

INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS



ANGELA ANGELOU GOTSIS

**CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA - DEVELOPMENT OF
VISUAL-ARTISTIC PRACTICES**

ABSTRACT

**OF A DISSERTATION FOR THE AWARD OF
THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE OF A DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

IN THE SCIENTIFIC SPECIALTY

CINEMA STUDIES, CINEMA ART AND TELEVISION, 8.4.

SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR.

PROF. DR. RADOSTINA NEYKOVA

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The dissertation was discussed and directed for public defense at a meeting of the Screen Arts Department held on 29.08.2022.

The dissertation consists of 220 pages, an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion and 62 illustrations; a bibliography with 36 titles in Bulgarian, 84 in English and a filmography with 189 films.

The public defense will be held on 03.02.2023 at 11:00 a.m. at a meeting of the scientific jury composed of: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Andronika Martonova, Institute of Art Studies; Assoc. Dr. Gergana Doncheva, Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology; Prof. Dr. Emilia Stoeva, NATFA, reviewer; Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Mihailova, Institute of Art Studies, chair of the SJ and reviewer; Prof. D. Petya Alexandrova, NBU.

The materials for the defense are available at the Administrative Services Department of the Institute for the Study of Arts, ul. The exhibition is available at the Department of Art Studies, 21 Krakra St.

Introduction

Chapter One. On experimental cinema in the last 25 years.

Chapter Two. Avant-garde and experimental cinema. Historical overview.

Chapter Three. The Influence of Avant-Garde Cinema on the Aesthetics of Feature Cinema.

Chapter Four. The work of Jonas Mekas, Steven Woloshen, Suzane Pitt, Paul Winkler and Gunvor Nelson.

4.1. Nurturing appreciation: Jonas Mekas and his multiple roles in the American experimental cinema.

4.2. The time-travelling of a film emulsionThe works of Steven Woloshen.

4.3. Animation techniques in the films of Suzane Pitt.

4.4. Paul Winkler's films with optical printer.

4.5. Visual-artistic practices in Gunvor Nelson's poetic films.

Chapter Five. Experimental Cinema on the Internet: curatorial platforms, video channels and author initiatives.

Conclusion

Contributions of the thesis

Publications on the thesis

INTRODUCTION.

The object of this research are leading visual-artistic practices used in experimental cinema in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. These practices encompass the creation and manipulation of both analogue and digital cinematic imagery in different types of cinema and their artistic symbiosis in the film artwork. Broadening the scope of analysis of different visual practices will contribute to a deeper and more analytical exploration of technical and aesthetic developments in the included screen examples. The combination of analogue and digital techniques for the creation of cinematic imagery, as well as the application of a given practice to different audiovisual works, provides an opportunity to explore experimental cinema in aesthetic, functional, distribution and communication terms.

The object of the research is the identification of a scientific territory and the construction of a methodology for the analysis of artistic practices in which the tape image stands out with its own artistic and expressive possibilities and limitations. Indicative film-examples containing specific and signifying (structure-forming) elements are selected. Analogue and digital visual-artistic practices are in a process of continuous interaction, which provides innumerable creative possibilities for contemporary filmmakers. Internet video-sharing platforms offer viewers direct contact with examples of avant-garde and experimental cinema.

The films discussed in the text represent the richness of visual-artistic practices in the creation of the moving image in the field of experimental cinema, marking a significant period in its history. The aesthetics of experimental films are found in a multitude of audiovisual works diverse in content and purpose. There is a pragmatic unity between the aesthetic merits of experimental films and their substantive intent, e.g. educational films, advertising films, music videos. The reason for these changes is accessible shooting equipment and relatively easy to learn post-production softwares. The attached empirical analysis presents the multi-colored palette of the authorial imprint, outlining a variety of content intentions. A given technique can be applied in both a visual music film or an animated one. Due to the comprehensiveness of the cinematic experiment, the interdisciplinary methodology contributes both to the aesthetic and content analysis of the film examples and to their contextualization, an element of utmost importance in the study of the contemporary screen phenomenon. Terms from the fields of film studies, philosophy, cognitive psychology, media studies,

and art history assist in delineating the various elements that characterize experimental cinema.

The experimental filmmakers I have included in the text create their films by combining manual techniques and computer processing. The definition of manual techniques used in this thesis refers to a generic term for techniques that are implemented without the aid of computer software. This includes the familiar camera-less techniques of the analogue past and direct animation. Their most modern designation is *DIY* cinema, under the umbrella of which all of the above techniques are included as well as the application of photographic film techniques to create a moving image.

Contemporary and future experimental cinematographers have the technical ability to independently execute the entire creative process - from idea through realization to distribution. This could by no means displace high-budget, high-tech films and the large teams of highly specialized professionals with which they are made, but it certainly gives room for the expression of many original ideas that would be unlikely to be realized in other historical contexts where the technical aspects of filmmaking were challenging. The period from the 1990s to the present is a key one in the history of cinema because of the rapid pace of technological development. In the foreseeable future, the techniques with which the authors presented in the text work will be replaced by computer software, which is an organic process in a high-tech art such as cinema. It is for this reason that the cinematographers discussed in the text have been selected in order to represent, without pretending to be exhaustive, the variety of manual techniques used by experimental artists. A craftsmanship that marks the transition to an entirely digitally created cinema.

The key points of the study are: an attempt to separate the concepts of avant-garde and experimental cinema through aesthetic and historical situating; an overview of the emergence of avant-garde cinema and its aesthetic and content response in contemporary audiovisual works; a summary and typology of image creation and manipulation techniques in the field of experimental cinema; an interpretation of the relationship between form and content in screen aesthetics in the films under consideration; a presentation of visual-artistic practices in the films of specific The attempt to separate the concepts of avant-garde and experimental cinema is based on the idea of experimental cinema as a continuous aesthetic movement mediated by

technological development. Avant-garde cinema, in turn, is invariably present in contemporary cinematic experiments, whether as a content or aesthetic inspiration. The contemporary experimental filmmaker is genuinely privileged whilst the possibilities for aesthetic play are limitless.

The visual-artistic practices used by the cinematographers discussed in the text leave a significant mark on the development of film aesthetics. Without being popular among the general public, the films of these artists are an inspiration for many current and future cinematographers. The true immersion in art is manifested precisely in experimentation with its means of expression and in moving beyond the familiar experience. Aesthetic experimentation is a persistent phenomenon in the screen arts. The visual-artistic practices of avant-garde and experimental cinema not only inspire auteur cinema, but also insistently remind viewers that films are works of art - an extraordinary reality in which the senses are awakened to unfamiliar experiences. What cinema loses in its unreasonable quest for verisimilitude, for imitation of reality, is the possibility of aesthetic pleasure, immersion in new emotional dimensions and the development of the capacity to feel.

Methodological approaches

The basic methodological approach is the empirical comparative analysis of the creation and reception of specific visual-artistic practices, the realization of content and aesthetic ideas and the possibility of dissemination of film works on the Internet. An interdisciplinary approach is used in the aesthetic analysis of screen media practices and technological techniques from the field of audio-visual arts, as well as the scientific toolkit of receptive theories for the analysis of the perceptual environment. The terminological apparatus includes the fields of film studies, philosophy, cognitive psychology, media studies, and art history.

Theoretically, a conceptual apparatus for the use of the terms avant-garde and experimental cinema is introduced. Their development over time in creative practice covers a twenty-five year period. Specific examples are used to illustrate the presence of visual-artistic practices characteristic of experimental cinema in a variety of formats and genres, from feature-length films to music videos. By introducing specific examples with scholarly uses of these terms, the dissertation isolates original concepts applied to

an area little explored in our art historical practice. A necessary historical overview of the emergence of the theory and practice of experimental screen-type products in earlier periods in the 20th century is provided. Central to the study is an examination of contemporary visual-artistic practices.

In contemporary's digital age, the accessibility of technology and the unhindered distribution of audio-visual products enables the audience to get acquainted with films perceived in previous decades as radical artistic expressions. This inevitably raises a key issue - does experimental cinema still exist? The question of whether experimental film is recognisable as such is also posed as a scholarly problem.

Historical and comparative analysis from a cinema studies perspective will help to situate temporally and aesthetically various techniques used by the experimental filmmakers presented. With over decades an accumulation of a multitude of experimental film works creates a specific uncharted world. In order to limit and therefore assure clarity the analysis has been chosen to focus primarily on screen examples from 1990 to 2022.

Aims of the research and scientific application:

To identify in empirical examples the creation of works with experimental aesthetics by filmmakers. It explores specific professional methods and mixedmedia techniques.

Among the objectives of this study are the following key contributions:

- Scientific substantiation of the various uses of the terms "avant-garde" and "experimental" cinema, through their aesthetic and historical situating in the screen phenomenon;
- Create a historical discourse on the emergence of avant-garde cinema and its aesthetic influence on other types of cinema;
- A parallel study of the typology and variative techniques of image creation and manipulation in the field of experimental cinema;
- Analytical presentation of the specificity of the visual-artistic practices used in the films of key authors;

- Study of the constellations in the author-audience communication situation in the actual existence of experimental cinema on the Internet.

The study reflects characteristic specifics of the experimental type of audio-visual creativity in the period from the 1990s to today.

Degree of study

In Bulgaria there is still no comprehensive study of the iconography and the development of visual-artistic practices in experimental cinema of the last twenty-five years, which covers both the stereotypical and the innovative narrative and visual solutions in contemporary high-tech cinema. The study will consider practices such as sand drawing, camera-less techniques, film destruction, the application of optical printing, diary film, and more. Bulgarian scholars such as Alexander Donev, Nadezhda Marinchevska, Bozhidar Manov, Ingeborg Bratoeva, Maya Dimitrova, Radostina Neykova, Vl. Ignatovsky and others touch upon different moments of the problem, analyzing the screen image and various single visual-artistic practices.

Authoritative reference sources have been studied worldwide, and many of them have been introduced for the first time in our country into scholarly use as evidence that the topic is particularly topical due to the numerous technical possibilities for the creation and distribution of audiovisual works in the age of technological diversity. In search of individual expression, contemporary experimental filmmakers combine analogue and digital techniques. This dissertation fills a new field in the development of screen forms.

Scientific novelty

The demarcation of a specific temporality - in the last three decades - makes it possible to scientifically problematize the object of study in a specific aesthetic and diverse technological aspect.

The development of visual-artistic practices in experimental cinema includes a variety of types, from animation to documentary films. A historical parallel is drawn in the analysis of a diverse filmic empiricism, spanning different periods in the

development of screen imagery. In essence, the scientific novelty of the dissertation is achieved by paralleling the aesthetic and technological orientations of the research, in its focus on the creative nature of the processes involved in the creation and construction of images, ideas and narratives in experimental cinema.

The study reflects the diversity of empirical examples of experimental screen products over the period of the last twenty-five years or so. With an overall theoretical and practical orientation, the aims of the research are tied to enriching the possibilities for creative experimentation. The achieved results have been introduced in the public domain through publications on the topic in scientific journals and in the proceedings of scientific conferences during the period of development of the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE. On experimental cinema in the last 25 years.

The concepts of avant-garde and experimental cinema are not synonymous, although they share similar techniques and aesthetic. The following lines attempt to separate the concepts, thinking experimental cinema in two modalities - as a distinct kind of cinema and as a visual-artistic practice present in other audiovisual works.

It is acceptable to consider avant-garde and experimental cinema separately, as they refer to a different cinematic phenomena in their genesis. At the same time, due to the development of digital technologies and the crossing of the boundaries between the different arts, experimental cinema can be safely perceived as an aesthetic practice of cinematic language in whose embrace many other branches of screen art are nested.

There are a number of fundamental differences between avant-garde and contemporary experimental cinema. The avant-garde cinema phenomenon is part of processes encompassing other arts situated in the specific historical period. The political factor involved in the radicalisation of visual language should not be overlooked. This is not to say that experimental cinema is not concerned with politics. Social and political overtones can be found in the achievements of feminist experimental cinema, e.g. in the films of Barbara Hammer; in those dealing with issues around social gender, homosexuality - the films of Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith. But in the 21st century, it

is unthinkable to talk about the marginalisation of a particular kind of art, because in the age of the internet, such marginalisation no longer exists.

To think of the notion of experimental cinema as a visual-artistic practice is due to the wide application of techniques typical of European avant-garde and American experimental films in works ranging from short films to music videos to the *fashion films* that have emerged in recent years. These techniques include lack of narrative or a non-linear one, flickering of the same image (the so-called *flicker effect*), animation techniques, continuous repetition of an image (the so-called *loop effect*), image imperfection such as scratches, mismatched colours, spots, etc. In digital modernity, "mistakes" are deliberate and sought after.

Another significant factor is the lack of like-minded groups uniting creatively in the development of specific screen ideas, such as the Surrealist, Lettrist, and even later groups (1950-1970s) in the U.S. such as those around Jonas Mekas, the No Film Movement, etc. The Internet's proliferation of audio-visual works removes the filmmaker's need to join a creative community and provides a number of opportunities for viewers to come into contact with one's work. The continuous development of shooting technologies creates the conditions for the application of labour-intensive in the past cinematographic techniques at the push of a button e.g. the effect filters found in modern smart phones and mobile apps for post-processing of photo images and video. Curiously enough, the strip-image aesthetic is even found in social media, e.g. Instagram provides its users with the ability to use different types of effects before posting photographs and videos. The mass application of specific visions nullifies their impact, turning them into a habit of consumption. The aesthetics with which avant-garde filmmakers and their American counterparts in later decades attempted to alter the viewer's sensibility is common trait in modernity. The time-absorbing screen experiments of the recent past are part not only of the work of filmmakers diverse in their styles, but also of everybody's everyday life. Screen art has long been eventless, including its experimental manifestations. Increasingly, the aesthetic distinctions between film and video work are blurred (like those between film and television series), and for future artists, these are unlikely to exist. In terms of viewers' experience with films, streaming platforms such as Netflix, HBO go and Amazon Prime Video have established cinema as a daily experience. Viewers use the same devices to watch movies, TV, and video.

The first mass-marketed digital cameras came onto the market in the 1990s, although they only reached satisfactory quality in the early 2000s. The most widely used video-sharing platforms were created almost at the same time - Vimeo in 2004 and YouTube in 2005. While before digitisation the processes of creating a film and its distribution were interlinked, after the mid-2000s the processes became independent. Therefore filmmakers have absolute freedom in how, when and where to present their work.

It is useful to consider the notion of experimental cinema as a contemporary visual-artistic practice, and not only in its capacity as a specific aesthetic period in the history of cinema, such as the cinematic avant-garde, due to the intense combination of different visual arts in their genesis into new hybrid forms. Avant-garde cinema is an exemplar of the fusion of techniques from different arts into a common artwork. To date, such practices are the norm, not the exception. There is a delicate note of distinction between experimental cinema as a type of cinema and visual experimentation in general, and it lies in the application of manual techniques and the skills required to work with them. This distinction is further developed by the educational value of various workshops in which techniques for working with celluloid film are learned, and also by the activity of film festivals entirely aimed at selecting, presenting and promoting films made on film, such as Engauge¹, a festival of experimental cinema whose focus is the application of analogue techniques. Cinematographers who use such techniques do not abandon the possibilities of digital technologies, but by reconciling images that are different in their genesis, assert a style of their own. Nevertheless, experimental cinema is not directed against a particular aesthetic, like the avant-garde, but is a field in which the cinematographer becomes a curator of visual-artistic practices through which one forms an individual aesthetic, embracing both the future of screen arts and its aesthetically abundant past.

The application of manual techniques and the preservation of experimental cinema as a type of cinema forward into the future is limited to a very small number of enthusiastic filmmakers and the activity of the aforementioned workshops and festivals. The likelihood that experimental cinema will be perceived as a historical phenomenon similar to avant-garde cinema is high. The experimental cinematographers presented in

¹ <https://filmfreeway.com/EngaugeExperimentalFilmFestival>

this text are a prime example of a generation of artists standing on the liminality between manual techniques, work on celluloid and digital ones. Their work is a significant aesthetic legacy in the history of cinema. The nostalgic return of manual techniques and working with celluloid film is unthinkable on a larger scale. Contemporary and future experimental filmmakers will be inspired by the aesthetics and content of previous generations of filmmakers, but will make their films using digital tools. A major factor in this is time - both methods assume a certain skill set, but the time to acquire these skills is significantly less when working with digital technologies at the expense of manual techniques. Moreover, the time it takes to create a film with manual techniques is many times greater than the time it takes to create a film with digital means. The beauty of the art of filmmaking lies in its capacity for renewal. In a state of constant change, cinematic language manages to engage each new generation of viewers. And this is not due to the narrative, which is often one-note, recognizable, but to the visual image's desire to impress, to communicate directly with the imaginative capacity of the viewers. Countless times the same mythological, historical, literary subjects become alive on the screen, and what they manage to touch the viewers with is the new, different image. For contemporary viewers, the visual experience is multidirectional, intimate and individual. The repeated screening of familiar narratives is driven by the meaningful persistence of stories and by the need for them to be told through an aesthetic manner appropriate to the audience's perception, i.e. for a viewer to experience a narrative, they need a recognizable film aesthetic. For example, Paul Venegger's lost expressionist film *Golem* (1915), based on a legend, has had subsequent screen interpretations, in 1951 by the Czech director Martin Fritsch's *The Emperor and the Golem* and again in 2018 by the Israeli directors Doron and Yoav Paz.

*"Works of art as sources of information appear to be important for adaptation to different living conditions and for human survival in general. The aesthetic experience is an important example of an activity in which the viewer seeks and acquires information that he stores in memory to be used in future situations."*²

Viewers' sensitivity to particular aesthetic values is closely interrelated with a number of other cultural, social and technological phenomena specific to a given

² Yordanova, Bilyana. *Psychology of aesthetic experience*. Neofit Rilski University Press. Blagoevgrad, 2016, p. 23.

historical period. This creates a need for cinema to retell old stories with a new vision, including self-citation in its achievements.

*"Cinema can count on never becoming banal because of the perception of the audience. It is not only uncontrollable. It is desirably unpredictable in order to preserve the wonder of art. That is why the audience is the protagonist in cinema. Every other element is subject to imitation, to becoming a model, to imitation, to reproduction of elements or whole modules."*³

Video sharing platforms are giving rise to an incredible development in the originally hybrid form of the music video. Quite a few videos are created with visual-artistic practices typical of experimental cinema, with the conceptual difference that the latter illustrate a song.

*"If music today is indeed more watched than listened to, this undoubtedly has a bearing on the expansion of visualised sound, a product of the dynamic evolution of modern audio-visual technologies and the directions in which electronic media culture has evolved in the late twentieth century."*⁴

Considering experimental cinema as a creative practice enables researchers and viewers to experience a wide range of audio-visual works that, regardless of their given title, bear the hallmarks of screen experimentation. Moreover, the likelihood of erasure of concepts increases with each technological push. In the very foreseeable future, the form through which artists express themselves will be introduced into a conceptual medium by the artists themselves. Until thirty years ago, authors defined themselves in a particular format, using its characteristic means and means of expression. Now, and in the future, artists have all the technical possibilities they need to jump between different spheres of art and create their own forms of expression. The art form is created by the artist, serving the idea. In the boundless digital world, quotations and references to audio-visual samples will continue to populate small, medium and large screens, and the inventive freedom of reconciling various visual-artistic practices opens up even more horizons. Thanks to digital technologies, art is part of everyone's daily life. The modern person has the opportunity for a daily aesthetic experience, and repeatedly, which helps to form new knowledge and cultural knowledge. The separation of the notions of avant-

³ Dimitrova, Maya. *Metamorphoses in communication: author - screen - viewer*. Institute for Arts Research at BAS, Sofia, 2006, pp. 118.

⁴ Levi, Claire. *Musical parody in the late 1920s*. Sofia : Institute for the Study of Arts, 2012, p. 86.

garde and experimental cinema, and the proposal to consider experimental cinema not only as a type of cinema, but also as a contemporary visual-artistic practice, allows for an expansion of the research field to include many audio-visual formats that are different in their intentions. The visual-artistic practices that screen experiments have historically accumulated reach a peak, then mediated by digital technologies flow into diverse visual tributaries. Thought along these lines, experimental cinema is neither alternative nor anti-Hollywood; on the contrary, its aesthetics are evident in every contemporary audio-visual format - music video, advertising, etc. The aspirations of avant-garde cinema, whose tradition is largely carried on by experimental cinema, have found their realization in the last 25 years, thanks precisely to the unceasing visual maelstrom that provokes authors to seek a different expression in the struggle for spectators' attention. To put it differently, the factors that in the past instigated the formation of the avant-garde cinema phenomenon were based on the lack of an alternative, while in the present moment the abundance of audiovisual works provokes the application of diverse techniques.

CHAPTER TWO. Avant-garde and experimental cinema. Historical overview.

"In the process of screen phenomenon, screen avant-gardes are dynamic systems. They manifest the global nature of the cinematic phenomenon and its complexity. Essential is their transforming traditional position."⁵

Capturing experimental cinema in a conceptual framework is at once a task with many possible answers or none. Experimental cinema poses a question whose answer is itself. Subsequent readings of the history of avant-garde and experimental cinema are concerned with attempts to delineate the concept by situating experimental cinema in different contexts of relationship:

- 1) with the application of various visual-artistic practices;
- 2) with spectator perception;
- 3) with spaces for distribution of experimental films.

⁵ Dimitrova, Maya. *European Cinema in the Age of Globalization* - IISc Archive. Sofia, 2009, p.7.

Experimental film is often characterised by the absence of a coherent plot or narrative. Various techniques of abstraction are used (lack of focus, painting or scratching the surface of the film, sharp editing); when sound is present, usually it is asynchronous. Most avant-garde films are silent. Thus, in the period of the 1920s, the goal of experimental cinema was conceptualized - to place the viewer in a more active relationship with the film. The first publicly presented cinematic "experiment" by the Lumiere brothers not only captivated viewers with the moving images on the screen, but this same appeal induced panic and fear. In the cinema history's mythopoeia is told that the "Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat" (1895) lulls many viewers into the apocalyptic impression that the coming train is likely to run them over as well. The experience and reaction are instantaneous. This first shock provoked by images on the screen is the beginning of a previously unfinished process, playing with the sensory nature of the audience and posing a question mark around the nature of what is defined as reality.

From a research point of view, avant-garde cinema can often be seen as a historically distinct period in the history of cinema. Although avant-garde films were made on other continents, modern avant-garde art remains a Western-European and Soviet artistic phenomenon, and the application of the term avant-garde cinema should be limited to films made in European countries and on the territory of the Soviet Union. The period covers the years between the two world wars in Europe and the decade after the end of the Second World War with the Lettrist group in France.

The Soviet film avant-garde took place in the relatively short but intense period 1920-30. Despite the success of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the new Soviet government faced the complex task of controlling all aspects of citizens' lives. In 1918, the government imposed strict controls on film material. With nothing to film on, many producers took their equipment and left for other countries.

Lack of equipment and difficult life circumstances brought several new young filmmakers into the mainstream - Dziga Vertov, began working on documentaries during the war; Lev Kuleshov was a teacher at the newly opened School of Cinematic Arts, famous for his editing experiment - the Kuleshov effect, proving the cognitive ability to make sense and logical coherence between shots; Sergei Eisenstein, whose theoretical texts commented on the practices of intellectual montage and its potential for creating impactful films; Vsevolod Pudovkin and the Ukrainian Aleksandr Dovzhenko,

whose films gradually moved from an aesthetic of avant-garde cinema and experimentation to the social realism that has since come to dominate.

In 1920, Sergei Eisenstein even briefly worked on a train carrying propaganda materials to the front during the Civil War (1917-1923). In the same year he returned to Moscow to the new "workers' theatre" Proletkult. By 1923 the government managed to monopolize the film industry by completely nationalizing it. By the end of the 1920s Soviet cinema was flourishing, there were cinemas in a number of small villages, and travelling cinemas visited agricultural areas. Production rose significantly. American and European films selected by censorship continued to be shown on the big screens.⁶

Denis Abramovich Kaufman known by his pseudonym Dziga Vertov was born on January 2, 1896 in Bialystok, Poland at that time part of Tsarist Russia. Vertov had two brothers with outstanding contributions to the art of filmmaking. Mikhail (Moses) Kaufman worked as a cinematographer on Dziga Vertov's films. Boris Kaufman, also a cinematographer, shot one of French director Jean Vigo's masterpieces, "Atalanta" (1934). During World War II, Boris emigrated to the USA, where he worked in films by Elia Kazan, Sidney Lumet and others. In the Soviet Union, Mikhail Kaufman directed and shot the film "Spring"(1929) - much of the footage is from a static camera, the movement is in-frame, representing urban scenes and natural phenomena such as the movement of clouds, the swaying of branches in the wind (a visual-artistic practice perhaps inspired by Griffith, who often used similar shots in his films). Techniques such as fast editing, multi-layered image with double exposure effect, and darkening are used.

A man of divergent interests, Dziga Vertov began working in cinema in 1918 at the invitation of his fellow student at the Psychoneurological Institute, Mikhail Koltsov, head of the Moscow Cinema Committee's newsreel department. "The Man with the Movie Camera" (1929) stated his intentions for a cinema language free from the influence of literature and theatre. Cinema without dramaturgy. The essence of the filming process is represented in the shots in which the cameraman Mikhail is filmed shooting from a car in motion. The photographer is being filmed. With this device Vertov attempts to capture the enigma of the cinematic image; paradoxically, he reinforces it with the rapid montage of shots - the women in the car, the cameraman

⁶ Ibid, p. 82.

filming them, a moving locomotive, and photographic images. Vertov winks at Edward Maybridge's 1876 experiment by including moving shots of a galloping horse and rider frozen in a photographic image at one particular moment - when all four hooves of the horse are in the air. The montage sequence depicting the movement of the gaze is achieved through close-ups of the eye and the camera moving quickly across the buildings, matched with multi-layered images with a double exposure effect.

Vertov's wife, Elizaveta Svilova, is an editor and director. She edited Vertov's series "Kinopravda" (1925), "Kinooko" (1924), "The Man with the Movie Camera", etc. Together with her, Dziga Vertov and Mikhail Kaufman formed a group with avant-garde views on cinema. They believed that naturalistic footage arranged in an editing sequence had a stronger impact than narrative films. Captured on film stock, unadulterated life is the true purpose of cinema.

Lev Kuleshov's discovery and bearing of his name is a significant contribution not only to the development of film aesthetics, but also to the thinking of film beyond the literary text. The Kuleshov effect is a technique that is still applied today, especially in works of experimental cinema and hybrid audio-visual formats e.g. music video. Its application comes as close as possible to the structure of variation and repetition in musical forms.

Alexander Dovzhenko shows his mastery using a variety of visual-artistic practices: diagonal composition, low angle, high-contrast shots, close-ups. In "Arsenal", the artist makes great use of diagonal composition to present movement and tension. This composition communicates with the general plans in which the still figures of women resemble ghosts. The shots resemble the aesthetics of photography - high contrast, lack of detail and few objects in the composition. The episodes with the military trenches are frozen in the weight of smoke and fog. The close-up of the toothless soldier laughing hysterically under a gas attack is evocative, interrupted by a shot of the dead soldier's face frozen in a grotesque smile.

*"People are beginning to see images as testimony. This is still the case today, which in turn hides monstrously large opportunities for manipulation."*⁷

⁷Doncheva - Stoilova, Teodora. *Bulgarian post-totalitarian documentary cinema*. Praises, trends, authors, films, analyses. Institute for Arts Research, BAS, Sofia, 2021, p. 87.

This is an essential question that applies not only to documentaries, but also to biopics, which remain a popular genre in feature cinema to this day. What is interesting about Soviet avant-garde cinema is its contact with new discoveries in the fields of physiology, psychology and neurology. European avant-gardists, with the exception of Antonin Artaud, considered emotional and sensual dimensions, basing them in the ephemeral inexplicability of the soul, while Soviet avant-gardists explicitly relied on the body, the perceptual capacity of the senses, and brain functions.

"Vsevolod Pudovkin's "Mechanics of the Brain" (1926) presents Ivan Pavlov's experiments revealing the functions of conditioned and unconditioned reflexes. From a contemporary perspective, a film with such content reflects criminal practices, but in those years, unfortunately, animal and human experimentation were regulated and accepted as the norm in scientific circles.

"Mother" (1926) is a screen adaptation of Maxim Gorky's novel of the same name. It incorporates a number of visual-artistic practices typical of avant-garde cinema, such as multi-layered imagery with a double-exposure effect. Photographic shots of buildings are superimposed on each other - architectural columns are contextually transformed into symbolic forms of the sustainability of new governance. In "Mother", Pudovkin departs from the practice of having the roles played by naturists and hires actors from the Moscow Art Theatre, although Konstantin Stanislavsky is not a fan of cinematic art.

8

Sergein Eisenstein concentrates not on the individual psyche, but on the social forces that act from the outside. The motivation of the characters is external, constitutive of their being, and for this reason his films do not have a single main character, but rather a group that forms a collective character, such as in Eisenstein's film "Old and New" (1929). Most often, the films feature non-professional actors. A similar practice of "typecasting", the search for a face that visualizes the qualities of the character, is also characteristic of Pudovkin's films. The difference lies in Pudovkin's approach, which builds individual characters.⁹ Eisenstein's first film, "Strike" (1924), was screened in 1925, marking the beginning of a different screen aesthetic. "The Battleship Potemkin", screened later in 1925, proved extremely popular in other

⁸ Youngblood, Denise. *Soviet silent cinema 1918 - 1930. In. one, 1908 to the Stalin era.* Cultural syllabus. Academic Studies Press, 2013, p. 74.

⁹ Ibid. 74.

countries and drew attention to the newly emerging film movement. After an unsuccessful tour of the United States and a partially shot film in Mexico, Sergei Eisenstein returned to Russia in May 1932. The new ruling political elite was not keen on Eisenstein's creative vision, although later, under intense pressure and interference, he made one of his most famous films, "Alexander Nevsky" (1938), for which he was awarded the Order of Lenin, Stalin's highest degree of merit.

Eisenstein also worked to transform the postulates of cinema, and his achievements are reflected in the radical reformulation of views on spectatorial function and the theoretical conceptualization of associative montage. Eisenstein's ideas about the transformation of cinematic language leading to a change in brain activity as a consequence of new forms of spectatorship is in some ways similar to those of Antonin Artaud and his rejection of narrative cinema in favour of attempts to communicate between one's cognitive activity and the film work. According to Eisenstein, the brain is not a passive mechanism that decodes signals fed to it from the screen and absorbs narrative structures. The author believes that the human brain creates and defines meanings using the information supplied by the sensory apparatus. Editing techniques are a major part of Eisenstein's cinematic contribution. He proposes a theoretical system in which the image and the montage pattern influence the reflexes of viewers, modelling their perceptions. The seemingly logical concept that projected images are the same images the brain perceives is turned 180 degrees, and Eisenstein argues that cinematic images take on a new form and meaning in the brain compared to "raw" screen material. Eisenstein envisions film's ability to provoke perceptions far different from what the eye sees because of the universal familiarity of the visual elements through which the cinematographer communicates. In his later writings, he also includes the role of emotions in the formation of meaning with an emphasis on the complex nature of ecstasy. For Eisenstein, ecstasy is the possibility of escaping beyond perceptual limitations and entering a dimension that is experienced by the great mystics of human history.

By the late 1920s, every major figure of the Soviet cinema had made a few well-known films. The sunset of the film trend was not driven by industrial or economic factors as in France and Germany. In the Soviet Union, the government exerted serious pressure on filming methods and editing techniques. Eisenstein and Dovzhenko were criticized for their unusual aesthetics. Stalin's government demanded films easily

understood by the public. Stylistic experiments were often criticized or outright censored.

Screen experiments were also actively created in the USA in this period, e.g. “Manhatta” (dir. Charles Sheeler, Paul Strand, 1921) or in Japan – “A Page of Madness” (dir. Teinosuke Kinogasa, 1928). The crucial difference why they should not be defined as avant-garde is that these films were not made in the context of a specific ideology, nor were their creators part of a group of like-minded individuals with specific political, social and aesthetic ideas that were embedded in their cinematic works. European avant-garde cinema has distinct, revolutionary intentions for the social environment and the change of aesthetics aims at awakening the spectatorial sensibility and orienting the audience towards socially provocative messages.

Where the modern project stumbles into catastrophes, into the failure of the modern idea of progress, and this certainly happened in the two world wars, avant-garde cinema subsequently emerged.¹⁰

German Expressionism was the daring pioneer in the evolution of cinema language after the end of First World War. The hidden fissures of the unconscious receive screen expression in the eerie images of the Expressionists, who not only sought to play with the perceptions of viewers, but also sought to bring out their terror, panic, nervousness, to embody the psychic in the screen. Within the framework of expressionist art, cinema is considered to be the most apt cognitive tool, possessing the ability to express experiences that have been submerged in darkness and previously inactive. The transformation in the way reality is presented on the screen also facilitates the remodelling of perceptual potential. A parallel world is being formed, a world in which theatre, literature and painting are involved alongside cinema, and in which the unspoken becomes a visual strategy for crossing boundaries and entering into sensory dimensions different from those previously known.

The avant-garde of the Impressionist movement in France in the 1920s, the subjective point of view was not the only contribution of the avant-garde movement to cinema. Each of the Impressionist group worked in both theoretical and practical ways, producing films that illustrated the concepts embedded in the theory. Key figures

¹⁰ Dimitrova, M. European Cinema in the Age of Globalization - IISc. Sofia, 2009, p. 7.

include Louis Deleuque, Jean Epstein, Marcel Le Bourbier, Germain Dulac and Abel Gance.

Among Germain Dulac's best-known experiments remain to this day the impressionist film "The Smiling Madame Beudet" (1922) and the surrealist "The Shell and the Priest", which preceded Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's "The Andalusian Dog" (1928). In "The Smiling Madame Beudet", Dulac employs techniques such as multiple exposure - a multi-layered image with the effect of double exposure and racy close-ups that associatively communicate with viewers. The close-up of the laughing Mr. Boede provokes in the viewers the impression of the grotesque, predatory, uncultured nature of the character in counterpoint to the contrail lighting in the close-ups of Mrs. Boede.

A visual-artistic practice like the superimposition creates a textual depth that challenges viewers to perceive beyond the usual registration of the moving image. The cinematic image is the text itself, over which the cognitive stimuli are spread for viewers. The multiple exposure functions as a structuring element not to fragment space-time, but to fuse it into a shared moment - that of the screen characters and that of the viewers.

Stepping into the oneiric unpredictability of surrealism, Dulac created "The Shell and the Priest" from a script by Antonin Artaud. Artaud was heavily involved in the turmoil of the European avant-garde, and cinema attracts the bravest. The intention was for Artaud to take on the role of the priest, but at the last minute Dreyer began filming "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (1928), where a commitment to play the monk Monsieur was arranged. "The Shell and the Priest" sparked a serious controversy between Dulac and Artaud, who viewed the film through very different theoretical lenses.¹¹

The audience reacted violently to the infusion between the two movements. Audience perceptions and surrealist ethos are put to the test. "The Andalusian Dog" is born out of the meeting of one dream with another. Visiting Dalí, Buñuel recounts how he dreamt of a sharp cloud slicing the moon and a barber's knife splitting an eye. Dalí responds to the dream with another dream in which a hand fills with stinging ants. The two write the script in about a week - any image that evokes any rational, associative or cognitive explanation is rejected. Hence, Surrealism in cinema makes use of associative editing practices, but in reverse. Surrealists do not seek to affirm spatio-temporal linearity, on the contrary they attempt to fragment it, yet linking images. Viewers know the images,

¹¹ Kuenzli, R. Dada and Surrealist Film. - The Mitt Press, 1996, p. 110.

but their arrangement in the edit sequences either deprives them of recognizable meaning or transforms them into the most disconcerting configurations. Surrealist approaches in contemporary animation form a rich and under-explored field.

In the 1950s and 1960s in Europe, the radical idea of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes to create a 'pure', 'absolute' cinema was transformed into a political and cultural act against the production of a mass cinema reality, which the works of experimental filmmakers attempted to refract. The spectacle is a familiar concept against which Situationists direct their artistic practice. Guy Debord dresses it up in extremely negative political and economic connotations. The society of spectacle is a society of advertising, mass media, and the entertainment industry, all of which create models of social and cultural behavior in which desire is codified, turning pleasure into a product. In a society of spectacle, people are doomed not to be free. By creating life as a product, one becomes increasingly detached from it.¹²

*The various avant-garde styles on screen form an exotic arabesque, shaping the global vision of the film avant-garde as a worldwide phenomenon.*¹³

The 1926 film “A Page of Madness” (Kurutta Ippēji) by the Japanese director Teinosuke Kinogasa is a great example of avant-garde cinema. Its running time is 71 minutes, a few minutes shorter than modern standards for feature-length films. In those years, Japanese filmmakers also sought to attract viewers to local cinema by drawing on new genre forms, e.g. the historical epics jidaigeki. Kinogasa did not attempt to emulate either its Japanese counterparts or its European ones, though it borrowed a wealth of cinematic techniques - shooting and editing - from the latter.

The film was lost for decades and only discovered by Kinogasa in 1971. It was the first film by the director, who had worked as an actor until then. This radical gesture has its own cultural roots in an otherwise established and well-regulated tradition in Japanese art. Kinogasa was part of the avant-garde movement called Shinkankakuha (School of New Perceptions), which in those years tried, like all avant-garde movements, tried to rethink human existence in the newly emerging technological environment. The influence of a particular cinematic movement is hard to be detected, as the film incorporates various visual-artistic practices like sharp shadows, halos of light to superimposed shots, close-ups. The camera is rarely static. One thing is certainly

¹² Debord, G. Society of Spectacle. - New York : Zone Books, 1995, p.23.

¹³ Dimitrova, M. European Cinema in the Age of Globalization - IISc. Sofia, 2009, p. 9.

missing - the subjective point of view introduced on the big screen by the impressionists. It is as if the viewer's identification with the character is not important to Kinogasa. His goal is the visual conjunction between reality and the fantasies of the male protagonist, who works as a janitor in a mental sanatorium where his wife is institutionalized. The narrative is non-linear, the structure of the individual episodes is resembling that of stanzas in white verse - without rhyme. The janitor experiences a series of paranoid, depressive states accompanied by hallucinations and perceptual illusions. In one of the last episodes, set after the porter's hallucination, a shot with nature elements appears - flowers, a lake with smooth water, a quiet street. Life is always at odds with the inner world of the characters. They are deprived of their phantasms and therefore inhabit some sort of a hell. The storm is interrupted by a kabuki dancer dressed in a fairy costume. She dances in front of a giant black and white orb that continuously rotates in an attempt to hypnotize the viewer, forcing them to abandon the logic of consciousness to immerse themselves in the onscreen disorganization. The most enigmatic character in the film is that of the dancer, who appears a total of eight times; perhaps she is the alter ego of the concierge's mentally ill wife, or a physical manifestation of depression. The acting is impressive, very much in the modus operandi of the modern avant-garde abounding with grotesque body movements and grimaces.

Kinogasa's "A Page of Madness" combines almost all visual-artistic practices of the European cinematic avant-garde, creating in an intense flow images that resemble a puzzle - solvable or not, as a question addressed to the audience.

Seeing a Sound - visual music films in the history of avant-garde and experimental cinema.

Cinema and music have similarities that make their interaction impressive. In both arts there is movement in time. Movement of sounds, movement of images, all in rhythm. If sounds are not organized into a composition and if images are not composed into the frame, in other words organized by the creative thought of the artist, then art does not exist: *"That, by virtue of their organization, works of art are something more not only than the organized, but also than the organizing principle - for as organized they*

acquire the semblance of the uncreated - is their spiritual definition."¹⁴ The avant-gard filmmakers compared cinema to music, seeking means of reaching the audience beyond those of narrative.

The visual music film reaches to establish its own aesthetic values, ideas and the application of certain visual-artistic practices among which: scratching the film emulsion and direct painting on the film with various pigments (ink, permanent markers), classical animation techniques, stop motion. In visual music films, abstract images predominate. The shared imagery helps to separate them into an individual offshoot of avant-garde and experimental cinema, which is to some extent being dissolved, even lost, mainly as a result of advances in technology and video-sharing platforms on the internet.

Not infrequently, visual music films are compared to synesthesia, a cognitive phenomenon in which perceptions from one sense provoke involuntary perceptions in another, e.g. music is seen, sound is tasted, etc. Synesthetes' experiences are bizarre, often complex systems that can sometimes be somewhat controlled. Analyzing his experiences, a synesthete notices that he sees each musical sound in a color motif, but because music is composed of many different tones, his musical images are complex tangles of colors. In film art, however, synesthesia is intentional. The demarcation of visual music film as a distinct genre of experimental cinema is the result of the artistic boldness in the work of filmmakers such as Len Lay, Norman McLaren, Mary Ellen Bute, Oscar Fischinger, and others who, with quite different aesthetic ideas and technical ingenuity, attempted to reach the same goal: cinema beyond mimesis. This non-mimetic cinema could not be deployed without music in which the lack of imitation is immanent.

Visual music films are an aesthetic legacy of modernism as well as an artistic approach found in the works of contemporary filmmakers. Regardless of the context, visual music films are an attempt at uniting of two senses, the play between each of them could lead to the development of a different perceptual sensibility.

Chapter Three. Influence of avant-garde cinema on the aesthetics of fiction cinema.

¹⁴ Adorno, T. *Aesthetic Theory*. Sofia, 2019, pp. 193. [Asthetische theorie. Sofia, 2019, p. 193.]

The aesthetic of the modern film avant-garde dissolves into the individual styles of different directors. The existence of Expressionist, Surrealist or Dadaist films outside those of representatives of the respective movement is unthinkable. Film avant-gardes come to life thanks to a group of like-minded artists who supported their creative practice. Nevertheless, representatives of particular movements work with more than one medium (Viking Egeling, Man Ray) or their cinematic careers are influenced by multiple aesthetic movements (Germain Dulac). Avant-garde movements start and end with the careers of their representatives, but the aesthetic, though fragmentary, is found in the films of other artists. It could hardly be argued that Dadaist or Surrealist cinema is made in the postmodern times, but what is certainly recognizable are key visual motifs, certain style of shooting and usage of editing techniques.

In Tim Burton's extraordinary world, where fantasy, beauty, and horror are inseparable the strong influence of the modern avant-garde cinema can be found. Burton's films are enriched with visual quotations from Expressionist works such as "Metropolis", "Nosferatu", "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari", etc. Long shadows, staircases winding towards loneliness, machines, human and non-human beings, mechanical alterations resemble the spark separating life and death. Burton's films vitalize the magical world of Expressionism. Hence, examining Expressionist films the aesthetic and substantive characteristics of the movement are pointed out, while a lineage essential to the films is overlooked: that of the magical, a tradition perhaps inherited from Romantic writers such as E.T.A. Hoffman. In his films Burton collides the nature of his unusual, dark, beautiful characters with the inevitable dullness of day-to-day human life. Lotte Eisner writes about the Germans' obsession with corridors, staircases, mirrors and shadows, dating back to Hoffmann's fairy tale texts.¹⁵ She argues that it is due to the German idea of *werden* (accomplishment) displacing that of *sein* (existence), and also to the upward movement often represented in expressionist films. The symmetrical appeal of staircases, which embodies a sense of balance and harmony, should not be underestimated.¹⁶ Mirrors and their reflections occupy an equally important stylistic place as staircases. Reflections can be created not only by mirrored surfaces, but also by windows, doors and puddles.¹⁷ The Expressionists move beyond the Impressionist and Surrealist attitude of opposition between reality and dreams; they

¹⁵ Eisner, Lotte. *The Haunted Screen*. Thames and Hudson - London, 1969, pp. 119, 129.

¹⁶ Ibid. 121.

¹⁷ Ibid. 130.

seek the metaphysical state in which the only overt form of life is that of monstrosity and darkness: *'Life is simply a concave mirror projecting impermanent figures, flickering like images from a magic lantern - in sharp focus when small and blurring when magnified.'*¹⁸

Romantic and Expressionist thought deals with the fissure in consciousness dividing it into two halves - one of which fully identifies with the image it rebels against, the other representing the rebellion itself. The deformed figures are both human and inhuman at the same time, e.g. the Frankenstein character.¹⁹ A similar conviction emerges in Burton's films, in which the protagonist is once again repelled from the good, ordered and deeply rational world into his own bleak and monstrously yet not entirely devoid of human desires existence. Behind aspirations to express fear, monstrosity and horror in Expressionist films, as well as in Burton's, there is a euphoria of discovering new forms of life in extreme bodily states, e.g. Edward from "Edward Scissorhands" (1990), the headless horseman from "Slippy Hollow" (1999), Frankenweenie from "Frankenweenie" (2012), and the array of unaccustomed creatures from Burton's commissioned films, such as "Batman" (1989), "Batman Returns" (1992), and "Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children" (2016). Maya Dimitrova notes of the postmodern author as if he/she is first and foremost a spectator and interpreter.²⁰ Burton strains through his own imagination the achievements of Expressionist cinema, whose visual zenith remains intact. The machines of "Metropolis" are at work in "Edward Scissorhands", while the tower city of Metropolis springs up in Gotham City in "Batman Returns". A common motif in Burton's films is the lonely castle on the summit, originally inhabited by Nosferatu, then later Edward Scissorhands, from a wealthy family in "Dark Shadows" (2012). The main characters melancholy climb the endless steps to solitude in "Vincent" (1982). Burton's characters, inhabit mysterious homes with whimsical interiors, or move through dim desolate landscapes. Immersed in a their own vulnerability, darkness and solitude, these characters touch the banal human world in often dead-end situations, only to retreat from it wounded. For the ill-fated characters, the socially rigid human world is attractive, but cruel, while for the audience the encounter with the creatures on screen is

¹⁸ Ibid, p.130.

¹⁹ Coates, Paul. *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror*. Cambridge University Press 1991, pp. 74.

²⁰ Dimitrova, Maya. *Metamorphoses in communication: author - screen - viewer*. Institute for the Study of Arts at BAS, Sofia, 2006, p.94.

a safe play with their Otherness: *'The demonic fair is a central motif in expressionist cinema. For the bourgeois intellectual, the fair has the appeal of the forbidden Other, a kind of pre-capitalist form of exchange and liberation identified by Bakhtin with the popular carnival.'*²¹

It is important to note that in Burton's work, a contemporary author, this Otherness is reversed - in his films, human beings are the embodiment of otherness, whilst the narrative unfolds through the sensibility of non-human life forms. The capacity of humans to inflict pain by succumbing to base and primal emotional-psychic states sweeps away the naïve and deeply vulnerable sensibility of the monsters.

Starting his career in animation, it is not surprising that Burton cites another significant 20th century artist, namely Lotte Reiniger and her silhouette animation films. Burton draws on Reiniger's cinematic style in both his animated films and his live-action ones, using the emblematic layering of elements in the frame composition. More often than not shadows represent conflict situations like in "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" and the animated "Corpse Bride" (2005). Burton manages to preserve and convey in a new context the contributions of the Expressionist cinema.

Surrealism has greatly influenced directors such as David Lynch, Leos Carax, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Jan Schweikmeier, the early films of Vera Hittilová and numerous titles such as "Being John Malkovich" (dir. Spike Jones, 1999), "Valeria and Her Week of Wonders" (dir. Jaromil Ires, 1970), "House" (dir. Nabuhiko Obayashi, 1977), etc.

In 1977, David Lynch made his directorial debut with the surreal horror "Eraserhead", which was preceded by screenings of Suzan Pitt's "Aspergers". Lynch pays particular attention to sound, often a collection of sounds that are different in genesis. The deceptive verisimilitude of the relationship between sound and image is evident in the episode where the man peering into the bars of the heater hears the sound of sirens outside, perhaps, but these sirens could also be the aural accompaniment to the lifting of theatrical curtains, opening a performance by a monstrous girl with a huge papier-mâché head. The monstrosity is a set of fractured thoughts, fantasies, wishful realities and sexual instincts with which the main character identifies himself.

²¹ Coates, Paul. *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror*. Cambridge University Press 1991, p. 28.

The Czech filmmakers were aware of the surrealist cinematography, but the avant-garde there blossomed decades later. Among the most impressive feature films with a surrealist modus are “Something Different” (1963), “Daisies” (1966) and “Fruit of Paradise” (1969) by Vera Chytilová. She was the most radical director among the group. The aesthetic in her films is formed by a variety of visual-artistic practices that evoke purposeful visual disorganization. "Daisies follows two city girls (Marie and Marie) who decide that the world is corrupt and this gives them the right to behave destructively, taking every situation as an invitation to destruction. The screenplay was written by Chytilová and Esther Krumbachova, and the cinematographer is Jaroslav Kucera. The film is framed by war documentary footage. The visually diverse episodes in the film recall not only the aesthetics of the avant-garde, but also that of classic silent cinema, e.g. the nightclub episode. *"The film becomes a sequence of audio-visual combinations - creative-experimental relationships between locations, costumes, cinematography and sound."*²²

Many of the scenes are shot with a color filter, and the editing is sharp, often without editing connection. Such an editing approach creates a collage aesthetic. The techniques used in the film do not seem to illustrate the narrative but fragment it. Thus, the multiple episodes shot with different colour filters narrate the euphoric and chaotic world in which the girls do damage. Imagery elements remind us that despite everything, the world is physically narrow and limited. In the scene where the girls use scissors to cut body parts from each other, severed heads are arranged in a polyscreen. Floating around the frame, the heads still speak though completely out of context, much like the magazine and newspaper clippings taped to the walls. Marie and Marie are playing a cruel game because they have nothing else, neither past nor future. Absurdist in its content, “Daisies” poses no moral questions. The girls often look directly into the camera lens. The victims of the destructive game are middle-aged men whose hopes of love take them to fancy restaurants where Marie and Marie eat savagely while their bilious laughter and jokes thwart any romantic impulse.

In the film “Fruit of Paradise” Chytilová again worked with Krumbachova and Kuchera. The first episode features superimpositions composed of macrophotographs of flowers, stones, plants and moving images of a nude man and woman recreating Adam

²² Hames, Peter. *Czech and Slovak cinema: Theme and Tradition (Traditions in World Cinema)*. Edinburgh University Press, 2010, p.152.

and Eve. A traditional technique of avant-garde and experimental cinema is used - scratching and painting on the film emulsion. The heterogeneous images in the film resemble pictorial canvases across which the man and woman move. The apple tree is filmed by hand - the camera moves chaotically across it, a technique reminiscent of Marie Menken's work in "Looking Through the Garden". Nature serves as a backdrop as large scenes are shot precisely at the crest of beautiful sheer cliffs, among meadows and on the beach. In the use of multi-layered images, the roles of the characters and the set are reversed: *"The bodies become a screen for vegetal veins and textures that are literally 'lost' in nature."*²³

"Fruit of Paradise is *"one of the last cinematic manifestations of the Prague Spring."*²⁴ The film turned out to be Chytilová's last before a ten-year period in which she did not shoot. In 1976, she returned to the screens with "The Apple Game" (Hra o jablko). Her style was considerably altered, as visual experiments such as those in "Daisies" and "Fruit of Paradise" were not taken kindly by the government, which described them as *"degenerate and subversive"*.²⁵ In the years following the Prague Spring, innovation in feature-length cinema was impossible, but short films and animation managed to preserve their independence to a certain extent.

Jan Švankmajer was not just influenced by surrealism in cinema, he was a surrealist filmmaker, a member of the Surrealist Group in the Czech Republic. Although he began his career at the same time as the other members of the Czech New Wave, Švankmajer seems to remain an independent figure in cinema, as he and his films identify more with the collective explorations of the Surrealist group than with the cinematic innovations of his fellow filmmakers.²⁶ A student of puppetry, the director brings the possibilities of inanimate objects to life on screen. Using the collage technique, a characteristic surrealist practice, the independent and parallel existence of its component parts is observed from beneath the whole. According to the author, *"Surrealism is anything but art: a worldview, a philosophy, an ideology, a psychology, a magic."*²⁷

²³ Ibid. 155.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. 168.

²⁷ Pikkov, Ulo. *Surrealist Sources of Eastern European Animation Film*. In: Baltic screen media review 2013 / volume 1 / article, p. 32.

In 1980 Švankmajer made an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Zánik domu Usherú), telling the story entirely using objects. The essence of animation, characterised by the techniques used to create animated films, is characterised by surreal elements such as irrationality, lack of gravity, mystery, fantasy and dream-like imagery.²⁸ A distinctive characteristic of Švankmajer's work is the juxtaposition of visual-artistic practices through which he not only forms his own cinematic signature, but also reveals the infinite possibilities of visual language for communication. The feature-length film "Alice" (1988) incorporates stop-motion animation with objects and live-action footage. It was inspired by Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland but is not a screen adaptation. The rhythm of the film is slow, and while aesthetically it doesn't evoke emotions typical of horror films, such emotions are definitely palpable. In Švankmajer's films, the line between horror and humor is subtle, perhaps even absent. The child actress Christina Kukhotova eats a pastry and in a flash becomes a child's doll, which is where her adventure begins. A creepy child doll, Chucky, also creeps viewers out in the American film of the same year- "Child's Play" (dir. Tom Holland, 1988). Typically of American filmmaking, Chucky quickly became an iconic image of horror, and not only more films in the series followed, but also a television series, comic books, collectible figurines, and so on. No such dramaturgical denouement befalls Švankmajer's "Alice", but the film is a model of cinematic craftsmanship and the courage to work with visual-artistic practices rarely employed. The challenge that such cinematic technique poses to viewers is defined by contemporary neuro-cognitive science as *embodied perception*. The term represents the human brain's cognitive potential for relating to the world, including the formation of individual-specific abilities. More interestingly, this cognitive mechanism is also used in perceptual processes and those related to imagination, through which one builds a understanding about the behavior of others. Humans use their own mental states embodied in corporeal form and attribute them to others through which we gain insight into the way how another person feels.²⁹ Cinema provides a way of experiencing reality and probably the one of non-human beings. The authors of the study give the example of Robert Bresson's 1966 film "Goodbye, Balthazar," in which viewers sympathize with Balthazar the donkey. Viewed from this perspective, Švankmajer's films prove to be a

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gallese, Vittorio; Guerra, Michele. *The Empathic Screen. Cinema and Neuroscience*. Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 1-2.

real test for the imaginative capacities of the viewers, where they apply their accumulated personal experience by relating it to the experiences of inanimate objects such as the Alice doll.

The short film “Food” (1992) was created using pixilation, which is a type of stop motion technique involving people, and the traditional three-dimensional technique of animation with plasticine figures. Pixilation transforms a person into an object. This is not to say that the application of the technique immortalizes a person, nor that it reduces them to an inanimate object. The latter is quite contrary to the ideas of Švankmajer, who through the application of certain techniques attempted to animate objects. Fragmenting human movement, pixilation is a grotesque, humorous challenge to perception, while emphasising the idea of an artwork that does not attempt to reproduce reality, but to present viewers with one of their own.

In one of Švankmajer's most recent feature films “Surviving Life” (2010), the artist combines cut-out animation technique with live-action footage. The cut-outs are from photographic images, optical reproductions of objects from reality. At the beginning of the film, the director presents his motive for using a cut-out technique “like the one used in old children's television programmes”³⁰ and it is rooted in the lack of financial means. This is the reason why the actors are only pictures. Švankmajer’s typical humour builds bridges between reality, dreams and daydreams. In the life of the main character, Eugene, all these dimensions intertwine, in a rather theatrical manner, whilst he has the leading role in each episode. Such cinematic expression approximates the immediate neuro-cognitive experience in the human brain, confirming that any linearly structured narrative is a creative function of the consciousness and therefore of art. Cinema begins where all other arts stop, it is, “...*life expressing life, experience expressing experience.*”³¹ Composing a story is an imaginative mental mechanism through which one can express one's experiences as a collection of reactions, memories and relationships with other people. In other words, composing a story paves the way to reflexivity. The narrative is a tool for communication, not communication itself. Its presence in film works is not obligatory. Cinema has long relied on narrative potential, with viewers not only identifying with onscreen characters through empathy, but also engaging with their own emotional stock as a reaction to external events. Švankmajer

³⁰ “Reliving Your Life” (Přežít svůj život, 2010) - 00:43.

³¹ Sobchack, Vivian. *The Address of the Eye. A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 5.

inverts this cinematic film-viewer dynamic by presenting the world, or to quote the title, "experiencing life" as a creative act - Eugene's doing - instead of a reaction to events external to the character.

Characteristic of the film avant-garde is the desire of the filmmakers to have an emotional impact on the audience, relying solely on the audiovisual vocabulary of cinema. The abandonment of narrative is a radical gesture present in the ethos of the modern avant-gardes. This approach is not tantamount to a logical absence or a kind of semantic chaos. The film has a meaning of its own, but it also generates one for the audience.³² Popular cinema engages viewers by following a plot, while avant-garde cinema opens up possibilities for its different interpretation. Viewers are never passive, regardless of the type of cinema. The film itself is a psychological experience.³³

The aesthetic characteristics of the film are directly influenced by the techniques used to create it. When shooting on film, the modus operandi is quite different from shooting on digital media due to the physical limitations of the film itself - roll length, light sensitivity, etc. Such problems do not exist when working with a digital camera, which greatly facilitates the shooting process. Editing softwares (including these special effects) allow manipulation of individual elements within the frame, which back in the day required hours of manual labour by the masters of montage. Digital cinema is the cinema of spontaneity because of its potential for a creative change at any given moment.

CHAPTER FOUR. The work of Jonas Mekas, Steven Woloshen, Suzan Pitt, Paul Winkler and Gunvor Nelsson.

Nurturing appreciation: Jonas Mekas and his many roles in American experimental cinema.

³² Ibid. 11.

³³ Hockings, Paul. *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. Walter de Gruyter (2003).pdf 249, p.55.

After many twists and turns in their lives following the Second World War, Jonas Mekas and his brother Adolfas sought refuge and opportunity in the United States, spending the last four years of their lives in a displaced persons camps across Western Europe. The young Lithuanians arrived in New York on October 29, 1949³⁴ Settling in Brooklyn, the two brothers began working in a factory, but quickly managed to immerse themselves in the city's seething film culture. Their initial goal was to break into Hollywood and their efforts consolidated around writing and submitting screenplays. All of their attempts to pursue a career in the film industry proved unsuccessful. Jonas began filming with his own Bolex camera, which marked the beginning of his film diaries, which had an aesthetic influence on contemporary video genres such as so-called vlogs. Over time, interest in filmmaking has increased, supported by the city's vibrant film culture. After the end of the war, Maya Deren organized screenings of her films, which inspired another emigrant from Europe, Amos Vogel. Vogel and his wife Marcia founded the Cinema 16 community (1949-1963), where films were being screened, moving images rather different from those of Hollywood, as well as debut films by emerging filmmakers - Jonas Mekas screened his first film, "Guns of the Trees" in 1961.

Mekas shoots for/against/through/himself. Mekas works as writer, director, cameraman, editor, whilst playing roles: "Watching my films, my diary films, I notice that when I film or let others film me, I start acting. I step into one character or another. I am this and that and someone else again."³⁵ Mekas consciously dissolves into the many faces of the characters swarming in the diary films. These characters can be part of the whole, but also stand-alone phenomena. The Jonas who walks the streets of a rainy New York City, shooting a walk with a camcorder and perhaps an impromptu monologue behind a camera in "A Walk" (1988), is not the same Jonas of "Lost, Lost, Lost" (1976).

"Lost, Lost, Lost" chronicles Mekas' days in the Lithuanian community of Brooklyn. Aesthetically, the film is reminiscent of the travelogue films of the dawn of cinema, except that the Bolex camera provides the cinematographer the opportunity for handheld shots. With the aid of a tripod, Jonas and Adolfas include themselves as characters. The author refers to himself and his brother with the definition of protagonists. Most of the film is shot on black and white film, but there is no shortage

³⁴ James 1992: 4.

³⁵ Rice, Shelley. *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999, p. 127.

of colour footage. The voice-over presents a narrative whose correspondence or non-conformity to the images is contextually dependent on the viewer's perception.

Jonas Mekas - film critic and publisher

Like many other filmmakers, Mekas also began his work in cinema by writing critical texts. What significantly differentiates him from his colleagues is the urge for independence and the desire to create something unique rather than fit his worldview into established structures. Mekas, along with his brother Adolphas, George Fénin, Louis Brigante and Edward de Laro, founded a journal of film criticism in 1955 under the name "Film Culture", later adding the subtitle America's Independent Motion Picture Magazine.³⁶ The magazine included texts on European cinema, Hollywood films and experimental cinema, the latter of which found itself the target of harsh criticism from Mekas himself. The author subsequently changed his position, becoming a fervent advocate of cinematic experimentation. This is not at all to say that Mekas is against Hollywood; perhaps his critical stance is rooted in the film industry's unapologetic policy of making the entertained spectator the norm. The magazine was published for several decades until 1996. Mekas's critical writings range from articles on Hollywood films, to those of Akira Kurosawa, Jean Vigo, to the films of like-minded artists such as Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, and others. At first glance, the ambivalence of the critical stance is hard to detect, but on further reading, a plethora of perspectives, seemingly written by different authors, emerge throughout the multitude of texts written. Each text is a universe unto itself. Mekas's aesthetic prism is fluid, and his refusal to apply a theoretical framework distinguishes him from the previous generation of film critics such as Béla Balazs, Rudolf Arnheim, Siegfried Kracauer, and also from his contemporaries such as André Bazin, Jean Mitry, and Christian Mertz. What shines through the controversial expressive modus operandi is the high humanism with which Mekas treats filmmakers and films.

Jonas Mekas - founder, director, distributor

On July 14, 1961, The Film-Makers' Cooperative began operating in New York City. Initially, a group of 22 artists formed "The New American Cinema Group, Inc." (NACG). This group included Jonas Mekas, Shirley Clarke, Andy Warhol and others. "The Film-Makers' Cooperative" is a division of NACG and continues to be its

³⁶ James, David E. To Free The Cinema: Jonas Mekas & The New York Underground. New Jersey, 1992, p. 7.

operating name. The Cooperative's policy is to refuse to apply aesthetic criteria to the acceptance of films. Thanks to Mekas' efforts and dedication over the years, a diverse creative collective was formed, but with a single distribution unit from where films with an experimental aesthetic could be rented for screenings, instead of each film being sought out personally by the filmmaker.³⁷

One of the Archive's main functions is to preserve and screen works of experimental film and video art extending into the creation of a library of resources such as books, periodicals, photographs, and other materials dealing with the history of experimental cinema. Workshops are organized in the Archive. Furthermore, there is a publishing activity, and public lectures are organized in conjunction with the screenings, quite in the spirit of the cinema clubs in France before The Second World War.³⁸

The Archive's activities do not go online, but retain its original idea of a physical space - a museum located in New York. However, the Archive's web presence is relevant to today's virtual demands, having an informative website whose content is easily navigated. The social modus operandi of European film clubs is a key feature of the organisation. The cinema-going experience is ritually preserved in its original form.

Jonas Mekas dissolves into many possible faces. On the edge of banal everyday existence, the myth begins to happen. Cinematographer, critic, publisher, co-founder of a museum and a film archive, Mekas proves that action is the only link of human existence in relation to which cultural limitations are powerless. Displaced, torn from his roots, man is forced to blossom everywhere, regardless.

The time-traveling of a film emulsion. The work of Steven Woloshen.

Experimental cinematographers explore the multi-directional creative potential of film stock - scratching, painting, perforating, gluing other objects onto film, etc. Through these visual-artistic practices, cinematographers emphasize the idea of film stock as a creative medium in its own right. Steven Woloshen's films are notable for their application of multifaceted techniques to create a moving image on film - painting, scratching the film emulsion, working with found footage, as well as the techniques he

³⁷ Id. at 10.

³⁸ (Dimitrova, May 2009: 17)

developed for destroying the celluloid material. In this text I explore precisely the specifics, technology and visual aesthetics of film emulsion as a journey through time, a journey into the art of the image, a journey into the depth of a paradoxically never-ending process. Woloshen consolidates the innovative and daring practices of filmstrip destruction into a practice that he identifies as reconstruction. The artist's reconstruction proposes a hypothetical future for films created on film, a return to light-sensitive emulsion from many years of journeying forward into destruction. The future of filmstrip works is marked by the material's ability to age, to acquire flaws, and thus to alter the image created on it. The destruction of celluloid film creates formless images, which are unrepresentations of reality. The horror of destruction is concentrated in vague, indistinct spots, in which the traces of a decay process that is brought to a certain stage are glimpsed. The organically decayed in the soil film stock takes on a dark, (in)figurative life of its own, in which corroded cracks show through. A life that is a fragmented mirror of recognizable forms.

Burying film stock in the soil is a process lasting several months, in which the chemical and physical environment of nature along with hundreds of insects burrow through the layers in search of an image. Both unexposed film and film that has already been shot are suitable for this technique. In the latter, the destruction of the emulsion transforms the images, making them blurry, full of cracks and gaps.

Soil strip rot can be applied both alone and in combination with other cameraless techniques. Woloshen's discoveries also include boiling the film stock in a "decoction" of water and bicarbonate of soda, fermenting it in a solution of cooking yeast and sugar, and painting pigments onto already-etched strips. The cinematographer also experiments with sound by working with these techniques in the optical sound zone of the strip.

Hence, the images that are created with destructive techniques are abstract. In the case that if one works on a already shot film strip the light images are transformed by the moisture and the abrasive environment. From beneath the cuts, holes and blisters on the surface of the footage, a fast-flying world is born, a tangle of relationships between colours and the formless. The destructive visual-artistic practices in Steven Woloshen's films bring (non)images out of the depths of the celluloid material itself. This is not a nostalgic act in which the artist seeks out the technological and artistic mark of filmmaking; on the contrary, Woloshen proposes an essentially transformative practice.

Where light paints representations of objects on the film strip, Woloshen replaces it with the dissolution of images. Even placed in darkness, the celluloid stock has the capacity to tear itself apart and create images, colors, and textures. In the darkness of cinematic counter-alchemy, a world of images emerges - monsters that traverse the inert repetitive cinematic images, enlivening the viewer's imagination. On the other hand, the rhythm of damage in Woloshen's films leaves space for contemplation to this same viewer, who is given the opportunity for subjective interpretation. It is this path that the viewer must walk across in order to discover and communicate with the screen image. These heterogeneous images, the fruit of destruction, decay and fermentation, provide innumerable opportunities for the experimental cinematographer to create previously unseen images by applying accessible visual-artistic practices.

The film, corroded by chemicals and insects provokes the presumed instability of the moving image. The transgression into formless moving images is a transformation into a transcendent state of pre-image immanent to the light-sensitive material. The artist co-authored with the film strip, which contains within itself the absolute potential to create expression by interacting with physical environmental factors - light, water, soil, living organisms, bicarbonate of soda, and cooking yeast. The film strip gains autonomy in its capacity for decay. Woloshen's images have reached their perfection in decay, and it is this inevitability that he seeks to preserve - a destruction that has reached the limit of its formlessness.

Animation techniques in Suzan Pitt's films.

Suzan Pitt is a diverse artist working in painting, opera, film, urban graffiti art and as a designer of hand-painted clothing. Her work as a set designer makes her a pioneer, the artist who first put animation on the opera stage. Her first opera was "The Magic Flute" (1983) staged in Wiesbaden, Germany. The animated episodes are projected onto curtains, and the singers walk between them. The second animated opera is "Faust" (1988) staged in Hamburg, Germany. Pitt's group of animators created an hour-long 35mm film that was projected onto a screen at certain sections of the opera's action. Pitt's films are created with a substantial crew. Around 20-30 animators are working with a variety of techniques. Regardless of the form through which Pitt expresses

herself, her auteurist gaze can be captured and traced in the rounded shapes, surrealist subject matter, richness of color palette, the fantastic in juxtaposition with the mundane, as well as the many references to pop culture. Movement and time provoke Pitt's foray into animation. For her, movement has an associative function. A common practice in Pitt's animations is the movement of the camera across the image. The static image is an object of exploration, a cognition by the optical eye of the camera, whose movement refracts the fabric of reality. Cinematic movement is the movement of thought across the image in search of relationships, or lack thereof, between image elements. The basis of the animated image lives *"in just such a secondary, processed reality. A reality with enormous freedom in the construction of space and time."*³⁹

The whimsical world of Suzan Pitt's animated films enchants viewers with oneiric journeys between conscious, unconscious and reality. The imaginative odyssey is situated between misadventures, dreams, fantasies and conjurations, the impact of which is determined by the different aesthetic qualities of the techniques used by the author. Pitt's contribution to the art of filmmaking lies both in the unadulterated expressions of her imagination and in her skilful handling of animation techniques - classical plate animation, direct techniques - scratching, bleaching and painting on film emulsion with coloured inks and paints, plasticine techniques and sand animation.

Paul Winkler's films with optical printer.

The optical printer is a technical system equipped with a projector at one end, a camera at the other and a light source. The film projected by the projector is re-captured by the camera frame by frame, a process with many possibilities for creative intervention. When the lenses of both the projector and the camera are changed, the newly obtained copy is affected. The timing can also change - the cadence is sped up or slowed down. Filters placed on one of the two optical devices result in color shifting or the creation of out-of-focus color blobs, etc. The application of masks can serve as a transition between individual frames. Working with the optical printer enables the reconciliation of many images into one. The effects are countless, hence, the cinematographer can experiment combining them in a way that suits one's creative idea.

³⁹ Neykova, R. Animation and chronophotographic cinema. Specificity of the animation image. 18.

The optical printer was used in Hollywood as early as the 1920s, and the special effects created with it marked significant film works such as “King Kong” (M. Cooper and E. Schoedsack, 1933) and “Citizen Kane” (Orson Welles, 1941). Unfortunately, it was financially accessible only to the major studios; independent and experimental filmmakers could not afford such expensive equipment. This was also due to the lack of infrastructure in avant-garde circles and the academy. On the one hand, there is a lack of film associations, and on the other, educational programs do not provide for the integration of such technical devices.

It was not until the 1960s that the optical printer became available to experimental filmmakers. Its introduction into experimental film practice was mediated by three factors that proved to be beneficial at the time. The first of these is expressed by the development of the DIY (DoItYourself) ethos, which focus is the application of handmade technical tools. The second significant aspect is the expansion of experimental film practice through the formation of film distribution cooperatives, media centres and also academic support in the form of experimental film studios. The third factor is expressed by the establishment of an aesthetic context encouraging the application of optical effects.⁴⁰

To date, special effects in cinema are created digitally and the optical printer is not used in the industry. Despite its popularity, there is a lack of historical texts dealing with its use in the work of experimental filmmakers.

A contemporary virtuoso in working with the optical printer is the cinematographer Paul Winkler. Winkler was born in 1939 in Hamburg, Germany. In 1959 he moved to Australia to work in construction. The boredom and expatriate life provoked Winkler into purchasing a photographic camera, and later a motion picture camera. His first camera was an 8mm "Bell & Howell".

For Winkler, one of the most important factors in making cinema is the love of it, regardless of type, genre, etc. The second key point is what he defines as what happens behind the film and how the film is created. The author's first interests are in documentary filmmaking and the possibilities to document the world. Winkler sought to gain more knowledge about cinema and this led him to the so-called film societies popular in the field of avant-garde and experimental cinema. During this period, the

⁴⁰ Powers, J. A DIY Come-On: A History of Optical Printing in Avant-Garde Cinema. *Cinema Journal*, Volume 57, Number 4, Summer 2018, pp. 71-95 (Article), pp. 79-80.

author lived in Melbourne, where he took part in an informal film education group, but there the emphasis was on screenings rather than making his own films. After he screened a his own film to the members of the group, they confessed to him that none of them had ever seen a film like his and that there was nowhere to learn similar techniques to those he used. This did not deter Winkler, who increasingly read philosophical books and experimented with various artistic techniques.

The documentary material is the foundation upon which Winkler's abstract thinking unfolds. He says that as a child he was drawn to abstract images, and over the years music, poetry and abstract painting contributed to the development of the visual-artistic practices through which he creates his films, mastering the technical possibilities of the optical printer to perfection, as well as inventing his own cinematic devices. The aesthetics of the images in his films are marked by the specificity of the tools used. Often, at the beginning of each film, the author shows the original image, and those that come after are its inevitable transformations. Through such techniques, the most seemingly ordinary camera leap beyond their light registration limits. Winkler approaches the cinematic image as an ever-changing organic matter. Intellect and emotion unite in a search for new sensations to familiar images and even physical places such as Australia's iconic Bondi Beach, etc.

Some of his most popular films are “Bondi Beach” (1979) and “Sydney Harbour Bridge“ (1977), in which urban images of Australian culture are merged with Winkler's personal experiences and his desire to give them a cinematic body through which to share feelings, thoughts and ideas. The filmmaker draws on cultural icons in many of his films. “Bondi Beach” presents the idea of the beach and its surrounding buildings, surf shop, rocks that form a jigsaw of geography, leisure culture and human architectural thought fill the harmonious coexistence of nature and man. The buildings are shot from low point of view, unobtrusively looking out to the sea, while the cinematographer brings the waves and their sounds into people's homes. There is no shortage of shots of the car lane along which beachgoers and surfers reach the beach. All these elements together with shots of people having fun in the water or lying out on the beach are stacked on top of each other in a polyscreen. The visual-artistic practice of the polyscreen challenges the authority of the absolute synchronization between time and space in the film artwork. Often in polyscreens, Winkler repeats certain shots two or more times, thereby creating a cinematic motif of alternating elements (frames). Each

element has retained its own movement and, whilst being disobedient to the others, fits into the whole. The captured objects are universally recognizable and culturally significant, while the movement in/of the individual frames and the configurations between them form a cyclical rhythm.

Winkler "fabricates" the sounds to his films and while he takes inspiration from images of local and global culture his work also features abstract images which multiply, flit and chase each other along the frame.

The screen poetics in Paul Winkler's films are distinguished by a minimalist aesthetic - the images are familiar and quite ordinary, the editing and the length of the shots organized in a moderate pace, and the subtle combination between seriousness and humor is evident in the unity of the author's thought and the usage of a chosen visual-artistic practice. Winkler's films are a kind of cinematic haiku whose expression is composed of images, movement and sound. The banality of everyday life is transformed into a reflective moment. In haiku, the language, the choice of words, and the author's thought must be so transparent to the readers that the latter feel the author's experience of coming into contact with the object of inspiration.⁴¹ In this modus, Winkler's films present the thoughts of the author's experiences.

Visual-artistic practices in Gunvor Nelson's poetic films.

Gunvor Nelson was born in 1931 in Sweden, where she studied painting and lithography. She moved to the United States to further her education and received an MFA from Mills College, California. With no formal training in the art of filmmaking, she immersed herself fearlessly in the waters of American experimental film. She made her first film as a joke with her husband Robert Nelson, also an experimental filmmaker. The couple shot their new house with the idea of sending the film to Gunvor's parents in Sweden as a keepsake. The idea of the film work as a personal means of communication, like the letters, cards and photographs that people used to exchange with each other, originated precisely in the field of experimental cinema, decades before contemporary internet video-sharing platforms and the practice of vlogging.

⁴¹ Higginson, W. The haiku handbook. Mcgraw-Hill book company, 1985, p. 10.

Subsequently, Nelson had a long practice as a lecturer at the San Francisco Art Institute - 1970-1992. The following year she moved back to Sweden, where she has lived, photographed and taught ever since.

New York, Boston and Los Angeles have traditions of experimental filmmaking that make them attractive and promising for artists in the field. As early as the 1940s, another major center for alternative culture - the Bay Area - formed in the United States, including San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland, Palo Alto, and elsewhere. Although unregulated in a formal movement, filmmakers such as Gunvor Nelson, Bruce Connor and Nathaniel Dorsky formed an eclectic environment for the development of experimental cinema. This geographically distinct cinematic phenomenon moved alongside the experimental tradition in literature, which featured poets such as Robert Duncan, Leslie Scalapino and others.

Several factors have contributed to the unstable yet very fruitful culture of alternative media. The non-traditional steep ridge-filled region in conjunction with the unending stream of immigrants coming and going are just a few of the reasons for the formation of this particular artistic climate. The hilly topography distorts perceptions of time and space, enabling one to visually trace one's entire journey from point A to point B. Immigrants from Europe, Asia, Latin America have been flowing into the stream of indigenous peoples since the Gold Rush period.

Nelson's works both in collaboration with Dorothy Wiley as well as on her own. She shot her films on 16mm film strip, and began working in video format in 1998. Her work is reflexive and strongly influenced by the artist's personal life. In the films are being reconciled multiple visual-artistic practices through which Nelson creates euphoric poetry, stirring images created with diverse techniques typical of other visual arts such as painting, printmaking. In Nelson's films, the frozen moment in the static image comes to life. The movement symbolizes the passage of time, drawing a beginning and an end. By moving painted images, newspaper clippings and photographs, the cinematographer cracks the ontological essence of the static image.

Her visual exploration crosses the boundaries of one medium to another. Photographs, paintings and moving image are interwoven in her screen imagery. This approach influences her choice of visual-artistic practices and their respective aesthetics. Already in *Schmeergutz*, Nelson's style stands out - close-ups, quick changes of frames by

means of the *montage technique without connection*⁴² and the moving of still images. Together these practices create a sense of moving collage.

Gunvor Nelson uses an optical printer in the film "My Name Is Oona" (1969). The film is a reflection on mother-daughter relationship, involving Nelson's daughter. The film frame is a no-man's space, providing freedom for both parties in the dialogue, one in front of the camera and the other behind it. The author uses a lot of superimposed shots, approaching an abstract aesthetic to the images. The film is not an idyllic portrait, quite the opposite - the feeling it leaves with viewers is one of intensity in the relationship, emphasised by the sound design.

In her films, Nelson skillfully intertwines her own emotional experiences with the unshakeability of the collective reality, that of the material world inhabited by demanding objects which shape human experience in multiple manners. Her films form a reflexive space, an expression of the enigmatic regularity between the ephemerality of the human soul and the stability of matter, of everyday life. In this sense, the author prefers to define her films as "personal films" instead of experimental ones, since the experiment implies something unfinished.⁴³ Nelson's personal films are a celluloid mirror in which representational thoughts and feelings are projected. Expression through the moving image is a practice that every modern person touches, and it is as if the avant-garde filmmakers' intentions to destabilize narrative in cinema have blossomed and branched out into multiple audio-visual formats.

FIFTH CHAPTER. Experimental Cinema on the Internet: curatorial platforms, video channels and author initiatives.

The Internet provides countless opportunities for viewers to watch films and video works of various kinds. Avant-garde and experimental filmmakers have always sought to carve out specific spaces where their films can be screened. On the one hand, this is

⁴² The application of this principle aims to create dynamics that result in perceptually more intense screen action. The effect of the technique consists in a kind of awakening of the viewer from the smooth montage - the "queen of montage". According to Jean-Luc Godard: "Only the unexpected can make the viewer accept the implausible". Fingova, S. The montage of the audiovisual work. NBU. Sofia, 2008, pp. 90-91.

⁴³ Sundholm, John. "The Material and the Mimetic: On Gunvor Nelson's Personal Filmmaking." Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media, vol. 48, no. 2, Wayne State University Press, 2007, pp. 165-73, p. 167.
32<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41552497>.

due to the reluctance of large cinemas to screen such films, and on the other, and perhaps more defining, is the extreme thirst of avant-garde and experimental filmmakers for an absolute independence - creatively and distributive wise. Audiences' access to works of an experimental nature has historically been conditioned by the formation and activity of film clubs in France, film libraries, museum and university archives, and time-honoured independent spaces such as the Anthology Film Archives headed by Jonas Mekas, as well as short-lived spaces for the screening of experimental cinema e.g. the No Wave films of the 1970s (USA), where filmmakers used different spaces to project their works to an audience. Physical spaces for film screenings, whether cinemas or those temporarily adapted for screenings e.g. museum halls, are characterised by constraints unknown to film distribution in the internet space.

"Among many other issues, the digital age has created entirely new dimensions to the discussion on independence in the arts. The traditional distinction of the previous era between distributing majors and independent distribution labels ceases to play a role insofar as more and more artists are finding outlets outside this paradigm. The main condition for this is the creation, thanks to digitalization, of new distribution channels in which the previous distinctions and strict hierarchies are falling away." ⁴⁴

The development of streaming platforms on the Internet has formed an extremely strong engagement of viewers with the audiovisual works they experience. Experimental cinema is no longer a cinematic enigma or intended only for certain groups of people with certain aesthetic claims, it is for everyone.

Curatorial Practice

"The term curator has a Latin root and literally means a guardian or trustee. In Bulgaria it is adopted in its modern interpretation from the English language and generally means a person responsible for a project in the field of art - from the birth of the idea to its complete realization, accordingly the project is called curatorial. Curatorial projects are primarily carried out in various fields of visual arts - fine art, photography, architecture, media, as well as in other, borderline arts." ⁴⁵

In the context of cinema, curatorial practice has certain similarities to that of film selection or programming, i.e. film selection. On the internet, and in streaming

⁴⁴ Donev, A. The Independents in Cinema. From Edison to Netflix. C., 2019, 29.

⁴⁵ Konstantinova, R. The Curatorial Project in Bulgaria. Without a past, but with a future - Art Studies Readings 2009, 329-332, 329.

platforms in particular, curatorial practice does not stop at selecting certain films, but has an all-encompassing activity, almost overlapping with the definition proposed above by Romyana Konstantinova. Independent platforms select their films through the prism of the so-called user experience, which describes the overall experience of the user when interacting with a particular product. While it may be unpleasant or even offensive to consider artworks as content or product, the present is irreversible. Regarding user experience, the idea behind it is that when interacting with an app, software, game, website, or even a real object, a number of emotional and cognitive connections are activated in the human brain that form affect. Thus, browsing a website could be a pleasant or unpleasant experience for the user. All of these functional, emotional and cognitive aspects are incorporated into the design of modern virtual and real-world products to make the user experience of interacting with them positive. New disciplines are being formed like interaction design⁴⁶ and experience design⁴⁷, both heavily involved in the creation of virtual products and services. Streaming platforms for audiovisual works not only select the films they will give audiences access to, but curate the entire experience - from the introduction to the platform on the front page, to navigating through it via buttons, to controlling the virtual viewing device and actually watching the film. The films are specifically selected to suit the main purpose of the medium in which they are present be it cultural-entertainment, socio-political, educational. The set of films determines the presence of a platform on the Internet, thus segmenting the audience for whom the selected films would be of interest. This is one of the key characteristics for most current and future media companies on the internet - the discovery of an aesthetic and therefore market niche unoccupied by the majors (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Mubi). Another significant characteristic is building the means for the audience to interact with the content the platform offers. The lack of such is evidence not only of an absence of interest on the part of viewers, but also of the low value in experiential (rather than financial) terms of the audiovisual works on offer. Therefore, the curation of video streaming platforms actually starts at the level of an idea, extending to its envelopment with values, a story, a mission. Successful cinema

⁴⁶ Interaction design is a concept related to the way people interact with technology. Good design aims to aid a person's understanding when dealing with a particular piece of technology. It incorporates principles from a variety of disciplines such as psychology, art, and cognitive science to ensure that users have an accessible and enjoyable experience with technology of various kinds (Norman, D. *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York, Basic books, 2013, 5).

⁴⁷ Experience design is the practice of creating products, services, events whose focus is quality and enjoyment of the experience (Norman, D. *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York, Basic books, 2013, 5).

streaming platforms are characterized by the high relevance they acquire in the everyday life of viewers, in unhindered access, satisfying educational, informational, entertainment needs.

Author's initiatives

The contemporary experimental filmmaker has no need for institutions, associations and groups of like-minded people to distribute his films. The relationship between artist and audience is unmediated, direct. Search engine algorithms are improving by the day, and the audience's horizons are becoming more and more enriched, which inevitably leads to a change in the perceptual and cognitive apparatus.

"The dominance of visual images these days requires a rethinking of our whole value system." ⁴⁸

Many experimental filmmakers choose established video distribution platforms such as Vimeo and Youtube through which to present their films to viewers without demanding payment. This approach to the distribution of audiovisual works is the key mark separating the generations of experimental filmmakers into pre- and post-digital.

Personal websites of experimental filmmakers serve not only as a portfolio, but also as a video platform. The presence of the contemporary artist on the web is inescapable.

The presence of experimental cinema on the internet is a definite fact, more and more small companies are forming around the idea of films created with visual-artistic practices typical of experimental cinema. The prevailing visual sensibility that characterizes the internet space and the extremely high degree of communication through images (static and moving) forms a natural need to create and watch films with diverse aesthetic qualities. The visual experiment undertaken by avant-garde cinematographers is no longer for the few, nor is it marginalized; it is becoming an evolutionary phenomenon of visual perceptibility. The change of means, methods and forms of communication inevitably leads to a transformation of people's cognitive abilities. This transformation has begun, its pace is markedly rapid. The ways in which people connect with each other, learn, and participate in cultural and educational activities place the focus on the image. Audiences' access to diverse types of cinema on the Internet is an incredible opportunity to acquire new knowledge, form personal aesthetic criteria and develop critical thinking.

⁴⁸ Alexandrova, P. Cinema and Reading. - Art Studies Readings, 2010, 224.

Conclusion.

Separating the notions of avant-garde and experimental cinema, through their aesthetic and historical positioning, sets a boundary between two different types of cinema in their ethos. While aesthetically sharing characteristics, avant-garde cinema is centered on the activities of a group of like-minded individuals who consolidated political, social, and intellectual intentions into the potential for impact of the cinematic image. Experimental cinema, but also cinema in general, inherits much of the aesthetic contributions of the avant-garde filmmakers, with the difference that, even while being part of artistic movements, the experimental filmmaker is more committed to individual creative expression. The impetus is not so much in forming an opposition as in presenting one's own world view. With few exceptions, experimental filmmakers work alone, much like artists. Those working with analogue techniques are very few, due to the laborious and time-consuming artistic process. The artists discussed in this dissertation are among the few craftsmen working with manual techniques, and their contributions stand out vividly. Technological advances and easy-to-learn computer software have formed a creative environment in which a range of techniques move from one format to another - experimental film, music video, advertising, educational video, etc. Viewed from this perspective, experimental filmmaking is seen as a visual-artistic practice that incorporates a variety of techniques from different origins (analogue and digital) and that interweaves with other forms of screen art forming hybrid genres.

The influence of avant-garde aesthetics in cinema is undeniable and this is evident in a number of big screen box office hits. The transformation in the viewer's perception is curious, illustrating the evolution of contemporary visual culture. This transformation is expressed in the shocking aspect that avant-garde films presented aesthetically and content-wise for their time and the current appeal with which high-budget cinema impacts on viewers. Avant-garde filmmakers pushed the possibilities of the technology available at the time, as do the spectacular films filled with effects, simulations, 3D characters, etc. to date.

The multi-coloured palette of techniques for the creation and manipulation of the moving image in the field of experimental cinema is made up of manual and computer techniques, in the reconciliation of which in a single work or even in a single frame the

authors discover their own "formula". Interestingly enough, at the core of this "formula" is precisely the experiment, by definition without a clear outcome. Each author's style is a consequence of his or her experimentation with diverse techniques. The capabilities of computer software to achieve an "analog" looking imagery preserves, even enhances, viewers' interest in the bygone aesthetics of film stock imperfections.

The analysis of the author-audience communication on the Internet proved that art intended for a defensive audience is unlikely to exist anymore. Current audiences are looking for heterogeneous audiovisual works due to the intense image usage. Video content platforms like YouTube and Vimeo, and independent companies in a sense of creation and distribution like Netflix, Amazon Prime, etc. have irrevocably changed cinema culture. Added to the above platforms is the activity of curated ones that select films based on the ideas and intentions that a particular company embodies through its activities. The proliferation of cinema on the Internet is in a state of forming a whole new conceptual register in whose definitions are woven concepts from different fields such as web design, user experience design. The Internet's transformation of the audience's contact with cinema has removed the sense of eventfulness that accompanies a visit to the cinema for a film screening. Watching audio-visual works of different types is a daily activity of a diverse nature - educational, entertaining, even social due to the opportunities for viewers to communicate with each other (Internet forums intended for cinéastes such as Letterboxd⁴⁹). The latter phenomenon has played a significant role in the profession of film criticism, which is also undergoing a transformation. The contribution of contemporary and future film critics lies in the selection of works in the vast ocean of moving images that are distinguished by significant aesthetics discoveries. A broad knowledge of contemporary cinema audiences provokes professionals to explore screen phenomena more closely and deeply, contributing to the formation of a more sustainable essence of film studies.

Experimental cinema involves a multitude of techniques, some established over the years, others the result of the personal experiments of artists who have devoted their time and efforts searching for visual newness. Due to the technological advances and free distribution of audio-visual works, techniques traditionally used in experimental cinema have been infused into the vast stream of hybrid screen forms, composing the fractal life of the contemporary moving image state. Contemporary audiences are not

⁴⁹ Letterboxd - <https://letterboxd.com/>

afraid of impressive, even shocking works in terms of visuals as well as content; on the contrary, they seek them out. The desire for novelty is shared by both viewers and the filmmakers themselves. In this sense, the group activity of the avant-garde cinema period is unthinkable, because the author's recognition is of an utmost importance. Naturally, there will always be filmmakers, in every type of cinema, who rely on well-studied and perceptually established modes of filmmaking, but the number of visual experimentators will also continually increase. Experimental cinema, with its diverse manifestations, will not only preserve the aesthetic excitement engendered by avant-garde filmmakers, but will also function as a major catalyst in transforming viewers' attitudes and their modus operandi in engaging with audiovisual works.

Contributions of the dissertation.

1. Although Bulgarian scholars such as Alexander Donev, Nadezhda Marinchevska, Bozhidar Manov, Ingeborg Bratoeva, Maya Dimitrova, Radostina Neykova, Vl. Ignatovski, etc., touch upon various moments in the field of experimental cinema, analyzing the screen image and individual visual-artistic practices, the dissertation represents the first of its kind in the country, a detailed study of visual-artistic practices characteristic of experimental cinema.
2. The text presents an attempt to separate the notions of avant-garde and experimental cinema through their aesthetic and historical situating in the screen phenomenon. It explores the aesthetic influence of avant-garde cinema on other types of audiovisual works.
3. The cinematographers studied in the text combine analogue and digital techniques in search of unique expression. The topic of this study is particularly relevant because of the many technical possibilities for creating and distributing audiovisual works in the age of a technological diversity.
4. The work explores the constellations in the author-audience communication in the actual existence of experimental cinema on the Internet. Reflecting on the diversity of empirical examples of experimental screen products in the period of the last twenty-five years or so, the thesis is characterized by a theoretical-practical orientation, covering key stages in the creation and distribution of audiovisual works with experimental aesthetics.

Publications.

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