

The Emergent Contemporary Movement of Spiritual Cinema and Media: Explorations in Mind/Body Alternations



**7th Biennial Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western
Esotericism (ESSWE), University of Amsterdam, 2-4 July 2019**

Lila Moore, PhD

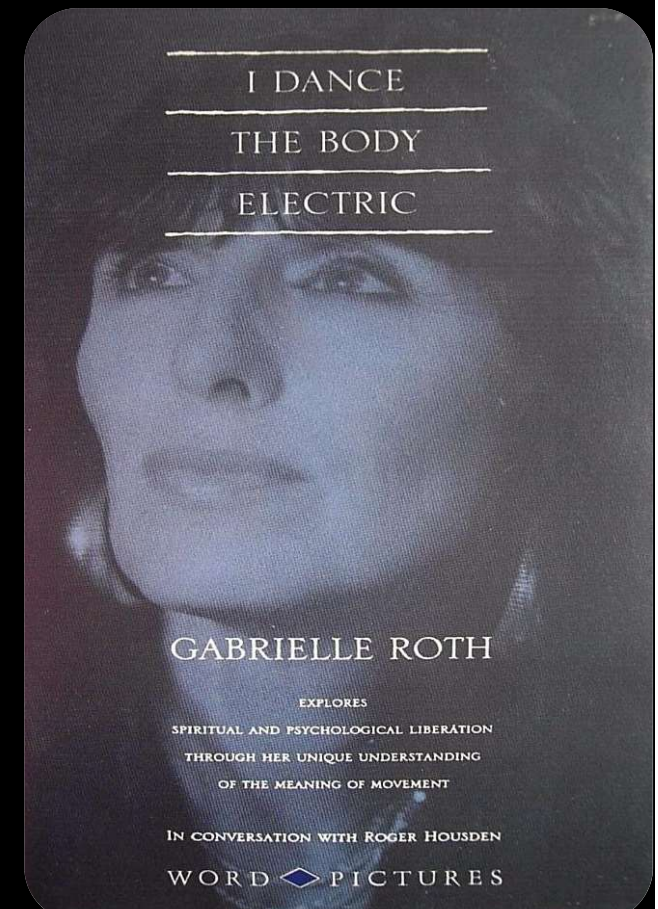
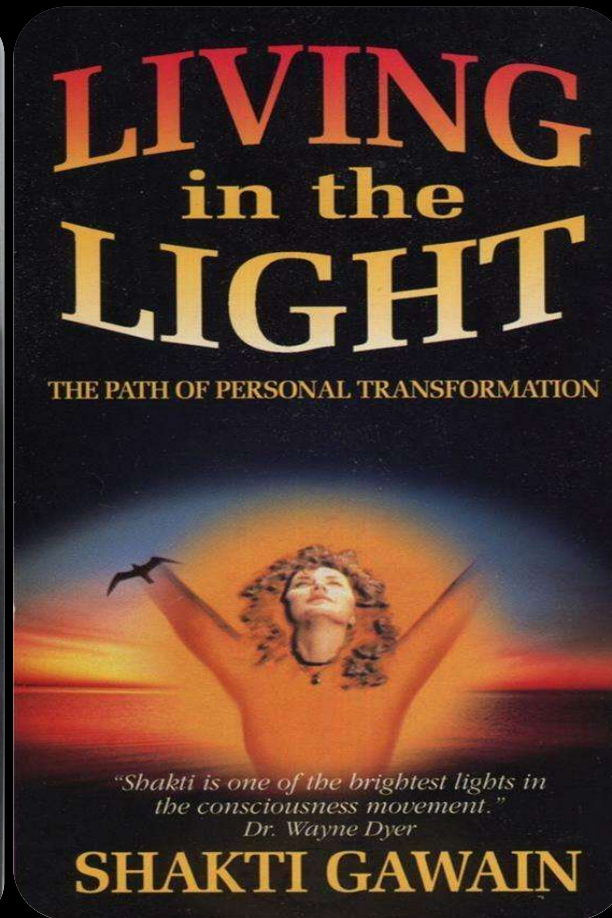
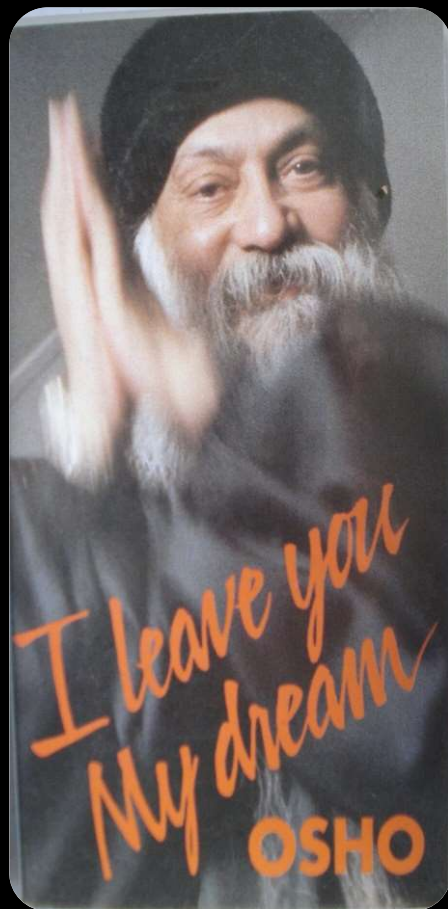
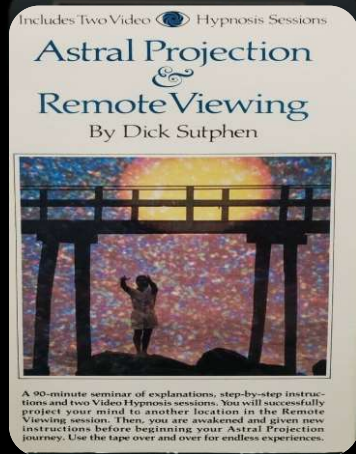
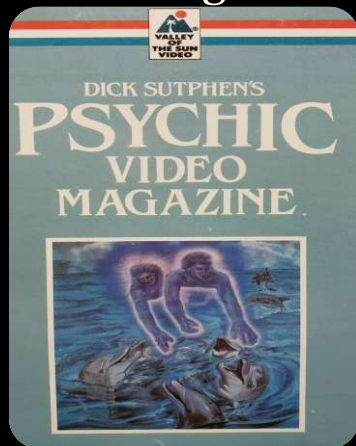
Cybernetic Futures Institute, UK
Zefat Academic College, Israel

Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, PhD

Zefat Academic College, Israel

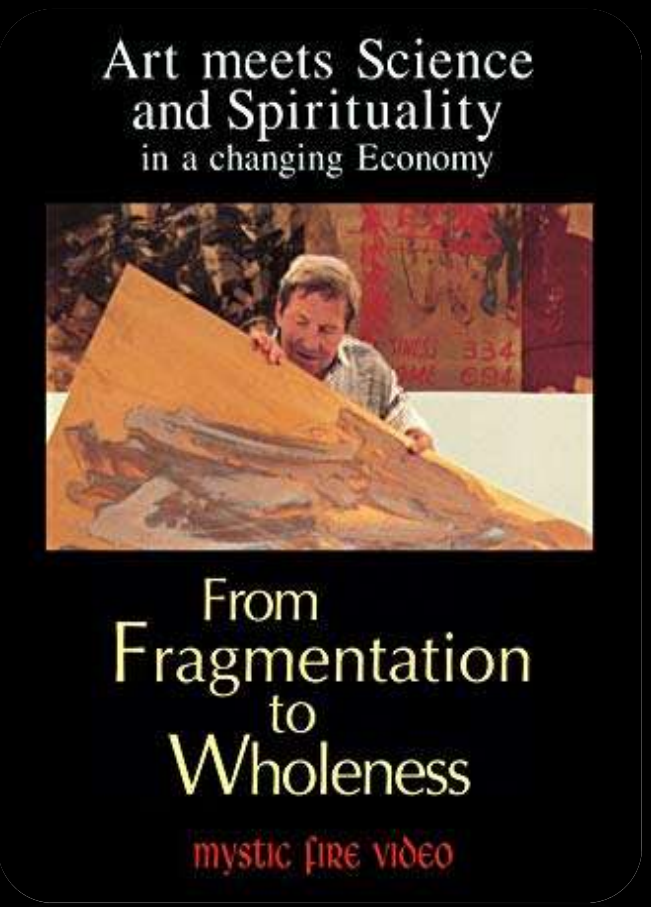
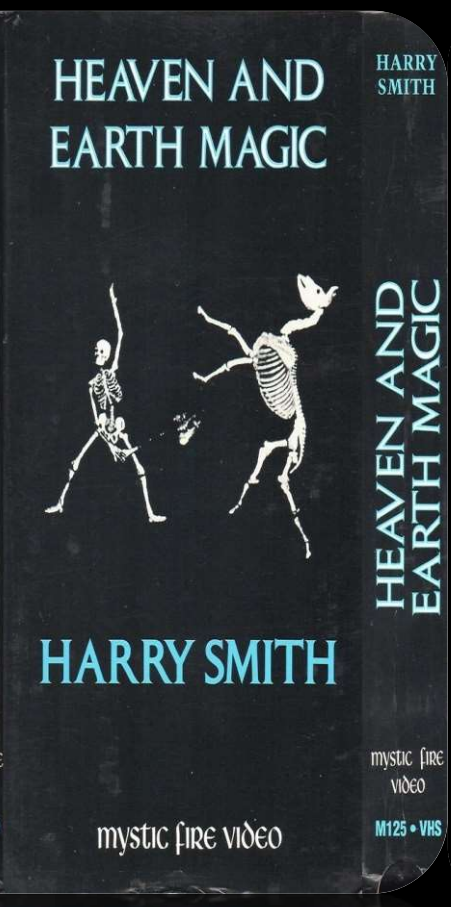
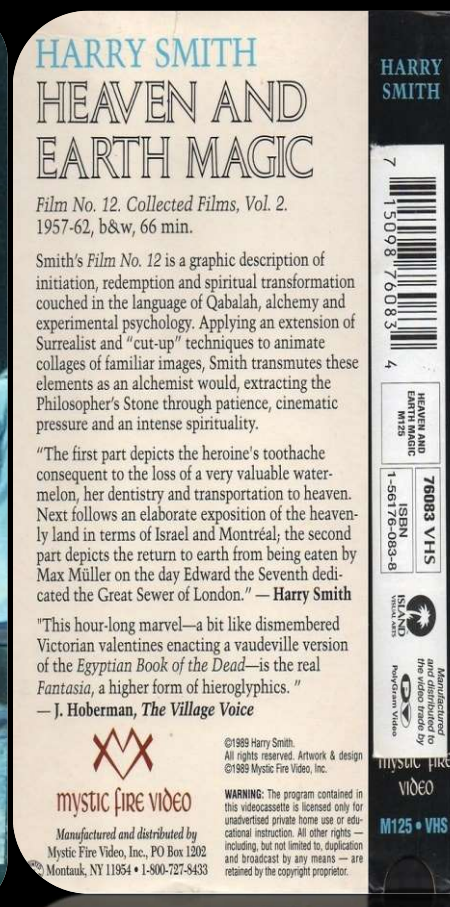
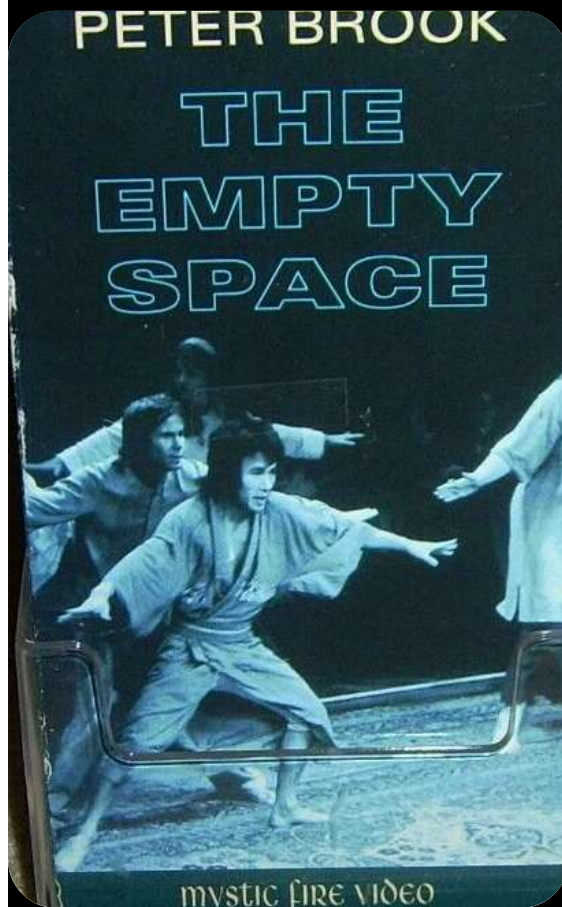
Spiritual Media: 1980s to mid-1990s

- During the 80s until the mid-late 90s only a limited selection of video productions on VHS tapes were commercially available, or familiar to the general public, and these were mainly instructional videos, teaching meditation, trance and various psychic and healing techniques by New Age spiritual teachers such as: Osho, Shakti Gawain, Dick Sutphen and Gabrielle Roth, amongst others.



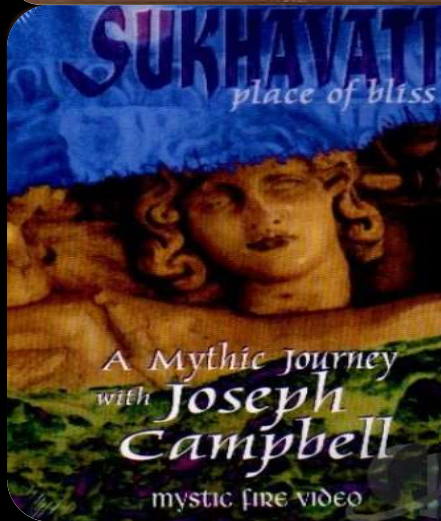
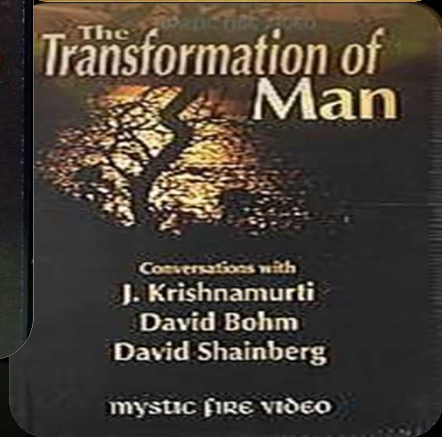
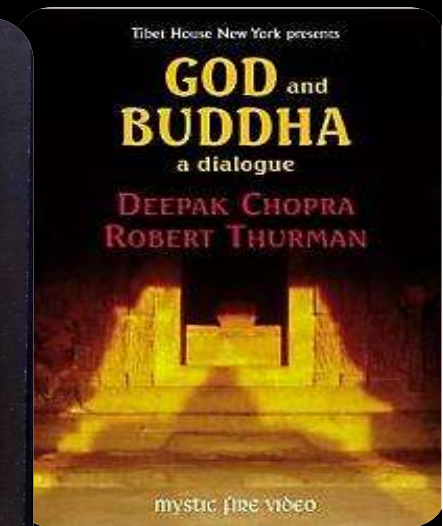
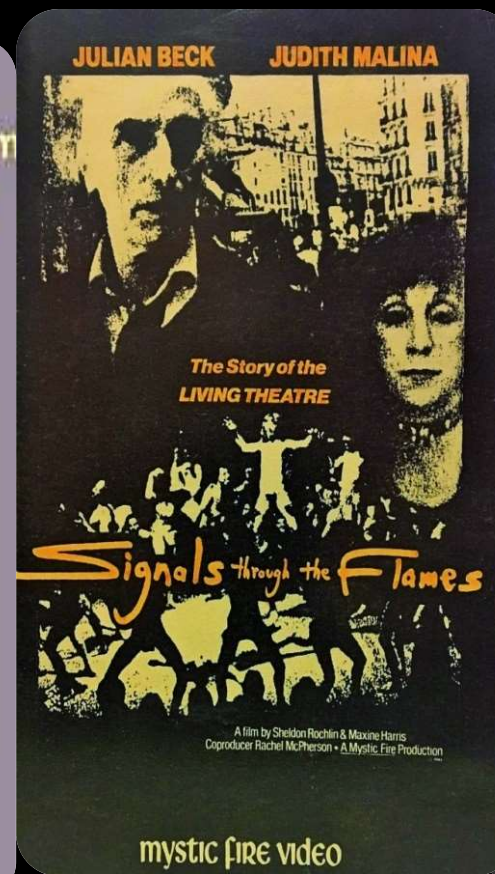
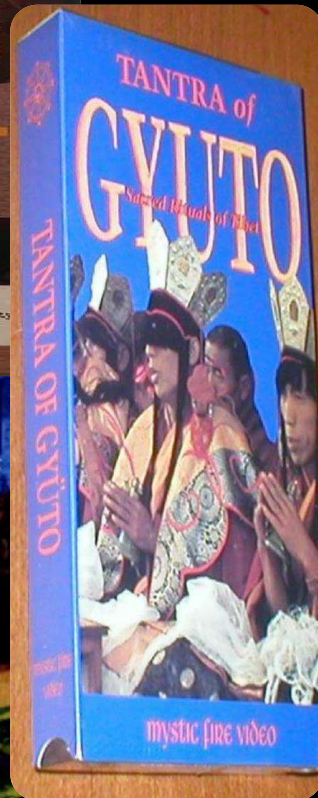
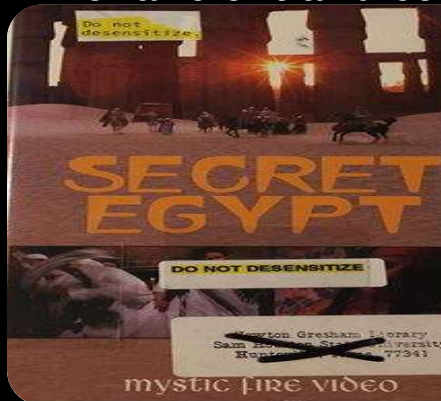
Mystic Fire Video, 1980s – 1990s

- Films on spiritual traditions and spiritual teachers that experimented with the documentary format alongside films on avant-garde artists and experimental film-makers such as: Maya Deren, John Cage and others were produced and distributed in the mid-80s and the 90s by the American experimental filmmaker Sheldon Rochlin of Mystic Fire Video. Rochlin often applied experimental film aesthetics to his productions in order to give alternate expression to processes of alternations in consciousness induced through mystical and shamanic techniques of ancient and contemporary practices.



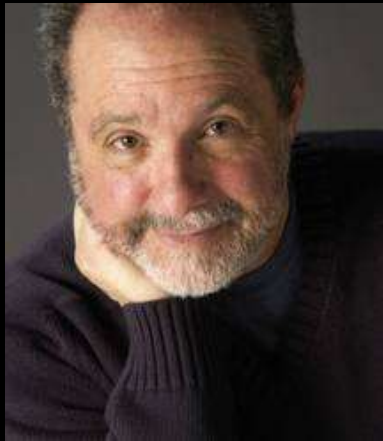
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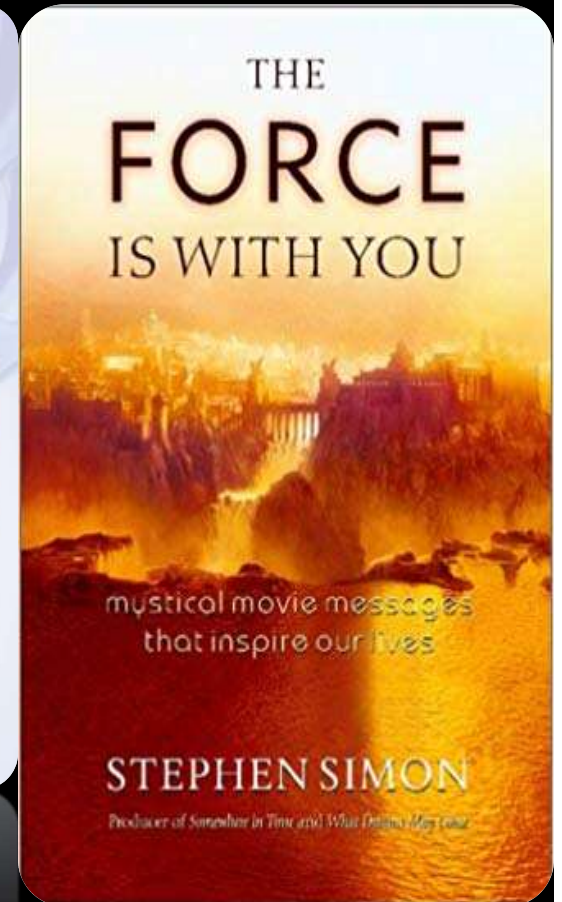
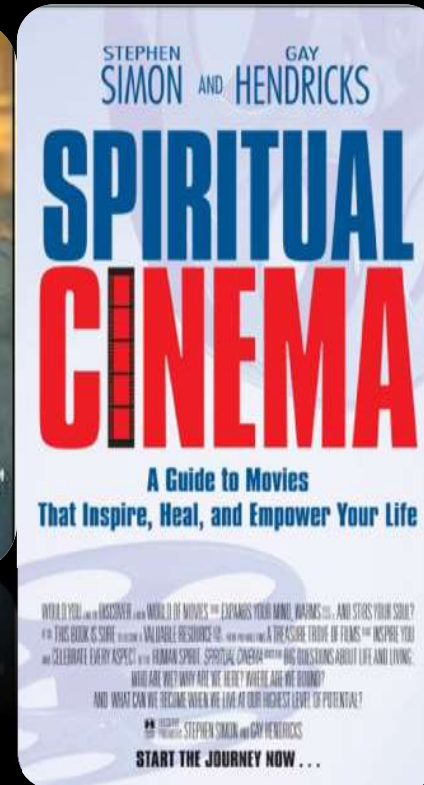


The Spiritual Cinema Circle

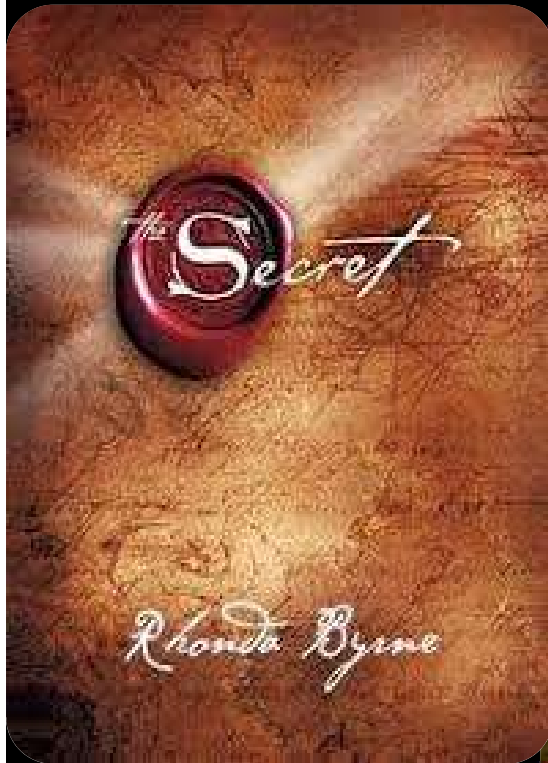
- The Spiritual Cinema Circle was co-founded in 2003-2004 by the Hollywood film producer Stephen Simon and Gay Hendricks, a psychologist and self-development teacher. Simon, who produced spiritually-themed Hollywood films, which have gained a cult status such as: *Somewhere in Time* from 1980 and *What Dreams May Come* from 1998, formulated a notion of a film genre which he terms as 'Spiritual Cinema'.



Stephen Simon



Released in 2006, *Conversations with God* coincided with other independent releases of spiritual films and media, most notable of which are *The Secret* released in 2006, and *The Celestine Prophecy* also released in 2006.



"BEFORE NOW, HARDLY ANYBODY GOT TO SEE THE BEST MOVIES MADE EVER/YEAR. NOW, WITH THE CIRCLE, YOU CAN ENJOY HEARTFUL, SOULFUL MOVIES... WITHOUT LEAVING HOME."

— Stephen Simon
 Producer and Director of INDIGO, Producer of SOMEBODY IN TIME and WHAT DREAMS MAY COME, Author of THE FORCE IS WITH YOU

| | |
|---|--------|
| Tea Cup | 5 min |
| Gabriel | 11 min |
| Passengers | 8 min |
| The Hired Heart | 90 min |
| Bonus! Behind the Seen: Conversations With God | 6 min |

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"AN INCREDIBLY EMOTIONAL JOURNEY."
Deputy Clinch

"A MOVIE THAT WILL TOUCH YOUR HEART IN A VERY DEEP WAY."
Cheryl Eckstein

"DON'T MISS THIS FILM... AN INSPIRING & ENGAGING TRUE STORY OF TRANSFORMATION."
Kathleen Williams

FROM THE BOOK THAT INSPIRED MILLIONS, COMES A FILM THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE.

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

THESE CONVERSATIONS WERE FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1991 AND HAVE TRANSCENDED THE US. TODAY THEY ARE KNOWN AND LOVED BY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN OVER 100 COUNTRIES. NOW YOU CAN EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF THESE CONVERSATIONS ON THE BIG SCREEN. THE MOVIE VERSION OF CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD IS A BEAUTIFUL AND INSPIRING FILM THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE. IT IS A MUST-SEE FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN THE POWER OF GOD AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE. THE MOVIE VERSION OF CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD IS A BEAUTIFUL AND INSPIRING FILM THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE. IT IS A MUST-SEE FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN THE POWER OF GOD AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE.

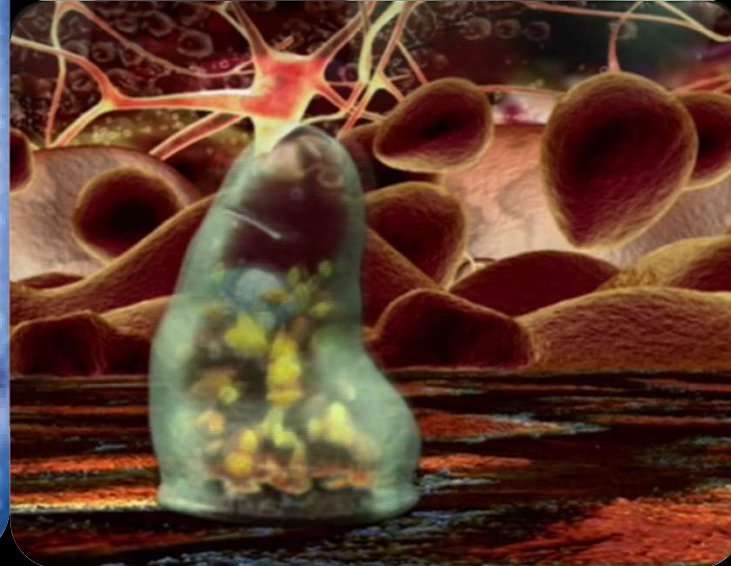
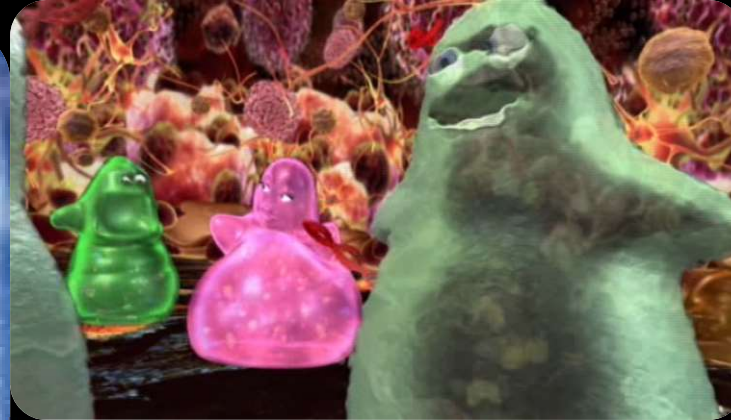
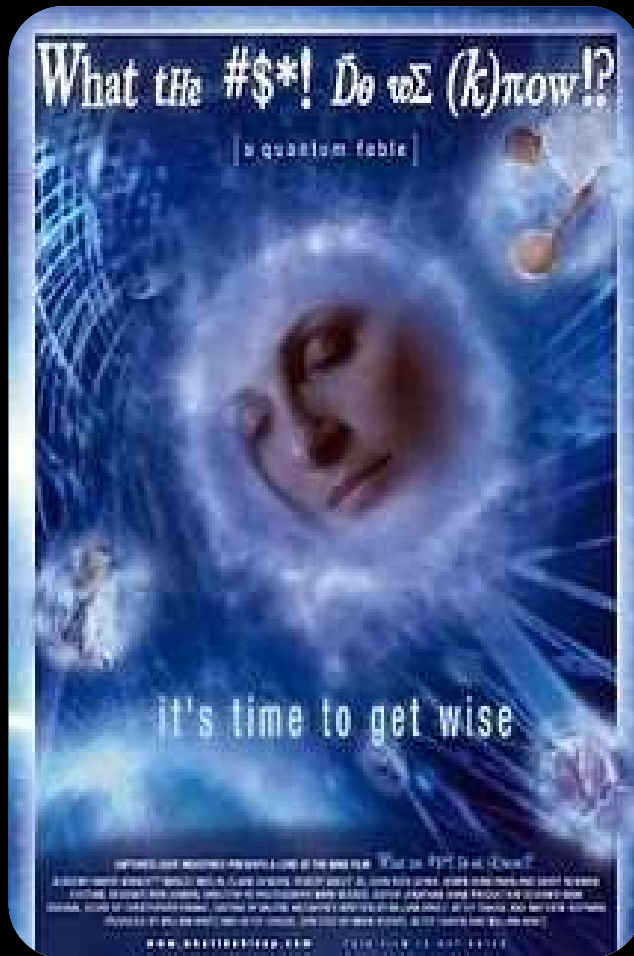
PG PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED www.CWGMoviemovie.com

COMING TO A THEATER NEAR YOU OCTOBER 2006

THERE'S ANOTHER WORLD. RIGHT HERE IN FRONT OF YOUR EYES.

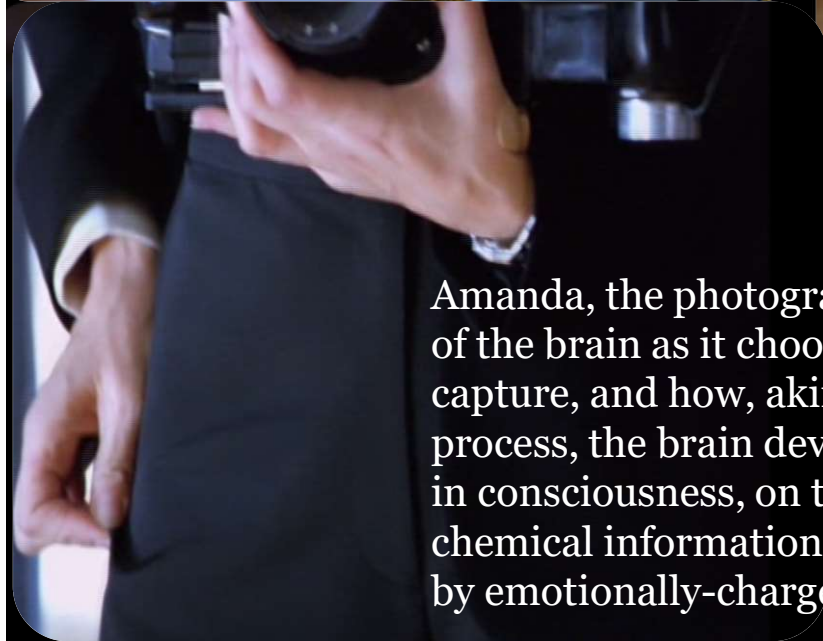
"It's impossible to overestimate the spiritual impact of The Celestine Prophecy. The movie version continues its mysterious influence, creating an actual model of this evolutionary awakening. The world will light up after you see it." — Marianne Williamson, author Return to Love

THE CELESTINE PROPHECY MOVIE



In 2004 *What the Bleep Do We Know* represented, and most probably heralded, a new genre of spiritual film in terms of its digital aesthetics, thematic content, and modes of production and distribution.

The film's depictions of neuro-chemical processes and their link to our emotions and well-being were scientifically informed by the neuroscientist Candace Pert, whose groundbreaking study revealed the molecular basis for the role of the emotions as the critical link between the mind and body. The film's animation sequences introduce us to the cell as the smallest form of consciousness in the body.



Amanda, the photographer, reveals the activity of the brain as it chooses what images to capture, and how, akin to a photographic process, the brain develops and prints images in consciousness, on the basis of neuro-chemical information triggered automatically by emotionally-charged chain of reactions.





The Bleep subverts the traditional role of the hero in relation to the exploration of consciousness by depicting the workings of the mind and body from the perspective of Amanda – a woman dealing with issues of disability, addiction to antidepressants, low self-image, and traumatic divorce. It also depicts her practice of mind-altering meditation techniques, detailing her visceral sensations and mental observations. By the end of the film, the crown of her achievement is a shift in consciousness grounded in a new set of relationship between her mind and body.

Recent films and associated apps bring together emergent technologies and spiritual technologies to depict women's experience of shamanic and visionary altered states. Interestingly, there is an emphasis on the notion of immanence where women as film-makers and film protagonists rely on direct inner experience. This tendency towards immanence, which can be identified in current films by women on women, has become associated with feminist theologies, feminist spiritual practices, and the interconnectedness of people and communities.

Icaros – A Vision



She Sings to the Stars





AWAVENA

There is another world, but it is in this one.

— W.B. YEATS



With AWAVENA, Emmy® Award winning artist and filmmaker Lynette Wallworth combines indigenous story tellers with the world's most cutting edge technologies to create the next generation VR / Mixed Reality non-fiction experience.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS – AWAVENA's women-led team includes pioneering women in philanthropy, technology, and entertainment. Executive Producers are Gigi Pritzker of MWM; Marcie Jastrow, director of the Technicolor Experience Center; Sandy Herz of the Skoll Foundation; and Nico Daswani of the World Economic Forum.

The notion of immanence through immersion and participation is developed in *AWAVENA*, a VR and mixed-reality film directed by the Australian artist Lynette Wallworth and released in 2018. In *AWAVENA* the viewer becomes a participant in a ceremony and enters the vision state of Hushahu, the first woman Shaman of the Yawanawa people of the Brazilian Amazon. Hushahu uses VR like the Uni tea (known as Ayahuasca) and guides the viewer/participant in the visionary world of the forest as it is revealed to her under the influence of the medicine.





A central image to the *AWAVENA* experience is that of a bridge that the shamaness invites the participants to cross. It is the bridge that divides consciousness into multidimensional realms and it is the bridge that according to Wallworth represents a new lineage of visionary women who will cross it. Due to Hushahu's courage and efforts, and the late shaman Tatá, who defied a rigid centuries-old tradition to train her, the Yawanawá spiritual life are currently led equally by men and women shamans.





YAWANAWA AR BRACELET

DEBUTING EXCLUSIVELY AT THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM IN DAVOS

Beaded bracelets made by Yawanawa women will be given to delegates at the World Economic Forum. Their patterns trigger an augmented reality (AR) mobile phone experience of an Awavena butterfly whose appearance is responsive to continually updating rainforest data from the Brazilian NGO Imazon, a project partner, allowing them to remain connected to the day-to-day health of the rainforest.

Hand beaded by women of the Yawanawá in Acre, Brazil, these bracelets are a work of incredible craftsmanship and artistry. Each bracelet features distinctive geometric designs that represent important symbols in Yawanawá cosmology. Part of the conceptual story of "Awavena," the bracelets come with an Augmented Reality animal created by Lynette Wallworth in partnership with Blippar. In the Blippar App, your bracelet will come to life with a forest creature - butterfly or snake - who responds to live continuously updated data about the health of the rainforest. 100% of proceeds from these bracelets will go directly towards supporting the Yawanawa Life Plan. Through sharing the tribe's handicrafts, the Yawanawá seek to share their distinctive culture with the outside world.



AWAVENA, and its associate mobile app that interacts with traditional beaded bracelets that come to life with augmented butterflies or snakes as seen in ceremonial altered states engages with the promise and challenge of technoetic arts.

Emergent technologies such as VR and AR enable and prompt double consciousness that refers to simultaneously experiencing more than one place and time where two or more realities intersect. *AWAVENA* generates a mode of double consciousness, a sense of experiencing an alternate reality whilst remaining in the actual reality.



The notion of shamanic double consciousness, involving the subtle alternations between different states of perception, and the diffusion of actual and visionary views and experiences of reality, are depicted from the perspectives of female protagonists in *She Sings to the Stars* from 2015 (Distributed by the Spiritual Cinema Circle) and *Icaros: A Vision* from 2016. Jennifer Corcoran, director of *She Sings to the Stars*, explores the notion of the feminine through a Native American grandmother and addresses the film as a contemplative participatory experience. In order to become part of the experience, the viewer has to agree to alter her or his awareness by pausing, observing the quality and pace of movements, reflecting on vivid visual details, and listening carefully.



Icaros – A Vision’s hybrid narrative consisting of part-fiction and part-documentary is depicted by poetic and surreal visual-style that reflects the Ayahuasca's premise that we can pass from dream to reality without leaving the dream. The filmmakers stated that they attempted to reinvent the aesthetics of psychedelics and avoid the colorful motifs of the '60s.



The filmmakers juxtaposed the technologies of Western and Amazonian medicines, the visions of the filmmaker's sick body organs produced by x-ray and MRI and the 'TV of the forest' that broadcasts the visions and diagnoses of Ayahuasca.



Hand-embroidered by women of the Amazon rainforest, the geometric designs of the textiles are reflections of the spirit world of Ayahuasca. Immersed in these patterns, Angelina dies peacefully under the Full Moon in the forest, in a shamanic state of double consciousness where dream and reality coexist. The film ends with the shamans blessing her transition with the smoke of their cigars.



The Quest for the 'Holy Grail' of Spiritual Cinema

AWAVENA, *She Sings to the Stars* & *Icaros – A Vision* generate the sense of ceremonial consciousness in particular 'double consciousness' through their different approaches to the manipulation of space-time that produces ritualistic rhythms and rhythms associated with the feminine. Alchemical processes that transpire in the body and psyche are now observed from a feminine lens, integrating western and aboriginal visioning technologies and perceptions.

Stephen Simon's statement that Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* is the holy grail of Spiritual Cinema seems to correspond not only with the wider scope and the evolving aesthetics of the emergent movement of spiritual cinema, but also with its syncretic and digital, technological characteristics, and the shifting modes of dissemination and reception of audio-visual content on social-media.

