

Alchemical Transformations: The Abstract Films of Harry Smith

by **Jamie Sexton**



No. 10/Mirror Animations

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Harry Smith not only seemed to get everywhere (at least within America), he also gave the impression that he could do anything. He weaved in and out of various cultural milieus, many of them notorious, and turned his mind to countless different creative and cultural endeavours. In a time when computers had not yet nudged their way into everyday life, Smith was making a decent attempt to turn his brain into a multimedia hub, a receptacle capable of sucking in and spewing out various bits of data, juggling them around in new, enlightening ways. (1) Considering his prodigious consumption of alcohol and drugs, this was no mean feat. And yet, despite Smith's many achievements, his life remained a mess. Serious bouts of deprivation, fits of childish anger towards his friends (sometimes leading to the destruction of his own creative objects) and perennial poverty were three of the main features that plagued and cursed him throughout his life. Whilst he was adept at perceiving and treating everything creatively, he was at a loss when dealing with the more rational, mundane things in life, such as financial matters. For Smith, mundanity was something to be collected, processed and imbued with magical qualities; he couldn't deal with non-transformable objects that remained in a state of functional stasis (eluding the alchemists' grasp). Thus Smith's elevation to the status of the Magus was both a curse as well as a blessing, which may well have suited his overall outlook, informed as it was by arcane belief systems, in particular a penchant for alchemy and the occult.

Smith has constantly played games with interviewers, mixing imagination and memory when recounting his past. It is no surprise that he had a rather disdainful attitude towards "facts", for a fact connotes something fixed and rigid, whilst Smith preferred reality to be more elastic.

Smith was born in 1923 in Portland, Oregon. His childhood experiences undoubtedly influenced his future interests: his parents were versed in Theosophy and active in occultism, and Smith has recalled that as a child "there were a great number of books on occultism and alchemy always in the basement". (2) It did not take very long for Smith the occultist to emerge, and he would later claim at various moments that he was the son of Alistair Crowley (though this claim is extremely dubious). (3) Smith's father taught him to draw the symbols of the Kabbalah, which led to his life-long involvement with magic and the Ordi Templi Orientis (of which Crowley had been head), as well as his intermingling of art and magic. His father also, according to Smith, gave him a blacksmith shop when he was twelve and told him to convert lead into gold, thus stimulating his alchemical pursuits. Again, this latter claim seems to tell us more about Smith's imagination than it does about

any 'truth', pointing to the importance that alchemy played in his creative endeavours.

Smith grew up near an Indian Lummi reservation, where his mother taught, and this undoubtedly influenced his abiding interest in cultural anthropology. He also developed other lifelong interests at an early age: linguistics, filmmaking, painting and music. (4) By the age of 15 he was engaged in his first archival documentation of folk culture, recording hours of tapes of Lummi and Salish songs and rituals, as well as compiling a dictionary of several Puget sound dialects. (5) This was a project that continued Smith's compulsion to map the world according to his own abstract principles. He had at this time already begun to write down his own transcription methods for visualising the music using diagrams. These efforts were attempts to record the "unknown Indian life" and were borne out of his curiosity concerning the links between music and existence. (6) These links were attributable to his wide-ranging interests as filtered through occultism and magic. For Smith, things needed to be documented not merely in order to preserve historical snapshots, but rather to shuffle such snapshots around and to discover their hidden meanings, as well as to filter them through alien codes so that alchemical transformations were produced.

After Smith had finished school he stumbled into the beatnik life. He had spent two years at the University of Washington between 1942–1944 studying anthropology and working as a teaching assistant, but eventually dropped out of college after experiencing marijuana for the first time during a trip to Berkeley. He subsequently felt that he couldn't go back to his old life and eventually relocated to California. It would appear that Smith's pot-instincts were justified here, as he had by this time already begun to make abstract films, and in California there was a large bohemian arts scene that would eventually prove receptive to the films that he was producing. He became involved in the Art in Cinema series of programmes, established by Frank Stauffacher, which screened a number of experimental films at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art between 1946–51. Smith also forged close links with a number of other experimental artists, including Jordan Belson and the Whitney brothers. Such contacts helped to establish his films on the avant-garde circuit, and they were continued when Smith later moved to New York in the 1950s, which was becoming a hotbed of underground film activity. Here Smith forged links with critic and curator Jonas Mekas, and became involved in the Filmmakers Co-op, which distributed artists' films, including those of Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage and Jack Smith.

Smith's earliest films (particularly those numbered 1-7, though 6 is lost) are those least directly associated with his cabalistic pursuits, and also his most geometrically abstract films. *No. 1* (ca. 1946–48) was hand-drawn onto the film itself, thus avoiding any need for a camera (importantly, Smith saw these early films as extensions of his paintings). (7) Alternating coloured rectangles and circles occasionally dance around the screen with hand-scrawled imprecision, against a vibrant, changeable, mesh backdrop. It's not an easy film to describe, due to its extreme abstraction and because of what P. Adams Sitney has called "the excessive instability of its imagery" (8). The film does not conform to dominant narrative cinema, eschewing the concrete references provided by cinematography and narrative. Yet, whilst it does not provide these pleasures, it does contain more sensorial effects, providing space to marvel at moving forms in and of themselves.



This mode of abstract cinema already had a lineage that stretched back to 1920s avant-garde filmmaking, which itself largely emerged out of the static visual arts. In Germany, Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling produced films derived from scroll paintings, in which geometrical shapes were animated in a rhythmic manner. Smith's *No. 1*



No.1/A Strange Dream

shares some similarities with Richter's *Rhythmus 21* (1921), though is distinguished by its colour and "direct" painting methods. Smith was also influenced by another German abstract filmmaker, Oskar Fischinger, who began making films in the late 1920s and who also contributed to Disney's *Fantasia*

(1940). None of these figures had actually painted directly onto film, and Smith was disappointed when he found out the New Zealand filmmaker Len Lye had. Lye was working in England and had produced *A Colour Box* in 1935, a hand-painted film which advertised the General Post Office. Smith's film is vaguely similar to Lye's, though *A Colour Box* features more wavy figures, a greater sense of offscreen space and less depth than *No. 1*.

What, though, were the connections between Smith's more hermetic interests and his first film? One explanation is the notion of synæsthesia, one of Smith's interests that also preoccupied earlier abstract filmmakers (particularly Fischinger and Lye). Synæsthesia – in which information in one sense is perceived subjectively in another sense (i.e., music producing different colour impressions) – is a phenomenon that has been recognised for more than a century and a half by scientists. (9) Synæsthesia challenged many existing scientific tenets, particularly through challenging researchers to produce "scientific evidence" concerning its existence, and the manner by which it merged the "objective" and the "subjective". It proved attractive to many artists and occult figures in the late 19th and early 20th century (many psychologists who were researching synæsthesia from a scientific angle tended to conduct psychical research, such as telepathy and somnambulism). (10) The phenomenon was thus attractive to those who were disenchanted with the more rigorously rationalised and mechanised world as posited, and shaped by, normative scientific theories.

The interest in synæsthesia as "non-rational", containing the capacity to transcend "mundane existence", stretches back to the Romantics, who used synæsthetic metaphors in order to construct an objective world that was more in tune with human subjectivity. It was, as Dann points out, a mode of experience that represented liberation from the laws and confinements of the physical world. (11) The Symbolists, too, employed it as a tool by which to reject realist art; they probed the depths of the inner world by using a number of different symbols built upon cross-sensory metaphors. As well as artists, many occult researchers saw synæsthetics as visionaries, demonstrating the evolution of perceptual capabilities. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, for example, believed that synæsthesia was a way of sensing the astral world (whilst Theosophists Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater produced many cross-sensory illustrations in their 1905 book, *Thought Forms*). (12) And whilst the gift of synæsthesia was rare, many found that drugs could aid a mode of experiencing the world on an absorbed, sensual level. In the 19th century, for example, hashish was seen by many artists as aiding sensuous experience, often resulting in muddled sensory states (LSD and DMT would later become more powerful sources for stimulating perceptual fusion).

It is noteworthy, then, that Smith himself experienced synæsthetic sensations when taking pot, remarking that he saw "little colored balls" when listening to Bessie Smith and also having a revelation listening to Dizzie Gillespie when high, in which he "literally saw all kinds of colored flashes" (13). It was at this point that he decided music could be added to his films (originally they were made silent). This is not, however, to de-emphasize the importance of his early silent films. (14) Smith's interest in cross-sensory perception was already evident in his attempts to transcribe music and was carried through to his early filmmaking.

His first film was made by hand-drawing onto the film strip, whilst his next two films were

batiked, a process involving successive layerings of dye, through which masked areas of the strip form abstractions. This resulted in tighter films in terms of formal organisation. Whilst *No. 1* appears to be very freeform in its structure, the next two move towards a more calculated mode of abstraction: in *No. 2* (ca. 1946-48), circles swoop across the frame and swarm within it. The film uses many more geometrical forms than the first, and structures them into occasional motifs, thus creating a more insistent rhythmic pulse. Yet the rhythms are never tightly structured into entirely predictable patterns: some movements are more random, thus retaining a sense of freeform abstraction. The structural mode of arrangement seems to be directly referenced in the predominant grid motif of *No. 3* (ca. 1947-49). Simple grids at the beginning intermingle with other shapes, such as diamonds. As the film progresses, grids intermittently grow more complex and dominate the screen, occasionally expanding to reveal vibrant coloured cells.

It was Smith's original intention to screen *No. 2* with a Dizzie Gillespie recording, "Guacha Guero". This not only links it to his own direct synaesthetic experiences but also to his *No. 4* (ca. 1949), which begins with a filmed sequence showing his painting, *Manteca* (ca. 1950). "Manteca" was the name of another Dizzie Gillespie song, and Smith's painting of the same name was another of his attempts to subjectively transcribe music, with certain strokes representing different notes. The resulting painting is a conglomeration of coiling twists and curls, surrounding more intricate and huddled shapes (such as circles and paisley patterns). It is a kind of document of Smith's direct, impressionistic encounter with the music, an attempt to transform his sensations into a codified form. The photograph of the painting at the beginning of the film seems somewhat out of kilter, yet may be related to Smith's attempts to place the dialectic between his films, paintings and musical inspiration at centre stage.



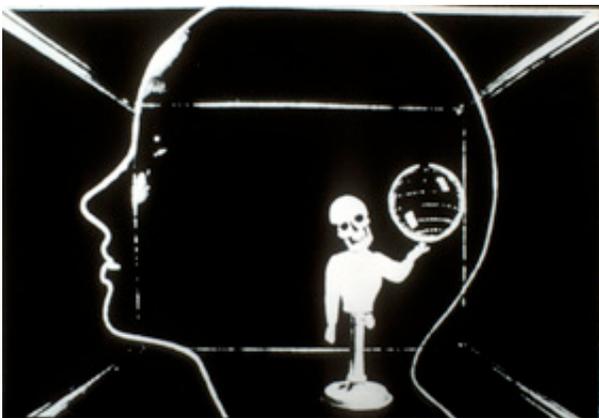
Manteca

For Smith, his films were secondary to his paintings, but I find that the films – moving in time as they do – are more satisfactory synaesthetic devices. It was not possible for Smith to capture the intricacies of individual paintings upon the tiny celluloid strip, and this may have given rise to his personal view that the paintings were superior. The films, though, produce complex configurations of shifting shapes through time, bombarding the senses in order to invite deeper viewer absorption.

In *No. 4*, the influence of Fischinger on Smith's work becomes more marked. The film works with a black background and white shapes. It begins with two small circles dancing in tandem across the screen, as well as decreasing and increasing in size to give an impression of depth. These are joined, via superimposition, by two simple grilles, and then by a larger grille which swishes from left to right and vice versa at such a speed to produce a blurred effect. Gradually the forms become more complex: larger, more elaborate grilles as well as clusters of less geometrically precise dots. Smith here is playing upon the tension between precise shapes and rhythms, and less regulated patterns and movements. The simple, regulated forms become more indistinct and murky through alchemical transformation. In *No. 4*, one can detect echoes of Fischinger's *Study no. 7* (1931) and *Study no. 8* (1932), which also feature geometrical forms dancing with precision against a plain background. Fischinger's films, though, seem to play upon a more regulated, complex mode of patterned mutation, as well as featuring more elaborate curled forms.

If *No. 4* is vaguely reminiscent of Fischinger, *No. 5* (ca. 1950) is more directly related to the great animator's work and this is made explicit in its sub-title, *Homage to Oskar Fischinger*. An extension of *No. 4*, *No. 5* expands that film's two-coloured format. It begins with a static red triangle, then a green square, and then a red circle. It is as though we are being introduced to the protagonists of the film: simple, static shapes out of which complexity and rhythmic interaction will be produced. The film is very much in line with the movements of *No. 4*, but with the addition of concentric circles, occasionally visible through the coloured shapes, as well as circles dancing around within (and bumping into) other circles. *No. 7* (ca. 1950–51) again features nods to Fischinger, in particular through a more sustained use of concentric moving circles as well as the motif of shapes composed of small triangles, which seem to explode outwards with projectile force. These motifs directly refer to Fischinger's *Allegretto* (1936) and create a sense of hypnotic absorption. The film also bombards the viewer with a number of alternating colour transitions used in conjunction with shapes that emerge from deep screen space. In addition to using moving circles and circular patterns, Smith again makes use of grille patterns at times within the film. The pace of movements and colour alternations intensify at various moments, as though attempting to overwhelm the viewer's sensorial apparatus.

The films numbered 1-3 seem to be related by their hand-painted techniques, whilst 4, 5 and 7 also feel of a piece through their use of optical printing. The third phase in Smith's filmmaking, according to his own description, concerns "semi-realistic animated collages made as part of my alchemical labours between 1957 and 1962" (though, as I have suggested, all of his films should to some degree be related to his alchemical preoccupations). (15) *No. 10* (ca. 1957) is the first surviving film from this "phase", and in it we can detect another shift in Smith's filmmaking, but also a notable continuity from *No. 7* (existence of films 8 and 9 would have no doubt helped in placing such continuity within a greater context). The shift is evident in his use of more "concrete" symbols and through the use of collaged materials. Yet the reference to more "elementary". Geometric forms is still present as both a background upon which the collaged material takes place (and interacts with), as well as a formal template by which such material is arranged upon the screen (i.e., the more concrete material is at times manipulated according to geometrical principles). Smith's collage imagery in this film more directly alludes to his particular interests, drawing as they do on "Cabalistic symbolism, Indian chiromancy [...] dancing, Buddhist mandalas, and Renaissance alchemy". (16) The use of concrete imagery, however, does not move Smith towards the depiction of a concrete narrative. Rather, these swarming transformations continue his interest in the film as an alchemical process. Whilst interpretations may be placed upon the film (particularly regarding rebirth and spiritual renewal), its textual status is extremely slippery.



No. 12/Heaven and Earth Magic

Whilst *No. 11* (ca. 1957) is in many ways similar to the previous film, *No. 12* (more commonly known as *Heaven and Earth Magic*, ca. 1957–62) is often regarded as Smith's masterwork. Though it again uses collage techniques, it is a much longer and more ambitious work than anything he had previously created. Such ambition was not only evident in the scale of the work itself, but also extended to the conditions whereby it was to be shown. Sitney has written that, whilst the film is in black and white, Smith had built a projector with colour filters to tint the images, whilst he also planned for the entire film to be projected

through a series of masking slides, which would transform the shape of the film. These slides were modelled on important images within the film, such as the recurrent watermelon or egg symbols. Apparently this only occurred for a single preview screening at Steinway Hall in New York. Smith also wanted to design seats in the shape of important motifs from the film (such as the watermelon) and to electrically manipulate the movement of the seats in accordance with the shapes and colours on screen. Such an ambitious plan, which would have greatly extended Smith's sensorial assaults, unfortunately never materialised. (17)

The film itself again references a number of sources, including neurological texts, the Kabbalah, as well as the inauguration of the London sewers. The latter event, which is referenced within the film, provides much of the source material as Smith obtained many of the film's images from an illustrated magazine featuring the sewers. (18) Smith was also influenced by Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, which documents the author's two nervous breakdowns (in the late 19th century) and describes them as visionary experiences through which he made contact with God. The themes of mentality and divination run through *Heaven and Earth Magic*, which features a loose story in which a woman chases a dog who has stolen her watermelon. After going to a dentist she then begins to experience a number of hallucinations under anaesthetic (directly referencing Smith's interest in the work of Canadian neurologist Dr Wildner Penfield, whose brain surgery on epileptics supposedly produced visions). This framing story may move closer to narrative again, but such a narrative thread (and a strange, rather illogical one at that) only produces confusion in the viewer who remains attached to unpicking a coherent plot. The fantasies of the woman produce a melange of associations, a convenient way by which Smith could again produce a welter of transformations.

A very loose plot does hover over a wealth of fantastical images, in which the woman ascends to heaven before the diminution of the anaesthetic brings her back down to earth (directly indicating Smith's belief in the importance of drugs as mystical mediators). This plot, however, is merely a backdrop to the more complex details of the film. A single "explanation" cannot contain its complexity, but it is clear that the importance of the mind is paramount. There is the central trope of the effects of drugs on the mind; there is the motif of a little man, who effectively represents the homunculus of the woman (19); and there is the associational structure of the film itself, which alludes to the unconscious. In fact, Noël Carroll has argued that the film models its very structure on the processes of the mind itself. (20) The importance of the mind and its unconscious processes were clearly important to Smith in the making of the film, and indeed informed its construction: he often worked upon it between sleeping bouts in his studio, in which his dreams directly fed into the work. (21) A similar process of associational sound construction also accompanies the images. Smith composed his own soundtrack for this film, in which a number of concrete noises are combined with the visuals, sometimes referring to them, sometimes creating curious and confusing contrasts.

The nature of associational, unconscious connections, in which logical relations are often flouted in favour of curious alterations, very much alerts us to the similarities between this film and the work of the surrealists, who also fed upon dream imagery in order to break down logical expectations. Indeed, Smith has talked of the surrealist influence in his work, focusing on his methods as akin to automatic writing. (22) Automatic writing involved the production of text in ways that bypassed the filtering censor of rational thought, tapping into the unconscious, or opening oneself to outside mystical influences. Automatic writing was one activity that the surrealists housed under the rubric of *psychic automatism*. Other activities included séances and the game "exquisite corpse", in which people composed a sentence or drawing unknown to other players on folded paper, resulting in the production of a collaborative, chance work.

Smith's last phase of filmmaking is more difficult to discuss for a number of reasons, which include: the fact that many of them are incomplete, unavailable or difficult to project (for instance, *Mahagonny/No. 18* (ca.1970–80), was designed for projection on four screens). (23) There seem to be two main developments characterising Smith's filmmaking during the latter part of his career: first, his aborted major project of reworking *Wizard of Oz*, of which only one sequence – "The Approach to Emerald City" – and a number of rushes survive. (These extracts have appeared in *Oz/No. 13* (ca. 1962), *Oz: The Tin Woodman's Dream/No. 16* (ca. 1967), *No. 19* (ca. 1980) and *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten/No. 20* (ca. 1981)); second, extending the incorporation of more "concrete" material, the use of photographed film.

Smith's *Wizard of Oz* film (co-animated with Joanne Ziprin) would have chronologically followed his *Heaven and Earth Magic*. The project was begun in the early 1960s and received major financial backing from a consortium (which included Elizabeth Taylor!). This was to be a widescreen film, using a number of coloured glass plates in front of the lens at varying distances in order to create strange effects. Smith drew on a number of sources in order to produce a cabalistic environment within which the *Oz* story would unfold: these included the drawings of Hieronymous Bosch, Tibetan mandalas and sketchings of microscopic life by biologist Ernst Haeckel. Unfortunately, the major backer of the film, Arthur Young, died and the project was abandoned.

It may well have been the expense and laboriousness of animation that led Smith to use photographed film (though these later films did include animated segments). This follows on from his increasing use of concrete references in his films, though the way he used such material was deliberately obscure. *Late Superimpositions/No. 14*, for example contained a mass of jumbled, multiply exposed and superimposed images. Smith shot much footage, including images of a Kiowa ritual and autobiographical material, in unedited 100-foot reels, and then pieced these reels together into a rhythmic whole. *Mahagonny* – loosely based upon Brecht and Weill's opera, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* – was an extension of *No. 14*, in which autobiographical film, animation, street symbols and images of nature are combined into a sensual, fluctuating flow.



No. 18/Mahagonny

Smith's occult and alchemical interests are important to an understanding of his films. Such interests fed into all of his creative activities, which connected to his wide-ranging, arcane interests in a number of different ways. His most famous achievement, of course, was not his films but his collection of music, *The Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952), which is seen as a crucial benchmark in the folk revival of the 1950s. Even this item was arranged in a symbolic manner, with each record in the set being assigned an abstract symbol representative of the elements; whilst Smith's accompanying booklet was pieced together in the manner of a surrealist collage (reflecting the way in which the anthology itself was a musical collage).

Smith's occult interests, in conjunction with his difficulties negotiating many of life's practicalities, may on the surface appear to have removed him from the "social". This was not the case, however: not only did he rely on a number of social networks in order to bring his work to visibility, he also tended to see his work in social terms. For instance, he

spoke of the *Anthology* in terms of stirring up social change. He never actually outlined any specific ways in which social change should or could arise, yet firmly saw his work as relating to the ways in which we experience the world. Thus we should see Smith's work in personal-political terms, as mixing things up in order to derange the senses, allowing one to see things anew, and thus for social change to emerge out of personal transformation. Again, such a project is very much in line with the aims of the surrealists, whose illogical juxtapositions were created in order to jolt the habitual, bourgeois mind out of its conventional ways of perceiving the world. As with the surrealists, Smith approached life in an artistic manner, so that distinctions between art and life became meaningless. As with the surrealists, he rearranged everyday elements in new ways in order to show us how the fantastic was embedded in the mundane (and how "mundanity" was a consequence of how we perceived the world, rather than a reflection the external world).

We should also think of Smith's work as an attempt to overcome oppositional boundaries, which would have been connected to rationality.

Within his films, for example, abstraction and concreteness, the ancient and the modern, vision and hearing, precision and randomness, to name but a few examples, were merged to varying degrees. Likewise, Smith refused to be pinned down to a single creative endeavour, his filmmaking merely one element amongst other dimensions of his practical achievements. Rigid classification was also anathema to Smith's way of thinking because it defied the alchemical spirit. Smith continually made connections between anything and everything. Connections, for Smith, were forever in flux, so that his work was a refusal of the status quo. Hence the fact that his films – whilst being connected by many concerns – were nevertheless always developing new modes of registration. This may also help explain Smith's notorious destructive impulses: it was as though once he had synthesised a number of disparate elements into an artistic work, then that work itself was in danger of becoming fixed. This would also explain why Smith would often rework older artistic works (at least those that had not been destroyed), as though hinting that such works were only of worth if they could further contribute to the process of alchemical transformation.

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Endnotes

1. Harvey Bialek has indeed called Smith a "hub", likening him to Da Vinci. In Paola Iglioni (Ed.), *American Magus: Harry Smith* (New York: Inanout Press, 1996), p. 200. ▲
2. Smith interviewed by P. Adams Sitney, *Film Culture*, No. 37, Summer 1965, p. 5. ▲
3. Ibid, p. 6. ▲
4. Bill Breeze, "In Memoriam, Harry Smith", in Iglioni (Ed.), *American Magus*, p. 7. ▲
5. Rani Singh in Iglioni (Ed.), *American Magus*, p. 14. ▲
6. Interview, *Film Culture*, No. 37, Summer 1965, p. 9. ▲
7. Some confusion as to the exact dates of Smith's films exists. For all dates I have

- drawn upon information provided by the [Harry Smith Archives](#). ▲
8. P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 237. ▲
 9. Kevin T. Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen: Synæsthesia and the Search for Transcendental Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 5. ▲
 10. Ibid., p. 51. ▲
 11. Ibid., p. 14. ▲
 12. Ibid., p. 51. ▲
 13. Interview, *Film Culture*, No. 37, Summer 1965, p. 9. ▲
 14. Smith's earlier, shorter films have since been accompanied by The Beatles music on the soundtrack and have been released on video as *Early Abstractions* (Re:Voir). ▲
 15. *Film-Makers Co-operative Catalogue*, No. 3, 1965, p. 57. ▲
 16. Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 246. ▲
 17. Ibid., p. 252. ▲
 18. Ibid., p. 253. ▲
 19. Noël Carroll, "Mind, Medium and Metaphor in Harry Smith's *Heaven and Earth Magic*", *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Winter 1977-78, p. 37. ▲
 20. Ibid., pp. 37-44. ▲
 21. Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 261. ▲
 22. Interview, *Film Culture*, Vol. 37, Summer 1965, p. 10. ▲
 23. These later films are unavailable on tape or DVD and are rarely shown in the UK. During 13-22 September 2002, the Anthology of Film Archives (New York) screened *Mahagonny* with a live score from John Zorn. It also screened many of his existing works from the later period of his career during this period. See [Harry Smith Archives website](#) for more details, as well as reviews, of this event. ▲

Heaven and Earth Magic (also known as Number 12, The Magic Feature, or Heaven and Earth Magic Feature) is an American avant-garde cutout animation feature film directed by visual artist, filmmaker and mystic Harry Everett Smith. Originally released in 1957, it was re-edited several times and the final version was released in 1962. The film primarily uses cut-out animated Victorian photographs on a black backdrop, and various, often repeated and processed sound effects as an audio collage for its