



Shirin Neshat, Passages Series, 2001

Unlike most of her works in which music and image develop in an integrated creative process, Neshat made a film in 2001 as a visual text for which a score would be composed later. The composer was to be the prolific Philip Glass, who has scored numerous films, including Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi*, Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* and Stephen Daldry's *The Hours*. Considered one of the leading figures of minimalism, his compositions are characterized by "repetitive slowly evolving passages that tend to transfix listeners and make them lose their sense of time."^{iv} His musical narrative unfolds loosely, often in cyclical arpeggios that combine harmonic and rhythmic language in the same structure. In 1997 Glass composed the music for a 3D animated opera directed by Robert Wilson that used 114 Rumi poems in English translation as the libretto, so he was familiar with one of Neshat's major inspirations.

Passage (2001) was the result of this collaboration between Neshat and Glass. The film presents an eternal cycle of birth and death, in which a group of women dig out a grave with their bare hands, clutching at clods of dirt to the soundtrack of a hypnotic chant. A group of men travel in a funeral procession, carrying a white shroud. They start from the coast and travel over the hills of the desert to the women anticipating their return. The camera cuts from men to women and back, never showing them together until the final scene. Again Neshat emphasizes the alienation between the sexes, even when the film is only a single projection. A little girl, dressed in white, plays alone by building a circular mound of rocks away from the adults. It is clear the death had been a tragic one and the whole community mourns the loss but in different ways: the men with rigid resolve and the women with instinctual ritual.

The only sound uttered by any of the actors in the film is when the women vocalize their grief in ululation. Their wail is like a fresh wound but it is also a healing catharsis. A path of fire ignites around the adults and leads off-screen. The fire surrounds the men and women joining them for the first time in grief. Even at her most grief-stricken Neshat presents the possibility of hope and rebirth. In all her projects, Neshat and her musical collaborators seem to be echoing Rumi's words: "From this world of separation / to union, a world beyond worlds!"^v

i. Sussan Deyhim Biography, (official Sussan Deyhim web-site: www.sussandeyhim.com, February 14, 2003).

ii. Richard Di Santo, *To Evoke and Live the Vibration: in conversation with Sussan Deyhim* (web -site: <http://www.incursion.org/features/deyhim.html>, October 28, 2001)

iii. Marine Van Hoof, *Shirin Neshat: veils in the wind* (*Artpress*, no. 279, May 2002), 39.

iv. Bryan Reesman, *Philip Glass (Mix: http://mixonline.com/ar/audio_philip_glass/index.htm April 1, 2002) web version.*

v. Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Look! This is Love: Poems of Rumi*, translated by Annemarie Schimmel (Boston / London: Shambhala, 1991) 76.