

OPINION

From Assoc. Prof. Dr Gergana Georgieva Doncheva, IBSCT-BAS,

Member of the academic jury, acc. to order №535-ПД, dated 7th October 2022
concerning the dissertation of Angela Angelou Gotsis, PhD student at the Screen Arts
Department, Institute of Art Studies, BAS

The proposed dissertation entitled: *Contemporary Experimental Cinema – The Development of Visual-Artistic Practices* deserves high recognition for the efforts of both Angela Gotsis and her supervisor Prof. Dr. Radostina Neykova. The subject is extremely topical but insufficiently studied in the Bulgarian context, which determines the difficult task of researching, studying, and systematizing a huge amount of information (films, sources available on the Internet, extensive bibliography on the topic).

A challenge in the development of the cited topic is the need for in-depth knowledge of the history and theory of cinema (particularly experimental and avant-garde cinema), but at the same time adequate expertise in the specific artistic practices (sand drawing, camera-less techniques, film destruction, film diary, optical printing) applied by the leading names in the field.

The analysis logically begins with the caveat that "*avant-garde and experimental cinema are not synonymous, although they share techniques for creating cinematic imagery and a correspondingly similar aesthetic*" (p.9). Experimental cinema is defined through its two hypostases: 1) a distinct kind of cinema and 2) a visual-artistic practice present in other audiovisual works (p.9). This is followed by a historical overview of the characteristics and development of avant-garde and experimental cinema, which focuses on the historical character of avant-garde cinema with a specific territorial and temporal scope (it concerns primarily Western Europe and the former Soviet Union and is temporally situated in the years between the two World Wars and the decade after the end of World War II). The picture of creative bustle and innovative achievement in the 1920s in the USSR, when the pioneers of Soviet cinema worked: Dziga Vertov, Lev Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Alexander Dovzhenko, is well presented. However, in discussing the political context and the imposed propaganda function as key to cinema, in two places in the text (p.18 and p.48) the term 'social realism' is used instead of the established term 'socialist realism' - the dominant normative aesthetic in Eastern Europe for approximately fifty years.

The author pays attention to the forms of impact of avant-garde cinema in relation to the evolution of the most popular type of cinema - the feature film. The influence of Expressionism and Surrealism and their subsequent transformations are explored in detail in Chapter Three, based on a variety of examples ranging from the post-World War II era to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The work of significant innovators in experimental cinema of the stature of Jonas Mekas, Stephen Walsh, Susan Pitt, Paul Wilker and Gunvor Nelson is explored in

Chapter Four. Through the case study method, Angela Gotsis successfully presents and problematizes their achievements in the field of experimental screen aesthetics. I would like to make special mention of the PhD student's broad knowledge and her obvious commitment to the topic, which allows her to construct a convincing and well-argued text.

The last chapter deals with the present of experimental cinema, which is set in a different communication environment, the Internet, changing not only the nature of filmmakers' work in general, but also of spectators and viewing practices per se. The democratization of access to the means of filmmaking and new forms of distribution on the web provide the opportunity for many more people to realize their ideas; at the same time, however, those working in experimental cinema are becoming increasingly individualistic, that is, the phenomenon of artistic currents driven by the energy of a common ideology and artistic techniques is disappearing.

A major contribution of the dissertation is the demonstrated ability to identify and analyze the unexpected metamorphoses of the cinematic avant-garde, whose aesthetic legacy continues to exert a visible influence today even in mainstream cinema. The PhD student can critically analyze and to formulate credible generalizations, such as her conclusion about the radically changed situation regarding the dynamics of communication between filmmakers and audiences, which puts the spectator in an increasingly active position: he demands more, gets bored faster and seeks new more exciting visual challenges.

In case that Angela Gotsis plans to publish her dissertation as a monograph, I would recommend a stylistic and linguistic revision to avoid possessive participles inappropriate to the academic writing style, such as in the following sentence: "*The expressionist aesthetic in which Lang created his silent works has been glossed over and transformed into the newly created American genre, film noir*" (p.79), expressive definitions that are not typical of scholarly texts: '*nymphs like Isadora Duncan and Louis Fuller blossom*' (p.29), terminological refinements: *the French Cinematheque* instead of the *Cinematheque* (p.52), *Hollywood's films* rather than *Hollywood films* (p.110, p.111), personal names: Christian Metz rather than Mertz, Amos Vogel rather than Vogel, punctuation related to distinct and hyphenated parts.

The expressed minor remarks do not undermine the overall positive impression of an excellent work and of the serious research potential of the author. The doctoral candidate has rigorously fulfilled the aims and objectives defined in the introduction of her dissertation, the abstract also meets the regulatory requirements. All this gives me grounds to recommend to the members of the scientific jury to award Angela Gotsis the educational and academic degree Doctor.

28 December 2022.

Sofia

With respect,

Assoc. Prof. Dr Gergana Doncheva