

The Ritual Machine and The Cinematic Legacy of Maya Deren: Revisiting *Virtuality*

Abstract

Building on Bruce Kapferer's engagement with virtuality, this article examines the generative dynamic integrated in ritual—a machine whose internal operations reorganize perception, cognition, and meaning. Shifting the analytic emphasis from interpretation to an orientation toward ritual dynamics, the paper argues that Maya Deren's postwar project of a “ritualistic mode of film” constitutes a technological instantiation of ritual virtuality. Through montage, temporal discontinuity, and spatial reconfiguration, Deren's “pure cinema” engineers “total events” via what she called “controlled accidents,” assembling independent cinematic components into totalizing formations that both constrain and expand human attention, memory, and embodied experience.

Conceptualizing Deren's films as closed-circuit game engines (her “Anagrams”), the article mobilizes Alfred Gell's notion of the indexed game to show how cinematic technique functions as a system of visual entrapment: spectators are drawn into a self-referential loop of prediction, probability, and control that continuously regenerates the ritual field. The analysis further situates this filmic ritual machine within anthropological debates on habitus, correspondence, and cosmological participation, linking Deren's cinematic séances to forms of technological mediation that collapse boundaries between self and cosmos. Finally, the article argues that Deren's cinematic logic persists in contemporary metaverse environments, where digital systems similarly generate autonomous ritual realities experienced not as parallel worlds but as part of reality's fabric—mediums for travelling further into the universe materially and metaphysically.