

FILM POEMS

programme notes

screened

NFT London
Cornerhouse Manchester
Riverside London
Arnolfini Bristol
Robin's Durham
Metro Derby
Cinematheque Brighton
The Lux London
Phoenix Leicester
MIFF 2000 India (with the support of
The British Council)
Triskel Cork

reviewed

Sight and Sound October 1999
Filmwaves Autumn 1999

forthcoming

The Cube Bristol
6th May tel. 0117 907 4191.

Broadway Nottingham
Duke Of Yorks Brighton
Scratch Projection Paris

William C Wees introductory
mini-essay 'Poetry-Films and Film Poems'
also appears at www.6degrees.co.uk

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Touring Programme

FILM POEMS

Film Poems was first screened at the National Film Theatre in February 1998, then later that year at the Cornerhouse Manchester.

These screenings, introduced by Peter Todd, at the Riverside Cinema, London and Arnolfini have been made possible through the interest of Ed Lewis and with the support of the Arts Council of England.

Later this year Film Poems will tour to several more venues as a British Film Institute Touring Programme thanks to the support of Briony Hanson of the BFI.

The programme may vary slightly from venue to venue. The NFT screened Jazz of Lights (Ian Hugo.1954.U.S.A) and not Manhatta, The Arnolfini screens Fiddle-De-Dee (Norman McLaren. 1947. Can.) and not Blue Scars.

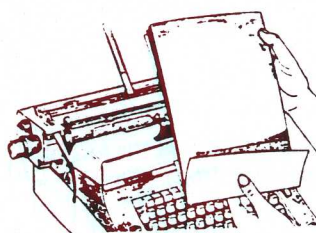
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The film prints come from BFI Collections Access (tel 0171 255 1444) and The Lux (0171 684 2782).

The South London Poem Film Society.
Nunhead, London, April 1999.
4th edition June 1999

(Doubles as issue 4 of Poem Film Film Poem)



Poetry-Films and Film Poems

By William C. Wees.

Rather than making a film to "illustrate" a poem or using a poem to "accompany" a film, a number of avant-garde film and video makers have created a synthesis of poetry and film that generates associations, connotations and metaphors neither the verbal nor the visual text would produce on its own.

This practice of juxtaposing poetic texts and cinematic images goes back at least as far as 1921, when Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand released their short film, **Manhatta**. By combining shots of New York City with quotations and paraphrases from several poems by the great 19th century American poet Walt Whitman, Sheeler and Strand not only celebrated American urbanism and modern technology (including the technology of cinema itself), but also inaugurated a new film genre, the poetry-film, which has continued to attract film and (more recently) video artists interested in exploring the dynamic symbiosis of poetic language and moving images.

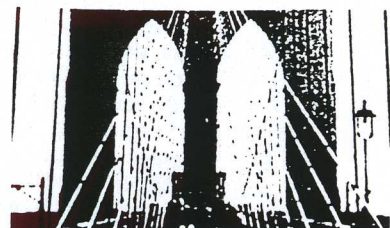
Two other early examples of poetry-films, Man Ray's **Étoile de mer** (1928), which incorporates fragments of a poem by Robert Desnos, and Marcel Duchamp's **Anemic Cinema** (1926), with its spiraling and multi-punning epigrams, are classics of the first generation of European avant-garde films, and **Manhatta** has been labeled "the first genuine avant-garde film produced in the United States."¹ While one might question how genuinely "avant-garde" that film is, there is no doubt that poetry-films frequently make use of unorthodox themes and techniques characteristic of avant-garde films. Conversely, there are many avant-garde films that might justifiably be called film poems, and in fact early avant-garde film practices spawned the term "ciné-poem" for short, non-narrative films composed of impressionistic or semi-abstract imagery carefully edited for rhythmic effects, complex formal relationships, and metaphorical or symbolic significance. Since the same characteristics are found in many poetry-films, the distinction between poetry-films and film poems lies mainly in the former's incorporation of a poetic text on the sound track or presented directly on the screen--or both: Martin Doyle and Guy Sherwin's **Mile End Purgatorio** (1991) is a particularly witty example of words on the sound track integrated with words on the screen.

An instructive comparison can be made between Ian Hugo's poetry-film **Bells of Atlantis** (1952), and Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid's film poem **Meshes of the Afternoon** (1943). The surreal, dream-like state evoked by **Meshes of the Afternoon** depends entirely on visual, cinematic effects. Indeed, the film had no sound track until 1959, when Deren decided to add music by Teiji Ito. While the music contributes an eerie atmosphere, the film's "poetry" derives from its powerful, evocative images, the dance-like movements of the protagonist (played by Deren), and the patterns and associations produced by the film's montage. As Catrina Neiman has observed, "Every image, every transition rhymes with another and is ultimately necessary either to creating the illusion of continuity or to establishing the ambiguity between dream and reality."² It is this visual "rhyming" that makes **Meshes of the Afternoon** a particularly powerful example of film poetry.

Bells of Atlantis, on the other hand, juxtaposes poetic prose spoken by Anais Nin, from her novella *House of Incest*, with images of Nin as a mysterious figure adrift in an underwater, womb-like environment, and eventually ascending to dry land and an unexplained crucifixion. (It is reasonable to suspect that **Bells of Atlantis** was influenced by **Meshes of the Afternoon**, given the respective dates of the films and the fact that Nin--and probably Hugo--knew Deren's work well.) The highly charged language of Nin's text expands the symbolic implications of the film's images, and conversely, the film's carefully constructed shots and superimpositions, filtered colours, fluid editing and echoing electronic music not only complement the mood of the text, but lend it a sensual dimension that strengthens and extends its metaphoric implications. The film might be thought of as an audio-visual interpretation or cinematic "reading" of Nin's text, and although the text existed before the film was made, it now serves to illuminate the significance of the images. This symbiotic relationship of word and image is the *raison d'être* of poetry-films.

While film poems have long been recognized as central to the avant-garde film tradition, poetry-films have received little special attention—except in San Francisco where a poet and filmmaker, Herman Berlandt, created a poetry-film workshop and began organizing poetry-film festivals in the early 1970s (his successor, George Aguilar, has continued the effort on behalf of what he calls "Cin(E)Poetry" in film and video). This disregard may be because poetry-films are a kind of hybrid art form and, therefore, seem less "pure," less essentially cinematic, in the high modernist sense that, until fairly recently, dominated critical thought on avant-garde film. Such thinking is unequivocally expressed in Germaine Dulac's proposition that film should be "an art of vision...an art of the eye,"³ and Stan Brakhage's call to filmmakers to undertake "a pursuit of knowledge foreign to language and founded upon visual communication...."⁴ No room for poetry-films there! But in addition to a post-modern appreciation of hybridity, which certainly does make room for poetry-films, there is the argument presented by the American theorist W.J.T. Mitchell. It is a mistake, Mitchell insists, to make absolute, unreconcilable distinctions between visual and verbal texts. He uses the term "imagetext" to designate "composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text,"⁵ and while he has many subtle and illuminating things to say about the juxtaposition of images and words, his most provocative (and controversial) assertion is that in one way or another, all works of art in all media are imagetexts: "In short, all arts are 'composite' arts (both text and image); all media are mixed media, combining different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes."⁶ Such generalizations may at first seem counter-intuitive or mischievously paradoxical, but I believe they offer a fresh and productive way of appreciating the conjunction of text and image in poetry-films and the less obvious, covert relationship of language and vision in film poems. As imagetexts, both poetry-films and film poems engage us in a multi-layered experience of the visual and verbal, spatial and temporal, literal and figurative that invests words with visual meaning and makes linguistic sense of moving images. They offer modes of communication that push against the limits of everyday uses of language (as does poetry) and conventional forms of filmmaking (as does avant-garde film). They are, like all interesting art, greater than the sum of their parts.

1. Jan-Christopher Horak, "Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's Manhatta," in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde 1919-1945*, Ed. Jan-Christopher Horak (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995): 267.
2. Catrina Neiman, *The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Works*, Eds. Vèvè Clark, Millicent Hodson and Catrina Neiman; Vol. I Part 2, *Chambers (1942-47)* (New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1988): 105.
3. Germaine Dulac, "The Essence of Cinema: The Visual Idea," in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, Ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978): 41 (originally published in 1924).
4. Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, *Film Culture* 30 (Fall 1963): n.p.
5. W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994): 89n.
6. Mitchell, 94-95.



MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON

Maya Deren

It was like finally finding the glove that fits. When I was writing poetry, I had, constantly, to transcribe my essentially visual images—always of movements, incidents, events—into verbal form. In motion pictures, I no longer had to translate. Fortunately, this is the way my mind works, and I could move directly from my imagination onto film.
—Biographical Statement, 1954

[*Meshes*] was made in our own house and we practically got crowded out by the equipment, lights, and rented 7-ft. electric restaurant fan which we used as a wind-machine. In the scenes where Sasha and I appear together we did it by starting the camera and jumping in front of it.⁸⁰

[This same restaurant fan] brought everything down in the house when it was turned on. The wiring of the house could not carry the current necessary for sufficient interior lighting, so all the mirrors in the house were placed outdoors strategically slanted to reflect the sun into the room. . . .⁸¹

. . . *Meshes* was the point of departure. There is a very, very short sequence in that film—right after the three images of the girl sit around the table and draw the key until it comes up knife—when the girl with the knife rises from the table to go towards the self which is sleeping in the

chair. As the girl with the knife rises, there is a close-up of her foot as she begins striding. The first step is in sand (with the suggestion of sea behind), the second stride (cut in) is in grass, third is on pavement, and the fourth is on the rug, and then the camera cuts up to her head with the hand with the knife descending towards the sleeping girl. What I meant when I planned that four stride sequence was that you have to come a long way—from the very beginning of time—to kill yourself, like the first life emerging from the primeval waters. Those four strides, in my intention, span all time. Now, I don't think it gets all that across—it's a real big idea if you start thinking about it, and it happens so quickly that all you get is a suggestion of a strange kind of distance traversed . . . which is all right, and as much as the film requires there. But the important thing for me is that, as I used to sit there and watch the film when it was projected for friends in those early days, that one short sequence always rang a bell or buzzed a buzzer in my head. It was like a crack letting the light of another world gleam through. I kept saying to myself, "The walls of this room are solid except right there. That leads to something. There's a door there leading to something. I've got to get it open because through there I can go someplace instead of leaving here by the same way that I came in."

And so I did, prying at it until my fingers were bleeding. . . .⁸²



Maya Deren.

Quotes from The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Works by Veve A Clark, Millicent Hodson, Catraina Neiman Volume I Part Two Chambers (1942-47) Pub. Anthology Film Archives / Film Culture, NYC USA 1988

FILM - POEM or POEM - FILM

A few notes about film and poetry, from Margaret Tait

In my "self-made films"(what Peter Todd calls No-Budget films) I'm always looking at where I am at the time, considering at length my immediate surroundings and "making use of available actuality" as I used to say. But in the feature scripts, which are fictional, imaginary situations are what I use. (Only one of those screenplays, BLUE BLACK PERMANENT, has so far been realised on film.) Surroundings, for fiction film, whether all sets built specifically for the film or partly 'real' - real places standing in for imaginary places - and props made for the part or at least sought out, chosen and placed, or maybe just 'found' already there, can end up being used in much the same way; - I mean, stared at, brought into the imaginary whole along with their own actuality.

The contradictory or paradoxical thing is that in a Documentary the real things depicted are liable to lose their reality by being photographed and presented in that "documentary" way, and there's no poetry in that. In poetry, something else happens. Hard to say what it is. Presence, let's say, soul or spirit, an empathy with whatever it is that's dwelt upon, feeling for it - to the point of identification.

On the other hand, I have at times been imbued with the idea of making a film to illustrate, or to set (in the sense of setting a poem to music) an existing poem, a known poem, and an early effort of mine was to set to pictures Hopkins' "The Leaden Echo And The Golden Echo". In HUGH MACDIARMID, A PORTRAIT I tried something similar, by setting picture to "Somersault" and "Krang" as spoken by MacDiarmid. Different from "The Eemis Stane" which is in the film with its musical setting, as a totality, and the picture during that is "incidental". Then again, when MacDiarmid reads "You Know Not Who I Am", which opens the film and closes it, that comes as a comment on the film and what it's about and on the partiality fully to be expected of a PORTRAIT.

This article first appeared in
poem film film poem Nov. 1997.

I think that film is essentially a poetic medium, and although it can be put to all sorts of other - creditable and discreditable - uses, these are secondary.

The great joy of directing BLUE BLACK PERMANENT was in working with the cast and crew, each bringing their own qualities into the feeling of the whole thing. It's mainly the actors and actresses who ^{give} so much greater scope in a feature compared with a short. They and the characters they create bring it into quite a different dimension from what one can do working away by oneself with a camera and an editing bench. Even all the organisation associated with having performers affects the dimension; and one of the miracles about film is that that, and all the complications of production on a wider scale, don't have to quell the poetry that's inherent in what's being made, so long as it is there in the first place.



ANCONA FILMS

ORKNEY.



PROGRAMME NOTE

AERIAL

(1974 4 minutes

Colour)

Touches on elemental images: air, water (and snow), earth, and fire (and smoke) all come into it. The track consists of a drawn-out musical sound, single piano notes and some natural sounds. The picture is a colour print from an original which is partly in colour and partly in black and white.

Hugh Macdiarmid, a Portrait shows Margaret Tait's idea of Macdiarmid's work acted by the poet himself amid all the scenes and objects that surround his daily life. "I dream of poems like the bread knife which cuts three slices at once," he says in his cottage in Biggar. Or he compares writing with getting "a tolerable idea of what happens when we bend a piece of wire backwards and forward until it breaks" and then walks balancing along low walls and the edges of Edinburgh pavements. He is in the Abbotsford bar. He is descending stone steps to the sea. He is tossing pebbles into a burn—and lines of his poems, in his own voice, echo through the images so that the film speaks out like music whether or not you have first looked up the incomprehensible words in a glossary.

Elizabeth Sussex, writing in "The Financial Times", 9 September 1970



MILE END PURGATORIO

As a response to the challenge to work collaboratively as filmmaker and poet in an equal partnership, avoiding the pitfall of illustration, we agreed upon a geographical starting point that would give each of us a difficult but complementary task. Given that we share an interest in London's East End, and have independently explored that interest in our respective fields, we decided our subject would be a row of shopfronts in Mile End. These comprise a gents hairdresser, tandoori takeaway, chinese fish and chips, pub and estate agent, on which numerous shop signs and words vie for attention.

The poet responds to this verbal and built environment, making sense (and nonsense) of what can be seen, drawing out meanings, finding ambiguities, developing ideas with reference to the filmmaker's own on-site observations. Woven into the text are quotes from, and allusions to Dante, the Psalms of the Bible, Shakespeare, Walter Raleigh and Blake; throughout the ages men reflecting on their lives, the literary references brought together around a theme of mid-life crisis and confusion.

The grandeur of the references is tempered with humour, and indeed games are played with the very significance of the generic term 'men'. This forms part of a further component, the East End, alluded to through figures of speech and suggestions of beer and football. Erupting out of this verbal potpourri is a sense of the absurd and the sublime. Therein lies some kind of answer (if one needs to supply one for a one-minute film); humour and pursuit of sensual pleasure provide relief from life's apparent chaos and meaninglessness.

The poem in itself is multilayered (some of its connections may well be missed at one viewing). Overloading adds to the anxiety and the humour. Further layers of connection and confusion are provided by the visual images, which at times wreak havoc with the words through a line of visual/verbal puns and allusions. The images also draw the themes together by revealing the source of much of the material in an East London street.

There are therefore - inevitably - illustrations of parts of the text. However, these work within a particular dynamic, that of the text simultaneously illustrating the images, which is in itself unusual.

We would anticipate further work on the detail of the film, and that new resonances would emerge in the making, possibly further influencing the text. In this way the final televised piece would reflect an organic growth and consolidation of ideas from the visual and verbal worlds of the filmmaker and poet, with constant cross - referencing between them. We hope you give us the opportunity to attempt this.

LITERARY SOURCES

MILE END PURGATORIO

SHOP SIGNS + EAST-END SOURCES

PSALM 90 The years of our life are threescore and ten
Midway through mine, I turned around; PUB SIGN 'OVER 23'S ONLY'
 DANTE PURGATORIO blimey if I wasn't lost in a dark grove. STREET SIGN 'GROVE ROAD E3!'

WALTER RALEIGH PILGRIMAGE Sure, I'd had my scrip of joy FOOTBALL
in the first half, but now I saw SHOP SIGN 'DOUBLE HAPPINESS' FISH + CHIPS
 CORINTHIANS 13 as if in a glass, happiness isn't enough. BEER

PSALM 90 For gents are swept away; SHOP SIGN 'GENTS HAIRSTYLIST' AND PHOTOS OF 3 MEN WITH GROOMED HAIR
they are like grass renewed in the morning,
in the evening it withers and dies. SHOP SIGN 'TANDOORI NIGHTS' TAKEAWAY.

DANTE PURGATORIO And me? Well, lost in a wood of error, GROVE ROAD
seeking words, a sign a way through. VARIOUS SIGNS ON PUB DOOR
 But doors were barred against me. 'BAR STAFF REQUIRED'
 'USE THE OTHER DOOR'
 'TANDOORI NIGHTS'
 + MISC. SHOP DOORS

SHAKESPEARE HAMLET Now could I drink hot blood! ON PUB DOOR 'CHILLED WINES'
with a cold snack, for I was empty 'HOT + COLD SNACKS'

BLAKE (JERUSALEM) and lost in unpleasant lands, ESTATE AGENT 'LAND + CO.'

HAMLET What a piece of work is a gent! ESTATE AGENT
how like an angel, but after half-time FOOTBALL
you're talking a quintessence of dust. DIRTY STREETS

HAMLET
 At last, though, the veils lifted
 BIBLE and it came unto me ... lo, in our second half FOOTBALL
what should a gent have but the same again? BEER, 'DOUBLE HAPPINESS' CHINESE FOOD + FISH AND CHIPS'

Darwish

Darwish is a poetic film, which explores the meanings of spiritual and physical journeys from the perspective of Sufism. A central concept of this tradition, which is of relevance to Asian people who have migrated to Britain, is that 'home' is a sense of spiritual belonging rather than one's geographical location, and that the journey towards this realisation is a circular one.

The Arabic word Suf means wool and the name Sufi is said to have come from the woollen coats they wore as they crossed the desert. The connection between this, the image of spinning wool and journeys is at the heart of the film.

One of the most influential Sufi orders are the Dervishes, who are famous for their whirling dance. In 1925 they were banned in Turkey, the doors to their lodges were bolted. The dervishes placed candles on the locks, and the opening shot of the film is a direct reference to that. It is also a visualisation of the word Darwish, a Persian word that literally means the threshold of the door (Dervish, an Arabic/Turkish word, means the Sufi who is at the door of enlightenment).

I wanted to make Darwish like a poem, a film that was circular in structure (rather than a linear narrative). It consists of 4 verses, each one starting with the image of candles being blown out and a door opening. I attempted to find a visual poetic language within the film that reflected Sufi poetry, philosophy, dance and music.

The film revolves around a poem by Rumi, the founder of the whirling dervishes: 'I declare that I am not a vagrant wandering through this bazaar that is the world, I am following the trail of my beloved for I possess the gift of love'. I was fortunate to find that Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan had performed this poem live in Paris and that Radio Paris had made a recording of this concert. Nusrat often used the poems of Sufi saints and poets in his music and I felt really privileged that he allowed me to use his music in my film.

Through the film's structure, it expresses the idea that all journeys are circular and that the journey the audience takes in watching it is circular. In 'Meditation on Violence' Maya Deren mapped out the movement of the dancer on the floor, transcribed it onto paper and used it as a guide for camera and editing. Following her principles, I mapped out the path of the dervish, essentially circles within one large circle, and used it to shape the film. This enabled me to make different connections and meanings with similar images, and gave me a framework for developing a non linear narrative.

by Shafeeq Vellani .

Films Like Poems, Films Like Music, Films Like Films

by Peter Todd

"...just as the silent cinema is becoming ever more valued and appreciated, in these *fin de siècle* years, so too are "personal" and "portrait" films, abstract, animation and documentary films. The visionary film makers...who contributed so richly to the artistic development and culture of the twentieth century, will be the subject of greater study and interest in the twenty-first..."¹

As we reach the turn of the century, this is a signpost to pleasures and exploration ahead. For reasons of choice and cost much of this work is short. Chamber music and pieces for solo instruments remain part of the repertoire. The short story remains a recognised form as does poetry. Personal film making remains largely hidden.

Many of these films are short, equally they are on 16mm, or now on video. The multiplex does not show 16mm films or video, and very rarely a short. New venues; pubs, cafes, clubs, galleries, homes and local festivals will continue to develop. Perhaps this is how this kind of film will be seen in the future (and its forms and formats develop accordingly), like the poetry, comedy, or music circuits. It's fine to write a poem or song about a mood, a walk, looking through a window, but a film? Why not? How would you show the work, programme it?

In the top/great film lists that appear with regularity, features dominate and short films including animation remain largely unmentioned. Is it that the short cannot 'compete' with features, that it needs to create its own canon or to have an allotted slot in the main lists?

Amateur cinema, poor cinema, and home movies are also possibilities "...the 'home movie' had been a strong current in avant-garde cinema since its beginnings in the 20s. Man Ray and Luis Bunuel, and in the 30s Jean Cocteau, had all made 'home movies' in that they had used props to hand, friends as actors and their surroundings as sets - Man Ray's *L'Etoile de Mer* (1928) and Bunuel's classic *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) are very much home movies in this sense. Kenneth Anger and Maya Deren in the US in the mid-40s also used their own apartments and friends to make *Fireworks* (1947) and *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) respectively."²

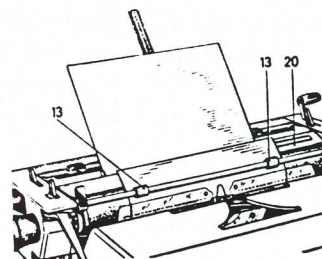
Was all early cinema, home movies, until the introduction of a means of cost control, the script? Film makers who have often developed their first work as shorts rarely have the opportunity or the interest (artistic/financial), to return to them at a later point. Derek Jarman remains one of the few who continued to work with 'shorts' as a part of his body of work. Margaret Tait completed only one feature but continues to produce short films. Could there be, is there work by film makers, like Emily Dickinson, film makers like Erik Satie, film makers like Sandy Denny, filmmakers like Jackson Pollock, like Prunella Clough, like...?

The home movie, the 'personal' being present at the beginning of cinema, will perhaps, now a hundred years later be re-animated. The possibilities for not just short works, could broaden and influence whatever cinema and film may become.

The Film Poems programme came from a desire to see films which explore the nature of film and poetry. As a film maker seeing films is as important as them being shown. 'Film Poems' is a part of that interest. By this work being screened, hopefully an interest in the films themselves, in programming in this and new ways, will continue.

1. Another Cinema Must be Saved. On the Preservation of Avant-garde and Experimental Cinema. Mary Lea Bandy. *Journal of Film Preservation*. No.50. 1995.

2. Derek Jarman: *Dreams of England*, Michael O'Pray, BFI Publishing.



NOTES ON THE MAKING OF *BLUE SCARS* by Matthew Sweeney

In 1994/95, when I was Writer in Residence at London's South Bank Centre, I engaged in a variety of cross-arts activities – with composers, visual artists, an animator, a rock star, and with the filmmaker Ian Cottage. This latter project, like all the others, was educational in nature, but it led to *Blue Scars*, whereas there is no lasting result of any of the other activities. This is reason alone to remember it fondly, but there's more reason – I have felt for some time that there's a real connection between poetry and film, at least a particular kind of poetry (among which I'd include my own) that I call 'imagistic narrative' – and so, I was delighted when the poem / film collaboration was mooted.

It was an outreach project (very outreach, considering the distance between Ashington and London), and two other poem films were being made simultaneously in different parts of the country. I met with Ian several times, I think, in London, to get our preliminary thoughts together. Then we had two weeks in Ashington for writing and filming. Much of the first week was spent feeling our way, and getting to know, to some extent, the kids we were working with. Ian and I both felt very strongly that the allotments, at the back of the town, was where the bulk of the poem film would be set. This was initially unpopular with the students, who felt embarrassed at this side of their lifestyle being focussed on, and consequently suspected our motives somewhat. We managed to convince them that we were sincere – and that the allotments were evocative, being full of the town's past. This was literally in evidence as we walked around and kept seeing bits of pit machinery recycled as parts of allotments. I was simultaneously involving the kids in writing exercises that showed how poems are built up of images and concrete particulars, rather than vague abstractions – and that poems and films are therefore more similar than they'd previously thought.

There was one danger Ian and I identified early on. This was the film becoming merely an illustration of the words. Neither of us wanted that to happen, and it didn't – though inevitably (and subliminally, wittily) certain images from the poem reappear visually on screen. My feeling is, though, that the film and the poem work against each other, rather than stay in linear alignment, and this feels to me right.

Because the past in the present was emerging as a theme, I sent the kids home with notebooks to grill their parents (many of the Dads would have been unemployed ex-miners) and grandparents on memorable or surprising things they remembered. I also sent them out, as spies, among the allotments, noting down anything they saw that looked interesting or different. Then, while Ian took some of the kids out filming, I took a group I'd isolated as the best writers into a room. We have a week to write this poem, I said, and no one's getting out till it's written.

I decided we'd write it as a committee, almost, with me leading. We had all the gathered notes, and my feeling was that we had more than enough material – we just had to shape and order it. And find the tone. I'd gone on, in the classroom writing sessions, about the need for surprise, and when I asked how we might start the poem, the most insistent suggestion was the image of headless hens tied by their feet to a fence. Playing devil's advocate, I pretended to be shocked. Did they think they were writing a punk poem, I asked. You said you wanted surprises, they said. I laughed and said it was a great opening, and we proceeded from there.

We wrote it slowly, and I had to prod it along, and come up with a lot of the phrasing. Also provide the shape and rhythm of it. Nevertheless, all of the kids there contributed to the writing of the poem, and could feel it was theirs. It also surprised them in some ways. I remember one girl being astonished that any outsider would be remotely interested in stuff that was so familiar to her. Another that a poem could be written in the language people spoke.

If I have one regret about the film it's that the reading of the poem is so indistinct. I felt very strongly that one of the kids should read the poem and not an actor. I picked out one boy and worked with him, till he could say it OK – audibly, with good emphasis and enunciation – but unfortunately, I had another commitment and couldn't be at the studio on the day of the recording. The boy obviously got nervous and didn't do nearly as well as he could have. I think I could have got it better if I'd been there.

And finally, a more general regret. Good as the text of the poem is – and substantial though my contribution to the writing was – it isn't as good as it would have been if I or any other professional poet had written it alone. Of course, this isn't wholly correct – I couldn't have come up with all the subject matter material or images on my own – but I'm talking about the polishedness of the writing. This is a side issue of all educational work, which is, by definition, more process-oriented than working towards a permanent result. At any rate, after working on *Blue Scars*, I felt I'd like to work with a filmmaker again, this time just the two of us. Interestingly enough, I recently did just that with a composer I've worked in schools with – we did some songs together, where I wrote the words which he set to music, and on a later occasion, I came up with a poem in response to a piece of his music. It was as satisfying as I thought it would be, and I'd like to repeat this in the medium of film.

MAKING POEM FILMS

1. The poem film must be an original creation
2. The poet and film-maker should work on an idea for a poem film. They should explore the idea together. The process of exploration should take no longer than a day
3. The film-maker should not interfere with the poet's writing. Similarly, the poet should not interfere with the film-maker's filming. The film and poem should be created in no more than three days.
4. Both poet and film-maker should push the boundaries of the poem film.
5. The poem film must be shot on film.
6. A minimal crew must be used for the shoot. Preferably the film-maker and a camera.
7. The poet can discuss the poem with the film-maker. However, no lines should be cited by the poet. The film-maker cannot read the poem before the filming is complete.
8. The film-maker can discuss the images they have filmed with the poet. No rushes can be shown to the poet. Sketches or storyboards are prohibited.
9. The poet can only show the film-maker the completed poem on the last day of filming. The film-maker can use the remaining time to shoot additional material.
10. The film-maker must edit the film on their own.
11. The poet and film-maker decide whose voice is used to recite the poem.
12. The poet can record the poem without the film-maker being present.
13. The film-maker is at liberty to erase the voice-over from the film if s/he does not like the poem.
14. The poet is at liberty to scratch the film's negative if s/he does not like the film.

Ian Cottage.

A First Visit With Ian Hugo

By Rochelle Holt Dubois

What I noticed first and throughout our visit were the hands and the eyes of Ian Hugo. I asked why he never consented to be in the Diaries, and he explained that as an employee of a bank, it was not considered business-like to be an artist. "During the day while doing other things I relieved dull moments by doodling and arrived home with my pockets stuffed with slips so that I soon had albums filled with hundreds of little figures, many of which I later used. Incidentally, I noticed that the original doodle, when it was good, had a freshness and spontaneity which was difficult to copy. Then with my meeting with S.W. Hayter came engraving and with it the exciting discovery that doodling with the burin brought out forms and objects which had a reality of their own—not simply in the conception but in the very stuff out of which they were made."

Hugo's copper engravings were displayed prominently all around us, the original plates indeed more beautiful even than the prints I had seen in Anais Nin's books. (In Hugo's 1946 "New Eyes on the Art of Engraving" he wrote "The spectator's eyes are drawn irresistibly to the plate with all its light and space values which are impossible to find in any print." He would also write that "Images and not words are my language. . . .")

"How did you meet Anais?" I ask.

"She was the deer-eyed girl in the fairytale, the woman standing in the archway." I recall Anais in that pose in a Maya Deren film. "I danced all night with her." Nin and Hugo were opposites, a Catholic and a Scotsman. "I gave her a Treasury of English Poetry and a book on Emerson," he recalls.

"How did you learn film-making?" I ask.

"I learned from my mistakes," he says.

"As a result of several trips to Mexico, Ian Hugo made the transition from engraver to film-maker. He followed the process of free association; he filmed whatever touched him or appealed to him. . . . The results were an impressionistic interpretation of the universal story of mankind's voyage told without words through a kaleidoscope of color, through sound and images. Beginning while he and the animals sleep and dream of the past, man is taken through tropical lagoons from birth, through childhood, adolescence, pain, struggle, old age, death, and burial in a mouth of a volcano in the clouds [The Diary of Anais Nin, vol. 5, p. 59]."

I remember the drumming and chanting as I watched Ian Hugo's film Ai-Ye; Vernon Martin and I had rented it to show at Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa in 1971 along with Jazz of Lights as part of the February birthday celebration for Anais Nin. Now we see it again:

"Ian Hugo spent months filming on Forty-second Street and finally produced Jazz of Lights. The title was inspired by James Herlihy's Jazz of Angels. . . . The basis is imaginative realism, that is, realism transmitted into fugitive impressions, an ephemeral flow of sensations. . . . When we become too familiar with certain street scenes we no longer see them. . . . [Diary, vol. 5, p. 253]." I see again the blind man, Moondog, the lights of Broadway, man's beasts, the machines and shovels that scoop up and spit out the earth of the city.

We watch Transmigration. "And what would you like to come back as?" I ask Hugo, and he answers quickly: "I would like to come back as an animal, a llama." I see the South American beast of burden in my mind's eye. I am upset. "But I'll probably come back as a chipmunk." I visualize the small striped squirrel of eastern North America. I relax—he is teasing us.

His recent film Luminescence unwinds before us. Afterwards he explains how he only now sees the film as the story of Anais, a fusion with plants and animals, to become the energy of light. I ask about the film he is working on now. He says, "The Double has Anais arriving as guru in a Viking ship." The unconscious is the source of all his and Anais' inspiration. He quotes from Bachelard's Water and the Dream: "We suffer with our dreams, but we also cure ourselves with our dreams."

[Edited from a larger article entitled "Luminescence: A Visit With Ian Hugo"]

Guy Sherwin
 Mile End Purgatorio 1991
 Views From Home 1987
 In Camera 1986
 Salt Water 1986
 Firescreen 1985
 Extracts From A Diary 1983
 Commemora 1981
 Notes 1981
 Messages 1980
 Night Train 1980
 Bath 1979
 Car/Radio 1979
 Platform 1979
 Still Life With Video Loop 1978
 Self Portrait 1977
 Short Film Series 1977 - Field Of Grain, Breathing, Chimney
 Window Frame, Anna/Vermeer, Clock And Train, Chimney
 Window Track, 1977
 Soundings 1977
 Railings Stairs 1977
 Musical Stairs 1977
 Jug 1977
 Cross Section 1977
 Coming Into View 1976
 Riding Ring 1976 - Burnt Image, Nine Trees,
 Short Film Series 1976 - Anna And Photo, Vermeer Still Life,
 Windbreak Print, Torch Shadow, Windbreak With Shadow,
 Handcrank Clock, Vermeer Frames, Richmond Track,
 Suffolk Track, Torchlight, Canal Shadow
 Walkway, Aviator, 1976
 Man With Mirror 1975
 Paper Landscapes 1974
 Silent Film 1974
 Interval 1974 1974
 Falling Rider 1974
 At The Academy 1974
 Newsprint 1972

Alexander Hammid
 Night Journey 1976 1964
 The 150 Lire Escape 1964
 To Be Alive 1964
 Portrait of U Thant 1962
 Night Journey 1961
 Casals Master Class 1961
 Power Among Men 1958
 The Gentleman in Room 6 1951
 The Angry Boy 1950
 Terribly Talented 1948
 This is America 1946
 The Private Life of a Cat 1945
 A Better Tomorrow 1945
 Library of Congress 1945
 Valley of the Tennessee 1944
 Toscanini 1944
 Meshes of the Afternoon 1943
 Prague Castle 1932
 Aimless Walk 1930

Margaret Tait
 Garden Pieces 1997
 Blue Black Permanent 1992
 Aspects of Kirkwall 1980
 Tailpiece 1976
 Place of Work 1976
 These Walls 1974
 On The Mountain 1974
 Aerial 1974
 Colour Poems 1974
 He's Back 1970
 Painted Eightsome 1970
 A Pleasant Place 1969
 Splashing 1966
 The Big Sheep 1966
 Palindrome 1964
 Where I Am Is Here 1964
 Hugh MacDiarmid A Portrait 1964
 Rose Street 1956
 The Drift Back 1956
 Orquill Burn 1955
 The Leaden Echo And The Golden Echo 1955
 Happy Bees 1955
 Salyppo 1955
 Portrait Of Ga 1952
 Three Portrait Sketches 1951
 One Is One 1951
 The Lion, The Griffin And The Kangaroo 1951

Maya Deran
 Davine Houssemen: The Living Gods of Haiti 1975
 The Very Eye of Night 1958
 Meditation on Violence 1946
 Ritual in Transfigured Time 1946
 A Study in Choreography for Camera 1945
 At Land 1944
 Witch's Cradle 1943
 Meshes of the Afternoon 1943

Ian Cottage
 Informer 1998
 Sleep 1998
 Mangelout 1995
 Blue Scars 1994
 Small Gestures 1994

Shafiq Vellani
 See Red 1998
 Escape To Somerset 1998
 Darwish 1993
 Circling The City 1996
 Walking Away With The Music 1989

Paul Strand
 Heart of Spain 1948
 Native Land 1942
 Redes 1935
 Manhatta 1921
 Photography 1942
 Tomorrow We Fly 1941
 It's Up To You 1941
 The Plow That Broke The Plains 1936
 Script
 people of the Cumberland 1937

Peter Todd
 Day Out Or 100' Of Film 1998
 Diary 1998
 To Red 1995
 Out 1990
 The Shoreline 1984
 Green And Pleasant Land 1979
 One Man Show
 Gasworks, London 1998
 Group Shows
 Sea Level, Dorset 1998 (curated by Judith Frost)
 Pause, London 1998 (curated by Aude Herral Jager)
 Curated
 Film Poems, a touring film programme, 1998 - 1999.
 Void, a group exhibition in a domestic environment,
 London 1997.

Ian Hugo
 Aphrodisiac II 1974
 Transfiguration 1973
 Ai-Re 1972
 Aphrodisiac 1971
 Venice Etude 1971
 Melodic Inversion 1971
 Levitation 1970
 Apertura 1970
 Through the Magiscope 1969
 Ian Hugo - Engraver/Film Maker 1968
 The Gondola Eye 1963
 Venice Etude No.1 1961
 Melodies Inversion 1958
 Jazz of Lights 1954
 Bells of Atlantis 1952



These filmographies are intended for guidance only and should not be considered authoritative, apologies for any mistakes

BOOKS CONCERNED WITH POETRY ON THE SCREEN

Although some films have been described as being "poetic", very little has been written about poetry and the cinema. Detailed below are the relevant books held in the BFI National Library.

FRENCH, Philip and Ken Wlaschin (eds.)
The Faber book of movie verse.

London: Faber and Faber, 1993. 458p. index.

An anthology of poetry about the cinema, with a useful introductory essay by Philip French offering an overview of poetry and the cinema.
In print.

HARRINGTON, John.
Film and/as literature.

Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1977. 364p. illus.

This is an anthology of writing about the relationship between film and literature. Section four deals with film and poetry, and the articles range from the transcription of a symposium on poetry and the film to the effect that movies have had on a poet.
Out of print.

SLIDE, Anthony (comp.)

The picture dancing on a screen: poetry of the cinema.
Vestal, N.Y.: Vestal Press, [1989]. 180p. plates. bibliog. indexes.

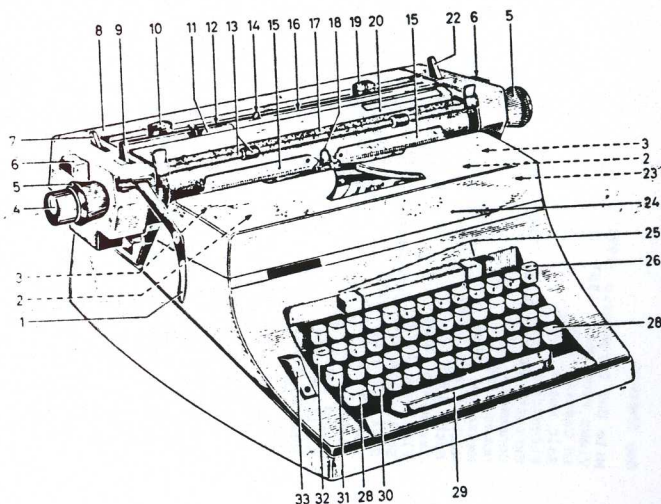
An anthology of poetry about the cinema. Nicely presented, with some photographs of stars.
In print.

VOGEL, Amos. (comp.)
Poetry and film.

New York: Gotham Book Mart, 1972. 26p.

The transcription of the poetry and the film symposium appears again here, plus an essay on experimental film.
In print.

Reprinted from Verse On Screen Source List
Northern Poetry Library, Northumberland, February, 1996



FILM POEMS

How do poetry and film work together? What is a film poem? Verse On Screen in Northumberland in 1996, was an exploration of poetry on film. Our programme seeks to explore further the relationships between poetry on film but also films that are 'poems'.

Manhatta. Dir. Charles Sheeler/Paul Strand. USA. 1921. 9 mins. Famous impressionistic representation of Walt Whitman's lyric hymn to the city. 'the first genuine avant garde film produced in the United States.'

Bells Of Atlantis. Dir. Ian Hugo. USA. 1952. 10 mins. 'This film, with spoken text by the poet Anais Nin, cause a sensation at the Venice Festival in 1952, for its striking achievement in collaboration, with the three arts, of camera, of sound, and of poetic text - meeting in a strange territory of free association.'

Meshes of the Afternoon. Dir. Maya Deren, Alexander Hammid. USA. 1943. 14 mins. 'The film begins in actuality and, eventually, ends there. But in the meantime the imagination, here given as a dream, intervenes.'

Hugh MacDiarmid A Portrait. Margaret Tait. UK. 1964. 9 mins. 'The bard emerges as a warm and affectionate subject, saying more and seeing more in its nine minutes than a half-hour television reportage.' '..and lines of his poems, in his own voice, echo through the images so that the film speaks like music.'

Aerial. Margaret Tait. UK. 1974. 4 mins. 'Touches on elemental images. Air, water (and snow), earth, and fire (and smoke), all come in to it.'

Mile End Purgatorio. Made by Guy Sherwin and Martin Doyle. UK. 1991. 1 min. A collaboration between film maker and poet. '...a particularly witty example of words on the sound track integrated with words on the screen..'

Darwish. Dir. Shafeeq Vellani. UK. 1993. 12 mins. 'This beautifully shot, award-winning film is a Sufi road movie, exploring dance, religious tradition and contemporary Britain.'

Out. Dir. Peter Todd. UK. 1990. 8 mins. 'In this thoughtful and beautifully observed short film, the same monologue is spoken by three different actresses in three different situations, the interpretation and hence the meaning changing in each case.'

Blue Scars. Dir. Ian Cottage. UK. 1994. 6 mins. 'A creative collaboration between students of Ashington High School, poet Matthew Sweeney and the film maker. This is a powerful but tender evocation of the history and future of what was once the 'biggest mining village in the world.'

programme may be subject to slight variation