

REVIEW

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On the dissertation of Angela Angelou Gotsis

CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA – THE DEVELOPMENT OF VISUAL-ARTISTIC PRACTICES

Academic advisor: Prof. Dr Radostina Neykova

The dissertation of Angela Gotsis, submitted for consideration by the academic jury, contains five chapters, a conclusion, and consists of 221 pages. The text is richly illustrated, and the number of films cited is 181.

The candidate has fulfilled the required qualitative and quantitative criteria in relation to publications on the dissertation topic.

The text is lexically rich, readable, and strong. Terms are for the most part used faithfully and there is no misuse of foreign words.

Angela Gotsis is one of the PhD students who has realized most importantly that if left in the deep ruts of theory, the text will lose important practical-applied conclusions and generalizations. This is not to say that she focused only on auteurs and their experimental or avant-garde films. In her doctoral thesis, and in other texts, she explores in depth the development of experimental cinema and avant-garde movements from the 1920s to the present.

In the text it is noticeable that connecting phrases to the quotations are often missing. For example, "In the words of...", "The theorist M. H. notes in his book..." or "I do not accept the statement of...". But CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA - THE DEVELOPMENT OF VISUAL-ARTISTIC PRACTICES focuses on avant-garde schools and movements in cinema. Therefore, when the author aims to make a rational-analytical characterization of the works of these periods, quoting "acutely" without inflected expressions is acceptable. Such linking phrases would be parasitic expressions, and the reader's curiosity is satisfied with the footnotes.

Before proceeding to an in-depth study of experimental cinema, the author also examines the socio-cultural conditions in which avant-garde movements in the various arts emerged. It is an axiomatic truth that the syntheticism of cinema inherits the richness of the other arts. Important avant-garde movements that are analyzed in

the text are expressionism, surrealism, and Dadaism. Angela focuses on the experiments in screen plasticity of avant-garde films from Europe and the USSR. Although effects such as: back drive of the camera, masked shot, multiple screen, double and multiple exposures etc. were also used by Méliès, they are present in Avant-garde films, but they are based on a new kind of dramaturgy and there is a progress in the reception of cinematic art. These are films for an already prepared audience, which I would describe as the "Post-Griffith Generation". In the case of one of Dziga Vertov's films cited, the author uses the term 'multi-layered exposition'. This is a term from light sensitive materials, in this case a black and white negative. In these elementary trick and combination shots it is customary to use the term "multiple exposure." The latter can be found later in the text.

Along with the hallmarks of any new school or movement in world cinema, avant-garde and experimental films are changing. The latter are influenced both by the dominant aesthetics of the different periods and by the technical sophistication of shooting techniques and image media. European cinema has always prided itself on a higher degree of artistic conventionality. Before introducing us to experiments in modern cinematography from the present day, Angela Gotsis's research examines works from analogue experimental cinema. More specifically of handmade experimental films that are distant from physical reality and are unknown to the so-called general viewer.

A particular focus of Angela's text is the analysis of Expressionism and the Kammerspielfilm. The polarities of light and dark, imaginary, and real, demon and angel are some of the elements accompanying Expressionism. For example, deformation and the glass-cheater are elements also present in experimental cinema, but in more extreme plastic solutions.

The distinction between experimental and avant-garde cinema is convincingly defended in the thesis. The great attention to artists working with light-sensitive celluloid is related to their, in the words of the author, "laborious and all-consuming work ". I would add talent. In most of these films, the poetic-metaphorical is the leading element. A symbiosis between abstract thinking and the material world. Today filmmaking is ubiquitous due to the accessibility of technology. Unfortunately, most of the mass production of audiovisual products today, does not expand the boundaries of the concept of film, but is a string of unconscious clichés.

It is difficult to separate from those who work with different software those who have a high visual culture, and even less if they have the skills to present their ideas without the support of a computer. The in-depth analysis of the experimenters in an analogue medium(s) is among the contributions of the thesis. If we compare the differences in **avant-garde and experimental cinema** with those that exist in established schools of cinema and in the work of the "emperors"(Buñuel, Fellini, Antonioni, Bergman, Pasolini). In the schools and movements of cinema there are **recognizable features**, while in the cited directors of auteur cinema there is an **individual style**, which are properly called by Prof. Vera Naydenova "the Olympians of cinema".

Filmmakers in experimental cinema do not enjoy the popularity of the cited artists, but the originality of their works also helps the development of film language on the one hand and is an inspiration for artists of all genres and types of cinemas on the other.

Stephen Woloshen's experiments on the destruction of celluloid is an unusual example of the performance of light-sensitive material. This is one of the most unusual encounters with the creativity of experimental filmmakers. In terms of the reliability of film stock, it is a medium of choice that can survive 600 years if properly stored. We all know how much audio-visual information has become dusty or there are no preserved playback devices. In Angela's text, the structural analysis of experimental cinema takes the lead and there is no room for the technical aspect.

The films of Maya Deren and Kenneth Anger, defined by Adams Smith as *trans* films, also have their place in experimental cinema. They are not legible in terms of structure, but they are films in which individual destinies are woven, and space plays a particular role. The films of Maya Deren and Kenneth Arthur are examples in which life's artistry can become screen's artistry.

Of the new explorations in the field of form, Angela also reflects on Susan Pitt. Her hybrid performances may be the first to use multimedia. Today, theatre and opera abound with multimedia solutions. Often this is not organic and is more of a crutch to the performance. With Susan Pitt there is a boldness and originality to the form, turning its back on everyday life and the groups within it.

Paul Winkler unfolds his ideas in a diametrically opposite direction, by experimenting on documentary material. Most of his films are low-budget, and we know that documentary originals are the pathfinders of small budgets. Many artists have used reportage footage to be later modified into landmark works. Of course, the most popular in this direction is pop art's forlorn Andy Warhol.

Video art has also found a place in the thesis. Its intensive development is also connected with the first camcorder (camera and recorder in one unit). The year is 1997 and the patent is Sony's. Prominent artists in this field do not absolutize new technologies. For Nam June Paik, progress comes not only from technology, but rather from the strong creative element that moves art forward. If we look back, at the history of cinema, we can see that what really mattered was primarily the content, the ideas, the emotions, the message, and the technology was secondary.

Other significant artists with strong creative invention are Bill Viola, Sharyn Nesha, Vito Acconci. And their view is that modern technology only aids the artistic form. We do not look for national identity in their works, but they carry the persistence of primitives. The imagination of the artists after them changes and elaborates their original searches.

The altered screen imagery and plasticity in contemporary documentary is also influenced by the experiments of the avant-gardists. The new documentary cinema, mediated by the means of expression in fiction cinema, leads the spectator's senses to a hypnotic, mysterious understatement that gives the fact, the captured empathy of

life, a kind of ambiguity and mystery. We see these changes in seminal works from the 1990s to the present that straddle the line between documentary and fiction. This includes both reenactments and hybrids with animation and CGI. Fabulist borrowings (altered dramaturgy) are also not uncommon. Namely, bringing some of the fabular structures of fiction film into documentary.

Part of the avant-garde searches in recent years is also net-art. These are experiments that can only stay in the computer and communicate to an audience that values the abstract distribution of ones and zeros that is binary information. Alexei Shulgin and Vuk Kusic are among the most prominent in net-art. They started out as a parody of the avant-garde, but now they participate in specialized festivals and have a large following, mostly in Europe.

For young filmmakers, it is important to know the experimenters in the original. If they limit themselves to references from contemporary cinema, second handedness is inevitable. Angela's practical-applied contribution is precisely to point out to filmmakers, through many examples, the **pioneers of experimental cinema**. Otherwise, one would be repeating the exclamation of Fritz Lang, who, watching in 1965 the early short films collected by Henri Langlois, said: *"Oh, if we had seen all this in 1925! Everything had been discovered, and how much effort we made to rediscover it..."*. Therefore, I confidently recommend that a short preview text with trailers from this work be presented in seminars to film school students.

I have no significant comments on the thesis submitted for defense. The text is thorough and comprehensive on the one hand, and readable on the other. CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA - THE DEVELOPMENT OF VISUAL-ARTISTIC PRACTICES has a contributory character, and this is not only due to the large volume, more important are the conclusions and generalizations contained therein. For me, Angela Gotsis is one of the researchers in the field of border forms in film art.

Unfortunately, I have no personal impressions of Angela, I can only trust the talented and successful supervisor she has worked with.

In conclusion, I accept the thesis and believe that Angela Gotsis meets the criteria and possesses the necessary qualities as well as professional experience.

I vote 'YES'.

01. 01. 2023, Sofia Prof. Dr Emilia Stoeva