

## Dance on Film

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*Flesh into Light: The Films of Amy Greenfield*  
By Robert A. Haller. 138 pp. Illustrated.  
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In *Flesh Into Light: The Films of Amy Greenfield*, Robert A. Haller presents a wealth of historical information and evaluates the significance of Greenfield's work on film and video. While he does not approach her career from a traditional academic standpoint, he has written an innovatively structured book, rich with primary sources, which will be of interest to art aficionados, historians, and scholars. He is particularly knowledgeable about film and video and discusses the development of these forms as creative mediums. He situates Greenfield in the burgeoning field of 1970s video art and elucidates how visual artists and choreographers influenced her work. Most notably, Haller draws parallels between Greenfield's work and the legacy of filmmaker Maya Deren (1917–1961). Both women worked to “evoke passionate states of mind through the use of close-up camera, by camera movement, and by film editing” (p. 9). While Greenfield trained and performed as a dancer, she is first and foremost a filmmaker, whose creative energies have focused on developing a unique movement language on film that conveys bodily states of motion and emotion through manipulation of time and space.

Haller is currently Director of Library Collections at Anthology Film Archives in New York City.<sup>1</sup> He has been publishing on the subject of film since 1980. He has written seven books and co-authored five, nine of which were published by the Film Archives. Haller first met Greenfield in 1976, when he saw her 1974 film *Dervish*. Although he does not disclose the full nature of his relationship to Greenfield, he does mention being involved in some of her projects over time. He took still photographs at an audition Greenfield held in 1978 and he photographed her feature film *Antigone/Last Rites* from 1985 to 1987. He mentions his involvement in these projects tangentially, leaving me curious about how his experiences with Greenfield have influenced his impressions of her work. Moreover, using the expression

connection swept through the audience, leaving the spectators transformed. While he does not provide evidence for this audience transformation, how he describes his personal experience in watching the filmmaker's work gives the reader a glimpse into his point of view.

According to Haller, Greenfield has made more than forty films since her first work in 1970; she is also a published author and curator. She trained as a dancer for more than ten years with teachers such as Robert Cohan, various instructors at the Martha Graham School, and Merce Cunningham, and she studied choreography with Louis Horst and Lucas Hoving before shifting her focus to filmmaking. Although Greenfield's poetry has been published, she primarily relies on music and rarely uses language or words in her films. Haller explains that “some [films] used printed words but fewer use spoken ones. They are reserved to make explicit what is already implicit in the movements of the body” (p. 10). While Greenfield's interests converged in filmmaking, she continued to perform in her own films through the early 1990s and has always collaborated with other dancers.

Yvonne Rainer's minimalist aesthetic influenced Greenfield's perceptions of movement. In an appendix for Haller's book, Greenfield discusses being inspired by a performance in which Rainer walked across the stage naked, and she seems to resonate with Rainer's rejection of virtuosity. (In his 2012 book, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image*, Douglas Rosenberg directly connects Rainer's famous *NO Manifesto* (1965) to Greenfield's early films.<sup>2</sup>) Greenfield writes, “I didn't want recognizable dance. I wanted to discover a language of human motion for the camera” (p. 121). In her quest for a new language of movement, she found inspiration in another important figure from dance history. Her 1982 film *Tides* opens with a quotation from Isadora Duncan's essay “Dance of the Future” contemplating the transitory but eternal nature of movement. As Haller indicates, *Tides* was also inspired by Maya Deren's film *At Land*:<sup>3</sup> both *At Land* and *Tides* reverse the flow of the ocean and prominently feature the moving female body, albeit a fully clothed Deren moves away from the ocean, and a naked Greenfield revels in the sea's foamy embrace.

Greenfield firmly believes that the naked body can communicate important knowledge that cannot be articulated through language. In a 1978 recorded conversation between Greenfield and an unidentified friend, she stated, “Nakedness naturally enlarges me, my perception of myself” (p. 44). According to Haller, Greenfield views female nudity as “energy in extreme action” (p. 71). To me, *Tides* appears to be an endless cycle of beginning

eager to discover the personal meanings I might find in them. His passion for her films is palpable. Fortunately, many of Greenfield's films are online through the websites Vimeo and YouTube, and she sells DVDs of her work on her own website.<sup>4</sup> I enjoyed this book most when I was able to read a chapter followed by watching the video featured in that section of the text.

Like a catalog, *Flesh into Light* lists, describes, and explains many of Greenfield's films; six of the chapters, arranged chronologically, are devoted to introducing and explicating them. In the seventh chapter, Haller provides eight discrete perspectives on how time, dance, close-ups, and transformation figure in Greenfield's work. He places a premium on visual experience and incorporates eight pages of black-and-white images interspersed throughout the book and sixteen color images in the center of the text. A preface explores the 2010 censorship controversy surrounding nudity in Greenfield's films. YouTube had banned, for violating "community standards," three of her films that had been posted online. Greenfield enlisted the National Coalition Against Censorship among other organizations to support her right to post her work online. The films were reinstated on YouTube, and Haller's inclusion of viewer comments brings a fresh and contemporary perspective to the filmmaker's work. Seven appendices include a filmography of the work through 2009, a bibliography of her books and articles, and a list of books and articles about her. The bibliography is partially annotated with quotations and thoughts that Haller deems important. Because here, as in the body of the text, the entries are listed chronologically, the reader is able to make connections to the ideas presented earlier. In the text's last section, "Greenfield on Greenfield," Haller generously gives her the last word.

"Greenfield on Greenfield" comprises eight short sections on Greenfield's production notes, specific film cycles, collaborators, and her views on nudity, delivered in a conversational and informal tone and written specifically for this text. In a delightful anecdote about her experience directing the actor Dennis Hopper in her film *Club Midnight* (2006), Greenfield is completely transparent about how the day's events unfolded. Her soundman forgot his microphones, they had to make do with a camcorder to capture the sound, and Greenfield delicately directed Hopper to get the performance she wanted. However, elsewhere I had questions about her artistic motives. She states that she intended *Element* (1973) to record "moving in mud, [as in] an African ritual," without further identification or description of the supposed African ritual (p. 121). Without cultural specifics or a clear frame of

ative process. The order in which she completed projects, including w ones she was working on simultaneously, figures importantly in the auth scheme. He also details how video-editing technology evolved, thereby c textualizing Greenfield's methods. For example, his clear explanation of reel-to-reel video-editing process helps readers to imagine what was requi to produce Greenfield's *Videotape for a Woman and a Man* (1978). Arch information from production schedules and long excerpts from the *F filmmaker's Newsletter* give readers an opportunity to examine the informat and come to their own conclusions.

*Flesh into Light* details Greenfield's contribution to the field and provi readers with an opportunity to become immersed in her work and ideas times, Haller states Greenfield's intentions without documenting his sou of reference, and he cites Hegel generically, without specifying a partic philosophical text. He focuses on Greenfield's artistic approach but d not provide a larger cultural context for her work beyond the evol of filmmaking technology. The scholar's zoom-in focus on an indivic artist's pursuits, as evidenced by a bibliography limited to sources wri by or about Greenfield, will not satisfy readers who want to see the la picture. However, he inventively divides the book into sections addres diverse aspects of Greenfield's career that can be read in different ord He clearly argues that, for Greenfield, choreographing film footage ta precedence over choreographing bodies in real time. For example, she been known to shoot film footage and then edit that footage in such a that two completely different pieces of filmmaking emerge. Haller preser readable text that sensitively conveys insight into Greenfield's sophistic portrayal of the moving body on screen.

## NOTES

1. Anthology Film Archives, <http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/contact/staff> (accessed February 2013).
2. Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 2012), 134.
3. Maya Deren, *At Land*, 1944, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ID088nkJID4> (accessed February 15, 2013).
4. Amy Greenfield Films, <http://www.amygreenfieldfilms.com/dvds/> (accessed July 12, 2013).