'Give me a body then...': (In)corporated Thinking in the Cinema of Menken, Deren, and Arledge

Rebecca A. Sheehan, California State University, Fullerton

Abstract

For Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze, the human body is essential to cinema's ability to advance thought, but the American avant-garde filmmakers Marie Menken, Maya Deren, and Sara Kathryn Arledge go much further in locating thought in embodiment rather than beyond it, even as their films are generally absent from Cavell's and Deleuze's writings. For instance, as Menken's hand-held camera emanates with the movements of her body, her *fidgetiness* expands upon the *metaphysical restlessness* Cavell describes as essential to thought. Menken's camera's immersion in her bodily movements (rather than standing apart from them) joins her work with Deren's Bergson-inspired films as, for instance, the context of outer space in *Very Eye of Night* (1952) is impossible to stand outside of or apart from, analogous to Bergson's notion of the body *in* the stream. Arledge's *Introspection* similarly situates the body where what T.E. Hulme might describe as a 'complex sense of varying directions of forces' replaces a sense of distanced sight. While Deleuze pronounces, 'Give me a body then… The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking...' and turns to Antonioni's, Warhol's, and Cassavetes' *tired* and *waiting* bodies as exemplary, I argue, it is Menken's, Deren's, and Arledge's dancing, fidgety bodies that perform Deleuze's epiphany.

Film-philosophers have long struggled to explain the relationship between cinema, thought, and the body. From Stanley Cavell's Emersonian-inspired writings that lean on classical Hollywood cinema to Gilles Deleuze's Bergson-inspired writings that lean primarily on the Post-War Art House, philosophers have reframed for cinema the age-old problems of skepticism, especially the extent to which a body is *at once* inside and outside of the world it views. For instance, Deleuze conceives of cinema as a 'membrane which puts an outside and an inside in contact',[1] while, for Cavell, the camera's 'implication'[2] reminds us of the ways

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[1] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 206.
[2] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 126–27.

in which we are endlessly limited from seeing ourselves *in* the world, and thus endlessly distanced from that world (hence that cinema is a 'moving image of skepticism').[3] Deleuze and Cavell share a common belief, call it a fantasy, that cinema might be able to reconcile the divide between subject and world, putting to rest the worries of skepticism by seizing cinema's ability to stage encounters with the world from which, at the same time, the camera's very distance, its purported objectivity, reminds us, we stand apart. Compellingly, they share this belief with a number of central figures of the American avant-garde. Stan Brakhage, for instance, employs cinema to overcome limitations he perceives of his own body as he wonders in *Metaphors on Vision* how many shades of green are visible to a baby crawling through grass before learning the word 'green',[4] attempting to answer this question in *Scenes from Under Childhood*, or when he fixates on death as, per Ludwig Wittgenstein, a limit that is not lived through,[5] in films like *The Dead* (1960) and *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* (1971), or where he contemplates the limits of his gendered body in films like *Loving* (1957) and *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959). Brakhage's films are intent on making present an everyday world to which he has assumed an embodied absence, a pre-ordained distance. In a similar vein but with a structuralist approach, Hollis Frampton imagines cinema overcoming the distance and difference between word and world, where

> we may come to visualize an intellectual space in which the systems of words and images will both, as Jonas Mekas once said of semiology, 'seem like half of something', a universe in which image and word, each resolving the contradictions inherent in the other, will constitute a system of consciousness.[6]

Andy Warhol's cinema has been similarly theorized by Steven Shaviro and others as aimed at realizing a closed distance between a body and its image. As Shaviro argues, Warhol treats cinema as a machine that 'is already immanent to the world, rather than a device standing at the transcendental threshold of the world, and mediating our perceptions and representations of it'.[7]

Contrary to thinking of cinema as an apparatus to overcome the body's pre-ordained distance from the world it nevertheless inhabits, in diverse but importantly overlapping ways, the cinema of Marie Menken, Maya Deren, and Sara Kathryn Arledge, each locate thought *in* embodiment rather than *beyond* it. As I will show, this is a quality that unites their cinema while critically distinguishing it from their

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[3] Ivi, p. 188.

[4] Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, ed. by P. Adams Sitney (New York: Film Culture Inc., 1963), unpaginated.

[5] See *Metaphors on Vision* (unpaginated) where Brakhage cites Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.4311, 'Death is not an event of life, we do not live to experience death…'.

[6] Hollis Frampton, *Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video, Texts 1968-1980* (Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), p. 10.

[7] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 214–15.

male avant-garde successors whose works, having garnered more critical and scholarly attention, have come to define the intersections between avant-garde cinema and philosophy. Indeed, even as this group of 1940s female filmmakers proved influential on the next generation of male American avant-garde filmmakers (Brakhage, Warhol, Frampton, etc.), the philosophy of embodiment their cinema collectively advances seems at the very least to have been overlooked if not critically misunderstood by that influential generation. Re-examining Menken, Deren, and Arledge, in the context of film-philosophies of embodiment (even as many of those have shaped and been shaped by their male avant-garde successors) has the potential to shift the very philosophical foundations of skepticism-fueled experiments like those of Brakhage, Frampton, and Warhol, that use cinema to overcome various perceived divides between the embodied subject and the world. While numerous films and filmmakers have been put to the service of film-philosophy's exploration of the relationship between cinema, thought, and the body, glaringly absent from these discussions have been these three filmmakers whose films, especially when taken as a whole, focus so intently on the interfaces between the body and cinema. While Menken's cinematography, or what Sitney has called her 'somatic camera',[8] constantly resonates with the movement of her own body, from a different but related angle, the *cine-dance* experiments of Deren and Arledge make the cinematic apparatus constantly dependent upon and emergent from the movement and shape of the human bodies it represents. That both Menken's camerawork and Deren's and Arledge's cinematography and editing *begins* by locating thought *in* embodiment rather than beyond it raises paradigm-shifting questions for philosophers following Deleuze and Cavell that contemplate cinema's thinking through the body more broadly.

The embodied nature of the cinema of these three filmmakers is unsurprising given the extent to which in the at times scant critical writings on them, descriptions of their films are intertwined with descriptions of their own bodies. In fact, the attention to the bodies of Deren and Menken included in everything from anecdotes to some of the only serious analysis and descriptions we have of a number of their works, is absolutely unmatched when it comes to the bodies of their male counterparts. In his obituary for Menken and Willard Maas (who died four days after his wife) in *The Village Voice*, January 14, 1971, Jonas Mekas writes of Menken, 'There was a very lyrical soul behind that huge and very often sad bulk of a woman, and she put all that soul into her work [...]. Marie's films were her flower garden [...] they were all very colorful and sweet and perfect, and not too bulky [...]',[9] a description with which Scott MacDonald prefaces what

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[8] P. Adams Sitney, *Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 23. Sitney opines that the description of the '[...] walking camera or the somatic camera might more vividly convey the identification of the mobile frame of the ultimately projected image with the movements of the filmmaker'.

[9] Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema*, *1959-1971*, 2nd edn (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 419.

would become the first major description of her work in avant-garde scholarship (as MacDonald himself notes) where it serves as the first epigraph to the section 'Marie Menken: *Glimpse of the Garden*', in *The Garden in the Machine*.[10] Indeed, Stan Brakhage frequently describes Menken's body in the same breath as he does her work. In a talk delivered in 1992 at the Innis Film Society, he prepares the audience for a screening of *Glimpse of the Garden* (1957) by saying that Menken gets '[...] close up on these little flowers that are really overlookable as she must have felt. She who was so large, but whom the man she really loved saw around her so often (sic), or overlooked her, as we say'.[11] Brakhage begins his chapter on Marie Menken in *Film at Wit's End*, one of the first scholarly considerations of her work, with this description, 'When I arrived at the apartment, Marie was there. She was an enormous woman, easily six feet, two inches tall, with broad and solid shoulders, a surprisingly slim waist and stout but shapely legs, like a dancer's'.[12] When Brakhage describes Menken's 'free, swinging, swooping hand-held' shots, which he credits with 'liberat[ing] a lot of independent filmmakers from the idea that had been so powerful up to then, that we have to imitate the Hollywood dolly shot, without the dollies', every time he does so he also includes a description of her body. About the context for the camera movement in *Visual Variations on Noguchi* (1945), Brakhage writes, with an impressive degree of detail for someone who wasn't actually there,

> So she barreled into Noguchi's studio with as big a noise as possible and as expansive a swinging of the camera, which must have practically disappeared in the enclosure of her large, cupped hands, just as Noguchi's sculptures probably seemed quite fragile as she danced among them, turning them this way and that on film.[13]

Writing about *Bagatelle for Willard Maas* (1961), for the filming of which Brakhage was actually present, he writes of accompanying Menken to Versailles, 'Imagine this large Lithuanian woman hurling herself into the air with her little, obviously amateur camera in hand, on the golden gates of Versailles'.[14] Thus, just as he fantasizes a way for cinema to deliver him beyond the limits of his own body, Brakhage fantasizes that Menken is attempting to do the same (while ascribing so many limitations to her body), but through these descriptions he ironically

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[10] Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films About Place* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2001), p. 54. MacDonald begins his section on Menken by noting, 'As of 1999 probably no woman who has had as significant an impact on American cinema as Marie Menken remains as little celebrated. Except for several of her colleagues of the 1950s and 1960s — Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, and P. Adams Sitney — virtually no one has been interested in assessing her films and their impact on others; and only Brakhage has written as much as a chapter on Menken'.

[11] 'Stan Brakhage on Marie Menken', *Film Culture*, 78 (Summer 1994), 1–9, (p. 8).

[12] Brakhage, *Film at Wit's End* (Kingston, NY: Documentext McPherson and Company, 1989), p. 33.

[13] Ivi, p. 38.

[14] Ivi, p. 46.

makes her body as immanent to her cinema as she understood it to be (without, I will argue, registering it as the hindrance Brakhage did). Brakhage similarly links Maya Deren's cinema with her embodiment in his chapter on her in the same volume, 'Maya herself possessed a rare intensity [...] I've seen big brawny men — Irish writers or someone just out of the pen — arrive at Maya's and become like terrified small children [...]. Not only because she was fierce, but because she was also incredibly sexy. Ah! Just to shake hands with her was arousing!'.[15] Of course, by placing her own body, often as a choreographed dancer, into her films, it remains foregrounded in Deren's cinema not as an obstacle but as part of the means of cinematic expression itself, similarly to the way the body features in films of another pioneer in cine-dance, Sara Kathryn Arledge, whose work has received considerably less attention than Menken's and Deren's but who I include in this article for the innovative ways in which she experiments with collapsing the distance between the body and cinema. Arledge's work between figuration and abstraction, painting and experimental cinema almost always meditates on the body but, similarly to the reception history of Deren and Menken, her work is often entangled in her biography, one which includes mental illness and institutionalization. Writing about the Armory Center for the Arts' recent retrospective of Arledge's work entitled *Serene for a Moment*, critic Jessica Simmons is right to note, 'While [...] personal fractures, traceable via the exhibition's biographical framing are illuminating, they are also unnecessary. All too often a woman artist's biographical narrative governs the discourse surrounding her work, tainting the ground for more critical readings'.[16]

The 'Metaphysical Restlessness' of Menken's Camera

In a register completely contrary to Brakhage's anxiety about the bodily limits of his experience and his use of cinema to overcome those, Menken's willingness to affirm her presence in her cinema inscribes her own means of visual and haptic perception into her filmmaking. As Melissa Ragona explains in reference to Brakhage's acknowledgment of the revolutionary nature of Menken breaking free from Hollywood's dolly shots, 'The smooth pan that implied the invisibility of the camera, a seamlessness without human error, was a norm that Menken challenged [...]'.[17] At the time Menken made her *Notebook* films, the inscription of the camera (and the embodiment of the person holding it) was as unorthodox to experimental filmmaking as it was to Hollywood, as P. Adams Sitney notes in

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[15] Ivi, p. 102.

[16] Jessica Simons, 'Sara Kathryn Arledge at the Armory Center for the Arts', *Contemporary Art Review.la*, 21 February 2019, <https://contemporaryartreview.la/sara-kathryn-arledge-at-the-armory-center-for-the-arts/> [accessed 30 October 2019].

[17] Melissa Ragona, 'Swing and Sway: Marie Menken's Filmic Events', in *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks,* ed. by Robin Blaetz (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 20–44 (p. 20).

Visionary Film, where he examines Menken's objections to a 'straight-forward observational film', the kind that other lyrical filmmakers (like Brakhage and Mekas) had made vogue. Sitney refers to the instance where Menken forces nature's hand in *Rain Drops* (1963) (from *Notebook*) by shaking a branch she's filming so that the rain drops fall from it.[18] Whereas Brakhage's films explore the everyday or what Cavell might have called the 'missable' from the standpoint of overcoming an inherent distance between body and world, transgressing the limitations of embodied experience and knowledge, Menken's cinema, by contrast, celebrates the body's mediation of the everyday world, refusing to acknowledge the premise of the problem skepticism poses about the unreachable/unknowable nature of a world beyond the subject. Her images as they 'swing and sway', are a constant testament to the embodied interface between subject and world. In Menken's cinema, there is an important coincidence between the significance of the 'ordinary' as the overlooked material of the everyday (e.g. the raindrop), the stuff of her notebook, and the material and formal *means* of cinema that involve the often un-pictured or undetected body of the cameraperson. This coincident foregrounding of both previously overlooked everyday images and the often-overlooked cameraperson underscores Menken's refusal to even raise the questions of absence with which skepticism begins; in her cinema, she is always already in the world and that world is always already in rather than beyond the embodied perspective of her camera. Where Brakhage reflects upon the limits of his embodied perception, the *problem* of the body as either interferingly asserting itself *between* the subject's mind and the world out there (as in the eyes that can only see certain shades of green limited by knowing the word for green), Menken's camerawork embraces the infinite potential (whether clumsy or graceful, planned or incidental) of encounters registered by the movements of her camera. This embrace of entanglement between subjective vision and world is nowhere as evident as it is in the sequence of Menken's *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* (1958-1961) in which the geometric designs of Spanish tiles take on the appearance of graphic animation, seeming to dance on their own. That this animation is produced by Menken's embodied camera and its interface with these designs and not through the editing that might have been done if this were a Hans Richter or Oskar Fischinger film, speaks to the degree to which Menken has enveloped her body in the production of images rather than attempting to extract its presence. If, as Cavell claims, cinema offers encounters with the world that might overcome skepticism — where Cavell turns, for instance, to Fred Astaire's (extra) ordinary footwork on a train platform as a demonstration of cinema making visible the missable — [19] Menken's hand-held camerawork makes such encounters more immediate through embracing contingencies that

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[18] Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, 3rd edn (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 160.
[19] Cavell, 'Something Out of the Ordinary', in *Cavell on Film*, ed. by William Rothman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), pp. 238–39.

are ever-emergent between the world and both the filmmaker and spectator. In this way, we might argue that Menken falls within the philosophical purview of what Richard Rorty called philosophers and poets who 'recognize contingency' rather than trying to transcend it, invested in a 'truth', or a relation to the world that is *made* rather than *found*.[20] Brakhage's Romantic leanings makes his cinema inherently strive for something *beyond* the body, whereas Menken's cinema is intent on the creation (rather than discovery) of embodied experiences in the world.

In his essay, 'What Photography Calls Thinking', Cavell examines what he calls the 'camera's knowledge of the metaphysical restlessness of the live body at rest' by turning to a scene in Frank Capra's *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) where the main character, Longfellow Deeds, appeals to 'the concept of thinking', 'the condition that causes universal fidgetiness' when he asserts that 'Everyone does silly things when they think'.[21] Cavell reads this scene in the context of Emerson's 'Behavior' essay, which he sees as 'an effort to return the mind to the living body',[22] arguing that

> [...] while thinking is no longer secured by the mind's declaration of its presence to itself [Decartes' *cogito ergo sum*], it is now to be secured by the presence of the live human body to the camera, in particular by the presence of the body's apparently least intelligent property, its fidgetiness, its metaphysical restlessness. In Descartes, the proof of thinking was that it cannot doubt itself, after Emerson the proof of thinking is that it cannot be concealed.[23]

There is a palpable 'metaphysical restlessness' of the kind Cavell describes in *Mr. Deeds'* courtroom scene in Menken's embodied camera movements, the quick pans and tilts that refigure Noguchi's sculptures in *Visual Variations*, or the camera's flighty brush over the flowers in *Glimpses of the Garden*, what we might call their Cartesian assertions of the body's insistent presence. For Menken, the presence of the body is not 'to the camera', but as a premise for the camera's very presence, thus the title of *Glimpses of the Garden* is appropriately analogous to her own perceptual acts. Here, the declaration of body's presence refutes that it could have ever been absent. Cavell's description of Mr. Deeds 'taking on the proof of his own existence, as if against its denial by the world',[24] suggests the metaphysical stakes of Menken's hand-held camerawork: the absence of a picture of the filmmaker's body in the film implying the world's denial of the subject and Menken's swinging and swaying, the persistent immanence of her hand to the camera's motions, as always already present as 'the proof' of her 'existence'.

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[20] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 25–27.

[21] Cavell, 'What Photography Calls Thinking', in *Cavell on Film,* p. 127.

[22] Ibidem.

[23] Ivi, p. 130.

[24] Ivi, p. 128.

Cavell argues that the camera plays a key role in the 'course of Deeds' lecture to the court, each time [it] follows his attention to a person's body's motion, [and] that person's reflex is shown to be an attempt to hide the motion'.[25] Here, for Cavell, the camera 'reveals and records […]' our knowledge of something 'fundamental to our existence which we resist'.[26] The camera is able to spotlight our least significant movements, fidgeting and our obliviousness to it or our oversight which suggests for Cavell our 'obliviousness to our existence',[27] an oversight whose possibility Menken's camera denies through an 'Emersonian proof of […] existence […] a perpetual visibility of the self'.[28]

If Menken's camera performs this 'perpetual visibility', redeeming the motions Hollywood cinema with its obsession with smooth dolly shots might cut, motions like those in *Mr. Deeds* that are represented as the 'silly things we do when we think', it is also performing Emersonian's 'aversive self' through recovering what society deems unimportant, resisting conformity by making visible and important the idiosyncrasies of the self. Emerson's agenda in his 'Behavior' essay, which Cavell describes as 'return[ing] the mind to the living body',[29] and the social aversions and non-conformity that blossom philosophically from a cinema like Menken's (wherein the mind has never departed the body) find an important correlation in the work of two philosophers who also suggest the ways in which Menken, Deren, and Arledge might reshape the foundations of film-philosophy. First, Cavell's Emersonian reading of *Mr. Deeds* bears an important relationship to Deleuze's discussion of the role of the body in the transition between what he calls cinema's *action-image* and the *time-image*, as the latter disrupts the former's conformity to the logic of movement and time. Second, the role of the body in Deleuze's formulation of the *time-image* borrows heavily from Henri Bergson's interest in recovering 'life', and 'vital phenomena' from the intellect's 'mechanistic theories' and its interest in matter, in other words, of overcoming a perceived distance between body and thinking, philosophies that directly inspired Maya Deren through her study of the English poet and critic T.E. Hulme. When Deleuze writes, 'Give me a body then […]', he notes that this is '[…] a formula of philosophical reversal. The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life'.[30] Menken's (and Deren's) work *plunge* us into the body in ways that celebrate that it was never an obstacle but the means to achieving what Hulme might call 'intuitive experience', as I discuss later. Thus, just as Menken poses a potential revision to Cavell's premise of cinema's

[25] Ivi, p. 131.
[26] Ibidem.
[27] Ibidem.
[28] Ibidem.
[29] Ivi, p. 127.
[30] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 189.

philosophy in skepticism (the distance between subject and world), here, we see another potential for philosophical revision. What Deleuze calls the 'plunge' into the body is precisely what distinguishes Menken's lyrical celebration of her embodied presence from Brakhage's desire to use film as a means of overcoming his body. Since the body locates the sensori-motor logic of the *movement-image* for Deleuze, it is unsurprising that the body features so largely in the emergence of the *time-image*, particularly the 'tired' and 'waiting' body, such as those Deleuze identifies in Michelangelo Antonioni's films or the 'everyday body' of Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) and *Eat* (1963).[31] To these 'attitudes' of the body Deleuze enumerates, Menken's films suggest one more; the body in motion or the dancing body, a body which might better accomplish a sense in which the body is 'no longer an intermediary', or an 'obstacle', descriptions Deleuze uses to describe what he sees as a 'new direction' in cinema. In fact, Deleuze claims this 'new' cinema as the 'first to mount the camera on an everyday body',[32] but from his descriptions of Antonioni, Warhol, and Cassavetes (where he sees the everyday 'gest' reasserting the body), it is evident that, in these instances he chooses, the camera stands *apart* from the bodies it films, even as it meditates upon what these bodies are doing between eventful or 'meaningful' actions that might be the only pictures of them previously shown in a mainstream film. Indeed, Menken goes beyond what the filmmakers Deleuze cites do by literally 'mount[ing] the camera on an everyday body', through her handheld work.

The fact that dance's intentionality is present-oriented rather than future-oriented and thus with it the body typically subjected to the logic of the *action-image*, is suspended *in-between*, moving for the sake of moving rather than moving for the sake of driving the plot, revealing what happens *next*, makes Menken's dancing camera movements ideal for demonstrating the new cinema of the *time-image* that Deleuze instead draws upon other examples culled from 'experimental cinema' to locate. As with Cavell's argument that *Mr. Deeds* uses cinema to attune us to the body (and its fidgetiness which like Deleuze's tired or waiting bodies, is an in-between state that an efficiently event-based narrative cinema might otherwise overlook, cut, or ignore) as 'proof of his existence, as if against its denial by the world',[33] where Menken's cinema obliterates the very premise of this denial (through the persistence of her fidgety body that was never absent from her cinema), we see here that Menken similarly eliminates the very premise of Deleuze's 'formula of philosophical reversal',[34] because her cinema does not propose a possibility for the body to have ever been separate from cinema or from its thinking, something into which Deleuze imagines a 'plunge'.[35]

[31] Ivi, p. 191.
[32] Ivi, 189.
[33] Cavell, 'What Photography Calls Thinking', p. 128.
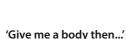[34] Deleuze, p. 189.
[35] Ibidem.

It is interesting that Deleuze doesn't examine filmmakers like Menken who employ hand-held and thus *embodied* cameras in the context of the 'new direction'[36] he describes, confining his study of the American avant-garde's depiction of the body to Warhol's long-takes and *Geography of the Body* (1943) by Moore and Maas (a film which by all accounts was mostly shot by Menken). Menken's interaction with both of these examples seems worth briefly exploring. We might think of her film, *Andy Warhol* (1965), as Menken's commentary on Warhol and his cinema, but along with her contributions to *Geography of the Body*, *Andy Warhol* teaches us how Menken not only collapses a proposed or perceived distance between cinema and the body, the representation of a skeptical divide, but negates and even undoes its very premise. If films like *Eat* and *Sleep* present the 'everyday body' in a radical way for Deleuze, they do so because they collapse the distance between the image of the eventful or important body and the reality of the everyday body. These films assert the primacy of the image, reminding us of the ways in which the real is already an image, they thus collapse the distance between the body and image (what Deleuze might take to be an act of thinking). By creating a portrait of Andy Warhol in which she uses fast-motion to produce something that resembles animation, Menken's response to Warhol's cinematic portraits, which themselves use cinema as a machine to collapse the distance between a body and its image, goes beyond this collapse, positing that Warhol himself is always already *in* the machine of cinema, literally animated by the creation of images. As Ragona notes, 'Menken turns Warhol into the mechanical, serial self he always claimed to be ("I am a machine.")'.[37] By doing this, Menken undermines the very position that postulates a distance from the machine or the machine's representation (the image) to be overcome, placing the artist's body in the machine just as Menken's own body always emanates from her hand-held camerawork. Her film thus ironically suggests that Warhol's attempt to collapse the distance between body and image actually recognizes and reasserts that distance as a premise, something her film undoes by always having located the artist *in* the machine. Similarly, *Geography of the Body* suggests the obliteration of a distance between body and representation. Through a series of close-ups, the film offers us defamiliarizing glimpses of bodies that without the context of establishing shots and set to a poetic voice-over invent fantastic possibilities for the worlds the parts of the bodies signify. Just as Ben Moore's poetry experiments with the different ways in which the body might represent, exploiting the distance between image and word, Menken's cinematography, the use of extreme close-ups but especially her use of a 'dime store magnifying glass'[38] attached to the camera lens, collapses the very distances playfully bridged (and thus ironically asserted) by Moore's elaborate poetic descriptions.

[36] Ibidem.
[37] Ragona, p. 36.
[38] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 75.

Deren's and Arledge's Bodies in the Stream of Time

Deleuze clearly generates his idea about the body being 'that which [thought] plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life',[39] from Henri Bergson's theories of vital phenomena, or getting beyond the intellect to 'life'. Deren was inspired by the same theories through her study of T.E. Hulme whose notion of 'intensive manifolds' borrowed from Bergson's metaphor of the 'stream of time'. Bergson suggests the intellectual error of thinking of time as a stream we stand apart from and view from a distance (from which we can turn it into the successive parts that constitute the measures of duration, an instant, a minute, an hour, in other words, from which we can *spatialize* it), insisting on the reality that we are *always in time*, and thus, that we are *in* the stream, not standing apart from it. Hulme does not just imagine the subject *in* the stream, he imagines *the body* of the subject in the stream and the interactions between the body itself and the *life* flowing around it. Hulme writes,

> If you think of mental life as a flowing stream, then ordinary intellectual knowledge is like looking at that stream from outside: you get a clear and perfectly describable picture. Imagine now that you are turned into a cross-section of this stream, that you have no sense of sight, that in fact your only sense is a sense of pressure. Then although you will have no clear picture or representation of the stream at all, you will in spite of that have a complete knowledge of it as a complex sense of the varying directions of the forces pressing on you.[40]

Deren's *The Very Eye of Night* (1958) capitalizes on the complex concept of outer space as a setting that suggests Hulme's 'varying directions of the forces pressing' on the body as the camera interfaces with optically printed bodies dancing across numerous vectors of the blackened screen littered with 'stars'. Outer-space, like Bergson's and Hulme's stream of time, is not something the body can stand apart from our outside of, rather, it is always already in it. *Very Eye of Night* experiments with such a body, opening a variety of three-dimensional vectors that interrupt our sense of the two-dimensional screen, vectors akin to Hulme's 'varying directions of forces', through the human bodies of the dancers that act as a central and universal measure, what we might call a taring device as we adjust our expectations of their embodied movement to what Deren presents on screen. Just as we come to depend upon the bodies of the dancers to define the space of *Very Eye's* illusion of depth, Deren uses optically printed images to challenge us to discern whether it is the body contained by the image which moves or whether the optically printed image itself is *moving* through space. Here, Deren sets up the same attention in the spectator to bodily movement

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[39] Deleuze, p. 189.
[40] T.E. Hulme, 'The Philosophy of Intensive Manifolds', in *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. by Herbert Read (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1924), pp. 171–214 (p. 188).

and the 'known pulse of an action',[41] as she does with regard to the origin of the dancer's movement in *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946) where the slowness with which the faun character 'falls' to the ground makes us wonder about whether the movement originates in his body or the cinematographer's manipulation of the film's speed. Deren explains her use of slow-motion,

> [...] It is not simply slowness of speed. It is, in fact, something which exists in our minds, not on the screen [...]. When we see a man in the attitudes of running and identify the activity as a run, one of the knowledges which is part of that identification is the pulse normal to that activity. It is because we are aware of the known pulse of the identified action while we watch it occur at a slower rate of speed that we experience the double-exposure of time which we know as slow motion. It cannot occur in an abstract film, where a triangle, for instance, can go fast or slow, but, having no necessary pulse, cannot go in slow motion.[42]

Thus, bodies are essential to the very expression of much of Deren's cinema as without such bodies (e.g. with an abstract film), and our familiarity with them ('the known pulse of the identified action'[43]), we would have difficulty comprehending the temporality of the images on screen. Indeed, many of Deren's experiments with cinematography and editing emanate from and critically depend upon the body. In *Anagram*, Deren writes about two instances where she uses the bodies of dancers to transgress the continuity of space and time in her films. Referring to an iconic match-on-action sequence in *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) where a dancer's leg begins to come down in a forest in one shot and in the next continues that motion this time in a living room, Deren claims that the 'integrity of the time element — the fact that the tempo of the movement is continuous...[holds] together spatial areas which are not, in reality, so related'.[44] In the second 'inversely related'[45] example, from *At Land* (1944), Deren claims to eliminate 'the spatial indication of the time that has transpired', and uses the body of the girl (Deren herself) which disappears over a sand dune only to reappear in an impossibly short amount of time from behind a dune much farther away, to allow for a 'continuity of space' to 'integrate periods of time which were not, in reality, in such immediate relationship'.[46] These instances exemplify the extent to which Deren's cinema depends upon the body's interface with the medium (with the camera, with editing). In each instance, the audience relies on the movement of the bodies to register that the original limits or rules of space

[41] Maya Deren, 'Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality', in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1978), pp. 67–73 (p. 68).
[42] Ivi.
[43] Ivi.
[44] Deren, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film* (Yonkers, NY: The Alicat Book Shop Press, 1946), pp. 50–51.
[45] Ibidem.
[46] Ivi, p. 51.

and time presented to us have been transgressed (the forest of *Choreography*, the spatial distance between the sand dunes in *At Land* and the time it would take to go between them). Without the dancer's body in *Choreography* joining through a match-on-action cut two radically distant spaces, we would simply see a cut to another location, not a transgression of the body's experience of the limits of space. Without the dancer's body in *At Land*, we would not register any temporal compression at all.

Deren's films think through the body in the ways Hulme (following Bergson) imagined as getting beyond the 'perfectly describable picture', of 'ordinary knowledge', to accomplish 'intuition',[47] and Deleuze describes as 'plung[ing]'[48] us into the body. In fact, Menken utilizes the body and what Deren describes as its 'known pulse of action'[49] to a similar effect with her use of fast motion in *Andy Warhol*, a film which is completely dependent upon Andy Warhol's embodied movements, where seeing the irregularities with which this jittery body on screen moves depends upon us knowing how bodies typically move. Making the tempo and nature of the body's movements so central to the temporality of the film is another important way in which Menken and Deren put bodies 'in the stream of time' (implying that they were always already there), making our perception of their films radically dependent upon the movements of the bodies pictured.

The ways Deren uses the body as a taring device, a universal register for determining 'real' time, which assumes the premise that a body is always already *in* the world (subject to the forces of gravity, and the limitations of its movements), rather than standing apart from it, forces us to rely on bodies, our own and those on screen, rather than attempting to transcend them or to think they are somehow keeping us/distancing us from the world. Similarly, Sara Kathryn Arledge's *Introspection* (1947), 'the first American abstract dance film',[50] according to David James, defines screen space around the bodies of her dancers which are visually collapsed into the cinematic medium through a wide-angle lens (similar to the effect of Menken's use of the magnifying glass in *Geography of the Body*) such that the world this film presents seems positively defined and organized around these bodies as if they were 'everything that is the case',[51] much as Wittgenstein defined 'the world' in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* or the way he defined language, 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world'.[52] Although, as David James notes, 'the camera is static throughout'[53] *Introspection*, the bodies of Arledge's dancers are never divorced from the camera, they never

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[47] Hulme, p. 188.
[48] Deleuze, p. 189.
[49] Deren, 'Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality', p. 68.
[50] David James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 249.
[51] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by Charles Kay Ogden (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922), p. 25.
[52] Ivi, p. 74.
[53] James, p. 250.

stand neutrally in front of it. Rather, they are contorted through the perspective of its lenses and through the optical printer that uses them to define alternative arrangements of the cinematic rectangle just as Deren's *The Very Eye of Night* (a film that came after *Introspection*) uses optically printing bodies of dancers moving along competing vectors to destabilize the rectilinear relationships between x, y, and z axes. Thus, for both Arledge and Deren, cinematic space emanates from a body that is always already central to it, in a way that is related to Menken's organization of her cinema around her hand-held shots, her own embodiment. It is as if Arledge and Deren through their cine-dance propose that 'the limits of their bodies are the limits of their world' and that their attitude about such a situation also follows Wittgenstein's attitude towards language, as their films present the body not as an obstacle to mourn (as philosophers have mourned the distance between language and world), to try to overcome (as their male counterparts have endeavored), but as something whose interface with the world might produce infinitely new undefined experiences. Their cinema comprises experiments with bodies we already know rather than imagining that cinema might bridge body and thought, thus standing us apart from our experience of the body, perceiving it as both an obstacle preventing us from being in the world and, like Deleuze, as something which we also don't yet inhabit.

Deren's *Study in Choreography for Camera* resists the sequential movements of the body that interested the proto-cinematic motion studies of Marey and Muybridge (which characterize figures going from one point to another, rather than not going anywhere, dancing as it were) and which help define the *action-image* for Deleuze. Deren uses editing and choreographed bodies in *Choreography* and *At Land* to disrupt the continuity *within* or *between* shots and the actions they picture. The dancer in *Choreography* who is in a living room for the first part of his leg's movement and then suddenly in the woods for the last, and the similar false match-on-action in *At Land* where Deren's feet are on a sandy beach in one moment and in the midst of the next movement trodding through grass, both tidily exemplify what Deleuze might call 'false continuities' and 'irrational cuts',[54] and both radiate from and depend upon the very movements of embodied subjects. Through its repeated incorporation of figures of circularity and curvature, Arledge's *Introspection* similarly resists sequential, linear movements, which confront both the logic of the *movement-image* and the linearity of Bergson's stream of time. For instance, the effect of the fish-eye lens itself disrupts the linear logic of the screen (and the rectilinear arrangement of x, y, and z axes) by producing curved images, yet another way in which her cinema inhabits the body which is itself comprised of curves rather than straight geometric lines. At the same time, many of Arledge's optically printed bodies and body parts are often assembled into rotating wheels and circles confronting the rectilinear screen with a circle as when at the beginning of the film numerous images of a man's

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[54] Deleuze, p. 278.

head are optically printed to rotate or when optically printed dancers perform unending pirouettes (layered on one another) or when a wheel of disembodied arms churn from background to foreground where their hands experience the extreme curvature of the lens. Such images fundamentally disrupt the causal motion and progress of the body (as moving from point a to point b) by making these bodies' motion one of perpetual return. In terms of theorizing bodies that create aversions to what Deleuze saw as the purposiveness of the *action image* or what Cavell following Emerson saw as the conformity of meaningful behaviour, Arledge's use of repetition and circularity might also be held in the same thought as the actions which Deleuze and Cavell imagined working against these tendencies (the waiting, sleeping bodies of Antonioni, Warhol and Cassavetes for Deleuze, the fidgety bodies in *Mr. Deeds* and the tap-dancing body of Fred Astaire for Cavell), actions I've compared to Menken's fidgety camera. Menken, Deren, and Arledge by contrasting the *objective* view of movement and duration afforded by Muybridge and Marey, a view that corresponds to philosophies that conceive of the world as *out there* apart from us and *waiting to be discovered*, challenge this philosophy with one in which the subject is immersed in and co-extensive with the world whose meaning is made through embodied encounters with it.