. The closing date of the spiral's interior leads to the era of the 1980s which is represented on the spiral's core as the present time. This space contains works and writings produced nowadays, and the continuous structure of the spiral suggests their relevance to its interior. The spiral's exterior is an empty space devoted entirely for the future. As this space is blank, an attempt was made by the author to draw conclusions on its empty path.

The conclusions were made through the analysis of past and present practice and theory and their supposed consequences on future progress. In the last chapter, the author concludes that the body of theory written by feminist film critics and theorists during the 1970s and the early 1980s has completed the task of its time. The conclusion also applies to the practices of film and dance which follow the notions of feminist writings. During the 1980s, these sets of theory and practice met with a crisis which was shared by the experimental sphere as a whole. The avant-garde lost its stubborn edge and diffused with commercial products such as music videos and advertisements (Kaplan, 1987). Strong and independent female characters which were first introduced by proto-feminist thinkers and artists have been replaced by images of women wearing cloths with padded-shoulders. These images have symbolised female empowerment and career minded women whose ambitions have been applied to the service of patriarchy. The positive aggression and opposition which characterised the early women's movement and the avant-garde spheres have been replaced by the fame-driven ambitious trend of the 1980s.

Moreover, it is not naïve to state that more creative experimentation is needed for the creation of new female images and identities. It is obvious that women are still a target for exploitation through the various branches of the media and, therefore, in the existing social and cultural patterns to various unpredictable degrees. It is too easy to conclude that the Western world has come a long way since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, and the women's movement of the 1970s, while in reality, women are still a target for violation and insults on sexual grounds. Random degrees of violation and humiliation experienced by women are often disguised by intellectual manipulation as in advertising, and in social and domestic situations where women are not safe with

their husbands, brothers and friends. The so-called sexual freedom to choose and dich sex partners is contrasted by the other extreme example whereby any woman who happens to walk alone at night is setting herself up for rape. Despite their somewhat experimental style, the music videos of the 1980s are produced for totally different reasons than those of the experimental film and video sphere, such as the works chosen by the author for analysis. It is therefore not enough to conclude that the crisis of the 1980s represents the death of the avant-garde along with the end of feminism. The author suggests that the 1980s have been a fuelling phase for the experimental sphere, a station for regeneration and the shedding of the superfluous cultural snakeskin before a new order of art and culture can emerge again. The author attempts to lay the foundation for this new cultural and aesthetic arena as it enlarges and radicalises the scales of film, dance and theory. This development is also effecting and reshaping the portrayals of the female image and identity.

The spiral is imaginatively positioned in a bluish space of ever-flowing amorphous space of waves and delicate energy. Conceptually as a model, the spiral and its surrounding waves are framed and contextualised as an integral part of the history and evolution of the experimental fields of film and dance. The amorphic waves that have been attributed to the spiral's movement represent its ability to multiply and evolve. As a construct it frees the history of the experimental spheres from fixed sets of practice and theory as it transcends the past to yet unknown future possibilities. The spiral pattern allows experimentation to exist and evolve, and theory to be written on the foundations, or through the influence, of past experiments, critical issues, crises and achievements. As the spiral is ever-growing, the fields of the present are soon to become the fields of the past. New boundaries can be drawn and old patterns are being transcended and transformed to ever-increasing tails and trails of creative energy and innovative art forms. (Image 2)

Image 1: The Spiral Structure

Image 2: The Spiral Structure with a few artistic and theoretical milestones.

Chapter 2
The Female Body in Theory

The spiral's interior and core present us with problems which confront the turn of the twentieth-century, exclusively, the highly debated topic concerning the visual, textual and contextual treatment of the female image. A leap towards the future must begin by circulation, first on the spiral structure, and the meeting of the past on the way back to the present, before any future prospects can be viewed or speculated. In order to specify the aspects concerned, the author has chosen to analyse the various treatments of the female image in specially selected films, which are discussed in Chapter 3. The general characteristic common to these films can be found in the element of dance which is encapsulated in their structures and as they offer alternative depictions of female physicality, personality and identity. The female image in the shape of a person succeeds and challenges the subject of female physicality, which has always been the basis for popular and traditional portrayals of women as fetishistic objects.

Before approaching the actual films, it is appropriate to first analyse the general motivation which energises the search for the female image and alternative portrayals of her physicality and identity. It is necessary to find the roots of this relentless journey in the spiral's interior and core, and in the sets of theoretical writings which they include. It is also convenient to tackle the medium of dance, as it is mainly concerned with the physical body as an instrument of expression. Therefore, dance as a practice provides a direct target for the search, and dance theory and criticism allow an insight into female related issues within this medium.

The debate is, therefore, concerned with the treatment of the female image, physical body, personality and identity in the practice of dance. It is relevant to the progression of the essay as the films analysed in Chapter 3 criticise the various ways women have been represented in dance whilst finding alternative forms of representation. The dance forms, styles and women's roles in the following descriptions are related, indirectly at this point, to the works discussed. In Chapter 3, a direct link to this study is made, allowing the unification of dance and film, and the multiplications of forms, ideas and ways of representation.

The article Viewing Women – The Second Sex (Adair, Briginshaw & Lynn, 1989) was published in the autumn of this year in Dance Theatre Magazine. The feminist writers of the article suggest that the problems in the practice of dance can be found in the

traditional dance techniques as they restrict the creation of alternative images. The claim that women are dominant in dance is argued by the writers who suggest that most female dancers offer a service to patriarchy through the performance of fixed and well-defined dance forms. The high percentage of women in the field of dance is "because women through dance can be pretty objects that the male audience wants" (Adair et al, 1989, p. 28). The connection between dance and sexual politics is explained as follows: [...] "dance is particularly potent when it comes to examining sexual politics because the dance language is centred on the body and bodies are inevitably gendered" (Adair et al, 1989, p. 28). Mainstream dance techniques teach dancers to display their bodies, i.e., they are trained to attract the audience's attention through sexual stimulation and arousal. This is the nature of the engagement with the dance audience. Such engagement between audience and dancers constructs a power imbalance that feminist debate is founded upon. It means that [...] "the performer has no control over the way she is looked at i.e. the desiring (audience), the desired (performer) – the object of the desire" (Adair et al, 1989, p. 28).

In ballet, in particular, and in mainstream dance women must achieve the goal of being a beautiful desirable woman. (Image 3) The ideal of beauty and desire is the result of a media controlled consumer society (Adair et al, 1989, pp.28-29). And as for conventional female identity: "As little girls we want to be ballet dancers because the feminine ideals are embodied within the image. We are surrounded by idealised images of women and as female dancers we are seen in this context"(Adair et al, 1989, p.29). Thus, only once freed from the constraints of past portrayals and biases, the female dancer can make use of her physical body through alternative dance concepts, some yet to be discovered. The author suggests, at this point, that in order to approach new experiments, new sets of practice and theory must be constructed. The direction undertaken by feminist theorists and artists during the 1970s requires further development and evolution.

As feminist ideology is in constant battle with patriarchal ideology, it is still oppressed by the latter's structures of thought. However, the need for constant debate with patriarchy is gradually decreasing in the 1980s, while the energy is invested in the search for new female images and identities. A search for images of women as they are and as they want to be seen: self-contained and removed from patriarchal ideology and conventions. The emphasis of patriarchal dogmas can lead into a theoretical trap. For example, it can be identified in a description of a dance piece by a leading choreographer. [...] "her use of the arabesque is rarely the expected long line, although the dancers are clearly able to execute such a line" (Adai et al, 1989, p.29). By unnecessarily remarking on the dancer's ability to execute the arabesque in a classical manner, which is the proper manner, the authors emphasise the dominance of the classical tradition and its superior physical demands. It is not the ability to execute the arabesque properly which makes the experiment and its dancer most valid. It is the context in which the arabesque is executed incorrectly which emphasises its

incorrectness without the classical need to perform it in the right way. The same argument can be applied to experimental film practice. For example, the debate of whether or not Maya Deren was able to produce a classical Hollywood melodrama is completely irrelevant to her achievement in the experimental sphere of filmmaking.

Patriarchal ideology in its relation to the oppression of women is futile for the execution and criticism of new artworks by women as the latter should already integrate feminist doctrines in their structures. It was already mentioned in a similar manner that the female image will be portrayed as she is, i.e., self-contained and separated from patriarchal conventions. The arguments made by the feminists of the 1970s can serve as a basis of knowledge, however, new voices of women need to be heard. Women should create their own images and identities as their oppression by patriarchal manipulation was already exposed by former female theorists and artists.

However, before any more steps can be made toward future prospects, past paths have to be re-discovered on the spiral structure. In this light, statements made by Mary Wollstonecraft in A *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (first published in 1792), echo the arguments made in Adair, Brignishow and Lynn's article (1989). It was an assumption commonly agreed in Wollstonecraft's time that the physical constitution of the female body is the reason for, and origin of, her inferiority. Female inferiority was disguised by the acquisition of artificial beauty ideals encouraged by patriarchy in order to keep women away from the acquisition of truth and knowledge. Wollstonecraft criticises the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) who, in her opinion, was responsible for the degradation of women to a degree of total helplessness and humiliation. Rousseau, she writes (Wollstonecraft 1982, p. 173), proceeds to prove that woman ought to be weak and passive, because she has less bodily strength than man hence infers that it is her duty to render herself agreeable to her master – this being the grand purpose of her existence. Moreover, religion, when perceived literally, led crowds of worshippers to believe that "Eve was literally speaking, one of Adam's ribs" (Wollstonecraft 1982, p. 109). This religious description has allowed men physical and spiritual superiority over women.

> It proves that man, from remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his intention to show that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was made for his convenience of pleasure (Wollstonecraft, 1982 ,p. 174).

Women, regardless of any considerations, have theoretically and practically rendered themselves to the ruling sex, as Wollstonecraf writes (1982, p.174):

> Supposing woman to have been formed only to please, and be subject to man, the conclusion is just. She ought to sacrifice every other consideration to render herself agreeable to him, and let this brutal desire of self-preservation be the

grand spring of all her actions, when it is proved to be the iron bed of fate, to fit which her character should be stretched or contracted, regardless of all moral or physical distinctions.

However, Rousseau states (Wollstonecraft, 1982, p. 175):

It being once demonstrated […] that man and woman are not, nor ought to be, constituted alike in temperament and character, it follows, of course, that they should not be educated in the same manner […] for this reason the education of women should be always relative to the men, to please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable – these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy.

According to Wollstonecraft, these duties required of women were cultivated by teaching them the arts of pleasing through dress and decor, and by decreasing intellectual stimulation in favour of the release of uncontrolled emotions, which are associated with women. This approach allowed male authors, philosophers and preachers to blow out of proportion a shallow female image. A doll made of air, unrealistically idealised and glorified. Wollstonecraft(1982, p. 193) criticises these fake female images as she writes:

I particularly object to the love-like phrases of pumped-up passion, which are everywhere interspersed it moves my gall to hear a preacher descanting on dress and needlework; and still more, to hear him address the British fair, the fairest of the fair, as if they had only feelings.

Images of the idealised dancers that Adair, Briginshaw and Lynn (1989) protest against, are clearly the outcome of centuries old idealised female subordination and slavery as it sharply observed by Wollstonecraft (1792). Furthermore, the problematic status of women can be understood on the basis of research in the field of dance including dance styles in various periods in history. The publication *Dance, Sex and Gender* (Hanna, 1988) provides the necessary insight. According to Hanna (1988, p.123): "The French and the industrial revolution (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) dealt serious blows to the prestige of dance, sending it from the epitome of royal male performance to the nadir of "inferior' female performance".

Female inferiority was based on sexual grounds as Hanna explains (1988, pp. 124-125):

Female dancers on the public stage were thought to be part of the demimonde or echelons of prostitution. The "Ballet Girl" had a pejorative connotation until the mid-twentieth century, and in some places it still does. Young female

dancers were a source of sexual titillation and even gratification. Abonnés, regular opera subscribers, were their protectors. The ballet "leg show" enticed wealthy men who relished the sight and fell in love with beautiful dancers, enduring their punishment of neglect and begging their reward of intimacy. Becoming a mistress to a wealthy man usually meant success, and the option of leaving the stage. Some less fortunate dancers in the "parade" left the theatre to become teachers or common prostitutes.

Until the mid-twentieth century, female performers came from the lower classes. For an attractive girl, dancing was an avenue of social mobility, an alternative to factory sweatshops, agriculture, or domestic work. Certainly talented women who achieved acclaim and the attention, alliance and commitment of wealthy admirers were envied. Respectable wives envied the dancers' freedom from the burden and hazards of childbearing and from being "sexually cowed and emotionally brutalized" by husbands (Shorter 1982, p. 16). But, respected, in the sense of the dominant culture's view of the proper female role, dancers were not.

The ballet which has been a target of feminist critique involves oppression conveyed through its aesthetic technique and its emotional, spiritual and intellectual messages. (Images 3 & 4) Hanna describes it as a patriarchal form of mating ritual (1988, p. 168):

Dance transforms animal visualized patterns of mating by using abstract stylization and other devices to encode sexual meaning. The Ballet pas de deux may also be a metaphor for male domination and patriarchy. In the duet, a man manipulates, controls and plays with his female partner. Mazo speaks of those "magically desirable, vulnerable and strong, fragile yet enduring women" entrusted with key roles in the classical ballet. The woman, a prize to be won, contrasts with the whore and the "slack bellied" housewife (1974, p. 9).

Image 3: Martin Rubenstein and Kathleen Gorham, dancers in the J.C. Williamson/Borovansky Ballet production of Gay Rosalinda, 1946
Photographer: Hal Williams

Image 4 : Pas de deux. Rachel Cameron and Henry Legerton,
Kirsova Ballet Les Sylphides. Photographer: Max Dupain, 1941-1944

[...] women's romantic roles generally did not depict independent women but untouchable, elusive sylphs [...] vengeful ghosts of betrayed women who died unwed [...] (Hannah 1988, p. 126). The author suggests that the dance medium has turned throughout the centuries into a source of fantasies invented by patriarchy to locate women between the two extreme poles of pseudo-spiritualism and prostitution.

The following passage on the tango is relevant as it demonstrates patriarchal control asserted through the medium and style of dance, an example which is also useful for works analysed in Chapter 3. (Image 5) Hannah writes on the origins and the characteristics of the dance (1988, p.164):

> [...] the tango originated about 1880 in taverns and dance halls of lower-class districts in the slum of Buenos Aires [...] the dance reflects the pimp's repertory of carefully studied posters and gestures. His hearty, straight, unmoving upper body and smooth steps mirror patterns in the underworld's duels. Perhaps, the pimp's elegant high-heeled shoes caused him to have the slightly forward-titled spine in tango. Male-female relations is the central theme of what was a daringly suggestive dance. The man (active, powerful and dominant) advances slightly inclined over the woman (passive, docile and submissive), who never escapes his embrace and overpowering control. Danced by pimps and "respectable" 'wealthy men who later took the scandalous dance to Paris, from where it eventually spread to respectable society throughout the world.

Image 5 : Argentinian tango in the streets of San Telmo, Buenos Aires
Photographer: Anouchka Unel, 2004

Women's liberation through the medium of dance was a historic milestone that was represented and led by Isadora Duncan. (Image 6) Duncan deliberately ditched the tights, the pointed shoes, the tutu, and the dancing style of the classical ballerina. Instead, she danced barefooted, dressed in a simple tunic initially to the music of nature, especially the sea waves, as she listened to her soul. She turned away from the forceful structures of the ballet and indicated the source of her work as she wrote: "My life and art came from the sea" (Duncan, 1927, p. 10). By intuitively answering the call of nature, she cleverly escaped the prejudices surrounding the fixed sexual roles of women in society and culture as well as in dance. The female body she visualised was physically strong and free to become a vessel for emotional, spiritual and intellectual experience through life, art and especially dance.

Spirituality and physicality were not confronted through opposition, but with the realisation that the body is capable of reflecting and expressing the divine principle of

the soul. Duncan's mythological metaphors and images, which originated from ancient Greece, served as creative gateways to idealistic freedom and ecstasy expressed through physical and spiritual movements. It is important to note that Duncan related to mythological themes and symbols in a pioneering Jungian sense, seeing in them reflections of the collective unconscious, going back in time to their creators. She found in the mythic settings and archetypes images that manifested her longing for, and vision of, physical and spiritual freedom.

Duncan's adventures led dance to the modern era of experiment, and made it possible for women to reconsider the medium which formerly oppressed them as a new path of liberation. Her visions of the dance of the future and the female dancer of the future catalysed the search for female identity and imagery. Duncan idealised the naked body in harmony with nature, and promoted dance as a path leading women and girls to independence. She performed when pregnant until she was forced to leave the stage due to social and cultural conventions and pressures. Sixty-two years after Duncan, it is still unacceptable for pregnant dancers and actresses to perform on stage or act in movies. A woman is generally required to hold a submissive, passive cultural and aesthetic position. However, a woman is neither active nor passive, she is both, and entitled to embody both aspects. Unjustified visual and kinaesthetic presentation of the female character as passive versus the active male character is demonstrated in dance (Hannah, 1988) as well as in the cinema (Mulvey, 1988).

Image 6: Isadora Duncan
Photographer: Arnold Genthe

A leap is, therefore, made to bridge the debate on female portrayal in dance theory with a similar debate in film theory. The essay most appropriate for this debate is entitled: Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (Mulvey, 1988, originally published in 1975). Utilising Fruedian psychoanalysis in the context of film theory, the article demonstrates "the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured the film form" (Mulvey 1988, p. 57). Central to patriarchy is the "image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world" [...] it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence" (Mulvey 1988, p. 57). Mainstream films are dependent on the image of the castrated woman to provide the viewers with kinds of pleasure, i.e., scopophilic pleasure, narcissistic pleasure, and voyeuristic pleasure.

The scopophilic pleasure provides the viewers visual access to the sexual intimacy of the performers on screen. Unseen by the subjects of their look as well as by other viewers due to the lack of light in the cinema theatre, pleasure is attained by looking at others' sexuality and exposed intimate privacy. The narcissistic pleasure is explained through Lacan's theory of the mirror phase and the formation of the ego. The star system of Hollywood cinema provides the viewers with endless targets of narcissistic identification with 'super-human' protagonists. Narcissistic identification is usually applied to male heroes, while the voyeuristic pleasure is attained through female characters. As the voyeuristic pleasure originated from the fear of castration, the female carrier of the 'bleeding wound' is fetishised and iconised to arouse sexual tension. Voyeuristic pleasure derives from the male gaze at the female image as a sexualised object. The female character is voyeuristically investigated by the male hero and the viewers until she is punished or saved. The acts of punishment or saviour serve to demystify the female mysterious power which is perceived as hidden in her sex and sexuality.

The author concludes that the various treatments of the female body or the female image as a sex object in popular culture as well as the arts are most common. It is rooted in the patriarchal convention of the active male and the passive female. The active male seems to be able to control the passive female according to his needs and suppress his fear of her on the account of sexual differences. His fears have justified centuries of oppression and the exhibition of females as iconised fetishes. His fears have served to deny the evolution of women as persons entitled to self-definition. Women should, therefore, define themselves and create their own images and identities as well as avoid visual references to the endless mirrors of conventions. The work of theorists, such as Mulvey, serves as a liberating force from conventional forms of representation by exposing their deep roots, psychological foundations and cultural meanings. Once the old roots are exposed, new seeds ought to be planted. Attempts in this direction are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3
The Spiral's Core and Interior: Analysis of Works

The importance of the film *Meshes of the Afternoon* made by Maya Deren in 1943 has not only been addressed for the potential of possibilities it uncovered for the experimental film language. *Meshes* investigates a female protagonist for the first time in the history of experimental film from uncompromised physical, emotional and spiritual perspectives. The film constructs the female image, her personality and identity, not only through the usage of camera and editing techniques, but by the actual experience of the protagonist; a female experience of physical, mental and emotional life as they are divided, conflicted, interacted and unified.

Most mainstream films locate their characters in a world where they act, feel and think. In *Meshes*, the protagonist is not merely located in a certain physical environment, but becomes an integral part of it. She also turns out to be the controller of her physical environment as the latter corresponds to her unstable states of mind.

Meshes portrays a young woman entering a house and falling asleep. In her dream she experiences a series of trance states which eventually cause her death. Silent questions are being asked concerning her problematic death: Did she commit suicide, or did an imaginary action kill her? Did the imaginary action of killing herself materialise during the trance state and did it originate from her mind? Detailed descriptions and analysis of *Meshes* and other films by Deren is available in the author's former essay: Maya Deren: Three Acts of Magic (1988). The author's main concern here is to focus exclusively on the unique elements which constitute Deren's female protagonists and the relations made to dance.

It was already mentioned that in *Meshes* a unity between the protagonist and the environment is achieved. It can be demonstrated by two sequences from the film. The first example is the famous four stride scene. […] "here a close-up on Deren's sandaled feet leads to four steps, as each foot is shown stepping in a different location: grass to mud, to pavement, to rug" (Heck-Rabi, 1984, p. 202). Deren bridges environmental distances through an editing technique which the author terms as trance-editing. It allows her to bridge one separate location with another and thereby control and manipulate space and time. Trance-editing enables 'supernatural' control as it originates in trance-states, such as the rapid changes of environments that serve to reinforce a trance state in the four stride scene.

The second example demonstrates how the environment relates to, or influences, the protagonist's state of mind, whereby she is overpowered by its behaviour and reaction. In this film sequence, the man enters the house and wakes the woman up, and she follows him up the stairs to the bedroom. As she climbs the stairs, it appears that the staircase has been taken over by unseen and forceful movements. These motions disrupt the woman's physical balance which she tries to maintain and adjust her

movements. This effect was achieved through extreme camera angles and editing. It reinforces the power of the environment over the woman. However, it also suggests that the environment responds to the woman's mental state or participates in it. (Image 7).

Image 7: *Meshes of the Afternoon* by Maya Deren, 1943

The young woman's complex personality and identity are constituted by the imaginative usage of the camera and the manipulation of space and time through trance-editing which bridges separate times and spaces. The woman as a female character is constituted by experimental film language innovated by Deren and not by the male gaze of mainstream films. The convention of the male-female relationship is broken in *Meshes* as the female and the male characters seem to reflect one another's mental states. In the same sequence, the woman follows the man to the bedroom and lays on the bed. Through his eyes, the flower which he places next to her on the pillow turns into a knife that she points at him. Through her eyes, his face turns into a mirror which breaks to pieces. The broken pieces of mirror fall on the seashore and are collected by the waves. In this way, the female and male characters seem to reflect each other through their delicately suggested intimacy and conflict. Their conflict is mutual and balanced as he sees his aggression in her, and she sees her destructive emotions in him. The structure and manner of the representation of the woman's identity is, therefore, not damaged by the conflict, but reinforced through its delicate observation.

The importance of *Meshes* to the formation of the cine-dance concept is evident in the utilisation of the camera and the editing for the portrayal of the woman's physical and emotional states including trance states. A unity is achieved between the two faculties, the physical and the emotional, which is relevant to the portrayal of dance and movement on film. The staircase sequence, mentioned above, is an actual dance piece, whereby extreme body gestures are reinforced and conveyed by extreme camera

angles and movements, and through editing, which recreates them as a filmic dance. The physical appearance of the female protagonist in *Meshes*, though striking with unconventional beauty, is not objectified or constructed in a fetishistic manner. Her beauty contributes to her complex identity which moves delicately between the poles of life and death. Her death is not a punishment or an act of saviour. It is a result of a physical and emotional journey, poetically and mythically explained by Deren: "you have to come a long way from the beginning of time to kill yourself, like the first life emerging from primeval waters" (Deren, 1965, p. 30).

The film *At Land* was made by Maya Deren in 1944. It captures the search for female identity and imagery as it presents an active and independent female protagonist. She is constantly dislocated in the changing landscapes of "20th century minded time and space" (Deren, 1965, p.2). Regardless of her unstable position in the physical environment, she controls her destiny by achieving her goal. In the film, her goal is represented through her motivation to possess a pawn of a chess game, which is constantly escaping her reach. As she is located in a mythological space and time, she is being transferred by trance-editing from natural environments such as seashore and bushy paths to civilised locations such as a dinner party and a hut. Her actions and movements are performed in a natural, free style as she crawls on a table surrounded by dining and conversing people, climbs dunes and collects shells and stones. In her simple dress with loose hair and barefooted, she is free from fetishistic attributes. Her natural beauty fuses with the natural beauty of the seashore. Her search for the pawn activates her space and time which correspond by dislocating her. Moreover, her independent personality and identity is not constructed by the gaze of male characters and viewers, but is created by film language and the film's reception by male and female viewers. The freedom to draw her destiny and materialise it by using her physical, intellectual and emotional capacities brings forth her image and identity. As such, she is self-made and self-contained with her separateness from patriarchal conventions. Patriarchy does not seem to stop the protagonist from manifesting her destiny by the means of film language as she is in control of her body and mind and has freedom of choice. Her natural movements and her simple, though striking, use of her body coupled with the film form is a powerful example of the potential involved in the portrayal of female personality and physicality. (Image 8)

Image 8: *At Land* by Maya Deren, 1944

A *Study in Choreography for the Camera* made by Deren in 1945 depicts a male dancer. Therefore, it is easier to observe the film language without the need to tackle the problematic sphere of the female image. The control Deren attributed to her female protagonists is, in this case, attributed to the male protagonist. With the assistance of the film language, the dancer achieves superiority over constraints of time and space. The film medium is answering the dance medium to the point of unification and realisation of the cine-dance concept. Deren's innovative concept and art form of cine-dance was the outcome of her fearless motivation to break through the conventions of dance in film and theatrical dance (Leaf, 1945, p.287). Her dancer is not performing on the traditional theatrical stage before an audience, but he is dancing in a forest, in a room, and in a courtyard, with his mechanical dance partner: the camera. He is dancing in the space his partner creates for him to the silent music of his body rhythms and the soundless quality of the pure film medium. In the film, the camera is revealing a forest view as it turns slowly to create an almost complete circle. As the camera turns, it discovers the dancer, and each time he is progressing in a stretching movement closer to the camera until his head disappears from the frame. The camera focuses on the dancer's lower body and as it frames a close-up of his leg, he steps into an apartment. According to Deren: "The illusion is that Beatty has stepped from the woods into an apartment with a single unbroken movement" (Deren 1988, p.266). From the apartment, the dancer is shifted to the courtyard of the Egyptian Hall at the Metropolitan Museum of Art to perform a pirouette sequence which leads to a close-up on his face as it turns around in escalating speed. Deren wrote on the technical side of this sequence:

This sequence is an example of how the camera can actually collaborate in creating a dance movement [...] Beatty, however, was actually doing a dervish turn on both feet [...] Because this turn could be sustained in balance, it could be photographed for quite a long time without interruption, in these courses of time the camera speed was changed from extreme slow motion to extreme acceleration. The moment, then, begins with a dream-like quality, and ends up with the blurring of a machine part. (Deren, 1988, p.266, originally published in 1945 in Dance Magazine).

The sequence ends when the dancer leaps into the air and lands in the forest where his dance began. Deren created this unnatural, extended leap by editing a sequence made of the shots which depict the dancer rising up into the air, and landing on the ground, from different points of view. By shooting the landing in reverse, she achieved the sudden leap into the air, from the position of a pirouette, without preparation and seemingly gravity free. (Image 9)
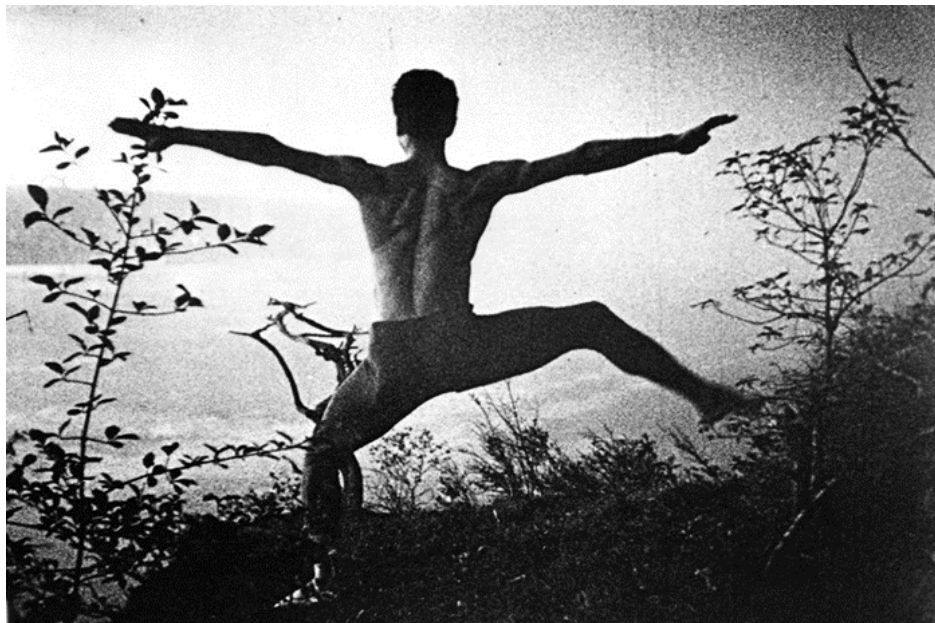

Image 9: A *Study in Choreography for Camera* by Maya Deren, 1945

Ritual in Transfigured Time was made by Maya Deren in 1946. The film portrays the transformation of a young woman from a widow to a bride. The widow is assisted by two women who initiate her with the will to take part in a courtship, and she is led to a party where she meets a man and dances with him. The couple is shifted to a garden where they dance until a new situation occurs. The man progresses toward the woman but loses her when she escapes his reach. He stops to see her running into the sea where she disappears. Under the waters the widow's black veil turns to white as she transforms into a bride. When the widow and the man are shifted to the garden, they jump and lift their arms as if with the intention of reaching the sky. Three women are

seen dancing, and their movements seem to associate them with the three Greek graces. It is the only scene where the dancers reveal a carefree attitude, celebrating essences such as freedom and love. This ideal state does not last long, and a more serious motive takes place when a chase begins as the male dancer tries to win the young widow. He seems to freeze into a still sculpture-like image through the filmic effect of frozen frame and editing that unfreezes and freezes him in stages before he jumps in long steps after the escaping woman. The effect of the frozen man on the woman results in fear, as he confronts her with a situation of life and death. It seems that a potential union with the man might lead her fertile state to one of infertility, decay, and physical death through time. Therefore, she prefers to offer her life to the waters as they contain the essence of all life. This interpretation can be supported by Deren, who gives the frozen frame effect the quality of death: […] "the frozen frame […] may constitute a comment on stillness and movement as the opposition of life and death" (Deren, 1985, p. 62).

The party scene takes on a ritualistic form. Deren repeats, reconstructs, freezes, and uses slow motion on the movements of the partying people. Thereby, she reconstructs a ceremonial dance where the opposites of life and death meet, depart and affect each other. Deren separates dance from dance conventions, not only by leading the dancers to nature and daily situations, but by editing and integrating different movements into new choreographic filmdance patterns. She creates dance from non-dance forms "by shifting emphasis from the purpose of the movement to the movement itself, and an informal social encounter then assumes the solemnity and dimension of a ritual" (Deren, 1985, p.63). The power of this form lies in the specific interrelations and contrasts of the camera, editing, the dance and the movements. Images of female characters and themes are therefore constituted by the film language and not, as they are voyeuristically investigated by male characters and viewers. The conflict between male and female principles takes on ritualistic and universal attributes and their potential union is compared with moments of life and death. The widow escapes fetishism as she escapes the man's reach. She is ready for transformation and a wedding once her identity is integrated with the waters of life. She, therefore, steps into a metaphorically depicted marriage as a whole person with integrated personality and identity and not as a fearful bride.

The female protagonists of the film wear clear-cut dresses, move naturally when they walk, run or perform simple dance sequences. It is only during the party scene that the guests look fashionable and sophisticated as they are engaged in conversation and courtship. Nevertheless, the scene is not a conventional courtship scene as it is abstracted into a ritualistic form. The widow and her two 'assistants' collaborate to form a female image which culminates in bridehood. (Image 10)

Image 10: *Ritual in Transfigured Time* by Maya Deren, 1946

The classical ballet is described in Chapter 2 as a dance form which degraded and suppressed female dancers. In the film *The Very Eye of the Night* made by Deren in 1956-1958, the classical ballet is elaborated on through film language that transcends and dissolves gender-based conflicts. The film is photographed and projected in a negative form and depicts dancers as images made of light moving in a gravity-free space, their bodies shining against the endless black space. The music, composed by Teiji Ito, is a soundtrack that functions in parallel with the visual form and content and evokes with them a cosmic atmosphere. Deren's choice of ballet, in this case, is suitable as the highest intention of the ballet is to overcome the inferiority of the human race as it is restricted to a lower form of existence on earth due to gravity. From a critical point of view, classical ballet's intention to overcome human inferiority is practised through gender inequality. In the ballet, female dancers cannot overcome human inferiority without the assistance of male dancers who must lift them off the ground (Hannah, 1988). As the film presents gravity-free space, it avoids some of the ballet's female-related problems and gender traps. In this case, the film language is manipulating the dance language to demonstrate a universal balance of dancers as celestial planets peacefully moving in space. On this bottomless and boundless plane, male and female principles dissolve together from the void of darkness into endless light as they participate in a cosmic ballet (Image 11).

Image 11: *The Very Eye of the Night* by Maya Deren, 1958

Deren's films have opened the way to various possibilities in the experimental sphere, in the area of dance films in general, and in regard to their portrayals of female protagonists and female images. Stepping toward the future, or circulating further on the spiral structure, one has to pause and acknowledge the "Mother of the Underground Film" (Renan, 1967, p.32) and of cine-dance (Leaf, 1945). Later works made by other women seem to tackle similar aspects in various ways. They integrate forms of film, video, dance and performance and were selected by the author for analysis as they involve the search for female images and identities through experimental language.

The film *Lives of Performers* was made by Yvonne Rainer in 1972. Rainer, a dancer, choreographer and film-maker, attacks the conventions of dance and film as she deconstructs them. As a choreographer she presents a wide definition of movement such as everyday movements, unrhythmic movements, and non-virtuosic movements. She attacks the conventions of dance performance with anti-performance attitudes. As a film-maker, she deconstructs narrative and visual conventions. The viewers of *Lives of Performers* are confronted with shots of floor, objects and people represented in an arbitrary manner. The voice over, which provides the viewers information by the film-maker and the performers, is constantly interrupted by desynchronisation and sequences of silence. According to Kahn (1982, 169-170) : *Lives of Performers* is

> a reworking of the conventions of popular narrative genres. The film is subtitled 'a melodrama,' and the narrative conventions it draws on are those of the 'backstage romance.' In thirteen long sequences, it tells the story of the relationships between a man and two women, a triangle. The characters, however, are playing themselves – they are real-life performers in the group of dancers working with the film-maker [...] The film departs quite radically from

dominant conventions of film narrative in its ordering and structure, and in the freedom with which it articulates elements of fiction and nonfiction. The plot, for instance, proceeds by leaps and bounds punctuated by running on the spot-by ellipsis and accretion.

It is irrelevant to explore the plot of the film as there is not a lot in the way of a conventional plot and instead there is an interrupted information, while the starting point of the film is also its closure. Rainer shows objects and people as they are abstracted to the point of emptiness. Her attitude to the filmic frame is similar to what she hangs in it. As Rainer explains (Kahn 1982, 170): "for me the story is an empty frame on which to hang images and thoughts which need support. I feel no obligation to flash out this armature with credible details of location and time."

Live of Performers was highly praised by the feminist film critics of the 1970s and 1980s. Although it does not offer specific alternative images of women and their topics, it criticises the melodrama, which was associated with women's films and women's topics. It also avoids the conventions of theatrical dance and dance scenes in mainstream cinema.

The films of Jeanette IIjon offer an elaboration of film language in its relation to images of female dancers. Their main interest is female protagonists at the centre of all physical and emotional events, as the film language serves to constitute this woman's world. *Fucii* was made by IIjon in 1975 (Circles, 1987). It portrays a woman dancer, shining in white outfit against the red floor, while her mirror image is reflected on a wall of mirrors. The situation transforms as the mirror image provokes her twin-sister as she gradually escapes her role as a reflection. The reflected image demonstrates her independence as she moves against the protagonist and refuses to return to her 'normal' position as a reflection. The twin-sisters meet as the boundaries of the mirror wall and the space between them collapse. Their interaction, as a single female entity, is transferred to a different location of a shining brown surface. Here, the two women are seen making love. (Image 12)

In *Mantra* made by IIjon in 1976, the dancer is completely manipulated by the film medium through stills, frozen frames, slow motion, negative and positive images, interactions and animation. The human body is transformed mechanically and the music by Stockhausen imbued the piece with non-verbal poetic inspiration.

The dance movements in *Fucii* are simple and include expressive gestures. It is a completely self-expressive dance, untraditionally located in dance history and theory. The film language assists the dancer to reach her mirror-image through visual manipulations created by camera movements and editing. The dance movements in *Mantra* are not relevant independently as they are incorporated within the film language. The woman dancer is manipulated by a woman filmmaker who constructs a

dance through the technological control she has over the dancer's image. Both films elaborate the concept of cine-dance and extend it to the dimensions of women's experience.

Image 12: *Fucii* by Jeanette IIjon, 1975

The film entitled *Invisible Adversaries (Unsichtbare Gegner)* was made by Valie Export in 1977. (Image 13) The 16mm film focuses on a female protagonist who is a photographer and video artist. According to Weibel and Export (1979, pp. 219-220):

> anna [...] observes her environment with her professional tools in order to test and to document its warnings as well as its perceptions; and indeed she perceives a frightening increase of destruction and aggression, however, the visual evidence turns against anna herself: what she wants to prove is valid only as evidence of her own abnormal change. This documentation of reality proves to be a document of anna's unreality following a journey through modern everyday life in which the exotic dimensions of its miserable stations are the image-meteors of the inner world, following inhuman encounters with 'human beings,' her isolation becomes greater and greater because her method of proof justifies what she sees (and what she sees justifies her method). Her friend, whom she wants to make into her partner/accomplice, detaches himself: he gives her his knowledge about the mechanism of reality, but he does not assist her in mastering them. Because he does not share her system of relations, their relationship dissolves. The psychiatrist whom she seeks out recommend a drug therapy [...] because her eye can no longer distinguish between endogenously (internal) and exogenously (external) produce meaning through observation, anna – who sense her subjective change – substitutes for her eye, the natural projector of reality, still and video cameras. In this way she

can control her observations and her environment with object observation-machines and she can observe the (hidden) truth. The question: is it anna's pathological observation which makes the environment actually so pathological, is answered by recursive fiction. anna's journey is the history of the disintegration of observation which is also the history of the deterioration of an environment (specifically that of vienna). For, as obviously as anna develops a system of relations with distorted traits, it is equally clear that her distorted system reflects concealed structures of our real system [...] in a society dominated by alienated people anna wants to preserve her true self. Thus, even when pushed far away, she returns again and again to her identity – like a salmon that returns home to its familiar pebbles after long trips in the Atlantic – as long as she tries to constitute her existence as humane in an inhuman environment.

The inhumane reality is coupled according to Anna with the Hyksos power. This information reaches Anna during her sleep through various radio stations which broadcast the world's news. Her Hyksos' paranoia colours the film with a science fiction tone.

Attention! Attention! Humans! Hyksos! An invisible power [...] An important announcement [...] Population [...] As we've just learned [...] well found suspicion [...] an invisible adversary [...] [...] a forging, perhaps other worldly power [...] An invisible enemy occupied the town and transformed people. Hyksos are hardly distinguishable from real humans. Anyone could already be Hyksos. Either he does not know it, or it's too late already, because he's already become Hyksos. Beware of communication. Hyksos are contagious. You are not alone. (Citation from the film.)
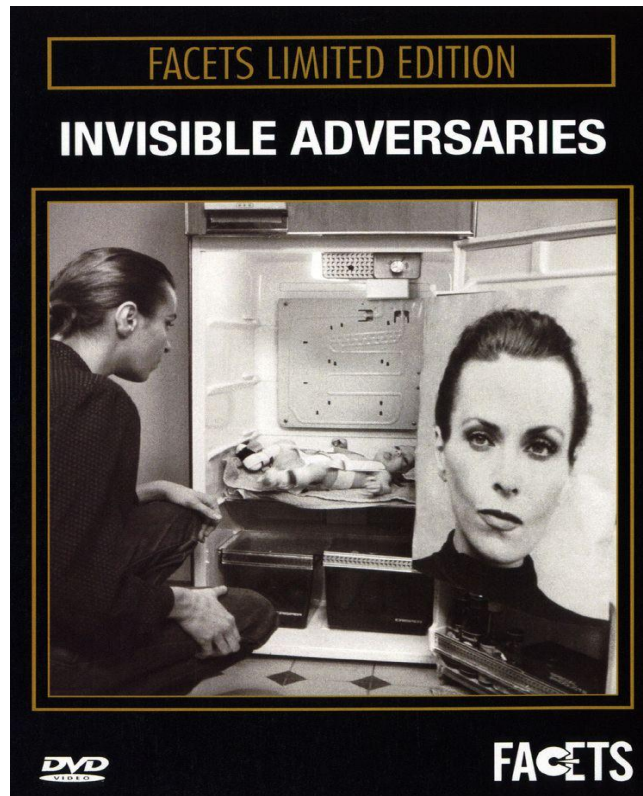
Image 13: *Invisible Adversaries* by Valie Export, 1977

Within the complexity of physical, environmental, emotional, intellectual and supernatural layers of existence, Anna tries to locate herself. Each attempt to separate reality from being perceived as an inner experience fails. She is constantly disfigured and dislocated by a pathological state of mind, as explained by her psychiatrist, which reflects a pathological and divided inhuman reality. The human in her which she tries to preserve from being destroyed by inhuman elements is considered to be abnormal, though it is the only comfortable chair in a collapsing house. The film portrays multi-layered inner and outer realities through multi-layered film language. This language includes video, photography, painting, installation and highly choreographed movement and stylised performance.

The following sequences from the film demonstrate the elaboration of a multi-layered film language as it constitutes a female identity, which is interrupted psychically and physically in the midst of conflicting realities and systems. The first sequence depicts Anna's dream through the conceptual form of art installation as the dream is being projected as film on the wall just above her bed. Before the actual dream's projection, Anna is shown in various positions on and under her bed. The live action is continued on the wall with black and white life-size photographic stills. The reality is, therefore, continued through the photographic illusions attached to Anna's bedroom wall. The projected dream portrays Anna skating through alienating city streets to the sound of her skate shoes clicking against the urban surfaces. This action is presented through

shots of the live action as the dream is being projected on Anna's bedroom wall. As the filmed and projected dream are integrating within the film itself, the dream is re-filmed and then projected again. (Image 13)

Image 13: *Invisible Adversaries* by Valie Export, 1977
The dream sequence.

The second sequence portrays Anna's work as a video artist as she tries to locate herself within the context of Renaissance paintings such as images of the Madonna and Venus. This is performed through video montages whereby her contemporary image is seen posing like the figures in the paintings and the two visual sources are mixed into one frame and image. The film allows the viewers an insight into Anna's work in the studio as it also focuses on the video images. Close-ups of the video monitors alter the filmic surface into the surface of a filmed video screen. The mixing of film and video changes the film's tones with alienating colours and textures. Anna's alienation within the context of Renaissance paintings is made coherent as her modern image and identity does not concur with past representations of female figures. Her complex identity is constructed through layers of film, video, painting and body language.

The third sequence takes place during a train journey as Anna's stressful emotional state is being suggested through physical behaviour. She is seen in a train's corridor as she slides against the glass doors and turns around continuously until she disappears at the end of the corridor. As she turns around, she is reflected in a wall of glass doors opposite to her, and her movements correspond to the expressive monotonous rhythm of the fast train. The film depicts human physical movements in correlation to machinery (in this case a train in motion) resulting in a sequence which has a brutal effect and dance-like form. The alienation that Anna experiences can be explained as originating from her lack of independent status in the patriarchal order of society,

which is represented by the Hyksos phenomenon. Patriarchy is, therefore, the enemy of irrationality for which Anna is blamed to suffer from as diagnosed by her psychiatrist and boyfriend, and as Anna suggests: "If you're creative in Vienna, the police suspect you."

The four filmmakers discussed so far confront the mediums of film and dance from uncompromised experimental perspectives, not only as individual artists, but also as a group of filmmakers gathered by the author. They attack narrative films' conventions through nonlinear and poetic investigations of their subject matters, i.e., female identity, female-centred situations, and female images.

The following works chosen for reflection continue the investigation of female images, identities and experiences. The 16mm film *Thriller* was made in 1979 by Sally Potter. According to Kuhn (1982, p. 169):

> Thriller is structured around a rearrangement of narrative discourse in dominant cinema by the installment of a woman's questioning voice as the film's organizing principle. The film is a reworking of the opera La Boheme, which is about a doomed love affair between a poet and a young seamstress: the woman finally dies of consumption. Thriller is told from the narrative point-of-view of Mimi, the tragic heroine, whose interrogatory voice-over pervades the film. The enigma set up by the film's narrative is the question of how and why Mimi died: the investigator ('I') being Mimi herself. By its recruitment of investigatory narrative structure and first-person voice-over, Triller at once draws upon, parodies, challenges and transforms the narrative and cinematic codes of the Hollywood film noir. e female victim adds a twist to the reconstruction of her own death, not only by telling the story herself, but also by considering causes for the unhappy romance and death of a young French working woman of a certain kind of social and historic condition, for instance – that could not be possibly enter the universe of operatic tragedy or the private investigator of film noir.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Mulvey (1975, 1988) exposed and explained the elements which constitute the objectification of women as fetishistic iconic targets. Potter proves similar evidence as she investigates Mimi's death. Mimi, the poor seamstress, had to die in order to stay an icon or a frozen fetish in the poet's memory and the male viewers of the opera. Conventional opera and classical narrative serve to hide women's lives and identities as they forcefully and falsely beautify them. If Mimi would have married the poet, they probably would have had children, and she would have had to labour day and night to sustain her family. But as Mimi finds out, the heroines of these particular narratives do not labour day and night and do not grow old, especially in the context of romantic love. Old age is the female icon's enemy. Hard work brings about old age's marks quickly. She then realises her role (Potter, 1979): "I had to be young,

single and vulnerable with a death that serves their desire." (Citation from the film.) The artificial decoration of women's images is, as mentioned in Chapter 2, emphasised by the classical ballet. The ballet's conventions, as in the arabesque movement, are criticised by Potter as Mimi remembers her death (Potter 1979): "Do you remember being in the room, the attic? Oh Mimi, you were carried away from the attic, yes, in arabesque [...] yes I was that is important, I was in arabesque, frozen in arabesque." Mimi, therefore, dies a symbolic death as she is frozen in arabesque, as many women before and after her did. Their physical and emotional helplessness supported by male heroes turned their lovely faces to death masks. Young and vulnerable they were slowly and gently suppressed through seemingly harmless arabesque. The film is constructed through an elaboration of stills, frozen frames and live actions. The emphasis on stillness contradicts the convention of movement which is attributed to the film medium. The moving image is, therefore, frozen, as it is released for short sequences of running time. As space and time are frozen and released repeatedly, the film depicts a life which was shortened by oppression and sickness brought about by poverty and misery. (Images 14 & 15)

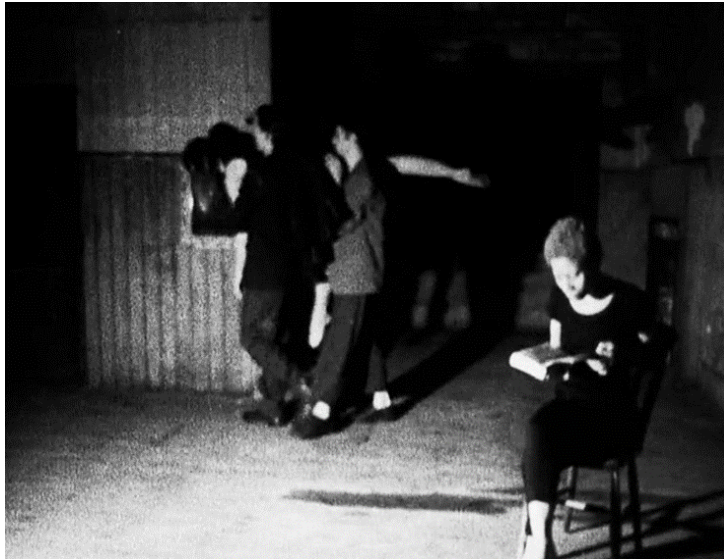Image 14: *Triller* by Sally Potter, 1979

Image 15: *Thriller* by Sally Potter, 1979.
Mimi is carried away frozen in arabesque.

The dance theatre of Pina Bausch explores the subject matter of gender through anti-dogmatic, self-expressive dance. The dance movements and sequences are choreographed into pseudo-theatrical scenes which either deconstruct dance convention or create imaginative alternatives. The grotesque and the absurd are demonstrated with ironic humour as cultural and social patterns are being criticised and transformed. Bausch's work is the subject of the film, *Die Klage Der Kaiserin* (1988). Although Bausch is not a film-maker she was credited as the film director. While the film offers alternative dance forms, it still rests on the border between cine-dance or dance-film as well as a filmed documentation of Bausch's work.

Image 16: *Die Klage der Kaiserin* by Pina Bausch, 1988.

The film language serves the dance as it leads it away from the physical limitations of a live performance to various indoor and outdoor locations. Nature and natural elements are used such as a snowy forest, a rainy day, a field and more. The film shifts the dance to various locations but it does not fully assist or collaborate with it through camera and editing techniques. Yet, the film narrative is nonlinear, uses sequences of repetition as it progresses according to its own logic. The importance of the film in this context is in the demonstration it offers to the absurdity of convention in relation to dance and gender. As such it assists the dance choreography to make its statements. In one of the film's sequences, a woman dressed in a white flowery dress climbs on a man's shoulders and throws herself into the arms of another man. As they both support her, she falls down. Regardless of the men's support, she is softly collapsing on the floor. The action is shot in slow motion and repeated several times. The dance convention originating in the ballet in which women are supported by men in risky physical situations is broken as the men are unable to prevent the woman from falling on the floor. The men dressed in evening suits and the white soft image and dress of the female dancer demonstrate the uselessness of social and cultural behavioural patterns, while the seeming support that the men offer the woman is softly leading to her total collapse.

Another sequence portrays the tango dance showing a close-up of the dancers' high-heeled shoes. Filmed up to the dancers' knees, the dance steps are represented through masculine legs in high heels which seem to avoid gender discrimination. While each dancer tries to push his feet between the legs of his partner, sexual connotations are suggested. The tango is mentioned in Chapter 2 as a sexual dance form which embodies gender discriminations. In this sequence, sexuality is ironically breaking the convention. In another sequence, a female dancer is seen running barefoot on the snowy ground of a forest. Dressed in a pink summer dress, she is running and crying. Thus, the hidden sufferings of the fair female dancer are exposed outside the theatre stage in a brutal scene in which her vulnerability is enforced by Nature. In another sequence, a male ballet dancer is seen during training with his ballet master/teacher as he is willingly submitting to the sufferings which are embodied in the exercises of the ballet's technique. The physical and spiritual world of Bausch is, therefore, traumatic. Her work confronts the faults and the sacrifices associated with dance in relation to gender conventions as they are embodied by contemporary dancers and dance forms.

The work of the author is divided into two interrelated areas: the first is devoted to film and video as an experimental practice and the second is dedicated to the sphere of Mirror Dance as a theoretical concept. The short experimental 16mm film *Sight* (1989) depicts a female protagonist's experience (performed by the author) in the fragile spheres that lead from blindness to sight. The fear of blindness brings about an emotional reaction. The revelation of sight is represented by expressive movements and the contrasts generated by the black and white 16mm footage. The states of

blindness and sight are physical as well as spiritual and they are divided by a fragile liminal bridge made of fear and courage. With love, such as the love for film and dance, one may cross that bridge. (Image 17)

Image 17: *Sight* by Lila Moore, 1989
Photographer: Fenella Greenfield

The concept of Mirror Dance is explored in the video piece entitled *Anima Urbana - The City Spirit* (1987), filmed on Video8 by Fenella Greenfield. The 8mm video format was released in 1984 (Wikipedia). In *Anima Urbana*, camera and editing collaborate with dance movements and performance actions as they form the medium and language of video-dance. The piece is performed by a female protagonist (the author) who portrays Anima, the female spirit of an urban existence. Contrasts made of elements of matter and spirit, darkness and light, and movements in different speeds and locations, are portrayed as they form a restless psychic existence in the streets of London. (Image 17)

The theoretical concept of Mirror Dance encapsulates the various reflections which are created through the interactions between the mediums of film, video, photography, dance and performance. During these interactions, the mediums mirror each other through multiplication, alternation and expansion. Similar to a genetic structure in the process of evolution, change or mutation occurs through interference. In this way, the past is genetically mirrored through the natural order of creative evolutionary mutations. As the mentioned mediums interact, interference occurs and past reflections evolve through new mirrors of reflected forms. The evolutionary process of art forms is demonstrated as a kinetic spiral shape that is moving on, and within, the waves of historic time and space.

Image 17: *Anima Urbana – The City Spirit by Lila Moore*, 1987
Photographer: Fenella Greenfield

Chapter 4
The Spiral's Exterior: Present Conclusions and Future Prospects

On the yellow space of the spiral's exterior, future works can be located. Present conclusions might throw light on this uninhabited space. From a formal perspective, the films discussed include more than one medium in their structures, and investigate the interactions between more than one medium of expression. Therefore, as different structures of expression interact, evolution occurs through interference. In terms of form, in A *Study for Choreography for the Camera*, Deren interferes with the medium of dance as she sends the dancer into the air or space in a physically impossible leap. In the Mirror Dance construct of the experimental 16mm film *Traps – The Prisoner and the Spirit* (1989), a projected film forms a dialogue with a performer. The author interferes with the film medium by setting up a person/performer to confront it during a live performance with the projected film. (Image 18) In terms of narrative and content, interference occurs when in Potter's *Thriller* (1979), Mimi, the film's protagonist, interferes with the classical narrative of film noir and the theatrical, operatic tragedy by questioning her own death in the plot. Broadly, interference seems to be necessary for the evolution of forms and contents in the sphere of experimental filmic artworks.

In the sphere of theory, interference occurs in feminist critique as it interferes with patriarchal ideology. Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* interferes with the patriarchal consciousness of classical narrative films as she exposes its concealed motivations. As patriarchal manipulation was significantly exposed in the 1970s, interference had to be directed to present the causes of women's oppression. In the 1980s these causes can be found in the growing industry of popular culture, and the various branches of the media. Interference can be unleashed through practice, through theory, and by using both. The major role of interference is to catalyse the birth of new forms and definitions in the experimental sphere especially in relation to female imagery and identity. Interference can target mainstream forms, contents and conventions. It can also be activated from within the experimental sphere as self-contained units of interference. As for the search for female imagery and identity, the experimental sphere might be a conceptual field from which to start this journey of discovery. Separated from, and free of, patriarchal conventions or mainstream forms of representation, the space to work is clear and ready. Now you can study yourself, build your own world, image and identity.
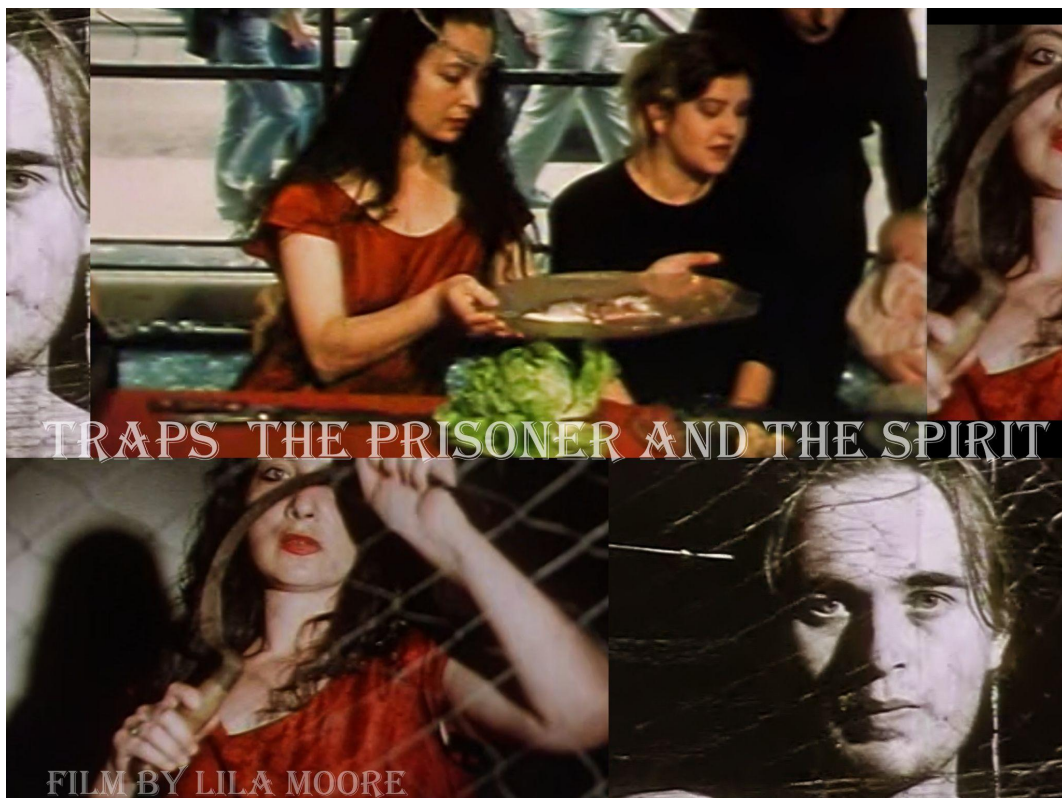

Image 18: *Traps – The Prisoner and the Spirit* by Lila Moore, 1989

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Epilogue

Revisiting my MA essay Spiral and Waves reminded me of the last scene of Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon.* The young man notices that the door is open and enters the house. Looking around the room, he discovers Maya sitting on an armchair, her face and body covered with broken pieces of mirror. She looks dead. But is she dead? Or will she wake up from the trance that possessed her to take her own life? Does the past matter or is the present constant? Maya Deren edited time into units of ritualistic time. It is time that is out of time, the time of ritual consciousness (Moore, 2017). Are we trapped in time? Are we caged by time's deadly grip? Or, can we play with time through myth and ritual and interfere with the conventions of linear time? *Meshes of the Afternoon* is a statement of our beginnings and endings and the cyclic enigma that defies death and ignites hope in everlasting time. The time that the ancient Egyptians deemed sacred, the time of the gods and goddesses; the dream time realm behind the walls of palaeolithic caves, and inside the belly of Aborignal rocks and all around in the material ground of existence. The medium of film has this magical or shamanic power to evoke the liminal border between one reality to another; whilst

dance is the instrument that energises and unleashes that which exists beyond the border of daily Newtonian reality.

The image of the broken pieces of mirror in *Meshes of the Afternoon* exemplifies the initial theoretical concept of Mirror Dance. A Dance made of film and dance through which consciousness explodes into endless streams of fragments reflecting numerous realities and states of mind. The streams flow into a spiral formation like a galaxy that continues to expand and circulate in a movement that unifies past, present and future into an evolving and mutating vision of art and consciousness. Celuloide film has been replaced by digital mediums and the performers are constantly replaced as well not only by new generations of humans but also by digital cyborgs, virtual and AI entities. Mirror Dance recalls the notion of choreianous, the dances of the mind, which I formulated as a result of making films and ritualistic performances dubbed as Networked Rites in cyberspace (Moore, 2018). The word choreianous combines the Greek words *circular dance* and *nous*. It implies noetic motion, dance choreography that manifests in a designated field and a shared hypercortex.

> It is a guiding principle and proposed neoteric art form that determines the practice of Networked Rites and of dance that happens in an augmented realm beyond the physical brain and body though linked with them in some way. Interestingly, Shanon emphasizes the dance of the mind during ayahuasca inebriation and as cognitive psychologist attempts to illustrate it. In his study, he integrates both mind and brain in the definition of this mode of dance, stating that the intoxication is the result of brain activity and what transpires is the result of the dance of the mind (Shanon, 2002, chapter 22, section 11).
> (Moore, 2018, p. 126)

The notions of interference and mutation discussed in the thesis have continued to stimulate my comprehension of evolution in art forms and consciousness. I returned to the idea of mutation in a depiction of the artist-shaman lab (Moore, 2018, p.121):

> When the field and site of the artist's lab is purposely assigned for the exploration of consciousness, which integrates her own subjective mind, the navigation and exercise of consciousness, including the technological instruments and the physical and psychic experience involved, are all part of the experimentation and outcome. Such subjective experiments involve hypothetical and metaphoric components and aesthetics that recall the archaic alchemists' labs where transmutation in matter and nature reflected transformations in the alchemist's consciousness.

> Early in my development as an artist, I halted my attempts to become a painter, realizing that a different medium would be more suitable to possess an ineffable dimension that seems invisible and separate though coincides with

the visible ordinary experience of the world. Although I was not thinking of conventional film-making, the notion of invisible film-like screens emerged as an aesthetic option and sensibility.

Moving through film-like screens and mirror dances, we can always return to the young woman seated on the armchair, who one afternoon got caught in the meshes of consciousness and lost her life for the sake of love and art.