Looking Again at Maya Deren:

How the ‘Mother of Avant-Garde Film’ was a Socially Conscious ‘Judaised Artist’

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Abstract

Russian-Jewish filmmaker, Maya Deren, known as the ‘mother of avant-garde film’, lived and worked in Greenwich Village, New York, from the 1930s until her death in 1961. Deren produced experimental films, wrote for a variety of magazines on her philosophy of art and civilisation, lectured around the United States, Canada and South America and established the Creative Film Foundation, a pioneering organisation that supported independent film-makers in America. Beyond being an educator and interested in film-art, Deren’s oeuvre revealed a strong social conscience.

Leading up to her career in film, Deren’s poetry, photography, her Masters Thesis in English Literature, and her role as assistant to anthropological dancer Katherine Dunham and to prominent political activist and writer, Max Eastman, all evinced strong social components. I argue therefore that Deren is more than an experimental film-maker; she is a socially conscious artist.

Following Deren’s immigration to New York with her family at age five, to escape anti-Semitic pogroms, she continued to spend her childhood and teenage years both escaping forms of anti-Semitism and on a continuous search for belonging. Deren’s work was coloured by this search and desire to navigate social and cultural alienation, resulting in an endeavor to create and promote morally responsible art that enabled civilisational progress and, most significantly, unity. This was to be created by the morally responsible ‘artist’, who Deren established as being a self-constructed and socially reflective figure that evolved with the socio-cultural context.

By exploring Deren within her early to mid twentieth century American environment, I reveal that Deren’s use of ‘the artist’ parallels the use of ‘the Jew’ as a cultural symbol, through which ideas of inclusion or exclusion from social and cultural life can be navigated. Deren, I therefore argue, must be read within the wider context of ‘Judaised’
discourse in America, in which ‘the Jew’ was a symbol through which to approach larger ideas of integration, assimilation and Americanisation.

My study explores the history of ‘Judaised’ discourse in America in the twentieth century, its use by an array of artists, including Deren, as well as closely analysing Deren’s theoretical texts and films in order to understand Deren and her oeuvre in a nuanced manner and to cement a place for Deren within both ‘Judaised’ history and twentieth-century America.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

1. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters

2. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used

3. the thesis is less than 40,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.
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Introduction
From ‘Mother of Avant-Garde Film’ to a Socially Conscious ‘Judaised’ Artist

Maya Deren, 1917-1961, is revered as the ‘mother of avant-garde film’ for her work in the 1940s and 1950s in Greenwich Village, New York, and Los Angeles, creating experimental films.¹ She created six films between 1943 and 1959 that combined tribal rituals and modern dance with modern psychological and philosophical ideas, and became the first filmmaker to receive a Guggenheim Grant for creative work in cinema. Her film career consisted of producing, acting in, distributing and publicising her films, as well as writing supplementary art theory. As Deren travelled across the United States, Canada and South America, she presented lectures at film screenings, turning her independent and experimental cinema into an educational experience for audiences who may have been otherwise alienated from the art world. Deren was the first to teach art theory to many of her audiences, when she traveled outside of New York, due to the lack of regional museums and art galleries at the time.² Diana Crane maintains that ‘until the 1940s, Americans in many regions of the United States were unaware of the existence of avant-garde art’.³ Deren therefore held an important place as a representative of the arts of New York City at a time when there were few local art experts to compete with her. Deren is also credited with bringing film theory and independent cinema to the Ivy League schools as well as to state teacher colleges and film societies across the country.⁴ Deren’s work is remembered beyond her own creations: in 1986 the American Film Institute created the Maya Deren Award to honour independent film artists.

Deren’s filmmaking was the continuation and combination of her work in a range of cultural arenas, from photography and poetry to modern dance.⁵ This vast array of

⁴ Rabinowitz, Points of Resistance, 76.
⁵ Ibid., 2.
work, already underway from her youth, did not just feed into her film-making but demonstrated her social conscience. Symbolist-influenced poetry, creative writing, political pieces exploring Trotskyism and history, experiments with surrealist photography and research into tribal dance and cultural theory constituted the background to her oeuvre, functioning, like her most famous avant-garde films, as a social message. From the age of ten, Deren was already writing poetry, which evolved quickly into socially-conscious work by the time she was fourteen. A letter sent home to her mother in 1931 relates a recent poem written at school about the need ‘to uplift mankind from the muddy depths, of ignorance and folly’. Her articles published that same year in student magazines at the League of Nations’ International School, The Little Tatler and Philia, also highlighted her social concerns. Her senior paper ‘The History and Present Conditions of the Russian Peasant’, 1933, indicated her next direction, an activist in the Social Problems Club at Syracuse University. She also wrote ‘Youth Marches On’ for The Argot and a nationally-distributed article for Student Outlook in 1935 for this same cause. Deren even served as the national secretary and regional organiser in the National Student Office of the Young Peoples’ Socialist League, presenting a paper for the American Socialist Party on the Russian Question. Yet her social conscience was not solely political, as her Smith College Master’s Thesis in English Literature, ‘The Influence of French Symbolists on the Anglo-American Poets’, 1939, demonstrated. In it she discussed how literary expression ought to act in combination with science, economics and politics to forge a better understanding of society. Deren also worked as a translator for the Russian revolutionary and writer Victor Serge, as an assistant for contemporary choreographer Katherine Dunham, and for socio-political figures including activist Max Eastman and journalist, explorer and occultist William Seabrook. This later developed into an interest in communal tribal cultures and new paths for education and systems for cultural support in the arts.

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7 Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, xxi.
10 Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, xxi, xxii.
It is through a *combination* of her avant-garde films and her broad range of cultural endeavours that her work must be understood. These two avenues combined in a cultural agenda that spanned her lifetime, in which she strove to create a culturally inclusive environment that focused on making each individual morally responsible, culturally involved and driven toward progressing humanity. This demonstrated that her concern was for civilisation, establishing her as more than a film-maker, but rather as a cultural activist. By exploring why and how she undertook such an agenda, this thesis will define a more nuanced image of Deren and in turn highlight the importance of the cultural trajectory that she pursued.

My thesis proposes that this social orientation of Deren’s work was essentially driven by her ethnic background. Through a study of this broad range of cultural endeavours, I reveal that Deren was motivated by the social conditions of her surrounds, the anti-Semitic tensions that permeated her life and that of her peers and family and her consequent socio-cultural position. As a result, the artist she established herself as, her films and her theoretical works, all illuminate the social conditions affecting a Russian-Jewish immigrant artist in 1940s in America, as well as defining from where Deren’s social conscience was derived.

Deren was born Eleanora Derenowsky to Jewish parents, Marie Fiedler and Solomon David Derenowsky in 1917 Kiev, Ukraine. At five years of age Deren was already on the run as her family escaped the anti-Semitic pogroms devastating the Jewish communities of Ukraine and Russia. They emigrated via Poland and France to Syracuse, New York, changing their name to Deren. In was here that she changed her first name to Maya, after the Hindu goddess of sorcery in order to enhance the image of herself as an artist. She married three times: Gregory Bardacke from 1934-1938, Alexander Hammid from 1942-1947 and Teiji Ito in the late 1950s. She led a short but productive life, dying prematurely at 44 of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1961 in Los Angeles, but had gained a place in the Western cultural canon. Deren has been labelled a proto-feminist, a pioneer, socialist, humanist and even a Russian Gypsy,

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12 Martina Kudlacek, *In the Mirror of Maya Deren* (New York: Zeitgeist, 2003), DVD.
due to the range of endeavours undertaken throughout her life. Yet these few details barely hint at the intriguing path of Deren’s life.

This study focuses on Deren’s more significant works such as ‘Religious Possession in Dancing’, 1942, ‘Creating Movies with a New Dimension: Time’, 1946, ‘Cinema as An Art Form’, 1946, and ‘Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality’, 1960. However, my main study is of her most extensive work, An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film, 1946, which represents the accumulation of her theories and comprises her main conceptual framework. I situate these creative works against her private and personal letters, diaries and interviews, reprinted in VèVè A. Clark, Millicent Hodson and Catrina Neiman’s The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Works, which provides a complex compilation of material taken from family members, life-long friends, ex-husbands and contemporaries. It is regarded as the most comprehensive collection of her work.

Relevant scholarship on Maya Deren

Relevant scholarship on Maya Deren offers various interpretations of Deren and reasons for the direction of her work. It is recognised that Deren was born Jewish, but little importance is placed on this.

In The Legend of Maya Deren Clark, Hodson and Neiman have collated a broad range of Deren’s personal and professional writing and other material from throughout her

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15 Deren, An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film (Yonkers, NY: The Alicat Book Shop Press, 1946), repr. with original page numbers in Nichols, Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde, appendix.
life, which, together with author commentary, sets out a comprehensive account of Deren’s background and her accomplishments.

There is however scant reference to Deren’s Jewish background. Apart from a discussion of the experiences of her family as Jews in Russia, there are only passing mentions in letters and interviews of her Jewish heritage. A letter from Deren to her former teacher reveals her feelings of being ‘alien’ and ‘not belonging’, as a child, because her parents were foreign and Jewish.

During interviews with acquaintances, it is noted that she rejected, and avoided mentioning, her Jewish background. But these references to Deren’s Jewish origins relate to her years as a school and university student. No connection is made between Deren’s background and upbringing and her future cultural endeavours, ideology and construction of her persona. The authors do not define her Jewish heritage as a significant motivation for her later work.

In The Modernist Poetics and Experimental Film Practice of Maya Deren (1917-1961) Renata Jackson, citing Legend, reports similarly on Deren’s life in Russia, and on her self-perception of being different from her peers at primary and graduate school, which, Jackson notes, Deren attributes partly to her Jewish background. She also takes account of Deren’s rejection of her Jewish identity, which she suggests was possibly associated with her Marxist leanings. However, Jackson places no further importance on Deren’s sense of not belonging was a result of her Jewish roots. Jackson does not see Deren’s work as being linked to her Jewish background.

Rather, Jackson takes she refers to Deren’s early socialist political activities as a starting point for the orientation of her work, and suggests they prepared the ground for her work with tribal communities and interest in group mentality. Jackson describes how, in the film Ritual in Transfigured Time, Deren presented depersonalised, ritualistic movements and forms to express universal feelings and

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18 Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 156-61.
19 Deren to Eda Lou Walton (former university instructor), 30 June 1939, ibid., 301.
20 Miriam Arsham (assistant and Greenwich Village neighbour), interview, August 1976, in ibid., 155-56 and Harry Roskolenko (fellow Trotskyist), interview, 10 February 1977, in ibid., 335.
21 Jackson, Modernist Poetics, 16-17, 20.
22 Ibid., 18.
truths that would be intuitively understood by everyone, which was reminiscent of her earlier socialist sensibilities.\textsuperscript{23}

Jackson sees \textit{Anagram} itself as a work of social and political consciousness, conveying moral tenets, that saw Deren defining scientific enquiry, ethics, aesthetics and film as all being within a broader framework of civilisational development. Her personal ideologies, theories and cultural activities all fed into what Jackson identifies as a ‘humanist’ framework.\textsuperscript{24} Her humanism, explains Jackson, was directed towards educating society and communicating moral values.\textsuperscript{25} This can be seen in Deren’s insistence that scientists and artists must use their conscious faculties to create a new reality in order to aid humanity in understanding its contemporary condition and progression - especially in the face of technological developments that could destroy the world. These concepts, Jackson says ‘one can clearly hear ... echoing throughout \textit{Anagram}’.\textsuperscript{26}

In ‘Politics and Savage Thought: About \textit{Anagram’}, Annette Michelson explores a similar framework, proposing that Deren’s Marxist studies and involvement in the Trotskyist youth movement ‘undoubtedly stimulated a sense of community’, and inclined her towards group culture in her later work with tribal society.\textsuperscript{27} She sees the focus on ritual dance as still displaying Deren’s previous socialist beliefs, in that the ritual dance uses the group to purposefully override the individual, as Deren’s ritual dance films work to subordinate the individual to the new powerful formation of a group.\textsuperscript{28} Michelson’s response to Deren, like Jackson’s, extends to the contemporary state of society. She sees Deren’s work as driven by her concern for society and the importance for society to be aware of its environment.

It is the effort to direct artistic practice to ‘a consciousness’ of the impact of scientific and technological advances, Michelson proposes, that ‘haunts her work’.\textsuperscript{29} From this comes Deren’s formulation of the artist as morally obligated to act, and to apply their consciousness, against the threats to society. Deren’s films and her major theoretical

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 138.
\item\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 56.
\item\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 67.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 68.
\item\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 34.
\item\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 42.
\end{itemize}
treatise Anagram are therefore considered by Michelson as being a direct response to the socio-political context.

She also discusses the artistic environment within which Deren worked. Surrounded by contemporaries such as Arthur Miller and William Maas, and the ‘coarse and derisive’ Dylan Thomas, Deren faced difficulties working in this patriarchal artistic world.30 But Michelson goes on to outline the success of Deren’s challenge to this environment and her immense contribution to American cinema. Going against the dominant trend of narrative film, Deren pushed to introduce metonymy and metaphor in film - a revolutionary idea that was to change the way films were made and presented.31 Michelson points also to the importance, in the history of film, of Deren’s insistence that, in cinema, practice had to be founded on theory. Important too was Deren’s insistence on system, while still allowing organic organisation.32 This work is specifically on Anagram, and Michelson does not see, or at any rate does not mention, any connection between this treatise and Deren’s Jewish background.

Lauren Rabinowitz, in Points of Resistance, recording the experiences of three women filmmakers of the avant-garde, places Deren’s work in a feminist framework. She points out that Deren’s films were not seen as women’s discourse, but as part of ‘postwar arts discourses’.33 Deren herself did not claim them as women’s discourse. Nor were they understood as such when presented to guests and societies in 1944-1945, Rabinowitz asserts.34 Rather they were seen as surrealistic, to which Deren strongly objected.35 She accompanied her films, explains Rabinowitz, with program notes that directed her audience to see the ‘rational order’ in them, thus avoiding their interpretation as surrealist, and disassociating them from women’s discourse.36

Analysing Deren’s films, Rabinowitz reveals traits that they share with women’s discourse. She points to the use of devices, common in women’s discourse, such as multiple selves, as seen in At Land.37 Meshes of the Afternoon, Rabinowitz proposes,

30 Ibid., 23.
31 Ibid., 26.
32 Ibid., 27.
33 Rabinowitz, Points of Resistance, 49.
34 Ibid., 67, 68.
35 Ibid., 68.
36 Ibid.,
37 Ibid., 66.
reflects the Hollywood genre of women’s melodrama, in its use of ‘point of view shots and dream sequences’.

Rabinowitz describes how the work of Deren and other women artists were created within the restrictions of a male dominated environment under constant social and psychological constraints. She notes how Deren’s male peers made fun of a woman having intellectual theories on film and that Deren’s friends needed to be associated with males to get entry to the art world. As one of the panel at the poetry and film symposium Cinema 16, Deren was not taken seriously by the male panelists.

Deren always opposed Hollywood and its patriarchal inclinations. Deren never aimed to be a ‘star’ in the Hollywood sense, Rabinowitz explains, and her appearance as a woman was not important to her. What was important was her status as filmmaker. But Rabinowitz also points out that Deren’s experiences at Haiti, investigations into Voudoun culture, and her identification with the priests, whom she saw as resembling the Western artist, led her to adopt a pose of “Otherness”, “exoticism” and a subversive position as a woman “outside the law”.

Rabinowitz presents quite an extensive account of Deren’s appearance and behaviour, describing how she was seen by her friends as an exotic beauty, with powerful personality, who needed to dominate any situation. Looking at her background, Rabinowitz observes that Deren came from a middle-class Russian Jewish family. But this only appears as a biographical note. Rabinowitz does not discuss Deren’s Jewish roots any further, and does not relate her ethnic origins to her work.

Writers, then, place Deren in diverse frameworks. They look at Deren as a leading avant garde film maker, theorist and innovator. They represent her as a humanist, and discuss the influence of the world situation and the effect of gender on her work. And they describe her Russian immigrant background and sense of otherness and alienation.

38 Ibid., 8.
39 Ibid. 76.
40 Ibid., 49.
41 Ibid., 79.
42 Ibid., 50-51.
43 Ibid., 52.
However, scholars do not examine Deren from the point of view of her Jewish heritage. While they acknowledge her Jewish identity, they do not address it as important because Deren dismisses it.

In this thesis, therefore, I propose a perspective on Deren not yet taken by any scholar. I suggest that Deren’s rejection of her Jewish origins is itself the key to what drove her work and character. I propose that, as a way of addressing her position as a Jew without revealing this aspect of her identity, Deren can be defined as taking a ‘Judaised’ approach to her work and persona, participating in ‘Judaised’ culture. ‘Judaised’ culture, with its associated symbolic figure ‘the Jew’, provides a platform for Jews and non-Jews alike to deal with in-betweenness, Otherness, and integration into society.

Looking at Deren within a ‘Judaised' framework allows additional light to be cast on her life and her activities. It allows a link to be made between Deren’s oeuvre and her life experiences, in the context of the social and cultural tensions surrounding Jews at the time, thus explaining the broader issues around her feelings of alienation and constant search for inclusion. It explains her political involvement and defines the basis of her moral outlook and social conscience. In a ‘Judaised' framework Deren’s oeuvre can be placed within the wider context of the ‘Judaised' discourse of 20th century America, in which ‘the Jew’ was used to approach larger ideas of integration, assimilation, and Americanisation.

I suggest that Deren should be seen, not only as a leading figure of the avant garde and a cultural activist, but also as a ‘Judaised’ artist participating in ‘Judaised’ culture.

My point of departure for Chapter One is, therefore, when Deren’s struggle to find social acceptance in her changing surrounds begins. I start by investigating Deren’s relation to her Russian-Jewish roots, the Jewish component of which was strongly rejected by her and her family upon their arrival in America. This includes an examination of her family’s assimilation into American life, their socio-economic
position and the wider social tensions, which all played a part in their decisions and struggles to gain acceptance in their new home. Deren’s own relationship to both her new and old identities developed from the path laid out by her family and went on to reflect those of her Jewish peers at university. These patterns can be considered as falling within the general pattern of upper-middle-class Russian-Jewish assimilation in America, as well as being a second-generation format of integration, respectively. Deren’s writing, political activism and finally her avant-garde artwork enabled her to find social acceptance. Here not only did she find groups to which she could belong, she was able to find cultural practices that were inclusive. Chapter One reveals how her life as a child, teenager and young adult followed a path of alienation and search for cultural inclusion that were to be significant factors in her later character and œuvre. Consequentially, her goal was to develop and perpetuate inclusivity in culture and society by being the artist ‘who seeks to change to better’ and who strives for unity by re-creating ‘abstract invisible forces of the cosmos in the intimate, immediate forms’ of her art.\(^4\)

Chapter Two follows by conducting a close analysis of Deren’s work and her call for all individuals to take up arms in the arts, just as she did, and become ‘the artist’. Here I include a study of her most comprehensive work, *Anagram*. In this text Deren addressed the responsibility of each individual to be socially and culturally active for the sake of their own person and in order to progress civilisation. The individual, acting as the artist, must ‘dedicate himself to the creative manipulation and transfiguration of all nature’, she declared.\(^5\) What is of significance is that Deren sought to ensure a culture of social inclusion through this proposition, believing that not only would individual integration be attained through embodying this role, but that this approach would reconcile society’s divisions and factions, resulting in a united and therefore all-inclusive humanity.

A key point of this chapter is to propose that Deren’s figure of ‘the artist’ reflected the cultural symbol defined by ‘the Jew’, as a figure of social responsiveness and self-cultivation. The theory and practices found in Deren’s notebooks, lecture series and


\(^5\) Deren, *Anagram*, 52.
program notes, her films and Anagram combine to demonstrate how, in adapting these qualities of ‘the Jew’ to the new format of ‘the artist’, the individual was able to best utilise his capacities as a human to interact with and develop society. That is, this positive connection with ‘the Jew’ reinforced Deren’s prescription of ‘the artist’. In utilising the same qualities as found in the character of ‘the Jew’, the artist would reflect ‘the Jew’ in their cultivation of themselves and the responsiveness of their actions, according to the evolving needs and nuances of their environment. In this manner ‘the artist’ could be the responsible social figure that Deren proposed, able to develop and integrate with society.

The cultural symbol of ‘the Jew’ is integral to this study. I therefore define it as a concept and framework generally here, before exploring it in depth in Chapter Two. While I refer to this cultural character as ‘the Jew’ it is also referred to as ‘the clichéd Jew’, ‘the literary Jew’ and the ‘imaginary Jew’. This was a cultural figure, symbol or concept established as a result of the lived experience of real Jews around the Western world and how they were received by Western culture. That is, ‘the Jew’ was a stereotypical depiction of Jewish migration, assimilation and integration into broader society that encompassed how they were understood within the broader social mindset. Jews and ‘the Jew’ were introduced as a concept into wider social discourse through newspapers, journals and other popular media. Use of this symbol in Europe, America, and Britain gave rise to a variety of character types that were associated with this cultural figure. In America, the ‘outsider’, ‘schlemiel’ ‘modernist’ and ‘ambivalent thinker’ were just some of the stereotypical labels attached to the ‘Jew’, derived from Jews’ lived experiences and struggles with ethnicity and life in America.

As Deren lived in America from early childhood, I will look at the use of this cultural symbol and vehicle specifically within the American milieu from the early to mid twentieth century in order to relate this framework to Deren and her work. A reading of Deren’s work as part of this culture of ‘the Jew’, including an assessment of how

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47 Desser and Friedman, American-Jewish Filmmakers, 11-12.
‘the Jew’s’ characteristics and qualities were understood and how they evolved in contemporary understanding, reveals an additional dimension to her work.

‘The Jew’ developed in this format under study following events that affected the lives of Jews themselves. The process towards Jewish emancipation in France following the Revolution and subsequently throughout Europe in the nineteenth century enabled Jews to re-make themselves as citizens, re-constructing their once religious identity into one of world citizen. In embodying this Enlightenment ideal, which enabled an escape from the singularity of one particular culture, and promised a home everywhere, the Jew came to epitomise the modern man. Associations between Jews and a universal status already existed, as they had traditionally been connected with being an exiled, homeless people without a nation, according to both Christian and Jewish texts. As a result, explains Michael Gluzman, the ‘wandering Jew’ could easily be invoked as a ‘symbol of modernism and modernity’.48

Social theorist Zygmunt Bauman writes that ‘The great fear of modern life is that of under-determination, unclarity, uncertainty - in other words, ambivalence… the Jew had entered modern times as ambivalence incarnate’.49 That is, Jews and their new identity came to be a symbol of cultural ambivalence and to function as a symbol through which gentile culture could also deal with its own modern ambivalence. ‘The Jew’ therefore emerged as a symbol of Western evolution, reflecting the changes and tensions of the context.

‘The Jew’ did not just reflect wider society symbolically, Jews themselves often constructed a modern self and cultural existence that complied with wider Christian society and reflected its social standards and values in order to integrate with the wider population in Europe, America and Britain.50 Jews constructed a variety of identities that coincided with their different political, class and cultural contexts in order to function or define themselves in the modern period. Identities were

'inherently shifting', declares Paula Hyman, due to both individual interactions with the environment and the changing social and cultural practices of the context.\textsuperscript{51}

‘The Jew’ was therefore a symbol of the mobile and self-constructed identities that reflected the modern world and hence simultaneously became a vehicle through which to critique it. When considered in the American context, ‘the Jew’ was used as a symbol to express the tensions surrounding immigration, Americanisation and questions of American identity and culture that were arising with the mass influx of immigrants to America, of which there were twenty-eight million between 1880 and 1920. Beyond representing modernity, its evolutions and being the traditional wanderer, ‘the Jew’ also came to epitomise the narrative of these immigrants to America. This was due to Jews themselves constituting a large proportion of these turn-of-the-century immigrants, with thirty-one percent of New York’s population in 1910 being Jewish.\textsuperscript{52}

‘The Jew’ as a vehicle for beliefs and opinions around these changes to America was further enabled by the ‘dual allegiance’ of this cultural character.\textsuperscript{53} In striving to assimilate, Jews tried to consciously construct a new socially appropriate identity, but the paradox of assimilation meant that the process was one of negating difference and therefore always signaled to previous identities and practices. As a result a ‘dual allegiance’ was understood to constitute Jewish modern identity and in turn the symbol of ‘the Jew’.\textsuperscript{54} While this emphasised the ambiguous and ambivalent character of ‘the Jew’, it also meant that ‘the Jew’ was the ultimate dialectical character. With their “dual” nature ‘the Jew’ could be used as a cultural symbol that reflected either side of the socio-cultural moment. This is how ‘the Jew’ as a character became a vehicle to question the process of Americanisation, the place of immigrants and even the culture of modernity itself. Therefore ‘the Jew’ was utilised by artists, politicians, writers and social critics to critique the changes being made to the twentieth-century American demographic and cultural landscape. This cultural

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 154.


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
symbol is part of what has been labeled more broadly as ‘Judaised’ culture, a term used by Bryan Cheyette and David Biale.55 Gluzman also refers to the term, but flags his use as generated from Cheyette.56 An early use of the term also appears in Isaac Deutscher’s 1958 essay ‘The Non-Jewish Jew as Thinker and Revolutionary’.57

Bryan Cheyette is prominent in scholarship on ‘Judaised’ discourse, which he also frames as ‘semitic’ or ‘semiticised’ discourse.58 He examines a range of cultural critics and writers in the early nineteenth century in America who, he argues, constructed themselves as ‘the Jew’, had their work act in a ‘Judaised’ manner or created characters who functioned as ‘the Jew’.59 Cheyette identifies how ‘the Jew’ was signalled by the features of cosmopolitanism and cultural ambiguity, and how, for instance, a writer whose work encouraged a cultural approach that was always ‘in dispute’, can be considered a ‘non-Jewish Jew’.60 Cheyette describes Isaac Rosenberg, a private soldier in the British Army during World War I, as someone ‘between cultures’, who finds it difficult to assimilate. Rosenberg’s poem, which speaks of ‘cosmopolitan sympathies’, demonstrates, according to Cheyette, how a Jewish man was also able to utilise the characteristics of ‘the Jew’ to describe his own real feelings of ambiguity towards his changing identity and newfound mobility.61 Cheyette turns to the writer James Joyce for another example, explaining how Ulysses, 1922, placed the ultimate cosmopolitan at the centre of European culture in the character of Leopold Bloom. Joyce has ‘Judaised’ this Greek tale, making Odysseus a ‘Jew’.62 He is described as a ‘cultured, all round-man’, emphasising his universal qualities and mobility.63

56 Gluzman, ‘Modernism and Exile,’ 236.
60 Ibid., 33.
61 Ibid., 32.
62 Cheyette, ‘Jewish Critic,’ 41.
A common element among those who embodied these traits is that by being universal or cosmopolitan they were ‘between cultures’. This meant not simply that they had a ‘dual allegiance’, but that they were on the margins of society. The 1944 cultural critic Isaac Rosenfeld defined Jews themselves in this manner: ‘Jews are marginal men. As marginal men, living in cities and coming from the middle classes, they are open to more influences than perhaps any other group’. Eric Zakim described the Jewish disposition as being ‘on the margin’ standing ‘between worlds’. In his explanation of how this continued into the 1960s and beyond, Daniel Bell, a cultural critic belonging to the New York Intellectual set, evoked the ‘uneasy truce’ between this dual allegiance of particularism and universalism.

Functioning the same way as these tropes of ‘marginal men’ and ‘dual allegiance’, Jonathan Freedman, whose work is central to ‘Judaised’ discourse, argues that ‘the Jew’ was able to be deployed ‘in the construction of ideas and ideologies of “culture”’. As ‘Jews did not fit into any of the major emerging cultural categories: nation, race, or language’, ‘the Jew’ therefore became the ultimate symbol for these evolving categories of Western modernity. As a result ‘the Jew’ could function as a vehicle through which to criticise or advocate evolving cultural reactions. Most significantly, Freedman, as well as Cheyette, maintained that cultural changes expressed through a critique that functioned through ‘the Jew’ or were formulated through the characteristics of ‘the Jew’ are to be recognised as ‘Judaised’.

Chapter Two outlines the experiences of Jews in America and delineates how ‘the Jew’ was used specifically in early to mid twentieth century American popular culture, literary works and politics as a vehicle to express opinions on modern America, the place of the immigrant within it, the process of Americanisation and other issues arising in the face of modernity. This study demonstrates how ‘the Jew’ was a ‘significant discursive site’ to be diagnosed or cured, attacked or defended.

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64 Cheyette, ‘Jewish Critic,’ 32.
65 Mendes-Flohr, ‘Between Existentialism and Zionism,’ 434.
70 Ibid., 24-25, 31.
identified with or against, as described by Rachel Duplessis.\(^71\) By demonstrating how ‘the Jew’ was reformatted and re-construed across different decades and zeitgeist in America, while the symbol’s characteristics of self-construction and embodiment of the wider socio-cultural environment remained, I highlight how these can be considered the significant characteristics that comprised ‘the Jew’. Jews and non-Jews, artists, politicians and writers, including Deren, who produced work or created personal identities that embodied these characteristics, are therefore part of ‘Judaised’ discourse in America in the twentieth century.

Deren’s work reacted to the pressing questions of inclusion or exclusion that permeated her American context, seeking to resolve such problems more broadly through a reconfiguring of this character. This builds on Chapter One’s depiction of Deren’s personal search for social and cultural inclusion, by demonstrating how she exhorted all individuals to become ‘the artist’ in a bid to create their own integrated place in society but also in the world. She defined the artist's work as a ‘comprehension and a manipulation of the universe in which man must somehow locate himself’.\(^72\) In using this symbol she was able to navigate the tensions she faced, in a broadly accepted manner, obscuring her own identity while still satisfying her need for inclusion.

Chapter Three illustrates that Deren did not just utilise the characteristics of ‘the Jew’ to define the artist, but also sought to create work that reflected these same qualities. Just as a ‘Judaised’ artist presented new paths for social inclusion, so too would ‘Judaised’ art, which would similarly develop from the environmental conditions and extend into new, socially encompassing territory.

As ‘the Jew’ was understood to symbolise a figure who responded to, and constructed his identity and behavior according to, his surrounds in order to find social acceptance, resulting in a character that reflected the wider socio-cultural moment, so too was the culture that manifested from ‘the Jew’. That is, cultural products that purposely captured the wider social surrounds, both enveloping and building on the

\(^{71}\) DuPlessis, *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures*, 140.
\(^{72}\) Deren, *Anagram*, 20.
different cultures and people that constituted it, captured the traits of ‘the Jew’ and could therefore similarly function as a vehicle for social and cultural inclusion.

An analysis of Deren’s films *Meshes of the Afternoon*, 1943, *At Land*, 1944, *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, 1945-46, *A Study in Choreography for the Camera*, 1945, and *The Very Eye of Night*, 1952-59, demonstrates how each functions as a form of social navigation and cultural response, reflecting the social context and depicting it as one united universe.\(^{73}\) By exploring these films in combination with the discussion Deren provides in her coinciding program notes, I reveal her broader aim of producing a picture of humanity that exists free of divides and factions, a message consistent with the majority of her work.

In Chapter Three I situate Deren among a range of ‘Judaised’ poets, film-makers and photographers who worked in early to mid twentieth century America. The poets have specifically been defined by DuPlessis and Cristanne Miller, as producing work that encompasses the traits of ‘the Jew’.\(^{74}\) I too draw on this concept, developing a discussion that examines how certain groups of film-makers, photographers and comic book writers can also be recognised as creating ‘Judaised’ art. Their work captured the different cultures and groups that comprised their surrounds, with the aim of developing a culture that both enveloped and was reflective of all its constituents, aiming to define a new mixed culture and identity for America that would be accepted.

In comparing these groups with Deren, I highlight how Deren’s reformulation of ‘the Jew’s’ characteristics into ‘Judaised' art was part of distinct practice, one that was not confined to either Jews or anti-Semitic discourse. Rather, it was an acceptable cultural vehicle for dealing with ideas of cultural difference and inclusion in twentieth century

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America. In this manner, I argue, Deren found a path through which she too could promote her ideas of cultural inclusion and unity.

Reading Deren’s oeuvre as situated within the surrounding ‘Judaised’ culture and against her own Jewish background, we can see the strong ideological backbone to her work and how her social conscience arose from her own dealings and very quickly became invested in the social well-being of her contemporaries. As a revered filmmaker, Maya Deren should be properly remembered for her contribution to much more than experimental film. Her work in ‘Judaised’ theory alerts us not only to the drive for inclusion of the marginalised, but also to how Jews and the symbol of ‘the Jew’ tell the history of those seeking refuge, understanding and an accepted place to exist. Sadly, these actions and history are once again significant in our times.
Chapter One

Maya Deren, Working for Cultural Inclusion

Maya Deren’s reputation as ‘the mother of avant-garde film’ has her revered as ‘the best known representative of post-war independent cinema discourse’, and a pioneering modernist artist-auteur.75 Her film career had begun modestly, displaying her experimental films on the wall of her Greenwich Village apartment for her contemporaries in the avant-garde. By 1946, Deren was showing them at an average of seven universities or museums per month and lecturing twice a month at these screenings, quickly establishing a reputation as an experimental film-maker.76 This practice of delivering lectures to coincide with film-screenings, as well as providing supplementary program notes, immediately flags her broader agenda.77 Similarly her creation of films ‘packed with ideological purpose’ and imagery of a strong social nature reveals that her cultural endeavours were not simply based in film-making, but were concerned with educating and informing her audience. Her work clearly extends beyond the limits of a career in film. Rather, through a range of different media and forums, Deren produced a constant reflection and critique of modern twentieth-century American society that demands she be recognised for her social conscience and efforts to achieve a positive impact on both her immediate environment and humanity in general.

In order to understand just what this social impact was and why Deren sought it, her work as a socially conscious artist is to be examined according to the theories and practices she deliberately cultivated. Broadly speaking, Deren sought the creation of an inclusive ‘total culture’ in which ‘larger meaning’ was to be found in the ‘depersonalization’ of individuals and their ‘straddle’ of social divisions and differences between groups. The aim of her project was to achieve ‘growth and development in the individual, progress in civilization’ and a united existence.78 This chapter examines how Deren’s work as a socially conscious artist who aimed for

75 Rabinowitz, Points of Resistance, 49.
77 Deren, Anagram, 16; Rabinowitz, Points of Resistance, 72.
78 Deren, Anagram, 20, 16; Deren, ‘Creating Movies with a New Dimension,’ 138.
inclusive existence is a reflection of her own personal need to find belonging in her new home of America. As a consequence of migrating from Russia to America at five years old and being of Jewish descent, Deren had a feeling of being ‘alien’ throughout her childhood in America. An exploration of her changing social, political and cultural practices during her childhood and young adult years demonstrates that Deren responded to her feelings of alienation and ‘not-belonging’ by searching for inclusive communities within which to exist.\textsuperscript{79} In this manner, Deren was able to navigate away from her difference and find acceptance, a practice which culminated in her career in film as an adult, but was no less prominent in her coinciding practices or previous work in her youth. Here Deren’s personal practices and needs can be considered to have driven her work as a socially conscious artist. Yet this was more than Deren trying to reconcile her own place within her social context or rather her alienation from it. That is, Deren’s pattern of searching for cultural inclusion in different communities throughout her life would eventually come to manifest in Deren producing her own culturally inclusive work in the hope of creating a world of broad cultural inclusion for all members of society. To understand the beginnings of Deren’s \textit{oeuvre} as a socially conscious artist who sought a ‘total culture’ for all society, I will now examine how the history of Deren’s feeling ‘alien’ was an instigator behind what was at first a personal and then a broader social endeavour.\textsuperscript{80}

\textit{How scholarship defines Deren’s motivation}

Alienation is of course but one of the many frameworks within which to define Deren and her work, as explored by a range of Deren scholars. Yet a study of her life reveals that she followed a pattern that consisted of a persistent search and repeated reaction of participation in cultural practices of an inclusive nature. As a result, I argue that alienation and social exclusion were demonstrably the strongest force motivating Deren.\textsuperscript{81}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{79} Deren to Eda Lou Walton, 30 June 1939, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, \textit{Legend}, 301. \textsuperscript{80} Deren, \textit{Anagram}, 16; Deren, \textit{Muntu Chart}, nd, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, \textit{Legend}, 11. \textsuperscript{81} Major scholarship on Deren includes Clark, Hodson Neiman, \textit{Legend}, Jackson, \textit{Modernist Poetics}, Michelson, \textquoteleft Poetics and Savage Thought,\textquoteright Annette Michelson, \textquoteleft On Reading Deren’s Notebook,\textquoteright \textit{October} 14 (1980), Catrina Neiman, \textquoteleft Art and Anthropology: The Crossroads: An Introduction to the Notebook of Maya Deren, 1947.\textquoteright}
The Legend of Maya Deren conducts a most extensive exploration of Deren through this lens. She is depicted as having thought of herself as an immigrant and an outsider in her teens and early adulthood, returning to her description of ‘being alien’ at school then at university. Legend’s accumulation of letters and poetry depicting Deren feeling a ‘void’ rather than meaning or connectedness to her societal surrounds becomes a platform by which the editors make their case that Deren’s alienation was a force behind her wanting a ‘sense of belonging’. Through interviews with Deren’s family and peers and an analysis of Deren’s personal letters, poetry and writing, the authors define Deren as reacting to alienation and exclusion but regard this as a driving force in only two moments of her life, her early school and early university life, rather than drawing from this as a foundation or motivational force consistently throughout her existence.

Neiman discusses Deren’s involvement with anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Haiti and Bali in 1947 as evidence of her interest in the way other cultures can provide a perspective on individual and broader social reconciliation for her own society. Deren looking to the universality found in tribal and ritual dance and its purposeful minimisation of personalised existence is seen by Neiman as a response by Deren to her own needs. Neiman therefore provides a reading of Deren’s 1947 notebook that encapsulates Deren’s concern for cultural inclusion. Maria Pramaggiore argues that Deren had a ‘highly individualised’ place in society, as an ‘exotic, uninhibited and solitary artist at odds with her culture’. Deren’s manipulation of her own image for publicity, as well as playing with concepts of individualised, subjective existence in film, was her way of dealing with this disposition, argues Pramaggiore.

Deren’s sensation of and reaction to alienation have thus been explored by several scholars, yet significantly what remains to be acknowledged is how this pattern of

82 Deren, Legend, 295.
83 Neiman, ‘Art and Anthropology,’ 15, 10-12.
alienation correlates with Deren’s Jewish background, an initial and defining difference since childhood.

*Family beginnings in America and the stigma around being Jewish*

Deren’s ‘terrible sense of not belonging’ and inability to find acceptance in her surrounding society transpired from her initial place as a Russian-Jewish immigrant in America into a lifetime search for acceptance and belonging, referring to her own displacement as stemming from her parents, whom she described as ‘foreigners’ and ‘Jews’.

The Derenowskys moved to Syracuse, New York, in 1922 to escape both the Russian Revolution and pogroms targeting Russian and Ukrainian Jews. After changing their name to Deren, a common trend for families with recognisably Jewish names, the family began their attempts to assimilate into American society. The Jewish community in Syracuse numbered in the thousands. However, the Derens did not participate in the Syracuse Jewish community. An interview with Pauline Penn, Deren’s aunt, reveals that their:

family was somewhat assimilated. They always had gentile friends. Maya’s father was that way, her mother too. They had a feeling for their Jewish roots, but not in a way that they would become part of the Jewish community. They would have looked for a cultural milieu that was sympathetic. These people could be Jews, they could be gentiles. When you get into the Arts, the Intellect and Culture, it’s a world of its own. It’s a world of its own that shouldn’t and generally doesn’t know race or sex or anything else. It’s a minority that lives by ideas.

The desire to reject all Jewish roots as part of an escape from pogroms and anti-Semitism provides an understandable reason the Derens sought to assimilate into

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85 Deren, ‘Self Portrait,’ 231.
American society and culture rather than be part of the Jewish community. Yet Deren’s family was already part of this assimilated milieu previously in Russia, therefore marking the family’s assimilation into American culture as their second.\textsuperscript{88} While this path of assimilation into American society is representative of the direction taken by middle-class, middle-European Jews who formed a secular Jewish identity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this was not commonly the case for Russian Jews, but rather for Jews from Germany and Austria who were often more affluent and progressive.\textsuperscript{89} The Derenowskys’ lack of religiosity, high level of assimilation and degree of wealth led friend Miriam Arsham to describe the family as ‘a particular kind of Russian Jews; they weren’t small village Jews. Her father was an educated, city man. He was a doctor, which is very unusual for Jews in Russia … There is a Russian Jewish intelligentsia which both her parents were part of: the people who sat around and had ardent discussions about liberalizing forces. Smoked cigarettes and talked about Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. That was their heritage’.\textsuperscript{90} Arsham explained that ‘for Jews in Russia, the Derenowskys had attained an unusually high position in the social order of the time’.\textsuperscript{91} The more common case for a Jew living in ghettoised Russia was that ‘your birth was not registered. You never were permitted in a Russian school. At the age of 12, you were stolen from your village to serve in the army. And your servitude in the army was pure slavery’.\textsuperscript{92} Yet, like other Jewish families, the Derenkowskys were still considered inferior in status.\textsuperscript{93} The laws of 1795 and 1835 confined the Jews, formerly living in what is now Poland, Lithuania and the Ukraine, to the Pale Settlement. In 1835 Jews were expelled from certain areas and in 1882 activities and jobs were still being restricted.\textsuperscript{94} For this reason, Deren’s parents’ secular and Russian education and consequent jobs, were ‘very unusual and had to have occurred during a period of relative liberalisation’.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{90}Arsham, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 156-57.
\textsuperscript{91}Ibid., 156.
\textsuperscript{92}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93}Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 161.
\textsuperscript{95}Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 156-57.
Deren’s family history on both her maternal and paternal sides consisted of ‘living by ideas’ alongside their Jewish identity. ‘There is a history of professionalism in the arts, science and business for Deren’s family. Not only would she be encouraged by their history to live up to a tradition, but she would also learn what authority was vested in the father’s side, in his heroes, his models, the homeland, Russia’, explains Penn.96 Deren’s parents’ marriage united two noteworthy Russian Jewish families.97 The paternal, Fiedler, side of her family traced its heritage in a direct line from Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Hassidic sect of Jews.98 Her father’s family also contained a writer who contributed to one of the largest Hebrew magazines and was a well-known specialist.99 Deren’s maternal side, the Promyshlianskys, had professional accomplishments which Penn describes as ‘all the more extraordinary considering the oppressed situation of ghettoised Jews (in Ukraine)’.100 The prohibition on study and restrictions for women did not stop Deren’s grandmother hiding books under her pillow to read as a child, nor restrict her adult involvement in social causes. Esther also went on to influence her children, including Deren’s mother Marie, to undertake ‘scholarship, ideas, cultural and professional pursuits’.101 While Deren and her family participated in middle-class high culture as Russian Jews, they still remained inferior subjects under the Russian Czar. While Deren’s family could not entirely avoid a connection with their Jewish background, by cultivating a cultural identity, they were at least able to access wider and greater social opportunities.

Understandably, once in America, Deren’s family continued to avoid Jewish identification and participation in Jewish communities, although this was not the common practice for immigrants. As a result Deren was brought up in an environment that was demarcated by high culture rather than by Jewish traditions. In the name of cultivating a middle-class identity rather than a Jewish one, at home the Derens discussed Russian classical literature such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, listened to the music of Brahms, Sibelius and Beethoven and discussed liberal politics.102 The interview with Penn portrays the Derens as culturally focused, cultivating a ‘universal

96 Penn, in ibid., 159-60.
97 Ibid.
98 Conversations with Wolf (Deren’s cousin) and Assya Zukerman, February 1978, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 159-60.
99 Ibid., 160.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 163.
102 Ibid., 159.
intellectualism’ through which they could participate more widely and find greater acceptance.

As Deren’s family consciously established a distance from their Jewish background, it seems questionable that Deren’s Jewish roots would be the cause of her alienation. However, Deren’s Jewish identity was not so far removed from her consciousness. Arsham explains that Deren ‘was very, very embarrassed about being Jewish. It was anti-Semitic, let’s just say it straight out … she hated it, it seemed very vulgar to her.’ Deren’s form of Jewish identity is clearly a complex and ambivalent one. A moment recounted by Penn portrays Deren’s belief that the notion of a religious identity was laughable: having once taunted her mother about their lack of religious practice, playfully provoking her – ‘we’re Jewish now, are we?’ Yet Deren still ‘had to ask permission of her mother to participate in the most ‘American’ of holidays, Thanksgiving’, illustrating that, while the family’s Jewish cultural practice was not a dominating element of family life, American culture was still not inhabited unquestionably nor wholly. As Deren’s Jewish roots were still relevant to her existence to some degree, they can therefore still be recognised as contributing to her alienation and search for acceptance.

However, this environment of assimilation and universalist high culture did indeed affect Deren’s forthcoming endeavours and practices. Even Deren’s persona reflects how she used this type of upbringing to try to find an acceptable role, appearance and status in society. Deren was described as wanting to be ‘cultivated in the “French” manner she felt she was part of’. Deren’s stepmother, Amalie Phelan, saw Deren continuing this familial trend of undertaking intellectual practices to become part of wider society, by taking ‘the route of intellectualizing to reach people’. She ‘wanted her whole being and her whole history to be that of an artist, so that any part of it that did not fit her concept, she simply lied about.’

103 Arsham, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 157.
104 Penn, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 160-69.
105 Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 295-96.
106 Arsham, in ibid., 156-57.
This reaction manifested in Deren’s presentation of herself. Deren’s pattern of name-changing throughout her life depicts both her dislike of her identifiably Jewish name as well as her aim to cultivate herself as an artist. Upon arriving in America and then attending school and university, she became Elenor Deren. Then after marrying second husband Alexander Hammid, and finding friends among the avant-garde community of Greenwich Village, she changed her name to Maya Deren. Although ‘Maya’ was the Hindu goddess of sorcery, Deren was still labeled ‘ethnic’ by those in the community, which suggests that her aim to create the illusion of being the artist did not obscure her Jewish characteristics as she had hoped.\(^{108}\) Anais Nin, a writer and contemporary within this Greenwich Village setting, described Deren in her diary as ‘Maya, the Gypsy, the Ukrainian gypsy, with wild frizzy hair’.\(^{109}\) While this does not initially seem negative, the stigma around this description becomes pronounced when Nin emphasised Deren’s ‘primitive’ qualities of ‘curly, wild hair … the mouth was wide and fleshy, the nose with a touch of South-Sea-Islander fullness’ negating any positive connotations in these ‘gypsy’ features. Rather they denote Deren as the ‘Jewess’ in Nin’s eyes.\(^{110}\) Deren responded to this casting of ‘Otherness’ by depicting herself quite specifically in her photography and marketing for her films.\(^{111}\) Deren tried to diminish her ‘exotic’ differences by softening her features through the use of abstraction and obscuration in mirrors and glass, as in such shots as the publicity photograph for \textit{Meshes of the Afternoon}.\(^{112}\) In this image she stands against a window, hands pressed to the glass, with her face and mass of curly hair receding into a soft blur. The resulting effect on her face of what Nin termed a ‘Botticelli effect’ of soft curves made these promotional photos more acceptable in their European-style beauty.\(^{113}\)

Deren consciously guided how her physical differences were perceived, highlighting her Russian background rather than Jewish roots. Deren’s second husband Hammid described Deren as having ‘a great flair for Russian-like clothing … she made her own fantasy clothes, kind of folksy, embroidery type.’ Deren’s third husband, Teiji

\(^{108}\) Clark, Hodson, Neiman, \textit{Legend}, 2-4.
\(^{110}\) Ibid.
\(^{111}\) Pramaggiore, ‘Performance and Persona,’ 19.
\(^{112}\) Ibid., 21.
\(^{113}\) Ibid., 20.
Ito, described Deren as ‘always a Russian …She was always dressed up talking, speaking many languages and being a Russian’. Deren’s exaggerated theatrical entrances in colourful costumes and jangling jewellery and impromptu Russian folk dances were her way of defining her visible differences as Russian. This demonstrates that Deren’s feeling of being an Outsider was a result of the Jewish component of her identity; she was evidently happy enough to play up to accepted stereotypes of being Russian, as here she could find inclusion through mainstream understanding.

Another way to conceive of this performance, however, is through what Arsham explains as Deren’s desire to cultivate herself as an artist, in which Deren emphasised a general exotic otherness considered acceptable in America and particularly within this group. Arsham describes her as wanting ‘her whole being and her whole history to be that of the artist’. Deren’s promotional images, performance and public persona of film-maker, or Russian artist, and desire to steer people’s perception of her away from regarding her as the ‘Jewess’, show that not only did she want to be accepted, but that, most significantly, she wanted to displace the characteristics that people attributed to being Jewish, and a supposed sign of her inherent difference.

Deren’s personal need to find acceptance began in her youth. While it is hard to detect her feelings of being accepted into her new American home initially, as she was only five when she moved, after she began school her sense of difference was clear. At age thirteen Deren was sent to the International School of Geneva, where her Russian heritage could be considered no different from the array of backgrounds from which other students came. Yet Deren’s feeling of being an Outsider becomes immediately evident when in her first year at the school, she joked in a letter to her mother in 1930 that: ‘When you see me at Christmas I will be a thin, emotional girl speaking French like a machine gun. That’s supposed to be a joke’. Yet this is more than a mere ‘joke’, this statement in fact demonstrates the physical and linguistic pressure that Deren experienced to feel equal to the larger group. Although comprised of

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114 Teiji Ito, recollection, May 1975, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, xx.
116 Arsham, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 156.
117 Deren to Marie Deren 24 October1930, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 56.
international students, there was obviously a similarity between them that Deren aspired to, but could not imitate.

Having initially felt excluded, Deren came to experience a sense of social stability at the school in Geneva. Herbert Passin describes how her ‘Geneva experience strengthened her European side very much’, suggesting that she developed the appropriate cultural characteristics that would ensure her acceptance. Yet her place as an outsider was still not wholly reconciled. According to Passin, Deren ‘always felt a bit alien’ at this school. Deren herself explained this sensation candidly in a letter written in 1939 to Eda Lou Walton, her former instructor at New York University, as having a ‘terrible sense of not belonging’. Deren made it explicit that this was due to her Jewish heritage, describing ‘the fact that my family always seemed in my eyes to be foreigners, incidentally being Jews and not having xmas trees or Easter eggs like my friends did … I was never accepted by the group.’ Deren was conscious not only of her difference, but of how it left her ostracised from her wider community. She saw herself as having a ‘terrible compulsion to conform’, which dictated then that she cultivate the ‘European’ sensibilities of those surrounding her. At this young age, Deren was already undertaking her own search for a group to belong to, on her path to assimilation.

Deren joins the Young Socialist Party League like many young American Jews

Deren’s participation in Young Socialist Party League as a young adult can be recognised as following both her family’s intellectual cultural practices and the ‘European’ practices of her peers in Geneva. The YSPL provided her with a new intellectual culture to be part of as a young woman. However, this participation can be considered as not simply a cultural pattern but rather as the continuation of her familial path of assimilation, as well as perpetuating wider Jewish practices of assimilation. In both America and Europe, the bourgeois Jewish youth of Deren’s age

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118 Herbert Passin, (friend and fellow member of the Young Peoples Socialist League), interview, July 1975, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 282.
119 Deren to Walton, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 301.
120 Ibid.
and class were seeking new cultural and intellectual modes by which to gain acceptance into wider society.\textsuperscript{121} Deren’s search for inclusion within the YSPL can be considered as her own personal search for a community to belong to but simultaneously cannot be extrapolated from the trends of her family or general Jewish cultural patterns in America that responded to prejudice or ostracism.

The 1930s saw many young Jewish intellectuals taking part in leftist politics, where ideologies transcended ethnic and religious particularities and instead placed emphasis and power in all-inclusive societies.\textsuperscript{122} Such pursuits provided Jewish youth, often the children of immigrants, a way to leave behind their Jewish heritage, and connect with broader American culture.\textsuperscript{123} However, fleeing Jewish heritage in this way removed them from the American mainstream and made them part of radical culture instead.\textsuperscript{124} Poet and fellow Trotskyist, Harry Roskolenko, explained that ‘for the Trotskyists those who were Jewish, it was a means of hiding their Russian Jewish identity … they saw themselves as universal people: we don’t have a religion’.\textsuperscript{125}

From 1934 to 1937, Deren worked for the Young Peoples Socialist League, an arm of the American Socialist Party. She was absorbed in recruiting students, organising anti-war strikes, reporting on these activities and trying to build a united front between American socialists, Trotskyists and other radicals. While her work often consisted of writing such as the poem ‘Youth Marches On’ and ‘Russian History’, a peer, Hal Draper, suggests Deren’s work went much further, recalling her ‘devotion to socialism’, and friends in her university circle described her as ‘very active’ as a Trotskyist.\textsuperscript{126} This was further demonstrated in her nine-month tenure as National Secretary, in her role as a regional organiser for her local branch of YSPL, and in her public presentation of a paper, with fellow Trotskyite Dan Eastman, at a Socialist Party convention in 1937. The paper, titled “Feudal Industrialism”, addressed the idea

\textsuperscript{121} Clark, Hodson, Neiman, \textit{Legend}, 313.
\textsuperscript{123} For a discussion of the universalistic versus non-universalistic tension in the appeal of the Left to Jewish intellectuals, see Philip Mendes, \textit{Jews and the Left: The Rise and Fall of a Political Alliance} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 15-18, 127-29.
\textsuperscript{124} Shapiro, ‘World War II,’ 69.
\textsuperscript{125} Roskolenko, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, \textit{Legend}, 335.
of a workers’ state for America.\textsuperscript{127} Deren’s work came to an end after her expulsion from the party in 1937.\textsuperscript{128} The attempt by the American Socialist party to unite the Trotskyists and Socialists under one umbrella was unsuccessful, resulting in the expulsion of all Trotskyist members, of whom Deren was one.

However, Deren’s personal letters suggest rather that she left the party for its failure to act against fascism and violence. She deemed herself ‘fooled’ for believing in the anti-fascist potential of the Trotskyites. She was disappointed in the American Socialist Party’s attitude to the non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany of 1939-1941. Deren had participated in organising peace rallies such as the Syracuse Student Strike in April 1935 and writing articles such as ‘350,000 Mass Against War in Student Walkout: Told “No substitute for strike”’, published in \textit{The Challenge of Youth}, April 1936, which also expressed this interest in peace, a resolution for which she was left wanting.\textsuperscript{129} Deren described her own abandonment of the YSPL as feeling let down that the ‘Trotskyite newspaper which tells about a big anti-fascist demonstration’ did not deliver peace and unity as promised.\textsuperscript{130}

Yet Deren’s adherence to the socialists extended beyond trying to counteract the exclusionary behavior of fascist and right-wing parties and seems to have been equally hinged on the party’s ability to combat anti-Semitism. Gregory Bardacke (Deren’s first husband), Louis Zwerling, Ray Rosenthal and Harry Roskolenko, peers of Deren, were just some of the Jews who were active in the party during the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{131} In interviews, these men declared that they had committed themselves to socialism because they believed it would counteract the anti-Semitism threatening them. Socialism’s ideology of equality promised the erasure of their ‘Otherness’, one of the causes of persecution of Jews.\textsuperscript{132} By the 1940s they still used socialism as a way to deal with their Jewish identity, but rather than use it to neutralise their difference, it became a tool to struggle against the lack of reaction to anti-Semitism in either Europe or America. Roskolenko maintained that Deren’s socialist ideology was

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[]\textsuperscript{128} Clark, Hodson, Neiman, \textit{Legend}, 309.
\item[]\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 261.
\item[]\textsuperscript{130} Jackson, \textit{Modernist Poetics}, 313; Jackson ‘The Modernist Poetics of Maya Deren,’ 18-19, 23.
\item[]\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 18-19.
\item[]\textsuperscript{132} Clark, Hodson, Neiman, \textit{Legend}, 313-14.
\end{enumerate}
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indeed a cover for her Jewish roots, just as it was his, suggesting Deren’s involvement in the party and movement aligned her work with the middle-class Jewish men of her generation in both their reaction to their Jewish identity as well as a way to navigate anti-Semitism.

To reduce Deren’s years of work as a conscientious Trotskyist merely to a consequence of her wanting to hide her Jewish roots, as suggested by Roskolenko, seems questionable. Equally reductive, however, is discounting the effect of Deren’s Jewish background on her search for peaceful equality. Deren’s adherence to socialism can be recognised as a search to belong to a universalist community, where differences of religion, class and ethnicity were erased, enabling an equal platform for all. Socialism was therefore indeed one of the many wider trends informing her ideological journey, but it was an underlying sensation of ‘alienation’, defined by Deren in this period as a ‘void’, that needs to be highlighted, as it instigated this reaction. Her ‘alienation’ induced her to follow the path of other American youth who shared her background and to seek solace in a movement that promised to remove this Otherness.

Reactions to Jewish identity in twentieth century America

While the Jewish component was only a marginal element of her identity, the situation in Europe and America in the 1930s and 1940s in regard to race, nationalism and anti-Semitism meant that Deren was defined by others as Jewish, no matter how hard she sought to remove this association. I argue therefore that Deren’s need for community came from her desire to eradicate her Otherness that stemmed from this external distinction.

Deren’s effort to eradicate any perceived distinction between herself and fellow Americans can be understood as following an existing pattern of American Jewry, which pre-dates these wartime threats. Jews had played down their Jewish heritage for nearly two centuries in order to fit into American mainstream society. Researching these responses to Jewish identity, Hyman examines how Jews constructed a ‘modern
self’ in accordance with wider society’s values and standards. Jonathan Sarna describes Jews as being unique in the migrant mix of America in their insertion of themselves into many of the country’s founding myths, which, he argues, demonstrates their eagerness for acceptance as well as their deep-seated insecurity. Jewish life in America in this period saw a ‘cult of synthesis’ that established an internal rhetoric for an ‘American-Jew’, but equally looked outward to transform America’s own vision of itself through promoting pluralism as a national ideal forging a new America in which Jews were insiders.133 This synthesis of culture meant that American Jews bridged two cultures, transforming both.

It was not until after World War II that Jews finally felt physically and psychologically secure in their individual and collective status.134 Before and during the war, American Jews had feared the spread of anti-Semitism from Europe and the rise of Judeophobia in America. Jewish entertainers or celebrities had felt the need to change their names to disguise their origins, as did Deren.135 They learned English and became citizens faster than most immigrant groups.136 Although Jews were committed to making America their new home, wartime public opinion polls revealed that they were still distrusted more than most other European immigrants.137 When Jews sought a solution to anti-Semitism, some turned to pamphlets like Escaping Judaism, which sought to overcome what was deemed by some as an inherent disadvantage of birth.138 Beyond the perception of a distinct Jewish identity as an obstacle to being American were the actual restrictions; the quotas on Jews in elite universities and medical schools, and in jobs such as engineering, insurance and banking. Even advertisements for jobs in the New York Times and New York Herald Tribune sometimes expressed a preference for Christians.139

By December 1945, the idea that being both American and Jewish was incongruous had started to wane. More tolerant attitudes and anti-discrimination laws facilitated

134 Shapiro, ‘World War II,’ 65.
135 For patterns of assimilation, see Biale, ‘The Melting Pot and Beyond,’ 17-33.
entry into universities and created more employment opportunities for Jews.\footnote{Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, 35, 183-84.} Hollywood films also began to mirror the changing mood, creating movies that dealt openly with the previous history of anti-Semitic policies, which had been part of the most virulently anti-Semitic period in American history. However, the Jewish community was slow to trust this new perspective and acceptance.\footnote{Shapiro, ‘World War II’, 72.}

Deren’s determined escape from her heritage was not uncommon, but rather part of this war-era trend. There were a few paths Jews ventured down in order to be included in wider society and make their escape. This was often labelled as ‘Jewish self-hatred’, but also understood less negatively as ‘assimilation’. Susan Glenn defines one of these paths as the construction of new identities, such as being ‘cosmopolitan’, which were devised as a way to reconfigure social existence.\footnote{Susan A. Glenn, ‘The Vogue of Jewish Self-Hatred in Post World War II America,’ *Jewish Social Studies, New Series* 12, no. 3 (2006): 96.} She cites David Riesman as seeing Jewish conformity not as a personal struggle but as a response to the larger social context. In his 1950 book *The Lonely Crowd* he explained that Americans who were ‘other directed’ conformed to what wider society expected of them and did so in order to avoid aloneness.\footnote{David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950), 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 37 cited in Glenn, ‘The Vogue of Jewish Self-Hatred,’ 115.} Interestingly, Dennis R. Wrong listed this title in his demonstration of the popularity of the discourse of ‘alienation’ during the period.\footnote{Dennis Wrong, ‘David Riesman: The Lonely Crowd Revisited,’ in *The Modern Condition: Essays at Century’s End* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998), 163.} This suggests that Jewish assimilation was considered both a personal response and part of a broader reaction to American culture of the time.

Assimilation was a popular discourse during both the pre and post-war period. In 1947, Nathan A. Pelcovits expressed concern that amongst Jewish students polled at Yale, many considered Jewishness ‘an appreciable burden’ and a quarter ‘favoured assimilation’.\footnote{Nathan A. Pelkovits, ‘What About Jewish Anti-Semitism: A Prescription to Cure Self-Hatred,’ *Commentary* (1947): 5, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/what-about-jewish-anti-semitism. See also discussion in Glenn, ‘The Vogue of Jewish Self-Hatred,’ 98.} Eliot Cohen referenced the ongoing debate concerning assimilation, citing ‘the emotion and the struggle over the problem of Jewish identification which gave so much of the color and drive to the Jewish intellectuals’ mentality of the
20’s’. Yet not all American Jews of the period who felt alienated or like outsiders rejected their Jewish heritage. Another trend was to assimilate into American society but still maintain a distinct Jewish element to their identity. A specific group of these self-described ‘alienated’ Jewish non-conformists, including Lionel Trilling, Harold Bloom, Irving Howe, Norman Podhoretz and Alfred Kazin, were known as the New York Intellectuals, a group of cultural critics. As Glenn explores, this array of liberal Jewish critics and social scientists openly expressed that they were uncertain of the meaning of their own Jewish identities, and sought individual rather than collective definitions of being Jewish. A number of these critics, including Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg, wrote for the New York magazine Commentary, where they expressed their ambivalence toward their Jewish identity. Often, these Jewish intellectuals spoke out against modern mass culture, seeking to avoid the conformity of post-war Jewish nationalism.

Deren’s life bridged these pre- and post-war periods, as her responses reflected. Her construction of a ‘modern self’ saw her avoid labeling her assimilation in terms of her Jewish identity, rather displacing it with a desire for acceptance within wider society. As noted, she ‘hated’ being Jewish, which suggests her assimilation can be understood as Jewish self-hatred. Yet simultaneously she constructed a ‘cosmopolitan’ identity as an ‘artist’ or ‘European’. In this manner she can be recognised as practising within the ‘cult of synthesis’, as her cultivation of these identities enabled her to define herself as acceptable in twentieth-century America.

Although Deren ‘never made reference to the fact that she was Jewish’, she and her work together were identifiably part of broader Jewish reactions to anti-Semitism. Her own association with being Jewish may only have gone as far as her desire for assimilation, yet the stigma surrounding being Jewish in America arguably continued her connection to her Jewish heritage. Therefore her search for acceptance was not

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147 These critics were typically educated at New York University and Columbia University and wrote for left-wing political journals such as the Partisan Review, Commentary and Dissent.
149 Arsham, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, 157
due to being alienated as a result of her own Jewish identity but rather as a result of American anti-Semitism.150

Deren turns to art and culture as a new platform for belonging

It was after graduating that Deren began to move away from more recognisable Jewish assimilation trends, but this did not mean that she felt free of her sense of alienation. No longer at university or in political parties with other Jewish youth, Deren altered her search for communities and instead began to formulate her own cultural platform for social empowerment and acceptance. After moving to Greenwich Village, she found a job as a freelance writer, editorial assistant and as an assistant to celebrities such as Dunham, and Seabrook and Eastman.151 With her carefully-constructed persona as an artist, she found friendship and acceptance amongst the avant-garde set of Greenwich Village, which included a range of figures including Anais Nin, Henry Miller, Arthur Miller, John Cage, Eric Hawkins, Amos Vogel, Parker Tyler, Willard Maas.152 Deren began her work to foster the idea that there was a vital role for the artist within society, and in turn a community for the artist, forming a cultural and ideological structure and working with film aesthetics and movement. This both empowered her and found her, and others in her position, inclusion in this new culturally driven community.

Yet the avant-garde of 1940s New York had an agenda that seemed at odds with Deren’s desires. This group of artists and intellectuals sought individualism and a disassociation from the current social and cultural structure of society. This was not necessarily a negative position: the artist had an elite and privileged identity in the eyes of this group, compared to a public that was supposed to be insensitive and ill-informed. The avant-garde’s work in abstract expressionism and surrealism sought to undermine established social norms, subverting the cohesiveness of society for the sake of individual emotion and expression. Surrealist painter Encharito Roberto Matta
began working with New York artists such as Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock and William Baziotes from 1941, defining a place for Surrealism within abstract painting where Surrealism’s automatism was compatible with conscious control and form. Matta encouraged abstract painters to break away from personalised Freudian orientations and instead draw on Jungian ideas of the collective unconscious. He argued that the individual’s fears and motivations should be expressed through eternal symbols that represented basic psychological ideas that could be received by a broader audience.\textsuperscript{153} Deren was in dialogue with Matta, having worked with him on her unfinished film \textit{The Witch’s Cradle} and at the Surrealist ‘Art of this Century’ Gallery in Manhattan, and was thus connected to this avant-garde movement. As Rabonowitz discusses, Matta’s investment in collective consciousness and conscious control, matched her own claims for conscious control and group awareness resulting in advocating art that was both more defined in its expression and form and would be received more broadly.\textsuperscript{154} Deren was not aiming to subvert the work of the avant-garde, but rather to remould the way the group formulated its work. Her hope was that avant-garde artists, need not resist absorption into a community as they could now consider themselves artists without necessarily being isolated from the rest of society.

The avant-garde New York school reflects the tensions between the individual artist and the pressures for a theory of collectivity. This tension is considered to have characterised this New York school because it was never resolved. The idea of the ‘isolated artist’ in his studio’ was a continuation of nineteenth-century, Romantic views of the artist as independent of any group identity. Deren attempted to resolve this tension, trying to create a synthesis between the individual auteur and collective practices that extended beyond theory.\textsuperscript{155}

In 1953 Deren independently founded and ran the Creative Film Foundation (CFF), an artists’ community which can be considered as working in opposition to the Abstract Expressionists’ notion of the artist as a solitary individual or at least as trying to build a platform for communication and support where artists could find a sense of solidarity.\textsuperscript{156} The group consisted of a number of film-artists and those working in the

\textsuperscript{153} Rabinowitz, \textit{Points of Resistance}, 69.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Rabinowitz, \textit{Points of Resistance}, 80-83.
arts, from around New York, who met monthly. Deren sought to have artists resist an identity of isolation by providing a system that functioned as a way to support the artist as a member of a special community, an activist for social change and a filmmaker. Yet Deren’s work to unify independent filmmakers was more than just a support structure for film-artists. Instead this can be considered a response to the predicament of the isolated artist that may have represented Deren’s own loneliness, suggesting her objective in trying to build a community while living and practising amongst the avant-garde in New York in the 1940s. In either case, this was clearly a step towards Deren’s more expansive undertaking to reconcile the place of society’s Outsider characters, as well as her own need for belonging.

Deren transfers ideas of belonging into film

It is further evident in Deren’s filmic exploration that she was focused on reconciling her own and a wider sensation of not belonging, as here she explored the effect of ritual traditions and tribal dance in the creation of group and communal sensations. Deren’s work in her ‘trance films’ to project a picture and message of an all-inclusive humanity suggests her continued sense of alienation but equally, and more importantly reveals that her reaction to the idea of belonging was so strong that it now took on even aesthetic form.

Deren’s trance films include *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Tahiti*, and *The Very Eye of Night*. These films, shot between 1945 and 1959, depicted an appropriation of tribal ‘rituals involving minimalisation of personal identity’, which enabled broad group participation in the community. In them, she formed a pre-emptive discussion of the ideas she would later explore in *Anagram*, where she defined the power of ritual in establishing an accessible community:

The ritualistic form treats the human being not as the source of the dramatic action, but as a somewhat depersonalized element in a dramatic whole. The

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157 Ibid.
intent of such depersonalization is not the destruction of the individual; on the contrary, it enlarges him beyond the personal dimension and frees him from the specializations and confines of personality. He becomes part of a dynamic whole which, like all such creative relationships, in turn, endow its parts with a measure of its larger meaning.158

Deren demonstrated that tribal dance, and the removal of the particular characteristics of the participants, could produce a group that shared assimilated characteristics formed by matching action and movement. These matching actions and movements were to be easily accessible and therefore accommodated all types, ensuring a broad commonality and sense of belonging. Deren’s understanding of tribal dance was formed during her research in Haiti, for which she received the first Guggenheim Grant for Independent Film.159

Deren explained that the footage that she collected on her research trips to Haiti did not simply record tribal rituals but rather set out to capture the state of the body while it was involved in this type of dancing. ‘I concentrated on various dance and ritual movements, many of which were photographed in slow motion, with the action of the body clearly delineated … I tried to ‘stop’ a moment, to isolate it from its context’.160

The footage included both medium and long shots in order to capture the full movement of the bodies. A ‘depersonalizing’ of these bodies was effected through panning and changing the focal lengths of the camera, just as the body is depersonalised while it participates in tribal dance.161

Deren defined the tribal practice of ritualised dance as not only obscuring personal and cultural differences but as being a ‘culturally formalized system’ that enabled ‘emotional emancipation’ as well.162 Here she was referring to the ability of tribal dance to induce states of hypnotism and trance. Through repeated sounds, gestures and movements, tribal groups were able to reach one matching a state of mesmerization, achieving an equilibrium of the unconscious. This shared mental state

158 Deren, Anagram, 20.
162 Michelson, ‘Poetics and Savage Thought,’ 40-41; Deren, ‘Religious Possession,’ 492.
was another tribal means of uniting people on one level and thereby creating one
‘whole’ practice, from which nobody was excluded.

Deren’s filmic depiction of ‘depersonalized’ dance, ritual and trance states and re-
adapted tribal practices became a new manifestation of her efforts to create collective
cultural practices that would provide a sense of belonging for those involved. While
her work seemed to be focused outside her own society, engaged with other cultures,
or appropriating these in depictions of society in film, it consistently promoted the
message of overall social inclusion through cultural participation for her
contemporary society. She explicitly declared that tribal dance and its evolutions
would create one ‘dramatic whole’ for society, from which ‘larger meaning’ could
ensue.¹⁶³

Yet seen in the light of her past concerns and practices, it is clear that Deren was still
hoping to find a cultural platform on which she could find acceptance and belonging
for herself. This built on the identity of the ‘artist’ and the ‘European’ that she had
been establishing since her time at the International Geneva School. In the artistic
milieu of Greenwich Village, her attitude had become more outwardly focused as she
had started to create a collective culture in which ‘artists’, ‘Jews’ and other
‘Outsiders’ could find belonging. This is a significant point in Deren’s life and work:
no longer was she trying to find acceptance in wider patterns to displace her Jewish
identity. Instead, now living as the cultivated artist among other artists, she sought to
satisfy her own needs as well as the needs of those who were similarly Outsiders,
alienated or displaced.

¹⁶³ Deren, Anagram, 20.
Chapter Two
Maya Deren and ‘The Artist’

Maya Deren cultivated a set of beliefs, a mode of behaviour, and an image that would enable her to find social acceptance and fit into her environment. Yet her concerns went beyond issues of personal acceptance to embrace the problem of the individual’s integration into society more broadly. This chapter explores Deren’s prescribed procedures for self-construction and process for social integration demonstrated in her theories, films, articles and behaviour and reconsiders it in the framework of her project of universal social integration. It is in this framework that Deren’s concern with the ‘artist’ can be recognised as the foundation of her work. The artist was a figure whom she believed every individual must embody in order to arrive at a socially inclusive culture.

Focusing mainly on her work An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film, this chapter examines how Deren explored the ‘moral form’ of art and the responsibility of ‘the artist’ to improve and progress society. Anagram was published in 1946 through a small, vanguard arts press in New York. A fifty-two page philosophy of art and civilisation, it is a compilation of elements from Deren’s studies of Einstein’s theory of relativity, seventeenth-century science and philosophy, literary theory, classicist and Romantic poetry and Gestalt psychology undertaken from 1938 to 1939 while completing her master’s degree at Smith College. In the preface to her master’s thesis, Deren explained the importance of studying works of literature in their socio-economic and political context: ‘literary criticism in general would benefit inestimably by some authoritative work on the relationship between science, economics, politics, and ideology (of which literature is an expression)’. Deren similarly constructed Anagram as a work extending from these studies and developed in relation to the scientific inquiry, ethics, and theories of aesthetics of her mid-twentieth century and post-war context. The title refers to the book’s format: a set of interrelating ideas about art, naturalism and surrealism, and also about

164 Deren, Anagram, 37.
166 Jackson, Modernist Poetics, 46-47.
Hollywood’s failure in relation to moral responsibilities. Deren provided not just a theoretical and contextual discourse in which to situate her work, but also an intellectual and ontological role for film, art and the artist. She related her work to the broader philosophical, scientific and aesthetic ideas of her period, framing her ideas in relation to the individual’s existence in civilisation. Rabinowitz argues that Deren’s ideas were unique during this period, because there was a limited range of film theory books available in English that developed ideas in this manner.\(^\text{167}\)

While Deren’s argument was specifically directed at how film should be placed amongst the other arts and contextualised as an important development of the period, she simultaneously produced a delineation of ‘the artist’. The latter was not specified in her preface as was the former, yet this exploration of ‘the artist’ as a significant figure within the period was no less important to Deren’s philosophy. Through her description of the artist and his ‘moral responsibility’ to foster ‘growth and development in the individual, progress in civilization’, her work became an ontological expression of how to live successfully as an individual who uses creative and intellectual capacities in a socially-conscious way.\(^\text{168}\) Deren described the artist’s role as an amalgamation of what was once the role of God and the role of the ‘primitive artist’ in tribal communities.\(^\text{169}\) Deren pointed to what she defined as a paradigmatic shift for Western society in the ‘17\textsuperscript{th} century’, as being the moment when divine determination of the environment was replaced by the power and capacity of the individual.\(^\text{170}\) In removing ‘divine will’, Western society recognised the power and capacity of each individual’s consciousness.\(^\text{171}\) This ability of individuals to both determine and permeate their surrounds gave them a ‘moral responsibility’ that replaced not only the role of God but also the role of the ‘primitive artist’ who previously had to ‘straddle the position between the community and the gods’ and illuminate the conditions of the context for his community. As the ‘primitive artist’ used consciousness, creativity and intellect to resist reification and alienation from the environment, so too must the modern version of ‘the artist’.\(^\text{172}\) Deren thus implied that for individuals to utilise human functions with a ‘moral

\(^{168}\) Deren, ‘Creating Movies with a New Dimension,’ 138.
\(^{169}\) Deren, *Anagram*, 17.
\(^{170}\) Ibid., 18.
\(^{171}\) Ibid.
\(^{172}\) Ibid., 16, 18.
responsibility’, they must do as the ‘primitive artist’ and God were believed to have once done. In being ‘the artist’ they were to better society, through progress and seeking to have its problems ‘resolved in miniature’. While this concept of ‘the artist’ was developed directly and explicitly through Anagram, ‘the artist’ also featured as an underlying theme, as I will demonstrate, throughout her smaller or more personal works, such as her notebooks and her program notes for the complementary lectures at screenings of her films.

When considering Deren’s ‘artist’ in terms of her early twentieth-century American context, a parallel with the symbol of ‘the Jew’ appears. Though never explicitly naming such a character in her work, Deren utilised the characteristics of ‘the Jew’ but redefined them for the ‘artist.’ This is something that commentators on Deren’s work have not clearly recognised or acknowledged. I therefore explore what these attributes entailed for both ‘the artist’ and ‘the Jew’, with reference to where these are expressed in Deren’s work and in cultural outputs of twentieth-century America. This exploration reveals that these parallel characteristics functioned as part of a wider context or discourse, that of ‘Judaised’ discourse. The chapter defines ‘Judaised’ discourse in America, delineating the history of Jews themselves on their path of immigration, integration and assimilation into America, in order to demonstrate how the symbol of ‘the Jew’ emerged and came to represent these characteristics, and how wider American culture reacted accordingly. By drawing parallels between the characteristics of ‘the artist’ and the Western cultural symbol of ‘the Jew’, I demonstrate that Deren can be understood as part of a wider history that used ‘the Jew’ as a mouthpiece or vehicle through which to create or respond to cultural change.

The interpretation of Deren’s ‘artist’ as analogous to and bearing a family resemblance to ‘the Jew’ enables a more nuanced reading of Deren and establishes a particular place for Deren in twentieth-century American culture. This chapter begins therefore by investigating Deren’s aim for each individual to embody ‘the artist’ and their morally necessary and socially significant role.

173 Deren, Anagram, 52.
Each individual as ‘the artist’

To begin understanding Deren’s ‘artist’, I turn to the central pillar of her oeuvre and its specific articulation in Anagram: that each individual has an ability, and therefore a responsibility, to creatively reflect upon and evolve with society, thereby living as an artist would. Anagram laid out the theory that individuals can be considered artists if their work ‘seeks to reveal the nature of reality’ as well as working to ‘extend… imaginatively’ upon this reality. Just ‘as in science, the process of creative art is two-fold: the experience of reality by the artist on one side, and his manipulation of that experience into an art reality on the other. In his person he is an instrument of discovery: in his art he exercises the art-instrument of invention’. Here Deren posited that individuals can act as artists according to their capacities. In doing so, they further utilise their human functions, as art and its ‘two-fold’ effect combine ‘discovery’ of knowledge and the reflection and expression of creativity. She saw art and the artist as ‘degenerated’ when acting only as an instrument of personal and environmental observation and discovery. She outlined three elements that combine to constitute art: ‘the reality to which a man has access – directly and through the researches of all other men; the crucible of his own imagination and intellect; and the art instrument by which he realises, through skillful exercise and control, his imaginative manipulations’. For this reason, art had to be ‘the effect of a controlled, artificial manipulation’. This ‘manipulation’ of both the ‘controlled’ and ‘imaginative’ sort, constitutes the creative component which Deren believed both made someone an artist and allowed that person to utilise human capacities to the full.

Yet, this art is not an ‘escape from the labour of truth’, declared Deren, who feared her readers’ negative reaction to her explanation of artistic reactions to society. Rather this ‘timely art’ must remain relevant to the scientific advances and inventions of the

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175 Deren, Anagram, 28, 16.
176 Ibid., 26.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid., 17.
179 Ibid., 23.
period. It would therefore develop as both an extension of the ‘labour of truth’ that constitutes the environment and as a new ‘reality’, which ‘illuminates our emotions and ideas which may have escaped our attention in the distracting profusions of reality, and so becomes educational’.  

That is, the artist ‘cannot shirk this responsibility by using, as a point of departure, the knowledge and state of mind of some precedent period of history’.  

Embodying the role of ‘the artist’ therefore enabled the individual to involve themselves directly in their society and context, as well as acting to develop their society. Through the use of their functions of creativity and knowledge, individuals were able to create a new ‘form of life’ as ‘a conscious manipulation designed to create effect, in contrast to the spontaneous compulsions of expression – and in its results – the new man-made reality’. This explains Deren’s final declaration in *Anagram* that:

> The history of art is the history of man and of his universe and of the moral relationship between them. Whatever the instrument the artist sought to recreate the abstract invisible forces of the cosmos in the intimate, immediate forms of his art, where the problems might be experienced and perhaps be resolved in miniature.  

Although Deren claimed that ‘the artist’’s qualities of ‘imagination’ and ‘discovery’ could be found in each human, thereby making it a role available to everyone, she also asserted that it was the attribute of ‘consciousness’ that made ‘the artist’ a role that not only could be, but should be, embodied by all. Deren defined working as an artist ‘as an exercise, above all, of consciousness’. ‘Consciousness’ was pivotal in her theories, as it was this component that united the qualities of acting creatively and intelligently as an artist with being morally responsible as a human. Deren asserted that ‘man’s mind, his consciousness, is the greatest triumph of nature, the product of aeons of evolutionary process’.  

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180 Ibid., 22-24.
181 Ibid., 17.
182 Ibid., 20. Underlining Deren’s.
183 Ibid., 52.
184 Ibid., 17.
185 Ibid., 9.
Deren’s depiction of history sees the significance of ‘consciousness’ as stemming from Enlightenment beliefs. She stated that in the ‘17th century man, along with nature, ceased to be the manifestation of the absolute divine will, and accepted, in the first pride of his newfound, individual consciousness, the moral responsibilities which he had, until then left to the dispensation of the deity’. She maintained that this consciousness developed when man ‘relinquished his concept of divine consciousness’ and was ready to ‘confront the choice of either developing his own and accepting all the moral responsibilities previously dispensated by divinity, or of merging with inconscient nature and enjoying the luxurious irresponsibility of being one of its more complex phenomenas’. She thus defined the power once designated to God as being now in the hands of each individual: ‘The phenomena which were once the manifestations of a transcendent deity are now the ordinary activities of man’.

Freed from divinely ordained actions, individuals were now at liberty to practise their own moral codes, utilising their natural functions of intellect, creativity and consciousness accordingly. A rejection of this freedom and choice for ‘moral responsibility’ would result in rejecting individual moral obligation to humanity, for, as Deren defined it, rejecting consciousness would render the individual as amoral as the ‘flora and fauna of the amoral natural world’. Therefore, to use one’s ‘consciousness’ was a ‘moral’ necessity to being human. What is significant here is that Deren believed that man’s creations and response to his environment must utilise his specific ability, that the individual’s response to his surrounds ‘must be a form predicated not upon absolutism, but upon the idea of consciousness’. As a result, Deren explained that this was not for certain individuals or ‘any particular group but to a special area and definite faculty in every or any man…which creates myths, invents divinities and ponders…which is the area of art, which makes us human and without which we are, at best, intelligent beasts’. Deren argued, therefore, that each individual, in using their ability to create, discover, ‘control’ and manipulate their

186 Ibid., 18.
187 Ibid., 9.
188 Ibid., 52.
189 Ibid., 9.
environment, must do this according to their ‘moral responsibility’ of consciousness, making them act simultaneously as a human and as ‘the artist’.

Deren considered that man is able to ‘dedicate himself to the creative manipulation and transfiguration of all nature, including himself, through the exercise of his conscious rational powers’. Working as an artist, therefore, each man, through his consciousness, is able ‘to discover and experience something new’. Hence, the artist represents not only the moral way to be human, but is in turn responsible for the progression of civilisation.

Deren asserted that this connection between being an artist and driving humanity with a human ‘moral’ reaction was not her own philosophy but was influenced by the ideas of T.E. Hulme and Henri Bergson, popular philosophers of the time. An exploration of their philosophies, as presented in Anagram, exposes how Deren further linked consciousness, the progress of humanity and the necessity to act as ‘the artist’. According to Jackson, Deren adapted her ideas from Hulme’s Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art, which critiqued Henri Bergson’s Creative Evolution. Hulme identified ‘the most familiar part of Bergson’ as his account of evolution, where there is ‘continuous evolution and creation’ born of an ‘impulse which is something akin to creative activity we find in our own mind and which, inserted in matter, has, following out this creative activity, gradually achieved the result we see in evolution’. Evolution of man is therefore ‘a current of consciousness flowed down into matter’. Bergson saw evolution as changes in inorganic and organic matter as resulting from a metaphysical ‘impulse’, which, when infused into physical matter causes change. Deren took on Hulme’s approach to Bergson’s theory in terms of his framing of this ‘impulse’ as a creative impulse in human beings which, when reacted to, leads to human development and organic evolution. Essentially, according to Deren, every individual is to be an ‘artist’, for

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191 Deren, Anagram, 9.
192 Ibid.
193 Jackson, ‘Modernist Poetics,’ 57.
195 Hulme, Speculations, 194 cited in ibid.
196 Jackson, ‘Modernist Poetics,’ 58; Deren, Anagram, 9.
an artist’s work is the ‘creative manipulation and transfiguration of all nature, including [man] himself’ and therefore enables humanity to progress.\textsuperscript{197}

In order to understand Deren’s definitive claim that ‘the artist’ had the ability to develop humanity and resolve social problems, I now turn to Deren’s perception of the historical role of the artist.

Deren painted a rather idealised vision of the ‘primitive artist’, whom she described as having a ‘selfless goal’. The primitive artist was to ‘straddle the position between the community and the gods, as required, through the creation of, for example, masks, shields, tapestries or dance movements. No art-form or object was ever merely decorative, but rather had to be packed with ideological purpose’\textsuperscript{198}. For Deren, the work of the ‘primitive artist’ acted as an illumination of the human condition to prevent alienation for the members of their communities, as their ‘art must at least comprehend the large facts of its total culture, and, at best, extend them imaginatively’.\textsuperscript{199} In the context of primitive art, Deren again referenced Hulme and his suggestion:

that when man is in conflict with a nature which he finds dangerously uncontrollable, he attempts to order and control it, vicariously, by doing so ... in his art … In any case, an absolutism of art forms seems highly appropriate to societies, which subject to natural disaster, rigidly localized by geographic and material restrictions, must place the unity of the tribe above all else and thus evolve an absolutism of political, moral and economic authority and an absolutistic concept of time and space. Thus the art works of primitive cultures comprehend and realize a whole system of ideas within their forms.\textsuperscript{200}

Deren argued that, through their work, the ‘primitive artist’ created a system appropriate for society, which enabled broader social comprehension or demystification.

\textsuperscript{197} Deren, \textit{Anagram}, 9.  
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 16.  
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 15.
The modern version of this artist was, for Deren, faced with modern problems of existence. ‘The reality which we must today extend – the large fact which we must comprehend, just as the primitive artist comprehended and extended his own reality – is the relativism which the airplane, the radio, and the new physics has made a reality of our lives’.

Deren’s inclusive use of ‘we’ implies the ability and need for each individual to act as the artist. Furthermore, she declared that ‘we must come to comprehend, the full responsibility, the world which we have now created’. It follows then that Deren’s description of the modern ‘artist’ was matched by her belief in what the work of the ‘primitive artist’ entailed. That is, the individual must form an appropriate ‘comprehension and a manipulation of the universe [within] which man must somehow locate himself’.

Deren’s philosophy therefore included the amalgamation of the ‘consciousness’ of the human, the ‘moral responsibility’ of humanity, and their combined ability to direct creativity and intellect and to drive the understanding and development of civilisation. The result was that, if an individual was to function responsibly for the sake of humanity’s development, he would be compelled to act as an ‘artist.’ Deren emphasised this link between the artist’s role and each individual’s ability to create ‘that triumphant moment – when the elements of a man’s experience suddenly fuse into a homogenous whole which transcends and so transfigures them’.

So while the artist himself had a specific and purposeful place in Deren’s understanding and definition of the unfolding of history, she equally contended that all people had the ability to react responsibly to their surrounds for the betterment of humanity. As Deren implied, this convergence of the capacity of each individual with the role of the artist, enabled a happy marriage between the two, with a new conception emerging in a role for everyone to embody.

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201 Ibid., 17.
202 Ibid., 52.
203 Ibid., 17, 20.
204 Ibid., 13.
The characteristics of ‘the artist’

Deren’s aim was not just to combine the ‘primitive artist’ and ‘moral’ consciousness into a new ‘artist’. A closer study of her definition of this role illuminates further those characteristics that she believed were necessary for this figure’s social response and social reactions. While Deren used a range of labels for what was to become her ‘artist’, what is consistent throughout her work were these characteristics of self-construction and a conscious reaction to one’s socio-cultural surrounds. Her work sought to demonstrate that these were necessary counterparts to the qualities of the consciousness, intelligence and imagination that she attributed to ‘the artist’, which she also attributed to the ‘deviant’ and the ‘witch’. 205

These ideas regarding individuals and how their self construction and social awareness functioned in regards to their community stemmed back to Deren’s earlier exploration of communal life in Haiti and Bali. Deren accompanied anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson on a trip to Bali in 1947, during which she sought to ‘discover in the various cultures or artifacts such force that they carry the entire culture in their arms, so to speak, and so bring to the larger pattern the vertical dimension of their singular reference’, as she wrote to Bateson. 206 That is, she hoped to find cultural patterns that she could define in a singular manner, which is how she arrived at her rather lineal definitions of the place of the ‘witch’ and ‘deviant’ in tribal culture in Haiti and Bali.

Deren’s sociological investigations into these particular figures matched the way she was to consider and discuss ‘the artist’. Her notebook from her 1947 trip to Bali maintained that:

A witch is actually successful in the sense of surviving deviant. You have a cultural, ideological, social, what-not pattern which is, for that society in question, normal (and, importantly, this is understood as a synonym for natural).

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205 For her discussion of witches and deviants, see Deren, ‘From the Notebook of Maya Deren, 1947,’ October 14 (1980): 33-35.
206 For Deren’s association with the anthropologists, see Catrina Neiman, ‘Art and Anthropology,’ 8-15 and Jackson, Modernist Poetics, 140-143; Deren to Gregory Bateson, 9 December 1946 in Deren and Bateson, ‘An Exchange of Letters between Maya Deren and Gregory Bateson,’ October 14 (1980): 16-17.
Most people survive because they conform to these patterns – because they behave normally. Then suddenly you have someone not behaving “normally” and usually they cannot survive, since having rejected the system and its support they go under, so to speak, and are referred to as “subnormal,” “maladjusted.” The “witch” is stronger than this as she is a deviant which survives, and since [she] does not draw its support from the normal pattern … For the survival of the witch independent of the accepted pattern means that she is simultaneously a manifestation of a non “normal” order which is apparently integrated and strong enough to sustain life.207

Deren appeared sympathetic toward these characters during her investigation into the Haitian and Balinese tribal rituals. A note to herself in the piece on Bali exposes the source of her empathy, as she herself had recently been called a ‘witch’ by her co-traveller, Mead.208 Deren wrote instead that she would have used ‘terms like “deviant, catalyst” to describe herself as she considered herself, along with colleagues Mead and Bateson, as ‘deviants, for anthropology is the study of deviancy from one’s social norm and is, theoretically, best advanced by deviants who, being deviant, have a respect for the existence of deviant orders’.209 What begins to emerge here is a picture of Deren’s respect for those with a social conscience and admiration for those who are able to see civilisational patterns and respond comprehensively in their own appropriate manner. According to Deren’s beliefs after these investigations, an individual who is able to formulate an independent pattern of existence is ‘not an isolated, individualized freak’ but a ‘manifestation of an abstract order’.210 Therefore as a result of this consciousness of social patterns, a figure can cultivate a self-constructed identity and reaction to their environment.

Another way to consider the ‘witch’ and her behaviour that is alternative to ‘social norms’ is to recognise that this alternative reaction to society and culture equally ‘illuminates emotions and ideas which may have escaped our attention in the distracting profusions of reality’ just as the ‘primitive artist’s’ did.211 The witch’s

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207 Deren, ‘Notebook,’ 33-34.
208 Ibid., 33.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid., 34.
211 Deren, Anagram, 24.
conscious rejection of social mores highlights just what these normal social mores are. In rejecting society, Deren argued, ‘the witch’ helps others to see ‘the large fact which we must comprehend’, much like the work of ‘the artist’. Deren’s depiction of the deviant did more than reflect her description of ‘the artist’; it demonstrated that the ‘deviant’ and ‘artist’ need to utilise the same characteristics that enable the ‘manipulation and transfiguration of all nature, including himself’. Like ‘the artist’, the witch or the deviant also worked to ‘re-create the abstract invisible forces of the cosmos…where the problems might be experienced and perhaps be resolved in miniature’. Deren’s work therefore revealed parallels between the deviant and the artist in regard to their self-construction and their ability to react to and extend from their wider social surrounds. Terms like ‘witch’, ‘deviant, catalyst’, and the term ‘artist’, which appeared in the earlier Anagram, can therefore be conflated. Hence ‘artist’ unites Deren’s oeuvre as well as her depiction of the nature and characteristics that constitute all these different terms.

*Self-construction and reactionary cultural practices*

Whichever descriptive term she used, Deren advocated a particular type of self-construction and reaction to the cultural environment, one necessarily transformative for both the self and society. Her focus on these qualities was connected to her belief that the individual’s conscious, creative and intelligent constructions served as more than simply a reaction to social norms. They served rather, just as an artist’s work might, to create a new existence for the self and society. Deren’s explanation of how each individual has the ability, through the characteristics of self-construction and socio-cultural consciousness, to transform self and society in order to create a new existence, can be found in her film program notes. She created these as specific interpretations of how to receive her films. She was very serious about having her films seen as demonstrations of these characteristics, even mailing the notes out before her film screenings. The notes boldly stated:

212 Ibid., 17.
213 Ibid., 9.
214 Ibid., 52.
Under no conditions are these films to be announced or publicized as surrealist or Freaudian [sic]. This is not only a serious misrepresentation of the films, but also confuses the audience by inspiring a false interpretation of the films according to systems [sic] to which they bear no relation. The preoccupation with conscious control of form which is involved….is obviously at variance with the Sur-realist aesthetic of spontaneity.215

Here, Deren, in specifying that her work dealt with a ‘conscious control of form’, confirmed her belief that the artist’s work needs to be directly related to ‘consciousness’ construction. Further her direct rejection of surrealism suggests that her work sought a consciousness construction that related to and therefore extended from the real world, rather than a cerebral one or one based in symbolism. This emphasises Deren’s belief in the need for transformation, but one that must be based in the reality of human characteristics that enable this; those of self-construction, social awareness and an appropriately evolving response. These characteristics enable a ‘conscious control’ that turns creative and imaginative intelligence into a transformed self and reality.

Further examples of the transformative construction of self and reality follow in her film program for the screening titled ‘Three Abandoned Films’ on 18 February, 1946, at the Provincetown Playhouse. In it Deren stipulated that her films depicted how:

man himself is such a phenomenon; and the marvellous in man is his creative intelligence, which transcends nature and creates out of it un-natural forms. In his art – whether architecture or poem – he does not reproduce a given reality … [He] relates them into a new reality … his proud ambition is to create, in the image of his own intelligence, a reality man-made.216

While this ostensibly suggests a surrealist result of building on a psychologically invented ‘man-made’ or ‘new reality’, this cannot be the case, as Deren had

215 Deren, program notes, 1945 cited in Rabinowitz, Points of Resistance, 68.
previously rejected surrealism as the system for reading her work. Her description of a ‘reality man-made’ therefore must be grounded in the socio-cultural reality, which means that it must involve the artist’s ‘intelligence’ as well as his ‘consciousness’ in order to first recognise the condition and then build this ‘into a new reality’. Here the characteristic of social-awareness results in work that first comprehends and then ‘transcends nature’. Furthermore in order for this reality to combine ‘his proud ambition is to create, in the image of his own intelligence’, the artist must have the characteristics not just of being socially-aware but self-conscious, or like his art, use his ‘imaginative intelligence’ to be self-constructed.

Man’s need to ‘transcend’ reality through his own creations appears to promote a culture of individualised existence which seems at odds with Deren arguing for the individual or the artist to be socially aware and responsive. Yet further examination of ‘Three Abandoned Films’ clarifies Deren’s formulation of how this creative individual should connect to their environment. The construction of ‘reality’ and self must exist in relation to each other, and as Deren desired the artist’s work to respond to ‘reality’, these must also relate to the state of the universe. In the program notes to At Land, Deren declared that film, ‘through dislocations of space and time…creates a relativistic universe in which the individual alone is a continuous identity. If one may speak of a theme, it is the effort of the individual to relate oneself, as an identity, to a fluid, apparently incoherent universe’.217 This statement builds on Deren’s promotion of the creative and conscious construction of self and surrounds. However, it also reveals once more her interest in belonging to a community. Even though the individual here appears to enjoy a discrete existence, the vision of a society constituted by fluid identities that reflect their surrounds necessarily creates a commonality. Here the foundation upon which Deren’s work rests is the belief that a self-constructed identity that reacts to and builds upon the realities of one’s environment is the best approach to the cultivation of one’s self and to finding a connected social existence. In utilising these traits and reactions, whether as a ‘witch’, ‘deviant’ or ‘artist’, Deren exhorted each individual to approach the world through these characteristics that enabled the embodiment of the artist’s role.

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Deren as ‘the artist’

Deren’s own approach, as the artist, took the form of film. Deren chose this medium to address her surrounds as she declared that film was:

not only an instrument for conveying the artist’s vision, but itself can contribute a view of the world created by intelligence inherent in its own mechanism. When this is achieved it creates a reality, an experience, which, as a whole, can exist only on film. In so doing it contributes to human experience, which is the ideal function of all art expression. 218

Cinema does this through being ‘a time-space art, capable of a unique kind of manipulation of temporal and spatial relationships’.219 That is, Deren believed that film has a transformative quality, which enables it to be an instrument that extends from the surrounds, as the artist requires. ‘The most immediate distinction of film is the capacity of the camera to represent a given reality in its own terms, to the extent that it is accepted as a substitute proper for that reality’, she maintained.220

Deren’s belief in the need for art to be both an intellectual understanding of the contextual reality as well as an imaginative reaction led her to pursue film, as she claimed that ‘the discovery and revelation of cinematic intelligence lies in the development of an art form eminently appropriate to our period of cultural development’.221 Furthermore, as part of a conscious reaction to one’s self and the ‘moral responsibility’ to one’s surrounds and to humanity in general, Deren affirmed that film’s process of cutting and cropping uses the conscious powers of the film-maker in this necessary manner. The film-maker takes the social context and provides a ‘conscious manipulation of its material from an intensely motivated point of view’, where ‘nothing must be left to chance or unconscious operations’. In this manner the film-maker satisfies Deren’s belief that ‘the artist’ must use their

218 Deren, ‘Cinema as an Independent Art Form’ program notes, August 1945, in Essential Deren, 246.
219 Deren, program notes, Theresa L. Kaufmann Auditorium, YM/YWHA, New York, 1 June 1946, in Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legends/Chambers, 460.
220 Deren, Anagram, 30.
221 Deren, ‘Cinema as an Independent Art Form,’ 246.
consciousness when reacting to their social place and surrounds. Furthermore filmmaking fulfilled the demands of being appropriate to the advances of the period, by adapting to ‘the discoveries and inventions of the twentieth century’ and by assisting in comprehending the social conditions. Deren’s use of film enabled her to connect to the environment and transform it through a conscious, creative, imaginative ‘manipulation’ that saw the realisation of both humanity’s development and the individual’s capabilities.  

‘The artist’ can be understood more comprehensively when aligned with the ‘Judaised’ discourse in the period from which Deren’s work emerged. It is of great significance that the features that denoted Deren’s ‘artist’ also comprise ‘the Jew’. Deren’s ‘artist’ was to construct himself or herself through a considered and conscious approach to history, science, technology and art of the day, with each individual developing a creative expression that was ‘a comprehension and a manipulation of the universe in which man must somehow locate himself’. ‘The Jew’ was also understood as re-constructing himself in his environment as appropriately reflective of contemporary contexts and in doing so, appeared integrated within it. The outcome was that ‘the Jew’ and ‘the artist’ shared the characteristics of ‘self construction’ and an ambivalent or evolving reaction to their context in order integrate with the wider socio-cultural environment which, in turn, would necessarily have a transformative effect on their self and their existence.

Tracing the history of ‘the Jew’ in America

Exploring the experiences of Jews, and concepts of ‘the Jew’, in twentieth-century American political, social and cultural life reveals similar characteristics of self-construction and cultural ambivalence as can be found in Deren’s ‘artist’ After migrating to America from their homes in Eastern and Western Europe, many Jews deliberately emulated broader social and political trends in order to integrate or assimilate with wider society, and came to be seen by the wider population as

222 Deren, Anagram, 12.
223 Ibid., 20.
embodying or expressing the society they now inhabited. As a result the image of ‘the Jew’ that emerged in the twentieth century was seen to signify the evolution of modern America, its immigration and population influx and its changing ideas of American identity and culture. In turn this figure became a vehicle to critique these changes to identity, loyalties and nationalism that were being navigated as modern American society evolved. The characteristics of ‘the Jew’ were seen to be those of self-construction and cultural appropriation, as these enabled integration into American culture and society, and were able continuously to reflect the social changes.

A look at America in the period from the early to mid twentieth century, framing the life of Deren, sees both carefully and unconsciously applied uses of this figurative framework, as a means of integration and as a form of cultural reaction or criticism. Yet tracing America’s and the Jewish response to ‘the Jew’ is a complex process. Jews themselves often had to navigate ‘the Jew’ as a cultural symbol simultaneous to their navigation of a new American identity and anti-Semitic discourse. ‘The Jew’ therefore changed along international lines, in accordance with various factors including the specific context in America, the American general public’s response, the response of new immigrants, and the response of Jews themselves. I will now delineate how this allegorical and dialectical symbol of ‘the Jew’ reflected the changing conception of the Other, the immigrant and the self-made man in America in the twentieth century. Significantly, this will simultaneously highlight how self-construction and the conscious embodiment of the socio-cultural surrounds were the most defining components of ‘the Jew’. Furthermore, this will demonstrate how, although ‘the Jew’ was understood differently and had changing associations through different decades, these characteristics continued to be the same. In this manner they could be deployed either to signal or to critique the changing ideas that surrounded ‘the Jew’ and figures such as the Other, the immigrant and the self-made man who were also understood to share these characteristics, and were therefore associated with ‘the Jew’.

Still affecting America’s conception of Jews in the early twentieth century was the German Jewish immigration of the 1830s to 1860s. This group had assimilated into America relatively easily, as many came from secular and wealthy backgrounds and,
upon arriving in America, they developed a commercial culture and culture in the arts in which they could take part. David Desser argues that Jews were able to immediately identify with America as a middle-class and newly-industrialised nation as this group of German-Jewish immigrants was essentially urban, coming from industrialised Germany.\textsuperscript{224} In fact, Jews were not merely adapting to commercial life but were behind the creation of it, with the founders of such stores as Bergdorf-Goodman, Bloomingdales and Macys both producing and reinforcing America’s middle-class culture. These German Jews also brought elements of middle-class classical European culture to America. Where they traveled around America setting up their stores they also founded local orchestras, library, museums and schools.\textsuperscript{225} These new cultural forums enabled German Jews to live as ‘cosmopolitans’ or Europeans in America, but also enabled ‘cosmopolitanism’ to be adopted and cultivated by a wider population. This reflected German-Jews’ adoption and cultivation of the classical and universal qualities of Germanism following the Enlightenment. Therefore in America the embodiment of the universal or cosmopolitan man reflected the attributes of ‘the Jew’. Here, this self-constructed identity that enabled mobility in society, under the guise of the ‘cosmopolitan’ could be considered a positive and idealised new identity.

However, as in Germany where Jews who constructed themselves according to this Enlightenment ideal were still seen as Grenzjude or border-Jews, a similar rejection of the ‘cosmopolitan’ was also seen in America.\textsuperscript{226} Cosmopolitanism could also be regarded with hostility, as Jews and other immigrants who were consciously constructed in this manner were seen as trying to buy a ticket into American life without being wholly loyal or truly American.\textsuperscript{227} Hence, in utilising the characteristics of mobility and self-making with a positive ‘cosmopolitan’ label, ‘the Jew’s’ characteristics could provide hope for a modern, upwardly mobile identity that connected to an international population. This did not, however, always lead to acceptance into American society for those that embodied these traits.

\textsuperscript{224} David Desser, ‘“Consumerist Realism”: American Jewish Life and the Classical Hollywood Cinema,’ \textit{Film History} 8, no. 3: \textit{Cinema and Nation II} (1996): 261.
\textsuperscript{225} Desser, ‘“Consumerist Realism”,’ 264-66.
\textsuperscript{226} Miller, \textit{Cultures of Modernism}, 136-37.
\textsuperscript{227} Desser, “Consumerist Realism”, 263 – 267.
A distinct change in America’s response to ‘the Jew’ came with the mass migration of Jews from Ukraine and Russia in the 1880s and again in the 1930s. Between 1880 and 1920, approximately twenty-eight million immigrants came to the United States, the majority to New York. The largest group came from the Russian Empire, of whom seventy percent were Jews. By 1915, 1.4 million Jews were living in New York, twenty-three percent of them on the Lower East Side. This group was able to integrate into their new surrounds in a way that contrasted with the anti-Semitism and legalised social exclusion found in their previous home. However, although in America they were able to receive citizenship and had access to individual rights as well as legal social inclusion, they could still not access all the social and cultural opportunities available in America. In this they were unlike their German-Jewish immigrant predecessors, who had, according to John Higham, occupied ‘an untrammeled place in American society’. This was due both to the state of poverty and the larger numbers in which this group of Russian Jews arrived. Along with Italians, the second largest group of immigrants in this period, these Jews settled in tenements on the Lower East Side in living conditions reminiscent of a ghetto. These ghetto-like quarters resulted in this group remaining recognisably Jewish to surrounding society.

Here, a further link between poverty and immigrants was also pinned onto ‘the Jew.’ It was not just their large numbers that made them an identifiable population, but the tradition of the Jews being ‘wanderers’ or a ‘homeless nation’ also created an immediate association with ‘the Jew’ as the epitome of ‘the immigrant’. Therefore in representing ‘the immigrant’ as poor and diseased, ‘the Jew’ became a symbol associated with ideas of rats or other vermin who spread disease and overran the population. This gave rise to ideas that ‘the Jew’ would wreak havoc on the environment, polluting the ‘natural’ national population in a cultural and physical

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228 Dinnerstein, Uneasy at Home, 18-20, 150, Polland and Soyer, Emerging Metropolis, xii, 111-13.
229 Dinnerstein, Uneasy at Home, 18.
230 Ibid, 25.
232 John Higham, Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America (New York: Athenaeum, 1975), 139.
manner just as pestilence and vermin would. Alfred Schultz’s 1908 *Race or Mongrel* cautioned that the ‘fall of nations is due to intermarriage with alien stocks’ and that a ‘nation’s strength is due to racial purity’. Russian Jews were even seen by the previous generation of Jewish immigrants themselves as a group of needy and sick that needed refuge. Poet Emma Lazarus, an upper-class assimilated American Jew, spoke of these new immigrants, who also included Slavs, Italians and Irish, as ‘huddled masses’, ‘tired’, ‘poor’ and ‘wretched’ in her famous poem found on the Statue of Liberty. ‘The Jew’ —associated with degeneration and miscegenation — was now seen as a creature that would drive healthy American society to its death. This symbol therefore became one against which those Jews who were already assimilated and included in American life had to define themselves against and one which immigrants in general had to negotiate.

In the 1920s new racial laws and unwritten social laws confirmed this association that had emerged at the turn of the century; the 1924 Immigration (or National Origins) Act restricted immigration to the United States. Nativist and reform groups saw ‘the Jew’ as representing those who were ‘un-American’ and ‘unassimilable’ due to their supposed ambivalence in loyalty. This demonised not just Jews but all forms of immigrant Otherness in order to strengthen the Anglo-Saxon population and any challenge to its cohesive culture. Debates over Americanisation continued through the early 1920s, with ‘the Jew’ and their alien Otherness often used by politicians, journalists and cultural critics as a tool to encourage fear of miscegenation and population decline. In 1922, journalist Kenneth Roberts, known nationally for his work in the *Saturday Evening Post*, declared that, with continued immigration,

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America would ‘be populated by a mongrel race’ and that ‘races cannot be crossbred without mongrelisation’. 241 Waldo Frank accused New York of being inhabited by ‘brew of Nigger-strut, of wailing Jew’. 242

This distinctly discriminatory and aggressive language within American discourse encouraged readers to reject the threatening Other with their array of bad qualities that would bring about America’s demise. 243 ‘The Jew’ was a symbol of a supposedly scientifically and genetically distinct Outsider. While expressed through ‘the Jew’, this association also targeted all those outside homogenous American or Nordic appearance as a threat to the American nation, now considered particularly poisonous during a socio-political push toward ‘Americanisation’. 244 Yet it was not just the Jews’ appearance or supposed genetic differences that presented a problem, but the ambivalent loyalty and permanent Otherness that were signalled by this symbol’s ‘dual allegiance’ to America and their Jewish roots.

But within this environment there was still room for the possibility that a modern and multi-cultural America could be adopted through characters like ‘the Jew’ by Jews themselves and by other immigrants. ‘The Jew’ was used by those poets and writers who tried to foster a harmonious image of multi-cultural and multi-national modern America. In Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot*, 1908, America is presented as ‘God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island … your fifty language and histories’. 245 Zangwill, according to David Biale, presented the experience of Jewish assimilation not as depending on the disappearance of ethnic traits, but through their inclusion of them into a new American multicultural identity. 246 That is, to become a modern American was to become ‘Judaised’. 247 This work promoted the idea of the American nation being built from a multiethnic base.

246 Biale, ‘The Melting Pot and Beyond,’ 23.
Horace Kallen, however proposed a different answer, confronting Zangwill in 1915, declaring ‘men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions… they cannot change their grandfathers’.

He argued for a ‘cultural pluralism’, that would recognise ethnic origins, rather than turning the concept of being American into being one type of idealised modern American.

Jews themselves took part in this discourse, attempting to reinvent their own identity as both a positive response to American nationalism and as a positive reconstruction of ‘the Jew’. Jews tried to create links to American historical narratives in order to define themselves as a foundational part of the population and to associate a Jewish past with an American past, suggesting in turn shared ideals.

This judeocentric reading of the nation’s history was promoted by groups such as the American Jewish Historical Society established in 1892, whose president, Oscar Straus, defined a direct association of ‘the Jews with the discovery of this continent and their participation in the early settlement of the colonies’. This picture of American history included Jews having funded Christopher Columbus and having been ‘pilgrim fathers’ who fought for religious freedom and contributed financially to the American Revolution. In this vision, Americans and Jews could find a harmonious synthesis. Further still, as explained by Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, speaking in 1905 on the concordance of Judaism and Americanism, Jewish views of ‘liberty and law, of man’s inalienable rights and duties … are in creative concordance with the distinctive principles pillaring American civilisation’. Therefore to be a better American was to be a better Jew and vice versa. This not only strengthened the belief of Jews in their secure place in America society and amongst its population, they hoped that this idea of their history and harmony with America would enable their people and culture to be considered good Americans. The characteristic of a ‘dual’ identity comprising ‘the Jew’ mean that ‘the Jew’ could symbolise for newcomers to America what it meant to be a culturally plural modern American. Jews themselves hoped to

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249 Sarna, ‘Cult of Synthesis,’ 53-60.
253 Sarna, ‘Cult of Synthesis,’ 57.
emphasise how ‘dual’ allegiance could lead people to be good Americans, by embodying the American ideals of democracy, liberty and tolerance.

As World War II began in Europe, America feared being dragged into the war. As a result, anti-Semitism rose, reflecting mounting judeophobia around the world. An amalgamated Jewish-American identity no longer necessarily enabled a navigation away from anti-Semitism as it had at the turn of the century, as new forms of anti-Jewish culture arose. In rural America the Ku Klux Klan was gaining hold, while in New York, groups such as the Christian Front and the Harlem Labor Union attacked Jews. In 1941 Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana cautioned Americans against Jews who were ‘gifted in the arts of corruption and bribery’ and ‘debauched legislatures’. Similarly Congressman John E. Rankin proclaimed himself a saviour of ‘old-line Americans, Anglo-Saxon people who have been here for 200 years’, and declared Jews responsible for the economic plight of rural America, urban crime, race agitation in the South of America as well as being behind other international problems. Furthermore, Jews were often depicted as ‘mongrel’ or ‘slime’ in poetry of the period, encouraging xenophobic attitudes towards Jews and migrants in general. T.S. Eliot’s ‘Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar’ identified ‘the Jew’ as less than a rat, at the bottom of society: ‘The rats are underneath the piles, The Jew is underneath the lot’. Associations surrounding ‘the Jew’ had become so negative that Jews avoided association with the religion and Hollywood relegated Jewish actors to roles as gangsters or bad guys in order to obscure their Jewish identity. ‘The Jew’ had become the scapegoat for everything to the point where Jews themselves wanted to escape Judaism, as the title of pamphlets such as Escaping Judaism suggested.

Jewish processes of assimilation similarly reflected this response, with some turning to Marxism as a way to transcend ethnic, class and religious categories. Others

254 Higham, Strangers in the Land, 285-6, Gurock, Jews in Gotham, 32-36.
256 John E. Rankin, speech to House of Representatives, 4 June 1941, United States Congressional Record, 76th Congress, 2nd Session, 1 November 1939 cited in Shapiro, ‘World War II,’ 67.
259 For the appeal of Marxism to Jewish Americans, see Mendes, Jews and the Left, 164-70.
denied their Jewish backgrounds and rationalised anti-Semitism. This type of rejection of Jewish identity was labelled Jewish self-hatred as it extended beyond assimilation into outright rejection.\footnote{Shapiro, ‘World War II,’ 69.} The result was that ‘the Jew’ was then liable to become the scapegoat for looming problems in Europe and America. The quality of ambiguity which the symbol possessed meant that ‘the Jew’ could be reformed into representing each of these problems as well as signifying the threat of the unknown.

In December 1941 when America entered the war, American and American-Jewish interests merged and anti-Semites in America went underground for fear of being openly associated with anti-Semitic Germany. ‘The Jew,’ being a representation of the culturally plural environment, became a positive symbol of the freedom and tolerance America stood for. By 1947, films like Crossfire began to reverse the ‘de-Semiticising’ of Hollywood that had taken place in the 1930s.\footnote{Ibid.} Donald Weber highlights that Crossfire’s definably Jewish hero, Samuels, is portrayed as a ‘bona fide American veteran’.\footnote{Donald Weber, ‘The Limits of Empathy: Hollywood’s Imaging of the Jews Circa 1947,’ in Key Texts in American Jewish Culture, ed. Jack Kugelmass (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press: 2003), 95.} During this period Jewish novelists also became popular voices of American military experience.\footnote{Shapiro, ‘World War II,’ 71-72.} Herman Wouk’s The Caine Mutiny, 1952, was at one stage the second-best selling twentieth-century novel.\footnote{Gordon Hunter, ‘The Meanings of Marjorie Morningstar,’ in Key Texts, 46.} Jews themselves fought the anti-Semitism in America from which they had previously hidden. Jews lobbied on state and federal levels for anti-discriminatory legislation, challenged discriminatory behaviour in court and promoted the overcoming of prejudice through community programs with other groups. Just as in the turn of the century when Jews had unified their own and American ideals, once again they declared that anti-Semitism was not just bad for Jews but also for the country. Different groups of American Jews united against Jewish discrimination and fought for religious, social and political tolerance, claiming it would strengthen American democracy.\footnote{Shapiro, ‘World War II,’ 73.} Here ‘the Jew’ came to represent democratic America and its fight for the ‘four freedoms’, as the Jewish character, Lee Diamond, in Pride of the Marines, 1945, declares: ‘We need a country to live in where no one gets booted around for any reason’.\footnote{Pride of the Marines, directed by Delmer Daves (Los Angeles: Warner Bros., 1945), film, as quoted in Shapiro, 75.}
Although ‘the Jew’ had come to be a symbol of tolerance and liberated modern America, the Jewish community itself was slow to trust this new conception. While different groups of Jews continued to feel alienated and practised various degrees of assimilation and self-hate, progress had been made towards overcoming institutionalised racism. Jews could now be openly ‘Jewish-American’ or ‘American Jews’. ‘The Jew’, now a ‘dual’ identity that could be identified with being modern American and as well as signaling the religious, cultural and personal freedoms available in America, was now a positive symbol in America’s mid-century culture. ‘The Jew’s’ characteristics had therefore come to be adopted, appropriated and reformatted to represent the benefits of having a ‘dual’ or mixed background and the cultural awareness and responsiveness that could therefore follow.

The main characteristics that remain constant in both positive and negative interpretations of ‘the Jew’ over these five decades are those of being socio-culturally responsive to the point of evolving with the social environment, and encompassing the range of social practices and trends that constituted it. This culture and personal ambivalence were most often used to show ‘the Jew’ negatively, yet Deren used this socio-cultural responsiveness and reflection as a way to ensure that ‘the artist’ integrated wholly with the ‘total culture’. This more closely reflects the actions from which the symbol and surrounding associations were born, as Jews themselves had used these characteristics on a positive mission to integrate. Similarly the artist needing to be of a ‘fluid’ identity, means that beyond behavior which enables integration into the surrounds avoiding social alienation or exclusion, Deren also defined an identity which constantly ‘relates’ to the ‘landscape’. Again, this reflects the unchanging structure of ‘the Jew’. This had previously resulted in ‘the Jew’ being depicted as a questionable character and of ambiguous identity, threatening to others healthy or strong identities, born from Nordic or Anglo-Saxon stock. However, Deren found good use for this self-built identity, just as in certain periods Jews themselves, writers, cultural critics and poets had. A ‘fluid’ identity implied the need for constant self-construction, which ensured the role of ‘the artist’ was available to

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267 Shapiro, ‘World War II,’ 72.
268 Deren, Anagram, 16.
270 Higham, Strangers in the Land, 273-75.
all individuals as Deren had declared it should be. Furthermore this self-constructed identity ensured it was through the individual’s ‘control’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘creativity’ that they could ensure their own ‘moral’ and ‘transcending’ ‘homogeneous’ envelopment in the ‘universe’.

Arguably reacting in fear of being associated with a controversial identity, Deren did not address her Jewish identity in the face of these changing ideas toward Jews or ‘the Jew’. Rather she utilised ‘the Jew’ as a vehicle to negotiate the world she lived in, as did many other Jews, Americans, critics, writers and poets of her time.

Deren’s oeuvre was created at the end of the period permeated by strong prejudice. This meant the positive representations of ‘the Jew’ that arose in the war-time and postwar period indeed affected Deren’s context. Her major work Anagram was produced in 1946 and her films were principally produced between 1943 and 1947. This explains why Deren felt comfortable using ideas reflecting or analogous to a positive reformulation of ‘the Jew’ within her work, as this period could also be considered the turning point for ‘the Jew’. Threatening associations or links with being poisonous had disappeared, and instead the characteristics of ‘the Jew’ could be applied to create a hope for a modern future of social inclusion.

Arguably this is why Deren did not yet feel comfortable to claim the identity of Jewish for herself and more importantly did not explicitly refer to terms more directly connected with ‘the Jew’ within her work, such as ‘cosmopolitan’ or ‘nomad’. However as these newly positive connotations for the characteristics of ‘the Jew’ had emerged, Deren was now, I argue, able to comfortably use these same characteristics for her own purposes, just as ‘the Jew’s’ characteristics had been re-appropriated over the last 50 years. That is, just as ‘the Jew’ had become a positive symbol of post-war modern America, embodying the ideals of tolerance, democracy and liberalism, so too was Deren’s artist able to be a positive embodiment and extension of the environment.

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272 Deren, Anagram, 13, 17, 20, 33, 52.
Although Deren does not label her ‘artist’ as ‘Judaised’, the figure she presents is both reflective of and reactive to the environment as ‘the Jew’ was understood to be. Deren’s artist working to ‘relate oneself, as an identity, to a fluid, apparently incoherent universe’ in order to create that ‘triumphant moment – when the elements of a man’s experience suddenly fuse into a homogenous whole which transcends and so transfigures them’ can be recognised as a re-embodiment of ‘the Jew’s’ characteristics of being consciously-constructed and reactive to the surrounds.273 This enabled the artist to achieve progress for both the individual and for civilisation. Just as ‘the Jew’ was used as a symbol for integration into the social and cultural life of America, so Deren’s ‘artist’ can be considered a vehicle through which she hoped to bring about the social and cultural change for the wider world, as her decree for the artist to ‘not so much act upon such a universe as re-act to its volatile variety’ implied.274 Deren herself can therefore be considered a ‘Judaised’ artist.

Chapter Three

‘Judaised’ Art: Resolving the Tensions of Maya Deren’s Landscape

As established in Chapter Two, Deren’s ‘artist’ can be considered reflective of ‘the Jew’, as ‘the artist’ was to relate to an ‘apparently incoherent universe’, thereby embodying an identity both consciously-constructed and reactive to the surrounds.\(^{275}\) These characteristics enable the ‘the artist’ to do more then respond to their social context. Rather Deren’s ‘artist’ can be read as a representation, or even an embodiment, of their environment, just as ‘the Jew’ was understood to be. It follows then that Deren’s ‘artist’ does not just ‘comprehend the total culture’, but that the ‘art’ of such an artist, as an expression of their response to their surrounds, is also reflective of the environment.\(^{276}\) Therefore, I propose that Deren’s films and theory both promoted and acted as a form of ‘Judaised’ art, as her work demonstrated how art can also react to and reflect the environment, and furthermore reconcile societal and individual divides.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate firstly how Deren defined art as being able to create realities where divides can be resolved, and secondly why Deren believed film was the method of art most contextually appropriate and therefore her chosen method of art. I then place Deren’s work in line with that of other Jews, artists and immigrants in America in the early to mid twentieth century who also worked to utilise art to overcome social and cultural divides, often in a bid to create a new cultural reality that would result in their social inclusion. It is here that I provide a reading of Deren’s work as part of a culture of ‘Judaised’ discourse. However Deren took a particular angle, where the ‘Judaised’ artist and ‘Judaised’ art were reformulated into a positive response that saw cultural work as promoting progress and integration as a civilisational aim, rather than simply having individual social inclusion as its endpoint. Deren used the medium of film to create collective sensations and group awareness in her audience. Through the use of allegorical narratives and symbolism she depicted how all individuals play an equal part in human existence and therefore

\(^{275}\) Deren, ‘At Land,’ 247.
\(^{276}\) Deren, Anagram, 16.
should be equally able to find acceptance in society. She used film as she saw it best function, as a way of creating an ‘intensely manipulated point of view’ that became a ‘reality created by the manipulation of instruments’. Through this ‘skillful exercise and control’ of ‘imaginative manipulations’ that purposely reflect and build on the social reality, Deren’s ‘Judaised’ art aimed to demonstrate how society could flourish in the absence of divisions between people and culture, and the divisive changes wrought by modernity. Deren practised and promoted this art in order to bring about a new integrated and inclusive reality.

Art builds an inclusive new reality

Deren’s work, from dance and film to theoretical explanations, depicted a range of ways for ‘the artist’ to reconcile or bridge divides, fractures and factions in society through art. Deren’s conception of art had her promoting its capacity to extend reality and create new realities that elevated society to a new cultural plane of social harmony. Deren believed art could produce such effects because, as an ‘artist’, an individual could ‘re-create the abstract, invisible forces and relationships of the cosmos in the intimate, immediate forms of art’. Most importantly, Deren saw the artist’s work as a responsibility that she declared people ‘cannot shirk’. It was not just that it utilised the capacity of individuals, but that it incorporated the ideas, advances and creations of the period, such as modern science, advances in technology and institutional progress, in a new, positive and progressive manner. Deren encouraged ‘the artist’ to act in accordance with broad social needs, particularly in areas of tension or fractures in society where the old structure inhibited progress or excluded people. Art was to be used to ameliorate the problems of modern society, working, as argued in Anagram, to ‘extend the new, miraculous realities of the airplane, the telephone, the radio’, and therefore develop civilisation, combining old and new systems, in a manifestation of an incorporative new society. By producing new

277 Ibid., 17. Underlining Deren’s.
278 Ibid., 33, 17.
279 Deren, Anagram, 52.
280 Ibid., 7, 17.
281 Ibid., 16.
work, the artist was able to turn a manifestation of their self-expression into a new cultural reality in which they were able to envelop themselves in their environments as well as use their 'art' as a bridge to unite social divisions and society with its artists. Art therefore had a moral, ideological and even ontological role for Deren.

In ‘Cinema as an Art Form’, Deren described the goal of the artist. She declared that ‘when we agree that a work of art is, first of all, creative, we actually mean that it creates a reality and itself constitutes an experience.’ In Anagram, Deren also declared that a true literary or visual art was one that created experience, in that art was not ‘simply an expression, of pain, for example, nor an impression of pain, but is itself a form which creates pain.’ It was, she maintained, ‘a conscious manipulation designed to create effect’. True art was the embodiment of an idea or emotion, not just an expression of or reaction to it.

Before examining the way that Deren turned to art as a form of cultural action, it is important to understand how she viewed her own context and how she saw within it the need for cultural resolutions. As young as seventeen, Deren was already socially aware, but she declared in ‘Self Portrait’ that ‘my father tells me that since he can remember me, I have always been analyzing and then revolting against the injustice of the social scene about me’. She described society and civilisation as ‘crumbling’ due to the divide between modern ways and old-fashioned institutions. She wrote of her dislike of past structures, their inhibiting of contemporary practice and their endangering of future progress. Society must ‘reform the dust of crumbling institutions’, she declared, start ‘revolting against the injustice of the social scene’ and transform the educational system, which was ‘inadequate, petty and corrupt’. In this rejection of old institutional structures and ways, she considered religion a ‘severe and oppressing neurosis of the race’ and that the ‘social and economic organisation of the state was rotten and filthy, law was a farce’. Deren was particularly dismayed by factions between old and new systems, not just by corruption and ‘injustice’.

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282 Maya Deren, ‘Cinema as an Art Form,’ New Directions 9 (1946), in Essential Deren, 22.
283 Deren, Anagram, 17.
285 Deren, ‘Self Portrait,’ 231.
286 Ibid.
287 Ibid.
288 Ibid., 233.
289 Ibid., 231-33.
Deren feared divisions in society, as she believed they prevented a clear understanding of the reality of the moment and therefore hindered social progress. Deren believed each person must seek that ‘triumphant moment – when the elements of a man’s experience suddenly fuse into a homogenous whole which transcends and so transfigures them’. Here Deren’s emphasis on the ‘homogeneous whole’ as the solution to responsibly dealing with ‘a world so intimately overwhelmed by scientific discovery, revelation and invention’ confirms that her concern was for divisions in society. Deren maintained that in the contemporary world ‘it is impossible to justify a neglect or ignorance of its realities’ and therefore differences and discrepancies must be overcome.

In *Anagram*, written twelve years later, these fears were again highlighted. Writing in 1947, Deren now addressed the dangers and tensions of the post-war context, amidst the onset of the Cold War and Korean War. *Anagram* discussed the particular dangers of individuals being ignorant, alienated or inactive in regard to approaching scientific and technological advancement. Deren pointed to the scientists themselves being concerned by ‘the almost casual acceptance of the use of atomic energy’ and to the fact that ‘men have humbly accepted their inability to comprehend the detailed processes of such miracles and have limited themselves to evaluating only the final results, which they have agreed to accept at their own risk’. It is important to note that it was not the technological advances that Deren feared but the ignorance and ‘casual acceptance’ of them by the general public. Significantly, Deren claimed that individuals must learn to deal with navigating ‘the schizoid culture’ of modernity, in which scientific and technological developments could be both ‘miracles’ of the time, but simultaneously result in potential disaster. Hence, Deren advocated the need to remove human ignorance surrounding these advancements, as these inhibit the individual from understanding both their surrounds and their own power or responsibility within their environment.

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290 Ibid., 13.
291 Ibid., 14.
292 Ibid.
293 Ibid., 7.
294 Ibid.
295 Ibid.
Yet it was not just awareness that Deren sought; instead she wanted to remind people of their capacity to control these advances, rather than ‘fiddle while Rome burns’, both due to the danger of these developments, and as part of their moral responsibility to progress civilisation. Society was overwhelmed by general fear, and by a sensation of ‘malaise’, argued Deren, which perpetuated feelings of alienation rather than inspiring a ‘radical’ social conscience.296 Here her central belief in the power of the individual in society and their role at the centre of civilisation was made clear: the ‘failure’ of an individual to recognise their own control and part in creating these modern advances would have deadly consequences.297

This inability to react appropriately to modern dangers and to cultural and social ignorance led Deren to accuse different groups in society of ‘failure’ as moral individuals in their response to their surrounds. She believed Hollywood film-makers had failed to demonstrate the reality of post-war existence. She argued further that the ‘failure’ of film to document the post-war reality had led to further failure of people to grasp their own power over the deadly nature of science and modern warfare. Deren derided the ‘documentaries of World War II’, disparaging them as an example of how ‘the failure of form is a failure of morals’.298 She believed that:

the human tragedy of war requires of those who presume to commemorate it – film-maker, writer, painter – a personal creative effort somehow commensurate in profundity and stature. Surely the vacant eyes and the desolate bodies of starved children, deserve and require, in the moral sense, something more than the maudlin clichés of the tourist camera or the skillful manipulations of skeletonized children, the horrors of Dachau, the burning Japanese soldier, after all the violences of war.299

Deren invoked the necessity to use film’s ability to be ‘conscientiously re-combined into the relationship of the reality itself’.300

296 Deren, ‘Self Portrait,’ 233.
297 Deren, Anagram, 37.
298 Ibid.
299 Ibid., 38.
300 Ibid., 37-38.
While Deren used *Anagram* to explain how the individual’s awareness was pertinent to civilisation and the continuation of humanity, it was in combination with her practical work that Deren was able to highlight more emphatically that she sought cultural involvement and action from the individual, turning the individual into an ‘artist’ who created a type of reconciliatory art. This is why Deren herself turned to film. In her article ‘Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality’, she wrote that editing a film could produce sequences that would give ‘particular or new meaning to the images’ and ‘transfigures them without distorting their aspect, diminishing their reality’. 301 Her films demonstrated her belief that the ‘labor which results in something created, to add to the sum total of the world…is infinitely more valuable than a labor devoted to the production of something already familiar’. 302 As such, it enabled her to satisfy her declaration that cultural creations are significant to the development of society. 303 Yet Deren did not believe that all film had this ability. Rather she argued that ‘if cinema is to take its place beside the others as a full-fledged art form, it must cease merely to record realities that owe nothing of their actual existence to the film instrument, instead, it must create a total experience so much out of the very nature of the instrument as to be inseparable from its means’. 304 She believed that film was the creative instrument powerful enough to generate a ‘new man-made reality’. 305

Deren concerned herself with justifying the technical components of filmmaking to further support her declaration of the medium’s potential in progressing social history and as a type of social corrective tool. In ‘Creating Movies with a New Dimension: Time’, Deren contended that ‘the motion picture camera is capable of creating new relationships between time and space, different from those of any other medium’. But she warned that ‘it must be appropriate to the theme and to the logic of its development, rather than a display of method designed to impress other movie makers’. 306

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302 Deren, ‘Creating Movies with a New Dimension,’ 138.
306 Deren, ‘Creating Movies with a New Dimension,’ 138.
Deren’s belief in the power of film as an art form that fulfilled her belief in art’s reconciling qualities, spread into her writing and into her financial and social schemes. While producing, writing, directing and acting in her own films, Deren also produced articles that gave ‘how-to’ advice on being a film-art maker, artist or an independent creator. Her work was published in an array of American magazines on amateur film, photography, dance and women’s publications, such as *Mademoiselle, The Village Voice, and Home Movie Making*, and continued to be reprinted in journals after her death in 1961. The concept that anyone could create art permeated her theoretical writing and practical work, as well as her efforts to cultivate financial and social support systems for artists.

Deren frequently invited artists, writers, dancers, choreographers, art critics, filmmakers and poets to the Greenwich Village apartment that she shared with her husband, composer Teiji Ito. Those who attended included writer, Anaïs Nin, filmmakers Shirley Clarke, Storm De Hirsch, Betty Ferguson, Marie Menken and composer Bebe Barron and film organisation activists Marcia Vogel and Cecile Starr, who were part of Greenwich Village’s avant-garde set of the 1950s. Deren’s last years were spent cultivating a salon for friends and those working in the arts, like those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a system of support and discussion for like-minded people. Her salon was another of her practices that can be understood as supporting the idea that each individual had the opportunity and was necessarily encouraged to create art for its function, beyond that of documentary or naturalism. Deren’s salon was the last of her attempts to support individuals who used art as a way to navigate their path in their community, as she died not long after a baby shower held at her apartment in 1961.

Deren embodied the roles of lecturer, teacher, publicist, and organisational administrator, looking to educate and incorporate people in her belief in film’s power as an art form specifically, but also in art in general. She brought film theory and independent cinema to the Ivy League schools, state teacher colleges and film

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310 Ibid., 3.
societies across the United States, Canada and South America at a time when there were very few other authorities working as she was.\textsuperscript{311} While it seems Deren’s focus was on film creation and production, her work to educate a wide American audience in ideas of the power and responsibility of art demonstrates that her work was not based purely in film but in the power of art and art’s message. This was a message she carefully cultivated through mailing or handing out program notes before film screenings, notes which boldly stated, as did her ‘Program Notes’, 1945, her message that ‘under no conditions are these films to be announced or publicised’ in any way other than the way she intended.\textsuperscript{312}

Deren’s creation of the artist-controlled Creative Film Foundation forms a similar case. As the executive secretary, she sought funds to underwrite grants, organise film screenings and symposia, and publicise film as a creative art form. The CFF became the first American organisation to regularly award grants and merit citations to independent filmmakers. Beyond being a financial support system for film-artists, Deren used the organisation as a way to promote the relationships between cinema, and other fine art forms, citing support for greater recognition of independent film from high profile artists including playwright Arthur Miller and architect Mies van der Rohe.\textsuperscript{313} Deren’s work to provide a place for art as a legitimate part of society that needed social, financial and educational support demonstrated her belief in its necessity and power, as, while needing systems of support itself, in turn it would become a system of support, as her creation of the CFF most strongly highlighted.

\textit{From reconciling social structures to reconciling division between individuals}

Having examined how Deren understood ‘art’ as being able to create a new ‘reality’ and each person as being equally able as well as responsible in this undertaking, I now turn to Deren’s perception of art as able to incorporate anybody and everybody in its production, acting as a form of unification between different individuals, groups.

\textsuperscript{311} Deren lectured at New York University, Yale University, Smith College, and the University of Chicago, among others. See Rabinowitz, \textit{Points of Resistance}, 76fn84.
\textsuperscript{312} Deren, ‘Program Notes,’ 1945 cited in Rabinowitz, \textit{Points of Resistance}, 68.
\textsuperscript{313} Rabinowitz, \textit{Points of Resistance}, 82-83.
and cultures. It was not just ignorance and technological advances that Deren feared as dividing society and people’s inability to recognise their power over such things. Deren was equally concerned with factions and exclusion between people and groups and so sought cultural and social inclusion and integration between these types of divides as well. Both in films and in her coinciding theories, Deren depicted the individual as active in a range of symbolic social and cultural struggles, which reflected the universal struggles of each individual. It was through depicting the individual as part of the broader plight of civilisation that Deren aimed to remove the distinction between individuals in society. She impressed upon her viewers and readers that, once difference is overcome, individuals all share the same social and cultural power and responsibility to act and develop self, society and civilisation. Ultimately, Deren used her art to present the idea of a unified society devoid of discrimination or divisions caused by ignorance, alienation or the specifics of cultural tensions. This type of art functioned as Deren thought necessary, as a way of seeing the divisions of the world ‘resolved in miniature’.

Deren’s films, supplemented by their accompanying program notes and brochures, acted in two ways to depict the individual as encompassed in this struggle. The first was through presenting symbolic and allegorical depictions of this social struggle. Films such as Meshes of the Afternoon, At Land and The Very Eye of Night depicted individuals who, removed of identifiable cultural identities, were presented as equally active in regard to their social responsibility and participation in the bigger picture of civilisational existence. The second way was via psychological inclusion, where films such as Ritual in Transfigured Time and A Study in Choreography for the Camera, acted, according to Deren, as tribal dance once had, to encompass everyone in a collective group sensation forming inclusive thought patterns transmitted through film.

Before exploring these two ways in which Deren sought to implicate each individual as an actor in the existence and progress of society and as part of a universal community, I will look at some poets, filmmakers, comic writers and photographers who, like Deren, worked during the early to mid twentieth century in America and

314 Deren, Anagram, 52.
sought to create a unified social existence, free of social and cultural tensions and divides, through their artwork. Their work functioned through characters, narratives and aesthetic to promote the idea of a united yet multicultural and ever-evolving society that was able to incorporate a range of identities, cultural practices and types of existence. The socially-responsive and socially-evolving characteristics attached to these narratives, figures or images meant that the work of these artists functioned in a manner parallel to the way ‘the Jew’ was used in literature or criticism. That is, their work promoted a multi-dimensional and mobile new existence that was incorporative of the dynamism and variety in the population and culture within their surrounds, making it part of ‘Judaised’ discourse.

‘Judaised’ artists and their art

‘Judaised’ art is not just a literary tool or a dialectical concept. Rather, it is an evolution that develops from creative expression that seeks real social repercussions within the environment. Based in New York and Los Angeles, just as Deren was, certain groups of poets, filmmakers, comic writers and photographers responded to the influx of immigrants, the place of minority groups and the opinions of different cultural movements that surrounded them, aiming for social stability, an accepted identity and cultural inclusion. In constructing culturally responsive artworks and practices, there was hope of social participation as well as for reconciling problems of social displacement and societal fissures, reflecting how Jews themselves had assimilated into society and how ‘the Jew’ as a symbol had come to be formed. As a result, I argue, the work of these groups can be considered ‘Judaised’. This discussion reveals that ‘Judaised’ characteristics were not just described on the page in relation to ‘the Jew’ and its associations but were utilised by Jews themselves, marginalised groups, immigrants and a range of artists as a way to find a nuanced state of living in society. They responded to the evolving socio-cultural context by specifically building their identity and cultivating a cultural response through their work that saw them integrating into society.
Suzanne Churchill, Cristanne Miller, and Rachel DuPlessis explore a group of poets who worked at the turn of the century from their living quarters in the Lower East Side of New York.\footnote{See Suzanne W. Churchill, ‘Making Space for ‘Others’: A History of a Modernist Little Magazine, Journal of Modern Literature 22, no. 1 (1997): 47-67, Miller, ‘Tongues “Loosened in the Melting Pot”,’ DuPlessis, Genders, Races and Religious Cultures.} This was not a formal group, but rather one that has been retrospectively recognised for their shared locale and contribution to the poetry magazine Others, published by several editors, some of whom were Jewish, between the years 1915-1919, as well as for work in what can be considered ‘Judaised’ discourse.\footnote{Editors included Alfred Kreymborg, Lola Ridge, William Carlos Williams, William Saphier, and Maxwell Bodenheim, of whom the latter two were Jewish. See Miller, ‘Tongues “Loosened in the Melting Pot”,’ 465.} Comprising both first and second-generation Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants, these poets have been recognised as using the symbol of ‘the Jew’ as a voice, identity or character as a way to express their response to their own ‘melting pot’ social surrounds. Miller cites poets such as Marianne Moore to explain how their Jewish background could have resulted in their exclusion from society, or at least designated their difference or immigrant status.\footnote{Ibid., 472.} Yet, when they used their Jewish background in their poetry as a reflection of the conglomerate new identities that were being formed in the ‘melting-pot’ of the Lower East Side, their work not only demonstrated the existence of polyglot identities, but provided a place for their own multi-ethnic and multi-cultural identity.

These Lower East Side poets with a Jewish background, such as Moore, were not just interested in their own ability to integrate or reflect the range of immigrants, those of multi-ethnic roots or other artists, in their surrounds. Rather they presented the idea of a mixed background as a glorified image of the new culturally plural environment for the Lower East Side, and for the whole of New York. In their work ‘the Jew’ was a character or symbol that epitomised people’s ability for ‘dual’ consciousness and for cultural or social change, questions facing those trying to Americanise. Moore described ‘the Jew’ as a positive answer to these questions of assimilation or culturally plural existence, referring to ‘You brilliant Jew, You bright particular chameleon’.\footnote{Marianne Moore, ‘To a Strategist,’ Observations, 16, in Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907-1924, ed. Robin G. Schulze (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 58 as quoted in DuPlessis, Genders, Races and Religious Cultures, 158.} Moore tried to use her poetry to eradicate the disdain or fear of the immigrant immigration process and negotiate the stigmas surrounding them, by
transforming the negative terminology applied to Jews, such as mongrel, rat and greedy into positive descriptions. Moore defended the rat in 1919, with the idea that the rat is a person who may be feared or despised but has the quality of being able to adapt or make more than one home. In ‘Dock Rats’, she takes on the persona of a rat herself and refers to the city as ‘a good place to come home to’. Here Moore’s work emphasised the good in being able to evolve with changing culture, modernity and the developing heterogeneous environment.

Such language could, of course, still be deemed a negative portrayal of mixed race or multicultural existence. However when considering these Lower East Side poets in terms of their focus on developing, indulging and presenting their ‘melting pot’ existence to a broad audience in the name of modernist poetry and therefore modern existence, it is clear that their use of ‘the Jew’, and the immigrant experience it symbolised was to be understood as vehicle for positive modern American existence. Poetry in this manner could be the dialect of new immigrants and the developing society, captured and promoted by these ‘Judaised’ poets.

Miller argues that this group of modern poets, and American modernity in general, arose from a demographic context that followed one of the largest migrations to America, including a large settlement of Jews in New York. That is, the culture of ‘modern’ existence in America coincided with immigration and Jewish influence in America, creating an affiliation between modernity and Jewish immigration and identity. This resulted in these modernist poets framing their work and ideas of modern existence through the ‘hybrid Jew’ who aimed to assimilate and integrate into society with ‘an admirable, cosmopolitanism, social and intellectual progressivism and willingness to experiment with the “new”’. As a result, Miller claims these poets represented ‘the Jew’ ‘more positively than in European modernist work’.

It was not just those Lower East Side poets of Jewish descent who used ‘the Jew’ as a positive symbol for an inclusive society. Other poets can be included in this group.

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322 Ibid., 456.
323 Ibid., 456.
that, living amongst immigrants and artists in the Lower East Side at the turn of the century, also chose to use ‘the Jew’ as a vehicle through which not just to define the immigration and integration experience, but as a positive manifestation of an inclusive multicultural modern identity. Lola Ridge was not a Jew, but used the attributes of ‘dual’ consciousness and loyalty associated with ‘the Jew’, making links to this idea in her work by speaking at once of the ‘old race’ of Jews with ‘backward vision’ and yet their ‘wisdom’ of deep learning. With its mix of different cultures, the ‘ghetto’ encouraged ‘free camaraderie’, Ridge maintained, which encompassed her social reality of living amongst-new immigrants and children of immigrants in a poem that encouraged those in the same position to see their context in a parallel manner. Ridge’s ‘Judaised’ poem develops from the environment, reflecting its tensions, but instead seeks to build ‘camaraderie’ through experiences reflective of what ‘the Jew’ was believed to seek.

Mina Loy’s poetry also included ideas of ‘composite’ identities that mirror Ridge’s dual-natured figures, and she celebrated the resulting culture that could be found through them. In Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose, Loy’s main character is Ova, a ‘composite/Anglo-Israelite’ with a ‘mongrel heart’ and a ‘Jewish brain’. Loy seeks to explain how the ‘tongue being loosened in the melting pot’ will result in a modern heterogeneous people and culture that reflect the new ‘composite language’ of modern society. By this Loy implies that people and language should reflect each other in new a mongrelisation of culture but, as the term ‘composite’ suggests, Loy sought one mongrelised identity and culture for all modern Americans. These turn-of-the-century Lower East side poets, of both Jewish and non-Jewish descent, utilised the idea of the ‘melting pot’ and the place of the ‘mongrel’ within it as their hope for the future of modern New York. By having their literary characters or themes represent the concept of ‘the Jew’ as a symbol of the wider cultural mix to be found in their surrounds, they therefore produced work that sought a new national narrative for America that made a heterogeneous population acceptable by promoting one modern

mongrelised culture and identity for all Americans, and in doing so created an inclusive atmosphere.

Another group of Lower East Side immigrant artists who reacted similarly to their ‘melting pot’ surrounds was the Photo League. These photographers used their work to navigate the evolving society that surrounded them, where migrants from all around Europe were simultaneously making New York their new home. They did not simply document the life of migrants, but rather were part of that life. When they took to the streets with their cameras, they went to capture the reality of the communities and neighbourhoods in which they had grown up, seeking to reveal to the outside what the reality was on the inside of the slums and tenements of the Lower East Side, which housed so many of New York’s immigrants.

The Photo League was the new name in 1936 for the Worker’s Camera League in New York City, established in 1930 as the product of the Workers International Relief, a Berlin-based Communist association. The Photo League’s initial mission was to reflect ‘the lives and struggles of the American workers’ and to ‘put the camera back into the hands of honest photographers who ... use it to photograph America’. The League comprised both amateur and some professional photographers and included a school, gallery and a newsletter called Photo Notes, which were all directed toward producing socially conscious art. The League included President Walter Rosenblum, photographers Sid Grossman and Sol Libsohn and over four hundred members such as Helen Levitt, Aaron Siskind, Arnold Eagle, Ruth Orkin, Sonia Handelman Meyer and Rebecca Lepkoff. They were predominantly Jewish, working-class and first-generation Americans who shared a belief in the expressive power of their art and its ability to illuminate the reality and hardships of their environment. The resulting work was more than just social commentary. The Photo League saw their work as a tool for social change. For these reasons I have classified it as ‘Judaised’ art.

Having been ‘brought up in an environment of crowded tenements’, these photographers were declared by the League’s President Walter Rosenblum to be the embodiment of their own work. ‘We feel deeply about the people we photograph, because our subject matter is of our own flesh and blood. In Harlem or on the East Side, we aren’t tourists spying on the quaint mannerisms of the people. We aren’t interested in slums for their picturesque qualities. The people who live in them are our fathers and mothers, our brothers and sisters. The kids are our own images when we were young’. These photographers did not just reveal an image of reality, but were themselves the living reality of this immigrant, working-class, multicultural and multi-ethnic mix of the Lower East Side in the 1930s and 40s. League member and teacher, Sid Grossman, has been documented as encouraging his students to discover the meaning of their work but more importantly, their relationship to it – that is, their place as Jewish working-class immigrants living in the tenements and slums of New York. Their work has since been regarded as a ‘transformative, personalised approach’ that contributed to the medium of photojournalism but also to American culture.

These photographers depicted the harsh realities of New York life, images of ‘strikes, picket lines and demonstrations of the unemployed’. However their work aimed to do more than just awaken wider society to the poverty and hardship that existed. Ann Tucker has defined it as ‘fostering social activism through photography’. Their work can be considered quite close to the original intention of the League to ‘photograph America’, yet these photographers actually aimed to create a new ‘America’ through their depictions.

Utilising their ambivalence as being both part of the streetscape and as photographing the streetscape, these photographers reflected the heterogeneous environment as well as well constituting it. By revealing the truth of their New York environment, they

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332 Ibid.
333 Rosenblum, ‘Where Do We Go from Here?’ np.
334 Anne Wilkes Tucker, This Was the Photo League: Compassion and the Camera from the Depression to the Cold War (Chicago: Stephen Daiter Gallery, 2001), 162.
335 Tucker, ‘The Photo League,’ 90.
placed the Other, the immigrant and the Jew, at the centre of their work. Although ‘the Jew’ and the immigrant had been considered ‘alien’, now, instead of being depicted as different or displaced, the immigrant was but one of the many that constituted the surrounds. Here the Other becomes the cornerstone of community, rather than a problematic or displaced figure. Furthermore, by depicting scenes that supplanted concepts of white America with this new ethnic mix, these photographers were able to redefine their own image and the image of New York as being multi-cultural. This group of Lower East Side photographers therefore cultivated the image of, or rather made themselves into a positive reformation of ‘the Jew’, by revealing the image of the ‘the Jew’ to be a positive representation of the Other, the immigrant or the Outsider, in that such figures represented the reality and changing environment of modern New York. Both Jews and other immigrants could therefore find inclusion in this ‘Judaised’ depiction that utilised this evolving and multi-cultural society as a basis from which to draw promise and build a culturally inclusive future.

Like these poets and photographers, Jewish filmmakers and Jews who worked in the American film industry at the beginning of the twentieth century can also be considered as working within this ‘Judaised’ culture. Portraying the American dream and stories of immigration as stories of inclusion and ideal modern life, their work became a manifestation of their hope for inclusion within American culture. Yet, rather than define a Jewish existence in America, these filmmakers worked to create a new cultural existence that would define a new America as a place for happy, modern existence that would encompass all of society, making their work ‘Judaised’ rather than a Jewish response. A large proportion of Hollywood’s first producers and production companies were first and second-generation immigrant Jews. They included Carl Laemmle of Universal Studios, Adolph Zukor of the Famous Players Film Company, Marcus Loew of Loews Pictures, Louis B. Mayer and Samuel Goldwyn of Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, and the Warner Brothers. The early films produced by these studios have been described as uniting the Jewish dream of finding a home and the Hollywood dream of making it in America, the land of opportunity, turning the Hollywood dream and the Jewish dream of American existence into one. Desser cites the ‘well-known’ argument that immigrant Jews and their children founded Hollywood in a way that clearly reflected the spirit of America being a land
of opportunity. Claire Pajaczkowska and Barry Curtis attribute the success of Hollywood to the fact that the ‘imaginings of a Jewish immigrant…could become a format for widely shared representations of American life’.  

Desser maintains that classical Hollywood cinema of the 1920s was a ‘function of particularly American and specifically American-Jewish characteristics’. That is, cinema of the 1920s reflected American optimism, America’s New World stature and its growing economy. Desser argues that Hollywood was not built solely on the optimism and economy of Jazz Age America, but also on the ideals that had enabled these Jews to find success in their new home. The American ideals of economic attainment through hard work, luck and entrepreneurialism, the rejection or obscuring of ethnic and religious traditions and an openness toward immigrants attaining opportunities, were not only behind the production of these films, but were perpetuated and promoted within these films. America was presented as the land of opportunity, where new idealised futures awaited, in films such as The Eternal Grind, 1916, by the Famous Players Film Company and Brewster’s Millions, 1914, and The Making of Bobby Burnit, 1914, both by the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company. It was in this way that Jewish filmmakers in Hollywood produced a vision of America, Hollywood and opportunity for immigrants as part of one vision of American success.

These studios also produced films that told generic stories of immigrants’ success in becoming American. Among these were stories of Jewish assimilation into American life that were to be understood as telling a broader story of the social success to be found in becoming American. Films such as Abie’s Irish Rose, 1928, and The Jazz Singer, 1927, demonstrated the tensions yet possibilities encountered with
assimilation into American culture. As Desser recognises, Edward Sloman’s *His People*, 1925, produced by Carl Laemmle’s Universal Studios, also functioned in this manner. It is a story of Russian-Jewish immigrants’ life in New York, beginning with an establishing shot of an unnamed ghetto and portraying intra-ethnic tensions of the 1920s between wealthy German-Jewish immigrants from an earlier wave of immigration and the newer Eastern European Jewish immigrants who were poorer, more religious and therefore less able to adapt to urban, middle-class American life. The film celebrates the success of the ‘good son’ who engages in brawls and marries a gentile woman while the bad son remains focused on schoolwork and marries a German-Jewish woman. The film depicts the success found in boxing and its ability to create a ‘real American’, rather than the traditional values of Jewish success found in learning. The film demonstrated the need for immigrants to adopt modern American culture as glory was to be found by seizing the opportunities America life had to offer. These films can be considered within ‘Judaised’ practice as they utilised the Jewish immigration and assimilation patterns that existed as an allegory for the general immigrant experience in America, and therefore turned the Jewish dream of finding a home through assimilation into the modern American dream. That is, assimilation and the grasping of opportunities found in America came to be seen as ‘Americanisation’ rather than a Jewish practice. Once more ‘the Jew’ became a way to frame the ambivalence and mobility of modern life. In this case, however, it was used positively in ‘Judaised’ film to tell the story of how assimilation and aiming for the American ideal can lead to being part of a modern American future.

Hollywood films did not always portray an idealised America or stories of immigrants’ successful integration. German Jewish directors who emigrated to America in the 1930s, such as Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak, and Billy and Willy Wilder, presented a sinister vision of the world. Vincent Brook argues that this sinister vision was a result of their shared experience of exile from Europe. Although this group was not religious or observant, but rather secular, they shared a common history of persecution, which led them, Brook argues, to be influential in

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341 Abie’s Irish Rose, directed by Victor Fleming (New York: Paramount Famous Lasky Corporation, 1928), film; The Jazz Singer, directed by Alan Crosland (Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 1927), film.
342 His People, directed by Edward Sloman (Los Angeles: Universal Studios, 1925), film.
343 Desser, ‘Consumerist Realism,’ 275.
establishing Film Noir in America.\footnote{Ibid., 4.} Their work, which dealt in crime stories and mystery cases or depicted war-related events, reflected what was happening in the world, much like an array of other cultural products did during war-time. Yet it was their particular German Expressionist influence that combined with their own and their people’s international experiences of anti-Semitism in the 1930s that, Brook argues, resulted in the dark narratives, aesthetics and characters that became known as Film Noir.\footnote{Ibid.}

This does not necessarily contradict the notion of Jewish producers creating or projecting a happy new home in the form of film. Rather, as studies of the creation and production of American comics such as Marvel Comics and DC Comics reveal, World War II-related cultural products did not have to provide a pessimistic depiction of the world, but acted as a form of strength found through a fight negotiated through the fantasy depicted on the page. Jewish comic-book writers created characters such as Superman and Spiderman; they turned weedy men, otherwise disempowered, into new strong men who had a powerful and necessary place in the world.\footnote{Arie Kaplan, From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008), 13-15. See also Joseph Witek, Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), Les Daniels, Comix: A History of Comic Books in America (New York: Bonanza Books, 1971).} That is, whether a sinister Film Noir vision or a glorified new reality of comic books, Jewish producers, directors and comic writers found a way to be included in their new surrounds and environment, turning their immigrant identity into a new amalgamation of being both American and immigrant as a way to address and exist in their new home. Within this range of films, broadly speaking, Jewish assimilation patterns were amalgamated with stories of general immigration to America in the early twentieth century, producing ‘Judaised’ films in their reflection and reconstruction of the cultural reality. Jewish filmmakers used these stories as a vehicle through which both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences could respond to and reflect on ideas of modern America and Americanisation and the place of different cultures and races within it. These films demonstrated a path for Jews and others immigrants to be part of America, but just as importantly demonstrated to a wider American audience how to live in a modern America that accepted this path.
Deren considered in the context of America’s range of ‘Judaised’ artists

These ‘Judaised’ artists created work responding to their surrounds, which sought to re-encompass cultural differences in a new cultural existence that unified the various groups, cultures and identities within society. That is, by representing a multi-dimensional environment, they created an avenue of inclusion through a ‘Judaised’ existence. These artists utilised the mobile and socio-culturally responsive constituents of ‘the Jew’, capitalising on the ability of these characteristics to reflect and evolve with the changing-population and mix of cultures found in society in order to produce a narrative, poem or photograph from which a new society could develop, uniting the multi-cultural and multi-national community in one heterogeneous modern identity.

Deren too sought to create a culture that encompassed a range of different people and ways of living in one ‘dynamic’ existence. She sought the same goal of an inclusive modern existence that incorporated all kinds of people and types of cultures. The work of each therefore functions in a ‘Judaised’ manner by utilising ‘the Jew’s’ characteristics as well as reformulating ‘the Jew’ as a vehicle through which to reflect and reconstitute the broad social surrounds in the hope of creating an art that manifests in an accessible and unified society. However, a close examination of Deren’s films shows that her approach differed in a significant way from that of the ‘Judaised’ artists discussed here.

Deren began developing ideas of how to produce inclusive cultural practices upon finishing her Masters degree. In the early 1940s, Deren contacted Katherine Dunham, an anthropological dancer, requesting to be her secretary.³⁴⁸ Deren traveled with Dunham on her expeditions to Haiti and Bali where she was studying tribal dance and its communal and inclusive properties. Here, Deren pursued her own interests alongside Dunham. In 1941, Deren began work as Dunham’s dance company manager and editorial assistant for two articles Dunham produced on Caribbean dance

³⁴⁸ Clark, Hodson, Neiman, Legend, xxiii.
and its communal ritual. Deren went on to publish her own articles on Haitian religious ceremonial dance, exploring ideas of communal practices in “Religious Possession in Dancing”. Deren’s interest in dance and its inclusive qualities developed further still into the creation of films such as Witches Cradle, A Study in Choreography for the Camera, The Private Life of a Cat, Meditation on Violence, Ritual in Transfigured Time, Divine Horseman, The Very Eye of Night and At Land. These all utilise a type of dance or group-based ritual to create cultural inclusion, just as Deren had explored within tribal cultures with Dunham. As Deren later argued in Anagram, in a summary of her earlier explorations, dance is a ritual form ‘which depersonalizes by use of masks, voluminous garments, group movements, etc., and in so doing, fuses all individual elements into a transcendent tribal power towards the achievement of some extraordinary grace’. Her theory was that ‘depersonalization’ did not destroy the individual, but rather released him from the ‘confines of personality’, allowing him to become a ‘dynamic whole’.

Deren’s belief in the communal sensation created through dance is a good starting point to highlight her interest in re-incorporating the individual into a communal cultural practice that found unity beyond or above difference and therefore overrode personal and cultural differences. This initial description of the inclusionary nature of tribal dance and ritual already illustrates how Deren perceived an opportunity for engaging all society in one communal state. Specifically however, the term ‘dynamic whole’ highlights that this communal existence was responsive to evolution of people and of culture and continued to react to incorporate difference into the ‘larger meaning’.

The ‘dynamic whole’ of ritual dance consisted of a shared psychological reaction for all involved, thereby establishing a commonality amongst all participants. This was described by Deren as a state of ‘possession’, the sensation of being possessed by something above or beyond the self. Deren described the result and sensation as being ‘marked by the retraction of cerebral control and the emancipation of a complete sub-

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349 Deren, ‘Religious Possession,’ 477-97; Jackson, Modernist Poetics, 30.
351 Deren, Anagram, 20.
352 Ibid.
conscious system of ideas’. Deren’s focus was not on the sensations but in the concept of being psychologically freed from social or cultural constraints of self and society’s norms, mores and strictures, and instead finding unity in a shared psychological co-existence.

Deren explored a range of techniques that she believed would induce these psychological reactions for whole communities. In ‘Religious Possession in Dancing’, she continued to explore these additional ideas, writing that:

> just as various mechanical devices such as crystals and light are employed in hypnotism, so, I believe, drum rhythms are extremely important in inducing possession. As we know, rhythm consists in the regularity of the interval between sounds. Once this interval has been established, our sense-perceptions are geared to an expectation of its recurrence.\footnote{Deren, ‘Religious Possession,’ 490.}

Deren described the effect on the body’s sensory receptors as being the significant component in the creation of this shared psychological sensation, turning her subject into a physiological one. When individuals participate in rituals that affect both their psychological and physiological states, they are therefore able to form a shared mentality. It is through a combination of these that Deren saw each individual as being able to cultivate not just the same psychological sensation but the same communal feelings. Emancipated from social constraints, this practice therefore created unity.

The question then becomes, how did Deren find forums in which these states of ‘possession’ might be produced, and from which new and shared understanding and identities could develop? Deren’s articles and essays describe the hypnotic or trance states produced in dance and other ritualised performance as creating this commonality of sensation for all those participating. Yet these were not practical or contextually appropriate for the 1940s American society towards which Deren’s work was aimed. She therefore had to find a way to ensure that group sensation and participation could be accessed in a manner broadly relative to her period’s practices.

\footnote{Ibid., 491.}
Deren’s adoption of film as an instrument through which to appropriately approach the society she lived in again becomes an understandable choice as she used her films to create ritualised performance, emphasised through the inclusion of repeated movements and drum rhythms. Deren saw films as constituting a type of ritual due to the chaining together of images, emotions, and creation of new time-space conceptions which resulted in a similar psychological reaction that she believed the rituals of dance and coinciding states of possession and trance created. Of Ritual in Transfigured Time, Deren declared: ‘the main effort has been to create dance out of non-dance elements by filmic manipulation. In this sense, the pattern, created by the film instrument, transcends the intentions and the movements of the individual performers, and for this reason I have called it Ritual’. Film, as a modern formulation of tribal rituals, Deren argued, resulted in the same inclusive sensation, as it produced in its viewers the same psychological and physiological response that ‘affects the very nature of the participant’ in ritual traditions.

Deren further developed this idea of film’s ability to encompass individuals in a united sensation in Meshes of the Afternoon and At Land. These two films explore techniques that extend beyond Deren’s philosophical notions of the power of ‘ritual’ into enveloping the individual in an allegorical narrative that depicts a story of the shared human journey. Both depict a type of social struggle in which a female protagonist undergoes a journey in which she fights against the symbolic cultural and social hurdles of society. Deren wrote of Meshes that ‘this film is concerned with the inner realities of an individual and with the way in which the sub-conscious will develop, interpret and elaborate an apparently simple and casual occurrence into a critical emotional experience. It is culminated by a double-ending in which it would seem that the imagined achieved, for the protagonist, such force that it became reality … the film establishes a reality’. This new ‘reality’ is the world this protagonist is able to construct. Deren utilised film’s ability to deliberately blur the borders between subjectivity and objectivity, emphasising the shared journey and therefore interchangeability between each individual. Here, what is highlighted is not just the

357 Deren, ‘Meshes of the Afternoon’ program notes, 1945, in Essential Deren, 246.
358 Ibid.
matching plight of individuals, but rather their ability to find equal empowerment in their reaction to and involvement in their surrounds and in turn to develop a new reality. These two films carefully provide constructed allegorical scenes that negotiate cultural particularism in order to give access to a wide audience. Deren deliberately produced an ambiguous protagonist in order to have the figure function allegorically.

In *Meshes*, the protagonist, a woman (acted by Deren) appears repeatedly in the dreamscape sequence that constitutes the film. Yet this ‘dream-woman’ is never presented as a whole image, as P. Adams Sitney notes: ‘there is no establishing shot, no view of the whole figure in her environment.’ Rather the woman is seen in components: a hand, sandaled feet then an arm. It is through this refusal to depict the woman as a whole that Deren obscures her identity. Instead these components of a human body must struggle against a range of objects – a key, a knife, a flower, a chair and a staircase. Deren’s use of close up camera angles frames the limbs or features of the dream-woman as being on par, that is equal in size or equally dominating of the screen, with these objects. In this manner, Deren is able to imply a struggle between the human and the world that surrounds them. While the film is open-ended, Deren’s message is successfully delivered pictorially – that both the individual and the world are made up of smaller parts and that the ‘larger meaning’ is found not just in the ‘total’ but in this shared struggle and reaction to existence.

*At Land* is described by Deren in the film’s supplementary program as ‘a film in the nature of an inverted Odyssey, where the universe assumes the initiative of movement and confronts the individual with a continuous fluidity towards which, as a constant identity, he seeks to relate himself’. The audience is alerted even before their viewing that Deren’s film is one in which the protagonist will once again face the battles of society and her environment. The female protagonist is featured in a series of scenes in which she is always struggling against a social hurdle or some sort of physical resistance, also implying social or cultural barriers. Scenes cut between her climbing driftwood, crawling through foliage and across a banquet table. Pramaggiore sees *At Land* as a metaphor for the journey of an individual, but defines it specifically

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360 Deren, *Anagram*, 20, 16.
as the individual struggling against social mores to do with gender, status and colour. But Deren’s film in fact aimed to work more broadly as the story of any individual and every individual who has to struggle to survive in the world, and particularly the modern world. This was explained by Deren in her program notes entitled ‘Chamber Films’, which she produced expressly to define the ideas behind her film. In it she explained that:

The universe was once conceived almost as a vast preserve, landscaped for heroes, plotted to provide them with appropriate adventures…Today the rules are ambiguous, the adversary is concealed in aliases, the oracles broadcast a babble of contradictions. Adventure is no longer reserved for heroes and challengers. The universe itself imposes its challenges upon the meek and the brave indiscriminately. One does not so much act upon such a universe as re-act to its volatile variety struggling to preserve, in the midst of such relentless metamorphosis, a constancy of personal identity.\(^{362}\)

Deren’s protagonist does not succumb to the modern world’s ‘babble of contradictions’ which divide the landscape.\(^{363}\) On the contrary, she adapts, acting with ‘relentless metamorphosis’ in order to survive, the ‘ambiguous’ surrounds.\(^{364}\) Deren suggested that a ‘personal’ approach, as depicted by her protagonist, exemplified how each individual ought to fight to exist, whether man or woman, ‘hero’ or regular individual. Through her protagonist changing from a creature emerging from the sea, to one who pulls herself up on the driftwood, crawls through foliage and across the banquet table before chasing a pawn, Deren presented a narrative symbolic of the larger plight of humanity, where an individual must fight for existence in order to survive environmental and social changes. Although Deren might have hoped the world would evolve and be rid of divisions, it seems she saw the personal role of the individual in reacting to the world as never complete, but rather as constantly ‘struggling to preserve … a constancy of personal identity’.\(^{365}\)

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\(^{362}\) Deren, ‘Chamber Films’ program notes, 1960, in Essential Deren, 251.

\(^{363}\) Deren, ‘Chamber Films,’ 251.

\(^{364}\) Ibid., 251-52.

\(^{365}\) Ibid., 251.
The allegorical journey of the protagonists in both *At Land* and *Meshes* reflects how an individual can be ostracised, alienated or incorporated inside or outside civilisation as they face both psychological and physical hurdles throughout their life. Deren’s films can be read as open narratives, and although it is her ‘female’ protagonist who has to strive to exist within the world physically and consciously, it is her combination of symbols and sensations, aimed at being comprehensible to all viewers, that reveals Deren’s message of humanity’s shared fate. Each individual has to survive ‘through dislocations of space and time … the individual alone is a continuous identity. If one may speak of a theme, it is the effort of the individual to relate oneself, as an identity, to a fluid, apparently incoherent universe’.

Her work depicted the constant threat facing the individual of being imminently subordinated to the larger power of humanity, which turned her films into a type of warning. Yet, by the same token, Deren demonstrated that individuals had the opportunity to play a formative role in their own life story. In this manner all individuals are grouped into one story of civilisation.

Deren’s *The Very Eye of Night* and *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* proceed *Meshes* and *At Land*, and act to further demonstrate Deren’s efforts to encompass all individuals in conceiving of themselves as part of the larger picture of humanity. These films are not narrative based like *Meshes* and *At Land*, but rather continue Deren’s work to create shared psychological sensations, just as she had written of in her exploration of traditional tribal rituals. Both manipulate space, time and imagery to remove a sense of context and cultural particulars. Furthermore, Deren’s characters are similarly removed of personal signatures, and ‘depersonalized’ in cultural attributes, thereby emphasising the interchangeability between people and suggesting the possibility for psychological exchange between all individuals within a community and across human civilisation. In this manner the characters in Deren’s scenarios and the scenarios themselves symbolise either every person or any person, and any time or place, thereby suggesting a picture of an inclusive and universal humanity. In this manner, *The Very Eye of Night* and *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* act to define all people as being equally able to be ‘part of a dynamic whole

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which, like all such creative relationships, in turn, endows its parts with a measure of its larger meaning’, that of universal human equality.\(^{367}\)

In ‘Art of the Moving-Picture’ Deren explained *The Very Eye of Night* as a symbolic demonstration of the larger picture of daily life as experienced by all individuals: ‘It is by the dark geometry of such nightly, celestial navigation that the day’s erratic negotiations are corrected and reconciled into the total orbits of our lives’.\(^{368}\) The ‘celestial navigation’ in this film is a grand scene in which white-silhouetted figures dance in unity against a black star-filled sky. Here Deren’s description of ‘our lives’, their ‘total orbits’ and the ability for them to be ‘reconciled’, already highlight both her belief in the need for daily problems to be ‘corrected’, as well as suggesting that each individual is able to be drawn into this group. That is, immediately it is clear from Deren’s written intention that her work was to act as a symbolic representation of the plight of all individuals, enveloping them in a collective experience of humanity. Deren used silhouettes, so that the figures have neither face nor any distinct cultural signature, as a symbol of the ‘archetypal Self of every man’, as she specified in ‘Art of the Moving-Picture’. Yet it is not just these non-distinct silhouettes that represent ‘every man’; the constellation itself is an overall symbol of who makes up ‘every man’, as it consists of different ‘parts’ and ‘satellites’, as Deren described the planets, that represent a range of different types of individuals in the universe.

While Deren utilised Greek mythological names for these dancing figures in order to have them act as archetypes for the constituents of humanity, she also worked to have her depiction connect to ‘metaphysical, mythological and astronomical systems’.\(^{369}\) There she emphasised these archetypes’ symbolic value over time and their use in different systems of science or belief to explain the human condition. As Jackson notes, Deren provided her figures with titles of male and female Greek deities that also connect ‘to the quaternity from Jungian psychology’ as well as to astronomical categorisations.\(^{370}\) ‘Ariel, Oberon, Titania and Umbriel’ are the deities, psychological character types and also the names of four moons or ‘satellites’ of Earth.\(^{371}\) Deren’s link here implied that characterising or allegorising the social mix that makes up

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\(^{370}\) Jackson, *Modernist Poetics*, 189.

\(^{371}\) *The Very Eye of Night* and coinciding program notes, ‘Art of the Moving-Picture,’ 1953 cited in ibid, 187.
society is a traditional act that unites different civilisations over time, even where systems of faith or understanding differ. Her re-use of these archetypes highlights the continued unity that can be found within different human understandings of society. She further encouraged this idea of a universal picture; for although on the one hand she acknowledged that there are a range of character types found in society, she simultaneously demonstrated that each person could also be represented by the same symbol of the ‘archetypal Self’. Deren’s nod to ‘Da Vinci’s Proportions of Man’ through the use of these silhouettes highlights this notion. The Vitruvian Man portrays the human figure in its most perfect form. Deren’s silhouettes, being just the outline of the human form themselves, all reflect this image of Da Vinci’s and therefore connect to the idea of each person being the ‘archetypal Self’. Hence Deren represented any and every individual as one and the same, implying the need to remove any perceived divides. The Very Eye of Night therefore takes a range of symbolic approaches to demonstrate that man, when removed of his personal identifiers, is essentially the same, as understood through Deren’s appropriation of archetypes. In the same vein, she also suggested that different systems of understanding society created over time can connect and so too can the assortment of people who constitute her contemporary society.

In A Study in Choreography for the Camera Deren once more presented images and ideas of universal participation for each individual with the aim of unifying any social divisions. Mark Franko has described the film’s ‘primitive’ dancing figure as moulded on the symbol of the ‘Virile Indian’ and the figure onto whom Deren projects her own feminine subjectivity. Here, conceptually, Deren conflated gender, race and nation to once more suggest that each individual can be representative and therefore interchangeable with each other. She used image and performance to be at once representative of these historic notions and structures of gender, race and nation, while simultaneously acting to free people from such concepts via her depiction of the ‘universal dancer’, the image representative of anybody. She wrote that ‘the ritualised form treats the human being not as the source of the dramatic action, but as the somewhat depersonalized element in a dramatic

whole’.\textsuperscript{373} The accompanying program for \textit{A Study in Choreography for the Camera} sees her explaining that, when watching her film, ‘we are not so much concerned with \textit{who} (the dancer) is as with \textit{how} he moves, and such a transfer of identification seems to me to constitute a progress away from the theatre concept of personalized character and towards a more cinematic concept, based on movement’.\textsuperscript{374} That is, the white female dancer, on her own or combined with the black male dancer, or vice versa, represents all people. Performing a dance in film that frees one from gender, race or national categorisations, thereby negating cultural and ‘personal dimensions’, the practice becomes one which equalises or navigates away from ‘difference’ and instead finds a place of inclusion with the ‘whole’ of society.\textsuperscript{375}

In order to see the overall picture Deren was presenting, I turn one last time to ‘Chamber Films’, where Deren declared that ‘adventure is no longer reserved for heroes and challengers. The universe itself imposes its challenges upon the meek and the brave indiscriminately’.\textsuperscript{376}

Ultimately, Deren stated her belief that by participating in civilisation, in this universal and eternal way, as she visibly tried to demonstrate in \textit{A Study in Choreography for the Camera} and \textit{The Very Eye of Night} individuals can be encouraged to recognise that they are capable of functioning as part of and as taking part in progressing the ‘the history of man and of his universe and of the moral relationship between them’.\textsuperscript{377} While appearing playful, Deren very carefully constructed films that represented her perception of the human condition; her films fulfilled her requirements of being contemporary and socially conscious and furthermore of creating art that built new realities that resolved problems of distinction, disconnect and exclusion.

Deren’s use of symbol, allegory and psychological themes in her films served to demonstrate that, while all people may be different, beyond these differences unity and equality can be found in their shared condition and struggle of being human. By

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{373} Deren, \textit{Anagram}, 20; Franko, ‘Aesthetic Agencies,’134-35.
\item \textsuperscript{375} Deren, \textit{Anagram}, 20.
\item \textsuperscript{376} Deren, ‘Chamber Films,’ 251.
\item \textsuperscript{377} Deren, \textit{Anagram}, 52.
\end{itemize}
depicting this one format for acceptance, Deren demonstrated that any environment can be equally inclusive of all people, for this shared universal condition remains true in all contexts. Therefore, no matter which environment Deren portrayed or which depictions of new realities she produced, her message remained the same: that the inclusive and dynamic nature of the shared social and human condition consistently characterises humanity and the landscape.

By reminding her audience of this shared existence, Deren sought to produce an inclusionary culture in which divisions were removed and people were aware of their equal moral responsibility to humanity and ‘the history of man’. This shared social responsibility of humanity both underlies and hence overrides the personal and cultural differences that are found on the purely superficial cultural and social levels.

This is where Deren’s approach differed from that of the film-makers, poets and photographers discussed above. While Deren advocated an environment of social inclusion which reflected the same goal as these ‘Judaised’ artists, there is an important difference. The approach of the poets, photographers and film-makers was to focus on cultural differences, and make them acceptable. The film-makers presented the Outsider as a figure of interest. Their films discussed, elevated, defended, and accepted the Outsider, the immigrant, the person of different culture, as a legitimate part of American life. The poets’ approach was to remove cultural divides and cultural rejection by reversing the negative stigma attached to the Other, ‘the Jew’. They did this through language that depicted a positive picture, even glorifying the notion of mixed race, presenting it as a favourable quality. The photographers sought to promote cultural inclusion by taking as their subjects the multi ethnic people of the Lower East End, and placing them on centre stage. In this way, they made the alternative culture of the Outsider an integral part of American culture, so that rather than being the fringe group, they become a normal part of the whole.

Deren, in contrast, proposed a solution beyond the social and cultural context. She sought to extend on the reality of the social environment and unify it through one conception of humanity, ever-evolving and ever-inclusive, reflecting the individuals and their different backgrounds that constitute it in a new picture of the universe. She

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378 Ibid.
sought to demonstrate that this inclusive-natured culture and society could be found by reaching outside of visible cultural practices to underlying essentialist ideas of humanity. It is through this base level similarity that people were to find broader universal inclusion as well as just social acceptance. Therefore where Deren’s work contrasts with other ‘Judaised’ artists is where it is most significant.\(^{379}\)

Although each individual must venture on their own path of an individual struggle relating a ‘fluid’ identity to the ‘volatile variety’ of the landscape, this does not mean that there needed to be social divides or exclusion.\(^{380}\) Rather, Deren’s films depict an environment which is accommodating to these differences, that is, dynamic and multi-dimensional, reflecting the characteristics of ‘the Jew’. Deren’s ‘Judaised’ art therefore bridges these social and cultural divisions and instead finds unity beyond these divides in a united concept of being essentially human.

\(^{379}\) Here Deren’s ‘Judaised’ practice is related, in particular, to the component of ‘Judaised’ discourse that deals with the place between universality and particularism, the tenuous space between the search for inclusion and finding inclusion, of which the need is forever signaled. The need to find a universal place of acceptance in order to remove particularist existence or exclusion can be also considered more generally a Messianic Jewish drive as it incorporates the idea of an all inclusive and better world for all, not just those with a parochial displacement. This drive is known as Tikkun Olam, healing the world. Deren’s ‘Judaised’ practice can therefore be read as related to this traditional Jewish idea, but the details and complexities of this connection and transition are far too broad to be discussed within the limits of this thesis.

\(^{380}\) Deren, ‘At Land,’ 247; Deren, ‘Chamber Films,’ 252.
Conclusion
Remembering Maya Deren

Maya Deren is remembered for her filmmaking, but the picture of who Deren was and what her oeuvre comprised is much more complex. As well as directing, acting and marketing her own films, she wrote educational treatises on film-making and art as a social necessity and researched the practices of ritual and tribal dance in order to appropriate them in a manner she believed would be progressive for society. She hosted her own modern-day salon where other filmmakers and artists came for support as well as creating the Creative Film Foundation to help experimental filmmakers. Most significantly, her activities demonstrate that she was a socially conscious artist, concerned with issues beyond her own creations and was equally involved with the idea of solidarity between artists and unity in society.

Deren was a Russian-Jewish American, yet she always denied her Jewish heritage. However, an exploration of the circumstances surrounding her life and her work, allows, I have proposed, the claim that it was this background that underlay all her work, and motivated the direction it took. An examination of Deren’s experiences, from childhood, reveal a strong feeling of alienation she felt as a Jew, reinforced by the coinciding effects of anti-Semitism.

This feeling of alienation led her to constantly seek ways to be accepted and included in society. At the International School in Geneva, she aimed to lose her Jewishness and mirror the ‘French manner’ adopted by her peers. Similarly, her pursuit of an array of intellectually and culturally focused work in her young adult years reflects this same aim of obscuring her Jewish background in the hope of integrating. Her early political activities in the Young Peoples’ Socialist League, and her efforts to create unity between artists, by building support systems like the CFF, may be seen, at least in part, as ways of being included in society.

Deren’s search for inclusion for herself extended to efforts to bring about social unity in the wider society. In 1943 she moved to Greenwich Village and began to seriously
cultivate the life of the artist. Here living as the cultivated artist amongst other artists, Deren began to write theories that addressed the role of art in resolving the divisions, factions, ignorance and apathy that leads to displacement and ostracisation in society. While stemming from her own underlying sense of alienation, her aim to build new social paths and practices had now become a positive venture into navigating these sensations on a universal level for all humanity.

This art was to be created by every individual, acting as a morally responsible artist. The artist was to be a self-constructed, socially reflective figure, able to ‘comprehend’ and ‘manipulate’ the universe, and therefore able to evolve with the socio-cultural context.

In Chapter Two it was proposed that the features denoted by Deren’s ‘artist’ reflected those of ‘the Jew’. A review of the experiences and perceptions of Jews in twentieth-century America showed ‘the Jew’, like Deren’s artist, to be a self constructed, socially reflective figure, able to interpret and evolve with the socio-cultural context.

In reconstituting the symbol of ‘the Jew’ and reformatting its characteristics as ‘the artist’, Deren utilised a practice already consolidated for vocalising cultural ideas for society. This ensured that she was defining a practice that was accessible to broad society as well as just theoretically insisting on one. Deren made use of this cultural character that had parallels with her own personal experience. In reconfiguring it she was able to access acceptable paths for discussing cultural belonging without having to address or identify her background. That is, by adopting this cultural trend Deren was able to hide her Jewish roots and navigate anti-Semitism, as ‘the Jew’ was used by both Jews and non-Jews alike to as a cultural vehicle through which to approach ideas on cultural inclusion.

Accepting Deren’s artist as a reconfiguration of ‘the Jew’ places Deren’s work in the field of ‘Judaised’ discourse. A comparison in Chapter Three of Deren’s work with that of ‘Judaised’ poets, photographers and filmmakers, working in New York and Los Angeles around the same time, showed that they had the same goal: these groups were all aiming to create paths for inclusion in society and culture through their art, just as Deren was. While they promoted inclusion through acceptance of differences,
allowing and even rejoicing in diversity in race and variety of cultural practices, Deren insisted on absolute one-ness beyond these differences. Her work addressed a much broader audience than American society. Instead Deren’s work more grandly sought unity for humanity with the aim of making universal change. In doing this she not only configures a place of belonging to finally resolve her own needs, but also provides an opportunity for anyone that is ever in a similar disposition to always be able to find refuge in ‘Judaised’ art and a ‘Judaised’ culture.

Deren’s films and theories presented a social condition which showed humanity to be unified in its shared struggle. She aimed to present all individuals as being able to find endless possibility for social inclusion by depicting one dynamic picture of the universe, in which this essential shared condition eternally over-rode any more superficial social or cultural factions. Undoubtedly Deren hoped this would manifest into a culture that was equally as wholly inclusive no matter who merged, migrated or mixed with the population.

Significantly Deren’s work is a reminder that ‘Judaised’ art and the culture surrounding ‘the Jew’ did not develop along purely negative lines. Just as poets, filmmakers, photographers and writers aimed to bring about inclusion through a positive format of ‘Judaised’ culture, Deren’s work too, I argue, is to be conceived as ‘Judaised’ art as it sought new socio-cultural practices and ways of thinking that aimed for an inclusive and harmonious picture of contemporary American society and the universe at large.

‘Judaised’ practices are still in use today as current scholarship, like that of Cheyette and Marc Caplan, continues to uncover. What is of further note is that this ‘Judaised’ culture and the symbol’s historical trajectories can also be traced as existing in Europe and Britain from the Enlightenment until today.

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The American Film Institute’s Maya Deren Award stands as a reminder of Deren’s efforts to see independent film recognised as an art form. However, Deren’s contribution to society goes far beyond this: her constant pursuit to act as a ‘Judaised’ artist and promote such an art form to wider society, begs recognition of her more broadly as an artist committed to creating a better world. Deren’s investment in an ideology that sought to create a world, driven by ‘the artist’ toward progress and unity deserves to be considered with gravitas.
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