

USE OF TIME

The structure in my films existed before I began talking about it. The structure is intuitive in conception. Analysis, abstraction, and my talking about it comes later. That is why my films are not formalist; that is, they do not strictly adhere to an *a priori* rule of form, but instead, spring from my intuitive gut experiences and so are phenomenological. The form is directly determined by the content. A lot of words. My films begin in what I call "feeling images," an inseparable unity of emotion and image of thought/idea/image and internal bodily states of excitement.

I am going to talk about time and imaging in some of my films: how they were created (what gave rise to the image language that became screen language) and how they differ from each other in time structure and image content. I will talk about the following films: *I WAS/I AM* (1973) which combines real time and fantasy time; "*X*" (1974) which is a ritual naming film based on subverted time; *Menses* (1974) a satire of the Walt Disney type movie ritual of menstruation; and *Dyketaitics*, which can be seen as erotic time.

Film is a projection of still pictures of images or non-images (color or non-color) usually at the standard projection time of twenty-four of these still pictures per second. So from the beginning, film is both illusion (the illusion of movement from the rapid succession of image or non-image) and "reality" (the progression of the celluloid strip through the projection system). Within this context the experience of time in *I WAS/I AM* is my attempt to combine "real" time and fantasy time. I believe these usually separated experiences are part of the same life experience. If we fantasize, as we all do, if we remember past and project future during the continual present, as we all do, we are experiencing real time which is composed of all this simultaneous imaging.

Tempo, or the ratio of these projected stills, is another variable the filmmaker constructs with the continuous present of the projection. In this first 16mm film I attempted to build film scores of increasing and decreasing intensities by image chain links of additions or deletions. The central image of the chain is two image frames, the neighboring image is four, the central image repeated is three, the neighbor, eight, and so on in a time-increasing construction within the film.

I WAS/I AM was inspired and influenced by the great work of the mother of American poetic film, *Meshes in the Afternoon*, by Maya Deren. Deren writes of simultaneous time as a unique and poetic experiencing in her small but comprehensive booklet, *An Anagram of Art and Ideas*. Deren's elucidation of the poetic film which

IN WOMEN'S CINEMA

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makes use of simultaneous time is excellent and the basis of much of my own work. I will give you her words on the poetic film. It is a transcription of that state of being where the intention or "intensification is carried out not by action but by the illumination of that moment." The illumination of the moment (the continuous present) means the film's construct is vertical rather than horizontal. It is a poetic construct of developing moments each one held together by an emotion or meaning they have in common rather than logical action. I talk about these images as feeling-images, one calls or recalls another, until a great pyramid is built of a particular feeling or an elucidation of the multi-dimensions of that feeling, that emotion state. I think Deren and I are talking about the same thing. She says, it is "the logic of central emotion or idea that attracts to itself disparate images which contain the central core they have in common. Film is essentially a montage and therefore by nature a poetic medium."

We have a long and continuing tradition of great women poets. It surprises me then that women's cinema in many cases continues and copies the linear, narrative left brain dramatization of the novel, of the Hollywood and international entertainment film. However, there are women filmmakers who work in the short, lyric genre of illuminated moments: Gunvor Nelson, Barbara Linkievitch, and Joyce Wieland, to mention a few.

This leads us into another area, the scientific study of the different hemispheric centers of the brain. The left is rational, linear, analytical, and related to speech and words. The right is the center of artistic, musical and spatial perception and I might add, the hemisphere that allows us to experience simultaneous and continuous time. Feminist phenomenology or gut level experiencing stems from right brain use: the nonverbal knowledge of intuition, feeling and imaging. I suggest that the right hemisphere is dominant in forming the image clusters in my films and in my dreams. In *Psychosynthesis* (1975) I use the holistic right brain for dream imagery and time structure. Some of the images are from deep sleep dreams, others from waking dreams or dream-like states of consciousness.

Presently I am attempting to understand the time structure of dreams and I think I can only talk here about my dreams. The time in my dreams seems to be time that can jump back and forth into past and future, time that is not chronologically sequential but emotionally, or symbolically sequential, much like the illuminated moments held together by emotional integrity. One scene may seem totally unrelated to another but in

fact is emotionally related and so time-related if we can enlarge the word 'time' to encompass a feeling image that connects with other feeling images and is a particular way of experiencing the world.

A recent dream I had is about this lecture as well as about teaching me a new characteristic of dreams: that I am able to control part of my dream by changing it much like the control an editor has at her editing bench.

The Gertrude Stein dream:

The long run to learn a foreign language from Gertrude Stein.

I was aware of every detail and it seemed to be taking forever.

So that I willfully changed the dream at one point in the seemingly endless run

To the classroom where I was late, had missed the last six lessons and knew

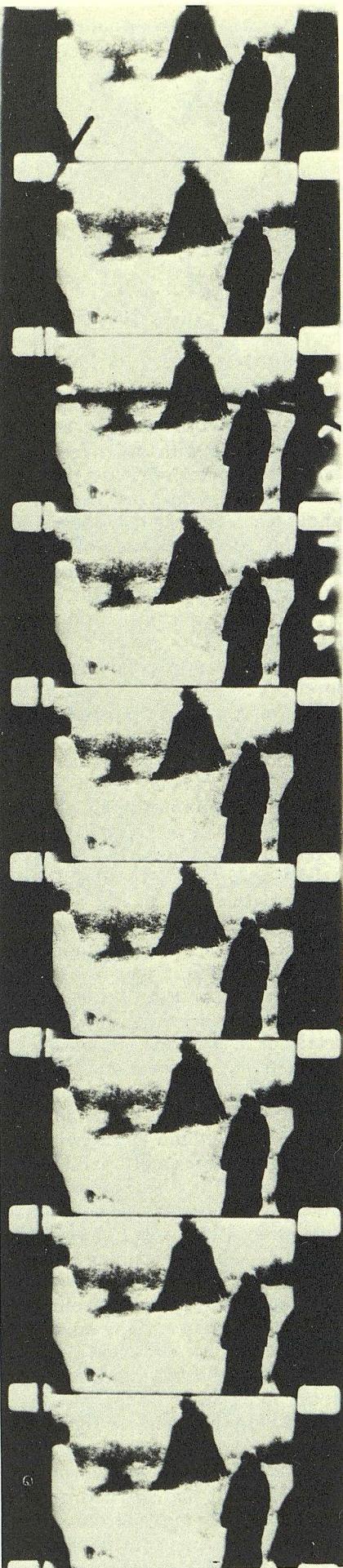
I wouldn't be able to pass the test.

Once at class we put all the words with similarities together

Each group was a different crayon color.

We learned the words by understanding distances creates by differences.

Analyzing this dream is a lot like analyzing the time structure of film. I was in a dream state of clocktime that went on and on in the running to the classroom. The time was extended like when I jog and notice the details of the surrounding bushes, rocks, sand patterns, leaves, trash, whatever one passes on the track or on the street during a run. Detail upon detail. How long is running time? As long as the details. Eventually detail notation became tedium and I switched purposefully to the classroom, to the emotional state from exasperation and frustration with clocktime to a new scene entirely but linked to the other by the emotional time of anxiety and frustration. I was late. I had missed a lot (probably because I was so busy running and noting the outer, external world) and would fail the test of understanding. But once there in the new environment I became interested in the class lesson and my anxiety disappeared with my receptive attitude. I learned about ordering and structuring of words. I think the emotional time is a recognition of the integration of my left brain analytic thinking process with the feeling or right brain state of the dream. I am engrossed, happy, content in absorbing structural information about linear words. (In emotional time one might say time had stopped because of concentration.) This dream then moved from a frustration with detailed chronological time to a blissful integration of intellectual inspiration that seemed chronologically timeless.



Gertrude Stein continually and continuously writes about time, although she was not fond of film as she knew it:

I myself never go to the cinema or hardly ever practically never and the cinema has never read my work or hardly ever. The fact remains that there is the same impulse to solve the problem of time in relation to emotion and the relation of the scene to the emotion of the audience in the one case as in the other.

In Stein's class we learned to differentiate by association which is much like Maya Deren writing that it is the "logic of central emotion that attracts disparate images." In Stein's class we learned the words by the distances between them.

When one thinks of Stein's paragraphs where the same words are used in different order from sentence to sentence the words have a dissimilar spatial relationship to one another, a different distance, a different time sequence. So that all the words colored orange in one paragraph—all the same word—will have a unique meaning depending on the spatial/time distance they have from one another, simply, their place in the sentence changes their meaning. Distance, a system of measurement, in this case is a way of looking at language as a construction of time notation.

Stein again: "I said in *Lucy Church Amiably* that women and children change; I said if men have not changed, women and children have." I love to think of her writing in the continuous present directly in the outdoors being surrounded by the thing one is writing about at the time one is writing (editing the emotion surrounded by celluloid images of emotional association, being in the emotional time one is when one is editing). She wrote *Lucy Church Amiably* wholly to the sound of streams and waterfalls. I find that exciting, inspiring, revolutionary. Living, fluid, changing energy streams provoke and carry the words of caretaker woman, our mother Stein. She wrote every day. Her present was in writing. She waited for the moment when she would be full of readiness to write and what she wrote came out of fullness as an overflowing. A waterfall.

"X" is a ritualistic self-naming film. Ritualistic because naming is a repetitive process. We say over and over again who we are. The more self-understanding the more inclusive our definition is. As we keep changing our naming changes. We are new, continually giving birth to ourselves, so newly recognized awarenesses of who we are give impetus for new naming forms be it film, a personal documentary of the evolving self, or the self-portraits of the painter that continue throughout her painting life.

In "X" the naming of myself at a low point of depression was a form of rebirthing myself. Everything had fallen away. I wrote in my journal several declarative statements: This is my exhibitionism; This is my anger; This is my pain; This is my transportation; These are the children I'm happy not to have...and with each sentence I wrote the image that came to be the emotional signifier of the dry word. The chain break for exhibitionism because of my interest in film and my revolt against the male film establishment (Anthony Quinn breaking the fake chain in *La Strada*); the tear crying pain for the great Dryer's *Jeanne D'Arc* where pain filled the screaming screen near future time but my time was my sister's time and it was her wash on the line, her dish

towels and baby diapers, my pain-her pain-our pain.

"X" is a metronome of subverted time: time that is rhythmically alternated, recapitulated, variated, retrogressed. A baroque ritualistic naming chant that pounds again and again with image and sound making a self-determined statement out of despair. I will, I will, I will be. In spite of, in spite of, in spite of. By the perception of repetitions the viewer makes film intelligible. Repetitions are identifiable signs of style, clues as to the way an artist sees, and even if the repetitions are convoluted and ambiguous with superimpositions and layers of filmic texture they are by their very nature based in time and represent the unique manner the artist plays and replays her/his visual present/past experience/memory imagery.

Ritual time is universal time, repeated time, sequential time. Time of repeated gestures of the same significance. Time that seems to stand still as when one embraces a lover. There are rituals of initiation, transcendence, rites of passage. There are emotional rituals of openness and trust, vows, the rituals of relationships.

Menses is a ritual too, a home-made one, but it is also a satire on the Walt Disney film which became for many of us the junior high school puberty rite of our culture, the time when we were shuttled off as prepubescent adolescent girls to the closed-off walks of a hushed and secret closet auditorium. In the films shown then it was lace and daisies and muted whispers that surrounded the flow. What a farce. To carry a rag between one's legs, to stuff cotton cylinders into a private perfect body opening, to say it was a secret and precious and distinguishing. The lie. The lie. The lie. The lie of the screen, the lie of Modess Incorporated propaganda. I'd make my own film combating from the other side. It was no fun. It was discomfort. It was womanly and so was talking about it and screaming and playing and boasting. It was no secret. It could be filmed in consumer heartland, Payless Drugstore; it could be exhibitionist and free and wild—nude women dripping blood in Tilden Park high over the intellectual playground of the state, Cal Berkeley. It could be collective, each woman planning her own interpretation of rage, chagrin, humor, pathos, bathos—whatever menses meant to her within the overall satiric and painted nature of film. And I could shape and form and find the unifier, the pubic triangle and the egg, red. And each of the women was a part of me and it was not necessary that my particular body and face be screen present. They acted out for me, for them, the personal expression of one bodily female function. The color Brecht, the humor Barbara.

One aspect of the ritual of relationship is the ritual of sexual activity or erotic time. Sexual activity is repeated

gestures, repeated responses. Surely there are the wonderful and innovative creations, experiments with each new lover and findings between old lovers if we are lucky, but there is the overform of sameness and the universality of time when the universe stops and we are centered in the still circle; as Eliot said, that's where the dance is. *Dyketactics* is erotic time; it is not made with the Freudian traditional belief that the sublimation of erotic energy into creative psychological pursuits is the only hope of a civilized society. This belief is apparently proven wrong by the secularly repressive, capitalistic, obsessive, chauvinistically oppressive world we know. *Dyketactics* is the free and joyful expression of erotic energy directly. Art is directly sexual; sex is directly art. The commercial length erotic time was edited kinesetically; by that I mean the images which are feeling images at the gut level were edited to touch: literally images of touching, eating, cleaning, washing, digging, climbing, stroking, licking, bathing, butting, hugging, yum. Textural editing. Feel it. Feels good. A lesbian commercial.

Finally, women's time for me, for Stein, for Maya Deren, or Mary Daly writing in a recent issue of *Quest, a Feminist Quarterly*, is in the continual present:

Feminist consciousness is experienced by a significant number of women as ontological becoming, that is, being. This process requires existential courage to be and to see, which is both revolutionary and revelatory, revealing our participation in ultimate reality as Verb, as intransitive verb.

Time for women is making, becoming, being. My films when projected exist in the present as continuous time, simultaneous time as living time as when I saw the celluloid strip in the editing bench in the flickering light of the moviescope. They are still present for me because they evoke the change we feminist women experience in our continual becoming in the difficult and oppressive society that environs us.

Barbara Hammer. Film strips from *The Great Goddess*.

This article was originally presented as a lecture at the San Francisco Art Institute, July 30, 1975.

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