

Shadows of Hopes: Landmarks for a Plastic History of the Twentieth Century Experimental Film Journals

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This Ph.D. thesis analyses periodicals published during the twentieth century by visual artists and filmmakers in the realm of avant-gardes and experimental cinema. The journals are conceived as plastic, conceptual, complex, and composite objects where text and image interact, cinematic images are reproduced, and photomontages are created.

The dissertation aimed at understanding the unique ways used by visual artists and filmmakers periodicals to create, defend, document, visualize and analyse cinematic paradigms. To what extent have journals become experimental works of texts and images? This study focused on the characteristics of the history of film periodicals, how layouts exhibit aesthetical, theoretical, and poetical dimensions of the cinematic image, how they call into question the perception and the cinematic paradigms, how they offer another insight into the critical history of cinema.

The cinematic image used within journals is a reprint of a single or several frames, either consecutive or isolated. The reprographic technique dematerializes and reifies the image, shifts the photochemical elements onto paper. The layouts of journals, in extracting and staging frames and stills, could recreate filmic idioms in paradoxically relying on stillness. Following the reification process, how do processes like transposing and transforming aim to objectify the image? To what extent do reification and objection address the cinematic image as the material and plastic product of a spatiotemporal apparatus? The reprinted frame is thus observed as the plastic inscription, the second degree of the artwork and the cinematic movement.

The frame gives an introspective look on the overall film from which it is extracted. The objection constitutes a new process in which the image is sensitively and intelligibly objectified. The reification on paper then enables a material, plastic, critical and/or symbolic study. The term 'objection' would describe the actualisation of the object's paradigms, while 'symbolisation'

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would refer to its depiction. Which proportions of objection and symbolisation compose the process?

The process of layout can be interpreted as taking the film to pieces and exhibiting it, leading to the recreation of visual interaction between exhibited frames. To what extent do the reproductions and layouts exhibit the display of spatial, plastic and meaningful interrelations between frames? The layout would compose a visual and textual display of frames taken apart and exhibited, introduced to new forms and significations. These displays are however designed to show, transcribe and comment on the film.

The study aimed at understanding what elements gave the extracted image this exemplary role, to consider the ways film journals form objects in which the artworks exist through interposed articles, frames and stills, in which the context is reflected, timeframes are intertwined between synchronicity and historicity. How do film journals create paradigms of textual and visual interplays: plastics, through material and formal processes of reification and objection, or discursive, through interrelations between texts and images? What form will these new paradigms take: exemplary, illustrative, iconic, demonstrative?

Film journals imply historical paradigms: on the one hand, the specific cultural backgrounds from which they appear, on the other hand each journal aims at documenting cinematic forms. How does an editor-in-chief design a medium, select a corpus and leave their mark upon plastic and critic histories of cinema? How are documentation and subjectivity intertwined? Will journals become archives of ideas and forms, platforms of interpretation? How do journals share a common history? What recurrences or transformations occur?

Journals are used to ensure the movement of the editors' ideas, either collective or singular. How do journals support the editor-in-chief's efforts in building an alternative cinema domain? Details from avant-garde film journals shed a different light on the links between avant-gardes and commercial or institutional cinematographic domains. Studying journals allow an understanding of the various influences of these domains through artworks, artistic careers and frequentations, to reconsider the original secession, autonomy if not separatism of a cinematographic avant-garde domain.

The dissertation focused on a corpus of journals that share similar editorial boards: strictly created by filmmakers and plasticians within the avant-garde realm. The thesis details the paradigms created by each journal and depicts a progressive specialisation. It opens on *Dada I* (1916) by poet Tristan Tzara and visual artist Hans Arp as well as *Dada Sinn der Welt* (1920) printed by artists George Grosz and John Heartfield as to distinguish two original interpretations of the plastic and critic interrelations of texts and images. The comparative approach of journals will reveal the specificities, as well as the shared aspects and differences of these two models.

The second part of the thesis opens on the second issue of *Promenoir* (1922) funded by filmmaker and poet Jean Epstein, which introduces the problem of

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the cinematic form and apparatus. Without reproducing cinematic images, the problems are discussed only through the articles.

Then the study turns to the issue 5-6 *Film* of *G. Material für elementare Gestaltung* (1926), created by painter and filmmaker Hans Richter in which cinema becomes for the first time the epicentre of a single issue. *Close Up*, created by filmmaker and poet Kenneth Macpherson, poet H.D. and writer Bryher, lands solid aesthetical and theoretical basis for avant-garde filmmaking within a collection solely devoted to film. The study of the fifth issue of the second volume (1928) will uncover the characteristic editorial lines of the publication.

Finally, the last part of the study revolves around two journals specialized on experimental cinema: issue 31 of *Film Culture* (1963–1964) published by Jonas Mekas and issue 51–52 of *Cantrill's Filmnotes* (1986) created by filmmakers Arthur and Corinne Cantrill.

Each issue was chosen either for its exemplary and synthetic elements in dealing with the plastic and discursive questions, or the introduction of specific changes that crystallize undergoing transformations. The analysis of each issue follows a similar and systematic scientific method in which the object is at first observed according to the plastic and problematic specificities of the reproduced images and the designed layouts, then according to the problems unveiled by the corpus and the textual and visual interrelations. The analysis details the precise characteristics to replace the conception of a visual and textual discourse.

The contemporary study of each issue is seized through crossed readings of the archive documents allowed by the editor-in-chief and their collaborators, contemporary journals and writings about art and human sciences. It corroborates and widens the spectrum of understanding of general or specialized artistic questions during the time studied. The confrontation with various implantations and periods, of plastic, theoretical and practical paradigms challenges the intrinsic dimensions of the magazine revealed by the analysis, and replaces it within a widened context. The studied journals will link in a chronological succession, of which incidence would seem reinforced by the progressive specialisation firstly around the cinematic image, then around the avant-garde cinematic image.