AVANT-GARDE AND EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA:
From film to digital
Avant-garde and experimental cinema: From film to digital
Workshop for painting students
by
Pedro Daniel da Costa Ferreira

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ADVISOR: Wojtek Pukocz (ASP Wrocław)
CO-ADVISOR: Daniel Ribas (EsACT – IPB)
PROFILE COORDINATOR: Miguel Carvalhais (FBAUP)
Abstract

Keywords: Avant-garde cinema, experimental, painting, film, video, digital media

Due to the strong relationship between painting and avant-garde cinema since the earliest movements, it is presented a historical reconsideration exploring the association between avant-garde and experimental cinema movements and painting. For a practical propose the workshop “from film to digital” was created with the intention of investigate if painting students should learn about cinema as an artistic practice during their studies. By analysing the history of avant-garde movements in film until the digital media age, by practicing film, animation and video, crossing mediums and relating them as digital media, 8 painting students participated in the short course. For 5 students it was their first experience with video. The workshop had the duration of one semester, 10 hours of theoretical lectures and 30 hours of practical work, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wroclaw (Poland) during the academic year 2012.
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Introduction

Due to the strong relationship between painting and avant-garde cinema since the earliest movements I questioned if painting students should learn about cinema as an artistic practice during their studies. Adding to painting the dimension of time and presenting it as an unconventional practice of cinema outside the mainstream and art cinema, do painting students have abilities to create avant-garde cinema? Are they interested in extending their works in motion paintings? Should avant-garde and experimental cinema be a class in fine arts studies? Through the use of multimedia tools can painting students present artistic potential through cinematic aspects? What is the relationship between painting and avant-garde and experimental cinema? What is the situation for avant-garde and experimental cinema in the digital media age? This dissertation proposes to answer these questions by researching the avant-garde cinema movements and its approach to painting. Through reconsidering the modern and postmodern periods, I explore the avant-garde and experimental cinema approach to painting and its practice in the digital media age. As Sidney Peterson proposed that painting students experiment with film and explore the relationship between mediums with “Workshop 20”¹ after the Second World War, I attempted to continue with his propose, applying it to digital media, by applying the workshop “from film to digital” for painting students and exploring the results through the methods of observation, interviews and questionnaires, answering the proposal along with a qualitative analysis. The research began in the academic classroom with 8 painting students participating in the short course. The workshop had the duration of 10 hours of theoretical lectures and 30 hours of practical work. The students created digital videos and practiced film, animation and video, using different mediums and techniques combining them with the use of computer-interface. They also explored databases in an attempt of media

¹ Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 127
appropriation. Through software (Adobe Photoshop, Premiere, After Effects, Audition and Dragon/iStopmotion), videos were created and further distributed in the online community Vimeo\(^2\), some had public presentations in festivals, and as video installation in the school gallery at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław (Poland), during the academic year of 2012. The students had the opportunity to choose between the workshop and the regular class of Multimedia/Electronic Media included in their study of Painting. To answer “do students have interest in creating experimental cinema?”, they were encouraged to analyse and create experimental cinema rather than obligated to create in particular experimental videos. In addition to the workshop, the essay “Avant-garde and experimental cinema: From film to digital” was created with the aim to make the students aware of the artistic practice until right up to the present day (part of that essay resulted in the state of the art of this paper), and the workshop video documentation\(^3\) was made to give the students opportunity to discuss their work and experience.

**Dissertation motivation and project context**

As a media artist and student I am inspired by avant-garde and experimental cinema, which made me question the approach of experimental cinema and painting. I explore the possibilities of cinematic language and the medium itself, as well as real time and live projection performance and crossing between mediums, manipulating and relating them together with the use of a laptop. I questioned why painting students do not learn about cinema as an artistic practice during their studies, which motivated me to research experimental cinema and its approach to painting for the class of “Photography and Cinema” lectured by Adriano Rangel, where I presented a small paper. This dissertation and workshop are the evolution and application of my previous paper, extended for my graduation thesis. Lately a few schools are opening courses about “Experimental film” or including

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\(^2\) vimeo.com/channels/fromfilm2digitalworkshop

\(^3\) Avant-garde and experimental cinema: from film to digital workshop making of, 19 min., 2012-13
the subject in their studies, for example, the Art Center College of Design, California. In 2011, the Nanyang Technological University School of Art, Design and Media opened the course “Survey of Experimental Film”. In 2012/13 the course of “Experimental Film and Performance Art” started at the San Francisco Art Institute, as well as the course “Artists Film and Video” at the London Metropolitan University. None of these courses are specifically for painting students. Meanwhile, schools are giving more importance to the avant-garde and experimental cinema practice in recent years. My research will introduce a fresh perspective into painting studies, by presenting to painting students the moving image, rhythm, motion and the dimension of time, as an alternative practice of cinema outside the mainstream and art cinema.

Problems and investigation methodology

Should painting students learn about cinema as an artistic practice during their studies? What is the relationship between avant-garde and experimental cinema with painting? What is the situation of avant-garde and experimental cinema in the digital media age? Do painting students have the ability to create avant-garde cinema? Have they interest in extending their works in motion paintings? Should avant-garde and experimental cinema be a class in fine arts studies? By the use of multimedia tools can painting students present artistic potential through cinematic aspects? Do students have interest in creating experimental cinema? The methodology applied to solve the investigation problem “Should painting students learn about cinema as an artistic practice during their studies?” is a reconsideration of the avant-garde and experimental cinema history and its approach to painting until the digital media age, and the practical workshop “from film to digital” is used to gather research. The methods of observation, interviews to professionals and questionnaires to the students are the basis for the qualitative analysis that answers the potential of the works, interest and evolution made by the painting students.
Dissertation structure

This dissertation is structured by “Introduction”, divided into three small introductions that contextualize: “Intro 1: Artistic perspective”, “Intro 2: Innovation and radical practice” and “Intro 3: Terms and tendencies” of experimental and avant-garde cinema during its history. Followed by “Chapter 1: A very different approach”, where I introduce the literature review and formulate a brief historical reconsideration and state of the art approaching avant-garde and experimental cinema to painting until contemporary practices. Starting with “Modernism: Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism”; the establishment and practice of “Abstract Film”; its development through “Abstract Expressionism: Cinema action”; the reaction to Modernism with “Postmodernism: Underground and Structural Film”; followed by “Electronic and video art”, i.e. how early electronic and video art intended to find a new way of painting; “Digital media: Experimental cinema influences” analyses the importance of experimental cinema in the appearance of digital media; and finally “Digital media as avant-garde: Structural digital video and Handmade digital cinema” where we understand the contemporary practices that are bringing radical approach to the avant-garde and experimental cinema by crossing mediums and exploiting digital media. In “Chapter 2: Workshop for painting students: From film to digital” we comprehend the “Materials and methodology” applied during the workshop, the short course “Syllabus” and “Workshop results”. Which proceeds to “Discussion”, exploring the investigation achievements through analysis of the students’ questionnaires and works; “Interview to professionals” analysing the investigation purpose and achievements, concluding the chapter with examination to “The students’ videos”. To finish the dissertation “Conclusion: Perspectives for future” and “Appendix”. 
Intro 1: Artistic perspective

“From generation to generation, cinema is evolving. Today, dozens of filmmaking communities everywhere are inventing new techniques and bringing us new images. Some use new technologies, but the old ones are still surprising us. Artist-run film labs, co-ops, festivals and microcinemas are multiplying all over the world. Today, making a film is easier than ever before. There are so many, hundreds of films to see, and to make.” Pip Chodorov, 4

The history of avant-garde cinema is inserted into two contexts: cinema and moving image culture and the modern and post-modern art movements. It is with the visual arts movement’s context that the history of the avant-garde and experimental cinema is associated, as we will shortly analyse further. Cinema, the new medium of the 20th century, was developing narrative and editing techniques in the earlier 1900s and started to be practised from an artistic perspective along with the beginning of abstract painting movements. Taken into a new visual territory, it became a non-representative cinema far away from the narrative model. During its history there existed many terms and tendencies that distinguished avant-garde cinema, making it difficult to define. Differing from the Hollywood cinema that rejected the modern art methods and conformed cinema in a traditional form of narration, avant-garde cinema embraced the radical break with the past, creating a cinema without borders, without story, characters or dialogues. The birth of the Abstract Film movement happened during the 1910-20s establishing itself on the course of the modern art movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Constructivism. Abstract Film was based in Europe, later spreading into a bigger international arena. This first generation of artists defended film as an art form, to be treated as high art like the other traditional arts. They were mostly painters, sculptors, photographers or graphic artists supplementing their work with filmmaking, such as Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Walter Ruttmann and Fernand Léger. Resisting the narrative commercial cinema, artists encouraged film to be recognized as an art

4 Chodorov, “Free Radicals – A History of Experimental Film”, 2010
medium. During the 1930s, Len Lye emerged as the most significant artist responsible for the development of handmade films exploring complex processes in print techniques and creating image layers. Lye shaped a unique identity within avant-garde and experimental cinema. The handmade film became a genre influencing the next generations. These first avant-garde filmmakers "passed a complex legacy of ideas to the next movements in film, video and digital art", narrative avant-garde, discontinuity montage, handmade films, overlapping images, printing techniques, loop and repetition and optical illusions.

A new generation of filmmakers grew in the USA post-Second World War and with the emergence of Abstract Expressionism, followed the steps of the first generation. Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage and Kenneth Anger took film as an artistic medium itself during the 1940s. They made a fundamental pictorial achievement, concerned with the relationship between the form of the work and the subject-matter, creating signifiers and signifieds. Stan Brakhage removes the control of animated shapes in favour of expressive textures. In the late 1950s artists presented different interests, the art world was divided into three tendencies, “the post-painterly abstraction, conceptual art and pop art”, artists opposed to the institutionalization of modern art such as “Modernism” by provoking a counterculture from which emerged the Underground Film and Structural Film. Thereby reducing film to the minimum characteristics of cinema creating a new form excluding symbolism, narrative and eliminating personal expression. In the 1960s there was an expansion of artistic work made by mixing film, video and digital media. Video became an artistic practice separated from the experimental film. Through live manipulation with the use of synthesizers, the electronic tool is treated as a medium with its own characteristics. Followed in video art and live

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5 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british practice”, 50
6 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british practice”, 71
performance, cinema starts to be practiced as Expanded Cinema.\textsuperscript{7} The context of early Video Art was combining performance-event-based and anti-object footage, constructing “an attack on high modernism and museum culture”\textsuperscript{8}. There was a special interest by sub-cultures, resulting in video art, social documentary and installations, some requiring the viewer’s interaction, therefore making the viewer a collaborator and not a spectator.\textsuperscript{9} Artists were divided between experimental filmmakers and video artists, resulting from different ideals and generations. They began to represent a post-modernist approach influenced by the Underground films of Andy Warhol. By rejecting modernism, “artists return to subject matter outside film’s own material and ontological concerns”.\textsuperscript{10} Video was a new medium to produce new images. With the technological evolution, compact cassettes, lightweight camcorders and the flexible Sony editing systems of the 1980s allowing the Scratch video movement based in rapid montage.\textsuperscript{11} Since the 1990s, art galleries embraced video for the first time and the digital media became the avant-garde — artists achieved new interpretations of image, combining existing material and generating images using computer interaction. Throughout its history, several techniques were invented and developed, single framing, painted or scratched film, extended dissolves, long-takes, flicker editing, cut-ups, fake synch, outdated film stock, found footage, out-of-focus, intermittent projection, media appropriation, and many others. These techniques were taken up and imitated in film FX, music videos, VFX and TV advertising. Experimental cinema pioneered the manipulative techniques that became normalized and can be found in our software presets, visual popular culture and digital media.


\textsuperscript{10} O’Pray, “Avant garde film: forms, themes and Film passions”, 108

\textsuperscript{11} See more: “WRO, “From Absolute Cinema to Future Film” (2009)” and “Rees, “A History of Experimental and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice” (1999)”
Malcolm Le Grice (1982) classifies the avant-garde films into four categories: \(^{12}\) firstly, the perceptual film started by Duchamp. These films try to examine or create experiences with mechanisms working on the perception and nervous system level; example of these films were made by Peter Kubelka, Paul Sharits, Brigit and Wilhelm Hein. Secondly – loop and image repetition – started by Leger in *Ballet Mecanique* (1924). Also a style used by Bruce Conner, John Wieland, Kurt Kren, Peter Gidal, and Malcolm Le Grice. Thirdly – manipulation experiments – experimenting with film print processes and re-shooting as seen in the work of Pat O’Neill, Klauss Schonherr, Hollis Frampton, Ken Jacobs and Michael Snow. These three categories give attention to the film’s own materiality. The fourth category – projection and projector – includes Expanded Cinema and the American abstract experiments by Jordan Belson and Vortex Concerts.

Among its history, the avant-garde was marked by historical moments of tension and radical activity, manifested by individuals and organizations creating films that break through borders, refusing conventions, challenging artists to explore the film practice outside the mainstream. The many terms and tendencies to describe avant-garde cinema shows that the artist is completely conscious of his own work. The use of digital media gives huge control over the final work bringing us new visions in a new territory. Contemporary artists carry on the avant-garde and experimental cinema practice through employing hybrid techniques, combining handmade film, video and digital technologies, live performing forms and installation, developing and innovating the methods to create avant-garde and experimental cinema. Avant-garde and experimental cinema are significant art forms of practice.

\(^{12}\) Le Grice, “Abstract Film and Beyond”, 105-121
“(...) The vanguard filmmakers do not have any term to define their work, their works are merely cinema.” Dominique Noguez, 13

Cinema offers to the visual arts the illusion of movement. In 1907 Bergson describes the illusion that cinema creates, calling it “cinematographic illusion”,14 explaining the illusion of perception and the reproduction of false movement offered by cinema. Avant-garde cinema concerns films and videos made by single-artists, small production groups that are mostly self-founded or small budget compared to art cinema or industrial cinema, which explores cinema to the extreme without limits. Avant-garde questions and challenges the codes and borders of cinema. It rejects and criticizes mainstream entertainment cinema.15 Dominique Noguez (1976) in “Qu’est-ce que le cinema experimental? Sa situation en France”16 said that experimental cinema is hard to qualify; Marcel Maze (1976) in “Un mouvement se constitue”17, defines it as a different cinematography, cinema of art and essay, research, non-commercial, without any other intention than its own movement. For Claudine Eizykman and Guy Fihman (1976) in “Un mouvement se constitue”18, it is non-narrative cinema, non-representative and non-industrial. Noguez19 notes the etymological meaning of “experimental” that originates from Latin, and descends from the verb *experiri* (to try, to essay), *experimentalis*, *experimentaum*, inducing the idea of investigation. It appears for the first time in 1503, related to medicine, meaning that the experience is based in the observation of facts. Experiencing at that time is to sense a

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13 Noguez, “Qu’est-ce que le cinema experimental? Sa situation en France”, “Une Histoire du Cinéma”, 54
14 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 4-6
16 Noguez, “Qu’est-ce que le cinema experimental? Sa situation en France”, “Une Histoire du Cinéma”, 45
17 Mazé, “Pour un cinema différent”, “Une Histoire du Cinema”, 64
18 Eizykmand, Fihman, “Un mouvement se constitue”, “Une Histoire du Cinema”, 59
19 Noguez, “Qu’est-ce que le cinema experimental? Sa situation en France”, “Une Histoire du Cinéma”, 51
phenomenon in the manifestation of the facts. In an aesthetic sense, to experiment does not necessarily mean to create what we do not know or to create without intention, for Kuleshov, “the kino-eye method is the scientific-experimental study process of the visible world”.20 In the beginning of the 1900s, important artistic movements and theoretical documents pushed for experiments in cinema, which made “cinema jumps out from a system into a free cinema, exceptional and creative – experimental. Everything is possible”.21 Avant-garde refers then to artists or works that are innovative and experimental, relating art, culture and politics, crossing the borders of what is accepted in a cultural environment. This kind of cinema does not have specified rules for production, shooting, projection, duration and distribution. The experimental practice is a practice that explores the cinematic formal and structural aspects of cinema, and techniques to bring innovation. Avant-garde cinema is the movement and attitude that led to practicing and experimenting with cinema as an art medium. I intend to explore the avant-garde cinema as an idea that carries on in contemporary radical artistic practice bringing innovation and new approaches rather than just the “avant-garde” as a normalized style or accepted techniques by the visual culture. With the evolution of new technologies, digital media and the Internet, the avant-garde presents as software, described by Lev Manovich (2002). The digital media allows us to experiment in new ways, cheap and simple to use. By means of software media is interpreted and generated allowing new imagery interpretations, through databases media is appropriated and manipulated allowing new paths of exploitation. Therefore allowing hybrid combination between film, video and digital media.

20 Kulechov, “Kinoglaza k Radioglazu”, 109-115
21 Noguez, “Qu’est-ce que le cinéma experimental? Sa situation en France”, “Une Histoire du Cinéma”, 52
Intro 3: Terms and tendencies

“People talk about experimental film, avant-garde film, etc... But there is no experimental film or avant-garde film... There’s just film, in which some people make shit, some make soup, others make films like beans, and then some make highly refined dishes, like we do.” — Maurice Lemaître, 22

There are many terms to describe avant-garde cinema: experimental, absolute, pure, non-narrative, underground, expanded, abstract. None of them are generally accepted or satisfactory; the consequence is that the term “avant-garde” is rejected by many filmmakers. “‘Pure Cinema’ (which was purely cinematic), ‘Integral Cinema’ (Germaine Dulac’s phrase, using ‘Integral’ in the French sense of ‘Wholly and completely’) and finally the two socio-political terms ‘Avant-Garde’ and ‘Experimental’, the first of which unfortunately implies military scouts invading enemy territory and the second of which sadly implies the filmmaker groping for some unclear result.” 24 Among many terms and tendencies, “avant-garde cinema” and “experimental cinema” are the two terminologies that predominate in describing this kind of cinema, “it’s also common to relate avant-garde cinema with the European cinema of the beginning of the century and the term experimental to the American avant-garde cinema”. 25 In the 1920s the tendencies for this kind of cinema were pure cinema, integral cinema, absolute, visual music, abstract or rhythmic. As the 1950s approached, the artists understood that “experimental” meant that their films were not finished works, not completed, but tries and essays, and as a result emerged the terms “personal cinema”, “private cinema” and “home-film”. Earlier in the 1960s, the terms “individual cinema” and “independent cinema” replaced the words “experimental” and “avant-garde”. These new terms were rejected as they did not

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22 Lemaître, “Free Radicals – A History of Experimental Film”, 2010
23 See more: “WRO, "From Absolute Cinema to Future Film", (2009)”
24 Moritz, “The Absolute Cinema”, “From Absolute Cinema to Future Film”, 52
26 Visual Music or colour music was explored during the 19th century and had impact in visual music experiences developed during the 20th century and in the emergency of abstract painting. The essence of Visual Music is the analogy between colours and music and also to transmit the sensation of sounds by colours.
correspond with the reality and a new term arrived – “new cinema” or “young cinema”, however, the expressions continued to be ambiguous in attempting to describe this type of cinema. During the 1960s appeared a general term, “New American Cinema”, a name introduced by the group of filmmakers, such as Shirley Clarke, Emile de Antonio, Markopoulos Gregory, Robert Frank, Adolfas Mekas, Jonas Mekas, Peter Bogdanovich and Lionel Rogosin. Working in an independent mode, they created the “New American Cinema Group” with the intention to promote and distribute avant-garde films. “Nobody wanted to distribute our films. So we had to create our own distribution centre”. Underground, Structural, non-commercial, innovative and politically complicated, in resistance and conflict to Hollywood. Structural digital video and Handmade digital cinema are the contemporary tendencies for avant-garde cinema, meanwhile the terms that still keep up are: avant-garde or experimental cinema (film, video or digital).

27 Mekas, “Free Radicals – A History of Experimental Film”, 2010
CHAPTER 1.
A very different approach

“Art can be anything, and that’s what produced the “avant-garde”. (...) I just improvised, as I do in... I give chance a chance, as I do in painting, as I do in film. That was the main credo of Dada: the discovery of chance as a possibility of expression.” Hans Richter, 28

The Lumière brothers demonstrated the “cinématographe” and their first films in Paris and London between 1895-96. In the late nineteenth century realist painting and drama dominated art form. “Films quickly passed through a primitive state where they were single-shot and very short, made by entertainers and showmen for fairgrounds and music-halls. Around 1903 to 1905, by capital investment and dramatic invention, films became longer, more elaborate and were shown in purpose-built cinemas”.29 Twenty years after the Lumière’s experiments, fiction film had aims of large magnitude, narrative cinema smoothed the traces of change in shot, angle of vision and introduced “invisible editing” to construct continuity without trace, markedly in D. W. Griffith’s film Intolerance (1916). At the same time, cinema started to be experienced from an artistic perspective. Throughout Abstract Film, animated abstract forms influenced by painting and motivated by representing music in a pictorial form, allowed a new purpose of exploiting colour, light and shape, creating paintings in time. In this chapter we are going to answer “what is the relationship between painting and avant-garde and experimental cinema?”, by introducing a brief historical review and examining the principal avant-garde movements and artists in cinema. We will start by introducing the Modernism movements such as Abstract Film and how it evolved into Abstract Expressionism and Action cinema. Moving on to the Postmodernism attitude, Underground and Structural film movements. Followed by Electronic and Video art as a research of new ways of paintings. At last answering to the question “what is the

28 Ritcher, “Free Radicals – A History of Experimental Film”, 2010
29 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british practice”, 75
situation for avant-garde and experimental cinema in the digital media age?", by understanding the influences of experimental cinema in the appearance of the digital medium and its manifestation as avant-garde in the contemporary circumstances by presenting the Structural digital video and Handmande digital cinema practices that are bringing radical approach to the avant-garde and experimental cinema by crossing mediums and digital media exploitation.

1.1. Modernism: Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism

The rise of Cubism (1908-12) brought new theories of time, space and perception in art, breaking with the analogy between picture and perception, decomposing forms, presenting changing viewpoints and angles and showing brush marks to emphasise the flat surface of canvas. These theories “led artists to try to put painting in motion through the film medium”.30 The Futurists were influenced by the theories of Bergson, representing movement and the velocity of subjects. The Italian Futurists turned directly to action, redefining the concept of art, creating a dynamic and radical action with their provocative manifestos. In the Painting Manifesto31 the Futurists call for the representation of movement and dynamism in the canvas, and in the manifesto of Futurist Cinema32 they declare that cinema should become impressionistic, synthetic, dynamic and free. At the same time, editing techniques and narrative commercial cinema was growing and evolving. The avant-garde cinema in Europe was anti-Hollywood, in style, form and production, attempting to create a model for film outside the categories of entertainment and fiction, against the USA industry. Dadaism, inspired by Futurism, was a much more contesting movement. Invented in 1916, it appealed to the

30 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british practice”, 20
31 Marinetti, “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting”, 1911
32 Marinetti, Corra, Settimelli, Ginna, Balla, Chiti, “The Futurist Cinema”, 1916
nonsense and chance in art. The Dada films\textsuperscript{33} were opposed to visual pleasure and anti-retina, requesting the viewer’s participation. \textit{Le Retour a la Raison} (1923) by Man Ray, \textit{Ballet Mechanique} (1924) by Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphey, and \textit{Anémic Cinéma} (1926) by Marcel Duchamp, create an exploitation of optical illusion and visual reaction. Surrealism like Futurism was founded by a group of artists that “dominated the modern art between the two world wars, evoking Dadaist anti-aesthetic during the 1920s”\textsuperscript{34}. They rejected imposing order and musical structure in an attempt to provoke contradiction, discontinuity and dissonant montage. The surrealist films make complex connections between images — meaning and sense are questioned. The purpose of discontinuity is to shift against the continuity of narrative film, exactly when narrative codes were reaching perfection. The temporal discontinuity concept and photographic illusion are used to demonstrate the state of dreams, for example in \textit{Un Chien Andalou} (1929) by Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel, and \textit{L'Etoile de mer} (1928) by Man Ray. Usually surrealist cinema is understood as “a search for the excessive and spectacular image, what the group were in fact trying to find was the wonderful in the banal, they rarely used special effects and high-grade illusions with what Surrealism is always associated with”.\textsuperscript{35} Surrealism became the most popular movement in modern art still influencing the mainstream, advertising and cinema industry.\textsuperscript{36} The Futurists were the first artists to make films by themselves. Between 1909-20 artists started to experiment with the new medium. Avant-garde film went in two directions. The narrative avant-garde or art cinema, cine-poem, is

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See more: “Rees, “A History of Experimental and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, (1999)”
\item Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 41
\item Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 44
\item Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 44-49
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
represented in movements such as French Impressionism\textsuperscript{37}, the Soviet school\textsuperscript{38} and German Expressionism. During the 1920s, the French Impressionist artists tried to move cinema to an artistic practice independent from literature and theatre by creating the genre — narrative avant-garde film. These artists had special interested into exploring the illusion of movement and the \textit{photogénie}\textsuperscript{39} concept. The other direction was a non-narrative approach in film form, the filmstrip treated like a painting canvas, the approach to painting, handmade films, Abstract Film, pure, absolute and visual, the direction that we will follow in this paper.

1.2. Abstract Film

“They are not merely representations of paintings, but rather are new kinds of painting that expand the parameters of field, providing us with new ways to think about, present, and experience painting. In so doing, they push us to redefine our conceptions of artistic practice, both in terms of painting and cinema.”\textit{ Gregory Zinman, 40}\n
Abstract Films provokes questions about what we are looking at, challenging our perception. “Abstraction always means something. By abstraction the artist creates a new world or reveals one that has been previously hidden: “choice + chance” is the equation at the heart of the proof of handmade cinema.”\textit{41} The abstract handmade film is a fusion of its formal characteristics such as colour, shape, form, depth, movement, rhythm, filmstrip intervention and its physical and synesthetic abilities. Painting in time “is dynamic, alive, in the process of becoming a composition that can only be understood as the entirety of the film, not the end product or last image we see on screen.”\textit{42} It offers a new dimension and an innovative way to represent, understand and perceive painting. Abstract filmmakers have always attempted to achieve a

\textsuperscript{37} See more: “Rees, “A History of Experimental and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, (1999)”
\textsuperscript{38} See more: “O’Pray, “Avant-garde film: forms, themes and passions”, (2003)”
\textsuperscript{39} Photogénie concept was introduced by Louis Delluc and expanded by Jean Epstein, it means the ability of the camera to transform what it portrays giving a augmented moral value
\textsuperscript{40} Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 94
\textsuperscript{41} Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 13, 85
\textsuperscript{42} Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 130
universal form of communication. The Futurist artists Arnaldo Ginna and Bruno Corra made the first experiments of hand painting raw film between 1910-12. In 1914, Léopold Survage wrote about his project Le Rythme Coloré an abstract film relating visual shapes, rhythm and colour. The first experiments from 1910-20s are confused: artists had limitations of equipment and technology, they learned by trial and error. Unfortunately the first films are lost or were never finished. These first experiments gained further interest in the 1920s from German artists. From 1919-25 the Abstract Film (or absolute film) was mainly German avant-garde. Through animation, artists such Oskar Fischinger, Walter Ruttmann, Hirschfeld-Mack, and the Dadaist artists Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter, achieved the movement of abstract forms. Adding the musical aspiration and rhythms of pure forms, they created a new kind of cinema, without narrative or documental aspects attempting to provoke feelings in the spectator. The Abstract Film does not necessarily produce an analogy between musical rhythm and the rhythm of shapes and colours (transforming abstract forms). Eggeling made their first attempts using a scroll-drawing technique by animating forms through long papers, “cinema was a natural extension of painting relating the granular structure of film and projection with the painting canvas” 44. In Diagonal Symphony (1921), Viking Eggeling abstracts forms from the landscape, reducing them to lines. Rhythmus 21 (1923) by Hans Richter plays with the screen space and surfaces using cut-out squares and rectangles to explore the visual dynamic of film, experiencing speed, accelerated editing, black & white and negative-positive, repetition of the same shot, continuous motion and quick insertions of geometric shapes. These two films represent an illusionism of film space in relation to forms and not a direct analogy with musical rhythm. Walter Ruttmann in Opus I (1921) experiments with the rhythm and harmony of curved forms contrasting edged triangles and rectangles. He uses the techniques of scroll paper

43 The project was interrupted and abandoned because of the beginning of the First World War— Le Rythme Coloré, Les soirées de Paris, 1914
44 Sitney, “Tableau historique”, “Une histoire du cinéma”, 11
and painting on glass. Ruttmann’s works attempt to reach a synthesis between painting and music. Throughout, the musical aspect is revealed in the film titles. By the 1930s, Len Lye started to work for the British General Post Office making advertisements, painting animations directly on to transparent film with the function of economic saving. Lye, influenced by Oskar Fischinger, was responsible for the development of handmade film, painting directly in the filmstrip and also explored the complex processes of print techniques such as Gasparcolor, creating image layers. He creates a unique identity, making the handmade film a genre that influenced the next generations. “Lye’s direct films reside between celluloid and canvas, and are works that both document the act of painting and yet can exist only as moving images” 45. For the film *A Colour Box* (1935) abstract patterns are painted directly on film relating the materiality of film and surface marks. In *Trade Tattoo* (1937) there is a mixture of hand painting techniques, photography editing and contrasting colour, which results in a composition of colour. Len Lye created a range of films, from complex hand painted works to the simple scratched white lines over black film. In *Free Radicals* (1958-1979), Lye scratches oscillations in every image to create a nervous movement frame-by-frame with synchronized sound. Around the same time as Lye, emerges the artist Norman McLaren, one of the pioneers of painting and scratching on film, as well as creating synthetic soundtracks 46 along with Oskar Fischinger and Barry Spinello, who utilized the process of drawing directly on the optical soundtrack. 47 The Abstract Film works as an extension of the visual arts, artists were important as filmmakers, painters or sculptors. Mostly these filmmakers were painters concerned with modern art movements and geometric abstraction that found in cinema a new way to expand painting.

45 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 101
47 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 211
The innovations introduced by absolute cinema are referred to by the next generations of film and video artists working within the experimental genres of video art as well as the commercial video clips. The ideas of absolute cinema had also a strong influence on development of computer art in each case when the artists were in search for new forms of expression and creative combination of image and sound. Piotr Krajewski, 48

1.3. Abstract Expressionism: Cinema action

"Brakhage, Deren, Sharits, Frampton and others implied that it was possible to be an artist-film-maker as such, rather than their using film to break down old barriers between art forms or to expand traditional notions of what constituted painting and sculpture." A. L. Rees, 50

During the earlier 1940s, a number of European artists moved to North America — Duchamp, Fernand Léger, Richter, Fischinger, Lye, McLaren, in attempt to escape from the rise of the Second World War. Other artists died — Eggeling (1925), Ruttmann (1941), Eisenstein (1948). 51 “Abstract expressionism was an American post–World War II art movement. It was the first specifically American movement to achieve worldwide influence and put New York City at the center of the western art world, a role formerly filled by Paris”. 52 As with the previous movements in Europe, a radical advance happened in art; Pollock redefined painting with his Action Painting, a radical practice of emphasizing the moment of create a painting. The “new waves of experimental film-makers began to explore film as an art form — growing directly from an engagement with the plastic material of film and light projection”. 53 It was no longer an extension of their artistic work; artists were dedicated exclusively to filmmaking. The American artists were divided into two groups. In one group, the filmmakers that recovered the avant-garde narrative film,
created the genre “psychodrama” or “trancefilm”\textsuperscript{54}. They had strong influences from Surrealism, but gave a different style from the European narrative avant-garde. Psychodrama films “deal with the self by using mythical themes and images, and the film-maker as narrative protagonist.”\textsuperscript{55} James Broughton, Kenneth Anger, Maya Deren, Willard Maas and Marie Menken, Gregory Markopoulos and Sidney Peterson, shared the ideal of personal cinema moving filmmaking into an art form itself. The second group were artists influenced by the German Abstract filmmakers (Ritcher, Ruttmann, Fischinger). They recovered Kandinsky’s synaesthesia\textsuperscript{56} language and the Abstract Film from the 1920s, giving a straight correspondence between image and music. The filmmakers Harry Smith, the Whitney Brothers and Jordan Belson, had a common interest in mysticism and Kandinsky. Searching for a visual language to represent inner visions in a pictorial form. With the Vortex Concerts, Belson combined a “new and ethnic music (using innovative stereo tape recording) with large-scale projections of abstract imagery on the dome of a planetarium”\textsuperscript{57}. In \textit{Early Abstractions} (1946-57), Harry Smith hand painted his films and described himself as a painter and not a filmmaker, considering that his visual language did not require obligatory musical supplement\textsuperscript{58} but, “often played his films as a sort of ‘light show’ with the live jazz performances.”\textsuperscript{59} The Whitney Brother’s\textsuperscript{60} manifested a particular interest by the synchronization of sound and image, resulting in a visual

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} O’Pray, “Avant-garde film: forms, themes and Film passions”, 49
\item \textsuperscript{56} The Kandinsky’s theory concerns the existence of a straight analogy between colours and musical sounds. Synaesthesia is to produce a sense impression by stimulation of other sense. — Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Wassily Kandinsky, 1911
\item \textsuperscript{57} Moritz, “The Absolute Cinema”, “From Absolute Cinema to Future Film, 56
\item \textsuperscript{58} Branco, “Cinema Abstracto: Da vanguarda europeia às primeiras manipulações digitais da imagem”, 41-42
\item \textsuperscript{59} Moritz, “The Absolute Cinema”, “From Absolute Cinema to Future Film: The Absolute Cinema”, 56
\item \textsuperscript{60} See more: “Youngblood, “Expanded Cinema”, (1970)”
\end{itemize}
music experience. John Whitney was pioneering the computer film, experimenting with analogue and digital computers to generate images. His experiments opened a new field of innovative possibilities, technology and light-play, exploring the Dada dogma of chance.

Cinema action emerges from the creative process associated with Abstract Expressionism, the engagement with the process and act of making using spontaneous expression, self-reflexivity, accidents and mistakes, the action of the body itself and sensitivity to film's materiality — cinema as an expressive device. Stan Brakhage explored and innovated the avant-garde film into a personal cinema, differing from the work of Lye or Ruttmann, which had everything under control. "For Brakhage, the painting model is important, for he is attempting to establish a similar relationship between the artist, the camera and the filmic image." His attitude created a break with the conventional rigour and film objectivity. Brakhage "broke most radically with narrative to inaugurate abstract montage, was strongly influenced by Pound and Stein on compression and repetition in language". Brakhage was an impressive artist, his works range "from 9 seconds in Eyemyth (1972), to 5 hours in The Art of Vision (1965)", portraits of family and friends, autobiography, film-poems and landscape films. He focuses on the act of shooting and editing through the use of metric rhythms, camera-style and subject-matter demanding great attention from the viewers to create meaning. "His virtuosic painted films are quite different both in spirit and execution from those works, but similarly offer up some of the most

61 Branco, “Cinema Abstracto: Da vanguarda europeia às primeiras manipulações digitais da imagem”, 44
62 Branco, “Cinema Abstracto: Da vanguarda europeia às primeiras manipulações digitais da imagem”, 45
63 O’Pray, “Avant garde film: forms, themes and Film passions”, 63
64 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 58
65 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 67
challenging handmade films in all of cinema”. He has a personal style that is unique. By the use of overlapped printing, painting and scratches on film to represent and create visions, by inserting different kinds of ink and different densities in the application of colour, he was creating a new essence. “Brakhage repeatedly stated that his painted films were attempts to represent two kinds of seeing. The first is hypnagogic vision, or optical feedback that occurs from within the structure of the eye itself. Rather than responding to the stimuli of light on optic nerves, this closed-eye vision is similar to what results when the retina is excited due to pressure put on the eyeball (from, say, rubbing one’s eyes)”. The film texture is no more limited to forms and objects, it challenges the viewers to question what they are seeing. At this time the avant-garde film is “very close to the process of viewing modern painting”. Later it was expanded into “gestural, mixed-media live art, pioneered by Jacobs, Smith and Warhol”. The Abstract Film influences are distinguished in such artists as José Antonio Sistiaga, Jennifer Reeves, Luther Price, Sara Petty hand draws, Larry Cuba’s computer graphics, among others.

1.4. Postmodernism: Underground and Structural Film

“No suspense! Only the now, as with paintings, with beginnings and endings far from one’s thoughts. From the start there was the allure of the loop.” Ken Jacobs, 72

In the late 1950s, artists opposed to the institutionalisation of modern art such as “Modernism” by provoking a counterculture. Film turned marginal, anarchist and underground, “Aggressive and physical, they

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67 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 156
68 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 67
69 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 66
71 Modernism: approximately from the 1860s to the 1960s; or from Manet to Warhol: Manovich, “Software as avant-garde”, 8
72 Jacobs, “Painted Air: The Joys and Sorrows of Evanescent Cinema”, 2005
reduce the screen to found footage, raw colour and bursts of black and white frames. They kept art outside the museum and its rules, they looked back to earlier times (especially to Dada). In Europe the experiments happened between light-play, basic sound and montage, other artists used film in live performance. In America the period is marked by the Andy Warhol’s films and the film *Scorpio Rising* (1964) by Kenneth Anger. He uses found TV and film footage with stylized portraits to satirize the subject-matter with a contemporary rock music soundtrack, preceded by Bruce Conner’s film *Cosmic Ray* (1961). These ideas flowed into the mainstream and “led to the birth of the music video”. Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren, Jonas Mekas, Jack Smith, Andy Warhol, Bruce Conner or Ken Jacobs, shared the aspiration of being outside the mainstream. The Underground Film led to the Structural film movement. The New American Cinema was the avant-garde movement centred in New York City by the 1960s. P. Adams Sitney uses the term “Structural film” to differ these films from “Formal cinema”. A structural film is composed of static shots, flicker effect, loop, re-shooting, creating a relationship between the film elements in a minimal approach — as seen in the work of Kurt Kren and Peter Kubelka. Distinguish from the formal films, films that explore the materiality of cinema — the style used by Stan Brakage and Andy Warhol. Malcolm Le Grice uses the expression “new formal cinema” to distinguish between the approach seen in Europe and the USA. “In the USA there was a reaction against Underground cinema, particularly against Warhol’s work, his intentions were not expressly formal but

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73 “Found footage” was perceived in diverse ways; it was derived from the Dadaist techniques of photographic or painting collage; afterwards it was associated with Duchamp’s idea of adopting ‘ready made objects’ by art; nowadays we discover in it the archetype of the basic computer practices of sampling, remix, looping, digital deformation and transformation of images as well as the post-modern method of quotations and borrowings.”: Krajewski, “From Absolute Cinema to Future Film”, 66

74 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british practice”, 56-63

75 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british practice”, 62

76 Branco, “Cinema Abstracto: Da vanguarda europeia às primeiras manipulações digitais da imagem”, 49
induced a provocative and neo-dada reaction.” 77 In America, Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Kurt Kren and Ernie Gehr, shared an interest in the experience of time by the spectator and the represented time. The manipulation of time and space was equally a property of film form, so that editing could undermine the surface realism of cinematography to create a new language that was film’s alone. 78 This representation presented a rupture in the complex temporality of films by Buñuel, Dali, Cocteau, Deren and Brakhage, which was concerned with perception, associated with the psychological circumstances of the spectator and not with the experience of time. In Europe, Peter Kubelka, Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice approach was to continue the experiments of the 1920s. Peter Kubelka took to the extreme in montage construction and rhythm. In Arnulf Reiner (1960) he erases any kind of image, making alternations between black and white frames, creating an abstraction in cinematography independent of painting abstraction. He works through time abstraction without any transformed painting forms 79 with the intention to illustrate abstract rhythms. “Structural film proposed that the shaping of film’s material – light, time and process – could create a new form of aesthetic pleasure, free of symbolism or narrative eliminating personal expression and eliciting the active participation of the viewer in the film.” 80

“Cinema is not about movement. That’s the first thing. Cinema is not movement, but the projection of still images in a speeded rhythm. Giving the illusion of movement, certainly, but that’s a special cause and cinema was invented originally to that special cause. Cinema is the quick projection of light impulses (...) having the possibility to attribute to the light a dimension in time.” Peter Kubelka, 81

77 Le Grice, “Abstract Film and Beyond”, 88
78 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 59
79 Branco, “Cinema Abstracto: Da vanguarda europeia às primeiras manipulações digitais da imagem”, 53
80 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 74
81 Cited in: Branco, “Cinema Abstracto: Da vanguarda europeia às primeiras manipulações digitais da imagem”, 53; Quoted in: “An Interview with Peter Kubelka by Jonas Mekas”, Film Culture, 44 (Spring 1967), 45
By rejecting modernism, “artists return to subject matter outside film’s own material and ontological concerns”.  

A few avant-garde filmmakers were already working on publicity and advertising for commercial industries in the 1920s and since the youthful boom of consumerism during the 1960-70s the visual culture did not create new radical forms. Even the 1990s widespread of computer and mid-2000s Web 2.0 did not bring new innovative forms of expression. Postmodernism style no longer represents new approaches in art, artists do not invent new forms, instead they re-use past media and artistic styles resulting in a mix and combination of avant-garde styles and popular culture.

### 1.5. Electronic and video art

"Beginning in the 1950s, film artists such as Hy Hirsh, Mary Ellen Bute, Norman McLaren, and John Whitney had begun to experiment with new, non-filmic image-producing devices, so as to introduce new visual elements into their films." [Zinman, 83]

Since the first computer experiments by John Whitney and his mythical abstract animations of the 1940-50s, artists have explored the electronic arts in such diverse fields as visual arts, music, dance, architecture and performance. The space between technology and art allowed artists to explore a new field of image construction and manipulation: "Just as abstract filmmaking had arisen from the art world and not the cinema world, so too was video art more directly influenced by arts other than film." [Zinman, 84] The context of early video art was combining performance and event, anti-object footage, constructing “an attack on high modernism and museum culture”. [Rees, 85] In the early 1960s video art was “a continuum of handmade moving-image practices that seek to paint in time as well as finding ways of developing personal image-making instruments” [Zinman, 86]. Scott

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82 O’Pray, “Avant garde film: forms, themes and Film passions”, 108
83 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 458
84 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 523
85 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 90
86 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 50
Bartlett, Nam June Paik, Stephen Beck, Ture Sjoland, and Jud Yalkut made works with the intention not to be exhibited in the conventional cinema projection, but rather on installed screens in galleries and museums, the space allowed to make single-channel or multi-screen installations, allowing the viewers to participate in the artwork. “These artists’ experiments with cathode-ray oscilloscopes, designed to observe varying signal voltage, paved the way for artists’ interventions into the television screen: first via signal distortion, then via the construction of increasingly sophisticated artisanal devices that granted control over existing broadcast signals—and eventually created and synthesized new signals.”87 Artists saw video as a new form of painting88 and as an expansion of painting, allowing the achievement of painterly aspects (colour, texture, shape, motion, overlaying) by creating moving images with their own attributes. “The analogue computers of John Whitney and the video synthesizers of Nam June Paik and Steve Beck look back to abstract painting to make meaning while simultaneously pointing to the moving image’s continuing history of technological change and forecasting the increasingly democratic tendencies of moving-image production.”89

The video art innovations and developments happened along with the evolution of Moog audio synthesizer and electronic music. “Electronic music created a new type of space: it broke away from traditional instrumental performance, and consequently, also to a large extent from traditional concert halls.”90 Video artists liberated moving images “from recorded media and taking them to a deeper intermedia realm of improvisatory performance informed by both music and painting”91. This allowed collaboration between artists, real-time image processing,

87 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 458
88 To learn more about you should check: “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode, Gregory Zinman, 2012”
89 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 452
90 Krajewski, “From Absolute Cinema to Future Film”, 13
91 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 497
manipulating and mixing of television signals and video tape\textsuperscript{92}, “using voltage control allows the user to manipulate in real time the parameters of the video signal—hue, chroma, luminance, horizontal and vertical sync—with signals generated by oscillators”\textsuperscript{93}. From the 1960s to 1990s there was an expansion of video as a medium in the wider culture. In the 1970s artists were divided between experimental filmmakers and video artists, resulting from different ideals and generations. There was special interest from sub-cultures, resulting in video art, social documentary and installations, some requiring the viewer’s interaction, therefore making the viewer a collaborator and not a spectator. The real-time aspect of video provides a medium based in electronic signals differing from the photosensitive image such as film.\textsuperscript{94} These formal characteristics and conceptual aspirations made video a distinctive art practice separated from the avant-garde film.

“Cinema for me is one big tree with different branches that change. The novel, for example, is a main branch and then different writers come in, so there are changes within that one branch. Similarly, in film there are different branches that come in – video art and video filming – but they are still the art of the moving image. Technologically, filming with video cameras or producing work through computers is like painting using oil or watercolours. These are different varieties but still they’re part of what is called painting, part of what are called moving images.” Jonas Mekas, \textsuperscript{95}

Video gives direct access to image production and manipulation, and it is also cheaper than film. Brought new possibilities for performing and to cross between film, video and digital, creating hybrid editing. In the mid-1980s, the British sub-culture of Scratch video\textsuperscript{96} emphasised the fast-cut editing and improvisation on the aesthetics of experimental film,

\textsuperscript{92} See more: “WRO, "From Absolute Cinema to Future Film" (2009)"
\textsuperscript{94} Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 112
\textsuperscript{95} Mekas, “Reflections on avant-garde cinema”, BFI, Georgia Korossi, 2013
\textsuperscript{96} See more: “Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, (1999)”
influenced by Bruce Conner and Structural films. Video-makers used found footage and re-edited TV footage, based on low-tech 8mm and Super-8. At the same time the rise of music videos was spreading into new commercial rock culture. The experimental artists blended into the commercial sector, the youthful boom of consumerism made the young generation the market leaders of mainstream culture, “embracing the rise of media studies and valorisation of popular style”. Artists presented a post-modernist attitude, no more experimenting with the formal aspects of cinema. Artists like Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman explored multi-screen projection, art cinema, multimedia production, weaving text and digital collage. The British artists graduating in the 1990s took video straight to the mainstream gallery world. The material is often appropriated and remixed, “viewing is subjective ‘psycho’-logical act which owes nothing to self-expression”, excluding the idea of process. Choosing the gallery rather than cinema theatre audience, Sam Taylor-Wood, Gillian Wearing, Douglas Gordon, Mona Hatoum, Jayne Parker, John Smith, Kate Elwes, Kate Maynell and Judith Goddard, pushed the moving image to be embraced by the art world influenced by the Andy Warhol’s films. By manipulating image and time with conceptual values artists create new works “in a ready-made “duchampian” style using their images and what they represent in terms of popular culture as their own work and material composition”. Artists presented interest in events and space, live performance and installations rather than structure or perception, remixing appropriated material creating political and cultural appreciations or digital abstractions as well as mimicking experimental

97 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 98
99 Rees, “A History of Experimental Film and Video: from the canonical avant-garde to contemporary british pratice”, 100
100 Nabais, “A autópsia digital do cinema: Um mapa pessoal dos encontros do cinema com o computador”, 5
cinema effects. Electronic and video arts passed strong influences to the contemporary online remix culture of YouTube and VJ culture.

1.6. Digital media: Experimental cinema influences

“The digital, as notions of trial and error, personal style, aesthetics, collaboration, prosthetics (light pens and Wacom tablets rather than brushes and stencils), and problem-solving are as vital to understanding the techniques and underpinnings of computer-generated imagery as handmade cinema.” Gregory Zinman, 101

Digital media allows the combination of different kinds of media through computer interfaces. Digital technologies digitize and transform encoded information into binary data, stored in digital form. Malcolm Le Grice (1999) says that it is difficult to define digital media as a medium with its own distinct characteristics, although he distinguishes digital art from modernist art. Modernism rests on the physical properties of the medium in opposition to digital systems that have the ‘non-tactility’ characteristic – processes of zeros and ones. 102 These processes are analysed and performed by software and hardware, responding to inputs and outputs given through interaction with artists or spectators. The avant-garde cinema techniques such as scratching, drawing and painting directly on film, velocity manipulation and live projection are the main influences in the appearance of such practices as VJ and Live Cinema, by manipulating images in real time, through audio-visual performance, relating cinema with space, time, projection, live montage and musical collaboration. 103

“The idea proffered by Lev Manovich, Berys Gaut, and other contemporary new-media critics—that digital cinema represents a form of painting—in fact has clear roots in artisanal, analog experimental cinema.” Gregory Zinman, 104

Malcolm Le Grice (1999) noted four directions of the experimental film that are key for digital media. 105 Firstly, the Abstract Film – abstraction of visual qualities from their representational function, bringing the concept

101 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 460
103 Nabais, “A autópsia digital do cinema: Um mapa pessoal dos encontros do cinema com o computador”, 11, 31-32
104 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 569

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and aesthetic of programmable principles through the computer, pioneered by John and James Whitney in the 1950s. Secondly, transforming image film by transforming the photographic image, as Man Ray and Len Lye did in their experiments, manipulating and transforming the real image, allowing the components of data and raw material to operate in a new form. Thirdly, Non-Narrative Film (structural and surrealist) – the cinematic non-linear models are related directly to the intrinsic feature of Random Access Memory in computers. And finally, Expanded Cinema – by using specific locations for performance or installation and demanding the involvement of the audience, Expanded Cinema created the concept of interaction. If Le Grice noted influences of experimental cinema on digital media, Manovich (2002) describes in the essay “Software as avant-garde” the transformation of the 1920s avant-garde techniques into software through the human-computer interface in the 1990s and changed into new paradigms. “The avant-garde strategy of collage re-emerged as a "cut and paste" command, the photo-collage as hundreds of image layers in a digitally composited video, the Dziga Vertov overlapped shots together in Man With a Movie Camera (1929) become a dozen windows opened at once on a computer desktop”. Consequently, artists nowadays continue to mix the old techniques together, creating new combinations by manipulating, generating and transforming digital data. Artists are divided, into those that appropriate and manipulate cinematographic works in an electronic and digital form to create new cinematic experiences, and the artists that analyse the formal structure of analogue mediums in function to transform them in data bases exploring its characteristics and potentials by using computer-interface. Mia Makela (2008) defines “Cinema” as a term that now is “understood as embracing all forms of configuring

106 Manovich, “Software as avant-garde”, 3-4, 8
107 Nabais, “A autópsia digital do cinema: Um mapa pessoal dos encontros do cinema com o computador”, 7
moving images, beginning with the animation of painted or synthetic images\textsuperscript{108}, which makes the digital moving images a cinema practice.

1.7. Digital media as avant-garde: Structural digital video and Handmade digital cinema

“The paintbrush thus finds new life as a waveform knob on a synthesizer, and the canvas takes on new qualities as a screen.” \textsuperscript{109} Gregory Zinman, 565

Manovich claims that new media represents a new avant-garde, which differs from the traditional. The traditional avant-garde brought new forms and ways of representing reality and how to see the world. The new media as avant-garde is no more concerned with creating new ways of representing reality, it “is about new ways of accessing and manipulating information and its techniques are hypermedia, databases, search engines, data mining, image processing, visualization, simulation.”\textsuperscript{110} By media access, analysing, generation and manipulation, “existing media images are juxtaposed together in order to be analysed”\textsuperscript{111}, new possibilities of moving image exploitation are obtained in a new territory, with the use of a computer interface. If, for the 1920s, the new medium was film, photography, new printing and architecture technologies, for the digital media society, the new media that represent radical innovation are the CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, Web sites, computer games, hypertext and hypermedia applications.\textsuperscript{112} The software codifies the old techniques of the 1920s avant-garde and allows new techniques of working with media that are “creating a new avant-garde for the meta-media society”.\textsuperscript{113} The traditional mass distribution of contents changed with the widespread use of the Internet, “music and films are streamed over Internet; MP3 music files to be downloaded and played using stand-
alone MP3 players; books to be downloaded into stand-alone electronic book devices”,¹¹⁴ individuals or small groups are producing and distributing their own contents over the Internet allowing a new widespread distribution, production and sharing, changing with social media. There are dedicated online DIY communities and forums, sharing knowledge, techniques and videos, promoting a personal artistic spirit and experimental practice. These media artists are much more concerned with the medium exploitation rather than just remixing imagery or simply generating visual effects.

“Structuralist practices and aesthetics were naturally carried over to a new generation of media equipment in the late-60s and early-70s.” Clint Enns, ¹¹⁵

The Structural Digital Video is a term adapted by Clint Enns and represents the continuation of Structural film practice towards digital media. Enns explains that the digital file is manipulated through software and explored by algorithm. Its aesthetic emphasizes the digital artefacts such as, glitch, noise, compression and feedback. Datamoshing, the practice that “aestheticizes artifacts of video compression, are structuralist visualizations of digital forms”¹¹⁶, offers a new visualization and exploitation of digital video. Artists such as Cory Arcangel, Nick Briz, Barbara Lattanzi, Rebecca Baron and Douglas Goodwin, work between algorithms and digital video, exploring the digital artefacts aesthetic to its limits. As happened with experimental film and video, this innovative technique pioneered by experimental media artists were ripped-off and imitated by mainstream culture as we see in Kayne West’s music video “Welcome To Heartbreak”¹¹⁷. Mainly media artist’s philosophy concerns
sharing. They build open source software and distribute their works on creative commons licence over the Web. Which make it easier for the mainstream to copy the latest innovative images and their techniques. Golan Levin (2012) calls new media artists the “unpaid R&D department of ad agencies”118.

Handmade digital cinema practice offers and pushes cinema into a new territory, it does not represent “a historical rupture with older forms of the moving image, but rather as the most recent manifestation of the desire to use moving-image technology to create new modes of vision”119. As Gregory Zinman (2012) notes, the contemporary artists are crossing between the analogue and digital mediums, they represent a continuation of the handmade techniques, giving emphasis to the material and abstract imagery providing new visions through employing digital technologies, software and hardware crossing with analogue technologies. Martha Colburn, Jennifer West, Jennifer Reeves, Steven Woloshen, Emmanuel Lefrant, Marcelle Thirache, David Rimmer, Ben Russell, Donna Cameron, Bruce McClure, Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder, and Eric Ostrowski, among others, use the digital technologies expressing new forms and visions, pushing moving image into a new territory.

“These aims and characteristics—first identified in the Futurists’ lost paint-on-film works, Ruttmann’s paint-on-glass apparatus, and Lye and McLaren’s direct animations—extended into the aural arena with the advent of the synthetic soundtrack, amplified by machines that make movies, and expanded into live moving-image performances, constitute a through-line in the development of cinema itself.” Gregory Zinman, 120

118 “Levin presents some tips for better advertisement agency practicing, “call to the artist”, “research the original author and do not re-interpret by hiring someone”, “show gratitude”, “cite it”, “share it”, “offer a licence fee”, “open source” and “donate money”. This procedure makes the cooperation between agencies and media artists possible and is definitely a better path than just imitating artist’s original work.” Levin, “Emerging Technology in Advertising”, 3, Golan Levin’s presentation from FITC’s ETA Conference in Toronto, 19 October 2012: http://www.scribd.com/doc/110907265/Golan-Levin-ETA-2012 (last visit June 2013)

119 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 570

120 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 580
As we shortly review in this chapter, the avant-garde and experimental cinema practice and its approach to painting emerged from the visual arts field rather than cinema. Visual artists extended their work to film, further, they dedicated exclusively to filmmaking as an artistic practice. By electronic live manipulation earlier video art appear from the arts field presenting a desire of creating live paintings achieving painterly aspects. The contemporary technique of digital handmade cinema carries on with the avant-garde and experimental cinema practice. Artists are crossing analogue and digital techniques exploring new possibilities with the use of software, offering new images and new possibilities. By testing the filmstrip resistance, the digital video qualities and programming capabilities, exploring the live action images, performance and collaboration, appropriating clips from internet, social media use, manipulating and processing images by means of software and hardware crossing with traditional analogue technologies, visual artists continue with the painterly aspects of moving images. Allowing a new field that combines the old medium techniques and offers new possibilities with the use of computer. If avant-garde and experimental cinema should be educated in the academic environment and university studies, noticeably that should be primordial in Fine Arts and Media studies than Cinema, where the main dogma is to continue the mainstream narrative scheme, traditional storytelling and storyline formulas, documentary and commercial animation and other clichés that became normalized such as “discontinuity”, “independent film” or “commercial music videos” without concerning and exploiting cinema as a medium of art, on the contrary to produce entertainment.
CHAPTER 2.  Workshop for painting students: From film to digital

We started this document with the main investigation problem “Should painting students learn about cinema as an artistic practice during their studies?” to answer the question was applied a practical research by means of a short course. Throughout the workshop the students learn about artists, films and movements of avant-garde and experimental cinema. They create experimental videos using different mediums and techniques combining and manipulating them together as digital media via computer-interface, software. Approaching the modern and post-modern art movements and the movements of avant-garde and experimental cinema, the workshop highlights the concepts of Abstract Film, Abstract Expressionism and Cinema Action, Underground Film, Structural Film, Electronic Arts, Video Art and Digital media. In this chapter we are going to comprehend the methodology and materials used during the workshop, the course syllabus, screened works and its results. We will review the students’ videos and analyse the questionnaires’ results about their experience during the short course, provoking a further discussion with interviews to professionals questioning the research achievements. The aim of the interviews and questionnaires is to answer, “Do students have interest in creating experimental cinema?”, “Do painting students have abilities to create avant-garde cinema?”, “By the use of multimedia tools can painting students present artistic potential through the cinematic aspects?”, “Have they interest in extending their works in motion paintings?”, and lastly “Should avant-garde and experimental cinema be a class in fine arts studies?”. To finish the chapter I analyse, one by one, the videos created by the students during the workshop.
2.1. Materials and methodology

The methodology applied to solve the investigation problem was a workshop divided into 10 hours of theoretical lectures and 30 hours of practical work. Starting the research directly in the academic classroom, 8 painting students created 10 videos. The methods of observation, interviews and questionnaires are the basis for the qualitative analysis. During the theoretical lectures important earlier abstract films and contemporary works were screened, as the first abstract film screened for an audience *Lichtspiel: Opus I* (1921)\(^\text{121}\) by Walter Ruttmann and the documentary *Free Radicals: A History of Experimental Film* (2011) by Pip Chodorov. With the lectures progression we analysed the works of Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Oskar Fischinger, Len Lye, Harry Smith, Norman McLaren, John Whitney, Stan Brakhage, Peter Kubelka and Jennifer Reeves. The practical workshop began with experimenting some earlier techniques used by the pioneering artists of Abstract Film such as hand painted animation directly on 35mm filmstrip, paper scroll and paint on glass stop-motion. Moving to electronic arts and video, the concepts of loop, appropriation, repetition, remix, transformation and combining were presented, as well as the video camera as a tool to capture live-action images. Concluding with digital media practice and social media, videos were created by the use of software (Adobe Photoshop, Premiere, After Effects, Audition and Dragon/iStopmotion), and further distributed in the online community *Vimeo*\(^\text{122}\), some of them had public screening in festivals, and presented as video installation in the school gallery at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wroclaw, Poland, during the academic year of 2012.

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121 Zinman, “Handmade: The Moving Image In The Artisanal Mode”, 58
122 vimeo.com/channels/fromfilm2digitalworkshop
2.2. Syllabus

The following program is the schedule adopt during the classes, divided in theoretical lectures followed by practical classes. This program offers essential theoretical knowledge about experimental and avant-garde cinema, its approach to painting, practical experience with handmade film, video, animation, sound and montage, how to relate digital media and painting with contemporary practices of avant-garde and experimental cinema, exploring and crossing mediums, artistic development and creativity, with the goal to create a short video with less than 10 minutes.

1. Introduction to experimental cinema


2. History of experimental and avant-garde cinema

3. The approach to painting: authors and works

   * Hans Richter
     Rhythmus 21 (3’, 1921)
   * Viking Eggeling
     Symphonie Diagonale (7’30”, 1924)
   * Walther Ruttmann
     Opus I (11’, 1921)
   * Len Lye
     Trade Tattoo (5’30”, 1937)
     A Color Box (3’40”, 1939)
     Free Radicals (4’30”, 1958-1979)
   * Oskar Fischinger
     Early Abstractions (20’, 1946-57)
   * Norman McLaren
     Begone Dull Care (7’47”, 1945)
   * Harry Smith
     A Strange Dream (6’, 1946)
   * Robert Breer
     Blazes (1’, 1961)
   * John Whitney
     Catalog (7’, 1961)
   * Stan Brakhage
     Mothlight (3’, 1963)
     Preludes #4 (1’40”, 1995)

123 Learn more in the course webpage: https://sites.google.com/site/pedroferreiraworkshop
* Jennifer Reeves  
* Luther Price  

4. Experimental cinema techniques, camera and editing tools  
* Image interpretation  
* Experimenting with video and animation  
* Adobe Photoshop, Premiere, After Effects, Audition and Dragon/iStopmotion  

5. Project conception  
6. Production of videos and animations  
7. Post-production of videos and sound  
* Projection of the final works and discussion session  

2.3. Workshop results  

8 painting students participated in the workshop  

- 5 students did not know or had not learnt about avant-garde and experimental cinema during their studies and had never made a video before.  
- 3 students had learnt about avant-garde and experimental cinema during their studies and had made videos before.  

Figure 1: Workshop participants
The essay ‘from film to digital’ was important for you?

- 7 students answered Yes
- 1 student answered No

Figure 2: Essay importance

Favorite avant-garde cinema movement

- 4 students preferred Abstract Film
- 2 students preferred Abstract Expressionism
- 2 students preferred Structural Films or Electronic arts/Video art

Figure 3: Favorite movement
Chapter 2 — Workshop results

Figure 4: Favorite techniques

- 5 students preferred paint over glass animation
- 3 students preferred 35 mm or computer animation

Figure 5: Favorite multimedia tools

- 8 students used Adobe Premiere Pro CS5
- 4 students used Adobe Photoshop CS5
- 1 student used Adobe After Effects CS5

Figure 6: Painting relations

- 7 students answered Yes
- 1 student answered No

46 | Chapter 2 — Workshop results
Figure 7: Previous experience with cinema

Experience before the workshop with video and animation

- 5 students declared **Too Bad**
- 3 students declared **Bad**
- 1 student declared **Normal**

Figure 8: Previous experience with multimedia tools

Experience before the workshop with multimedia tools

- 4 students declared **Normal**
- 2 students declared **Bad**
- 2 students declared **Too Bad**

Figure 9: Experience after the workshop

Experience after the workshop (video/animation/multimedia tools)

- 1 student **Too Bad**
- 2 students **Normal**
- 4 students **Good**
- 1 student **Really Good**
Would you like to have a subject about avant-garde cinema?

- 7 students answered Yes
- 1 student answered No

Figure 10: Avant-garde cinema as subject

Workshop appreciation

- 6 students answered Really Good
- 2 students answered Good

Figure 11: Workshop appreciation

Will you create more experimental videos in the future?

- 8 students answered Yes

Figure 12: About future
2.4. Discussion

The results illustrate to us that primarily painting students do not have knowledge about cinema as an artistic practice. During the workshop the students largely improved their skills with video, animation, multimedia tools and computers. They found mainly interest in Abstract Films and its techniques, relating their paintings to their videos. Through mixing the analogue techniques of 35 mm handmade animation and painting on glass transforming it in digital media by digital technologies the students learnt the differences between the non-tactile characteristics of digital media, where the binary encoded information has the possibility to be transformed acquiring new values and be interpreted by software achieving different meanings from the original information. They found the workshop essentially “Really Good” and would like to have a subject about avant-garde cinema as part of their academic course. They enjoyed participating in the workshop and creating experimental videos, describing it as “fun” and “something new”. Last but not the least, everyone answered that will make more experimental videos in the future.

When we analyse the ten videos made by the students, we understand that four videos do not present attractive results for the avant-garde and experimental cinema practice; they tried to create ads, narrative or documentary computer animations or videos influenced by the remix and music video culture. The other six videos do present experimental approach, by exploring the formal cinematic aspects and the possibilities of digital media. They mostly preferred to make animations. Three students made 35 mm hand painted animations, were one student explores the software motion abilities and the others merge found footage and video. The two students that did not work on 35 mm animation, made stop-motion animation paint on glass and combined with video or other mediums. Crossing the analogue and digital, appropriating videos, sounds and music from databases (the Internet allows a great collaboration between artists), image manipulation and
processing with the use of software, the students demonstrated an avant-garde approach applying contemporary practices. With the use of digital media aesthetics they push the moving images to a new territory. The works have the mutation ability to be presented online in the Vimeo community, the possibility to be installed in a space and to be screened in a conventional theatre room. We conclude answering that mainly students found interest in experimental cinema and would like to have a class about avant-garde cinema. Generally they present the skills to create avant-garde cinema but do not demonstrate much interest to extend their works in motion paintings. They found cinema as a medium to try something different but somehow relating to their paintings. With the use of multimedia tools they did present artistic potential through the cinematic aspects in a digital aesthetics.

2.5. Interview to professionals

To obtain contrast and deeper discussion of my results I interviewed the professionals, Alexei Dmitriev, experimental filmmaker and curator from St. Petersburg; Bryan Konefsky from New Mexico, filmmaker, director of the Film Festival Experiments in Cinema, president and founder from the Basement Films (a volunteer-run micro-cinema supporting experimental cinema), lecturer at Department of Cinematic Arts, University of New Mexico, visiting lecturer at UCSC and board of advisors in Ann Arbor Film Festival. And Jon Behrens, Seattle based filmmaker, film programmer, photographer, sound manipulator and teacher. The interviews have the intention to provoke and expose different opinions about the students’ works and my investigation results.

[Pedro] What do you think about the dissertation purpose “Should painting students learn about cinema as an artistic practice during their studies?”

124 vimeo.com/channels/fromfilm2digitalworkshop
125 Alexei Dmitriev: https://vimeo.com/avdmitriev
126 Bryan Konefsky: http://experimentsincinema.com
127 Jon Behrens: http://www.jonbehrens.blogspot.com
[Jon] “No.”

[Alexei] “Well, the purpose sounds good, but I would say that painting students should learn about cinema only on facultative basis, as many of them would found cinema a completely different field that they have no need to penetrate.”

[Bryan] “This is an interesting question. If the question is “do students necessarily need to know about experimental cinema in order to make their own films” the answer is likely no... In other words, students (well, everyone really) are so media savvy (we know the language of the moving image as we live a life determined by screens...128 that we can easily make movies almost unconsciously... However, the value of being a student is to disengage from “dailiness” and engage in the extraordinariness of time – that is, having the luxury to “dive” deep into research that is often not possible when we emerge from scholarly activities and find ourselves too often swallowed up by the stuff of existence (a job, paying bills etc). So, within this context if a student finds an affinity toward moving image art (painting students included), I think they owe it to themselves to find a way of placing themselves within the historic trajectory of this particular mode of creative expression and engage their work in the larger conversation that is not unlike a kind of time travelling... Questions students might ask themselves include “how does their moving image work respond to concerns that artists struggled with in the past/present when making this kind of art work?”

I always find it interesting to have a student from a different discipline engage in a new creative activity without the “baggage” of knowing the “proper” way of doing things...

I like to think of moving image art as a kind of meta-art form. That is cinema potentially contains all the other arts. From painting to acting to music to photography etc, cinema has the possibility of incorporating concerns from all the arts (the only other art form that comes close to this “meta-ness” is opera). And, I like to think that art – if nothing else – has a responsibility to give us an accurate barometric read of the human condition... So, if cinema (all forms) is a meta-art form and art has this social responsibility, then cinema has a unique responsibility in terms of this barometric read. Because of this I often tell audiences that cinema is too important an art form to be left to filmmakers. Of course, I am mostly referring to the mindless crap that Hollywood churns out and the filmmakers responsible for that mind-numbing “entertainment”129

128 Noted by Bryan: “see Chris Hedges’ article titled Retribution for a World Lost in Screens http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/retribution_for_a_world_lost_in_screens_20100927/ (Last visit June 2013)”

129 Noted by Bryan: “Film Drama The Opium of the Masses by Malcolm LeGrice”
The other aspect of having individuals (students) work in this moving image mode for the first time has to do with the tools we use to create our art. Brian Eno wrote a short but interesting article for Wired magazine back in the 1990s titled *Revenge of the Intuitive* that was written on the occasion of his first experience in a digital recording studio. In the essay he talks about how much one needs to know about ones tools in order to be creative with them... And here he suggests the complications of a digital recording studio where possibilities seem endless compared to the “old school” analogue recording studios where the technological parameters of what the tools could do were more clear. I mention this article because sometimes a student new to a particular mode of creative expression might not know a lot about the tools. Sometimes a more senior student might dismiss the younger student because of this lack of familiarity.

However, one could argue how much do we really need to know about the tools we use in our creative practice in order to be creative with them? For example, does a painting student necessarily need to know how to mix dry pigment into oil paint, or does that same student need to know how to weave canvas in order to paint (successfully) on it? Similarly, how much do we need to know about software, our computer or the DSLR camera we shoot with to be creative with those tools? Do we necessarily need to know how to write code, or can we simply be end users (but creative end users!).”

*Pedro* “Did the students present abilities to create avant-garde cinema? By the use of multimedia tools can painting students present artistic potential through the cinematic aspects?”

*Jon* “I have only good things to say about the videos on your vimeo page. I have put some of them on my Cinema X channel13°, I liked all of them and I think your students have the abilities.”

*Alexei* “Not really. Most of them either dive into pointless abstract scratch cinema or try to work towards animation. The only 2 promising titles were: *Symphony no. 4* and *Road to nowhere.*”

*Bryan* “Yeah!!!! I really loved the videos – I watched every one of them multiple times. There seemed to be a general sense of freshness (what I talked about above) with these works – They WERE engaging. I think too often (at least in the USA) when one talks about hand-made films, the conversation begins and ends with Stan Brakhage. Yes, in many ways he truly popularized this visceral approach to movie making, but he, like your students who were making works that maybe suggested Brakhage to a degree, are all part of this long, lovely and ongoing historic dialogue around that particular approach to the moving image.”

13° vimeo.com/channels/cinemax
[Pedro] “Should avant-garde and experimental cinema be a class in fine arts studies?”

[Jon] “No I think it should be in film classes, too many things to study that involve film so it should be a film class.”

[Alexei] “Of course, but as a facultative course.”

[Bryan] “Yes, I think both avant-garde courses that approach the subject as a studio class and as a topic of historic study are valuable (tools) for students. And, I would argue that it doesn’t mean “we” are necessarily trying to convert students to become filmmakers, rather “we” are exposing young artists to as wide a range of approaches to creativity as possible. I would hope that the painting students who took your workshop will come away from the experience at least (if nothing else) thinking differently about their painting practice. Similarly, I think film students should be exposed to the other arts to help them think in new ways about the moving image and – perhaps – most importantly to break down the sometimes arbitrary barriers between disciplines (theater, painting, sculpture, poetry etc). To that end (I don’t like labeling things myself), I no longer even call myself an artist... I find that term too confining... For me it speaks to the antiquated idea of artist as genius... One who spends ones time away from the world in a secluded studio and then descends back into the world to share their brilliance... I just find the term artist too problematic. Presently I refer to myself as a cultural worker. For me, that terms breaks down some of the barriers and boundaries a bit more comfortably... A cultural worker feels like someone intrinsically engaged in the world and if art does give us that important barometric read of the human condition then one needs to be engaged in the world (in profound ways) in order to have a sense of it.”

[Pedro] “What is the practice situation of avant-garde and experimental cinema in the digital media age? Which are the innovative techniques that digital media offers?”

[Jon] “For me I have only just began to experiment with the digital world, I have always worked with film 35 and 16 mm, but I do like the idea of shooting on film and finish on digital. I have always the way SD looks so I never had any interest going there however I do like HD and I have began to play around with that medium, so who knows what in store for the future.”

[Alexei] “Now everything is very easy. You can basically make a film without money or camera or even a computer sometimes.”

[Bryan] “Experimental cinema (the alternative screen, undependent cinema, counter-current cinema, personal cinema etc) has always
explored new ways to think about the technological and it’s relationship to the creative practice. This questioning comes back to my point about art having a responsibility to give us an accurate assessment of the human condition. To this end cinematic experimentation necessarily needs to engage both new and old technologies to give us a sense of where “we” are going and where “we” have been (as a species).

For me, art must be challenging and profoundly radical or it isn’t art. As such, I am particularly interested in artistic/cultural interventions (found footage films, for example where issues of cultural ownership are questioned... how can we come to some sense of who we are if we don’t have access to our own history?... The example here is that Bill Gates’ Corbis Corporation owns the electronic rights to most of the history of photography). I see much of this kind of activity happening on the internet where power structures attempt to use these technologies of communication for social control and, as a response, artists use these technologies to derail such oligarchical aspirations through interactive, community projects, hacking activities, media empowerment etc...”

[Pedro] How can the Internet help the avant-garde and experimental cinema practice to look forward towards innovation?”

[Jon] “I think the internet has played a big role of the practice of Avant-garde and Experimental cinema, so much easy’r now to promote yourself and to meet people doing what you do.”

[Alexei] “Internet helps a lot with material, communication, research and distribution.”

[Bryan] “Presently, the internet is providing us with the potential for artists to become socially (globally) engaged in profound ways that had never been possible in the past. It is this sense of global communication and the nurturing of international (connected) micro-communities that really interests me. I like to think about experimental filmmakers as the modern day travelling troubadours who bring the “news of the day” from their particular region (micro-community) to share across borders... New technological tools (uploading video, email, Twitter, Skype, Creative Commons, Archive.org) have made this profoundly human desire to share more and more possible, more and more meaningful, and more and more revolutionary. And, what I mean by revolutionary has to do with simply having the opportunity to communicate directly with people involved in different activities, projects and struggles around the world... Communication that

131 Noted by Bryan “see Woody Vasulka’s essay from the late 1990s titled The New Epistemic Space”
defiantly sidesteps corporate media and the social control that they wish to enforce. And, here – on some level – I am thinking about the sub-genre of experimental films called “essay films.” This mode of working is remarkably radical in that we have the opportunity to hear about an individual’s personal and specific experience of the world unfiltered by Hollywood, board rooms filled with marketing executives trying to figure out “what will sell,” and/or the pitfalls of corporate cinematic distribution.”

[Pedro] “Any other comments that you would like to say?”

[Alexei] “Would have given them the tasks that would deprive them of any animation techniques, so they do something that they never did.”

[Bryan] “Your questions are great – really thought provoking – thanks! And, the workshop that you conducted was amazing! I am sure it took a lot of hard work to make it happen, but the video documentation really suggests that it was a complete and total success – congratulations!”

2.6. The students’ videos

This motion painting presents the relationship of the student’s paintings with shapes and stamped textures. We percept shape, colour and texture composition, energetic speed and rhythm with counterpoint montage,
music appropriation, image manipulation, animation, overlapping images, printing techniques, loop and repetition and the use of found footage. Using acetate paper and paint on glass animation, she brings a personal vision of colour and texture composition. *Motion Colour* was the student’s first experience creating a video.

![Telegram still shot](image)

**TELEGRAM (2’04”, Grazyna Małkiewicz, 2012)**

*INSTALLATION AT GALERIA CENTRUM SZTUKI UŻYTKOWEJ, ASP, WROCŁAW 2013
OFFICIAL SELECTION OGÓLNOPOLSKIEGO FESTIWALU POLSKIEJ ANIMACJI “OIPLA” (School competition, 30 screenings around Polish cities), POLAND 2013*

A motion painting that questions the chaos in life of contemporary man. Too much information, phone calls, speed, colours and information becomes noise, human voices get distorted and everything turns gray and silent. Using 35 mm hand painted animation crossing to digital, the software possibilities of motion, overlapping, image manipulation, loop and repetition with music appropriation. She explores a world of information, noise and chaos. *Telegram* was the student’s second experience creating a video.
This motion painting remained as an exercise. Created in 35 mm hand painted animation, explores the overlapped image, loop and repetition with appropriated music. The author of the music “Salakappaka Sound System”\(^{132}\) found the video on Internet and shared on his blog. This exercise was used for the student’s final work and influenced the way of the student perceive and create her painting.

\(^{132}\) Salakappaka Sound System: http://ikuinen-kaamos.blogspot.com/2013/01/some-more-video-stuff.html (last visit June 2013)
A line, a road for bicycles. Variations provoked by the asphalt warmness. This experimental video explores repetition, loop, music appropriation, overlapped image and image manipulation mixed with 35 mm animation producing psychedelic compositions. Once again the student uses music by “Salakappaka Sound System” and the author shared the video on his blog comenting “I think the sound and visuals work well together in this one.”133 Road to Nowhere was the student’s first experience creating a video.

Perception of time, slow and sudden contrasts, a storm starts. Found footage from the Internet, combined with 35 mm animation and photography overlapped, sound exploitation, speed and spatial development. This video challenges intuition and emotion, influenced by the artist Stan Brakhage. The student had previous experience with video.

133 Salakappaka Sound System: http://ikuinen-kaamos.blogspot.com/2013/03/more-eye-candy.html (last visit June 2013)
SYMPHONY NO. 4 (1’20”, Monika Bielińska, 2012)
INSTALLATION AT GALERIA CENTRUM SZTUKI UŻYTEKOWEJ, ASP, WROCŁAW 2013

The conductor orders the music to start leading an animation. Black and white experimental video mixed with ink animation on glass ending in colour flicker. She explores the negative-positive space, repetition and loop, software possibilities of motion, montage and music appropriation. She perceives rhythm. The author of the appropriated music “Marlo Eggplant” found the video online, contacted the student and commented on the video with this warm statement, “This is wonderful! I love the use of colour and punctuated shifts in image. Percussive visual under current. Wonderful!”\textsuperscript{134}. \textit{Symphony No. 4} was the student’s first experience creating a video.

\textsuperscript{134} Marlo Eggplant, https://vimeo.com/54089381 (last vist June 2013)
This video shows computer-animated drawings of city landscapes. The drawings were originally made using ink and pens and later worked on Adobe Photoshop and animated in Adobe After Effects. With an environmental soundtrack this video attempts to reach the documentary aesthetic rather than experimental. The student had previous experience with video.
Video inspired by the film *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola. “Trench psychosis” is a definition of a mental illness caused by the constant stress of sitting in the trenches. With a parody mood and 8 bits music the video makes fun of war, the results are not so interesting in the experimental cinema aesthetics, but rather showing influences from the online remix culture. Trench Psychosis was the student’s first experience creating a video.

![Figure 21: Panda still shot](image)

**PANDA (1’04”, Grazyna Małkiewicz, 2012)**

*INSTALLATION AT GALERIA CENTRUM SZTUKI UŻYTKOWEJ, ASP, WROCŁAW 2013*

This animation on glass is a PSA (Public Service Advertisement). The student created this exercise after the tragic event on November 11, 2012 in Wrocław, where a group of extreme nationalists attacked a centre of alternative culture, destroying equipment, cars, buildings, and massacring one of residents. By using Advertisement language the ad is presented in an alternative aesthetic using paint on glass technique.
Figure 22: Mucha still shot

MUCHA (2’07”, Paweł Sobolewski, 2012)
INSTALLATION AT GALERIA CENTRUM SZTUKI UŻYTKOWEJ, ASP, WROCLAW 2013

Computer animation about annoying things. This video presents a storytelling desire, exploring the software motion abilities and crossing mediums. The result is closer to mainstream animation rather than avant-garde and experimental aesthetic. Mucha was the student’s first experience creating a video.

By presenting a new field to painting studies, the moving images, researching the avant-garde movements in cinema approaching to painting and employing earlier Abstract film techniques, as well contemporary practices of Handmade digital cinema, the students created experimental videos relating with their painting. As painters they are very found to the physical matter. The practical lectures confirmed the interest by the painting students into exploring the moving images capabilities and to discover relations between mediums as well combining them to create experimental videos. They made a giant evolution using computers and multimedia tools (something that they were not experienced before or interested at all). Arising their awareness about the medium of our times, the digital media, and how to explore it through their artistic practice, offering new possibilities for painting
practices. With the use of social media they shared the workshop experience and collaborated with other artists throughout online communities. The results presents us that even without experience in the moving images field, they are familiar with the cinematic language and presented abilities and skills to create avant-garde cinema, with the use of multimedia tools they proved artistic potential to explore the cinematic aspects and mostly relating to contemporary practice of Handmade digital cinema.

**Conclusion: Perspectives for future**

The contemporary approach of digital handmade cinema continues with the avant-garde and experimental cinema practice. Artists are crossing analogue and digital techniques exploring new possibilities with the use of software, offering new images and new possibilities for the avant-garde and experimental cinema practice. Visual artists carry on the painterly aspects for the moving images in a new field the digital media, which combines the old medium techniques and offers new possibilities with the use of computer. Should painting students learn about cinema as an artistic practice during their studies? Yes, at least they should be educated during studies about such practices, both as an historical contextualization and artistic practice (tool) of avant-garde and experimental cinema and its approach to painting. By the use of multimedia tools can painting students present artistic potential through cinematic aspects? They did present artistic potential to explore the cinematic aspects by the use of multimedia tools to create experimental videos. Have they interest in extending their works in motion paintings? No, mostly they presented interest into try something different. Do students have interest in creating experimental cinema? Even if they did not know before the course what was experimental cinema, they presented enthusiasm since the beginning and interest into create experimental videos during the workshop and to continue creating in the future. Do painting students have the ability to create avant-garde
cinema? By embracing the contemporary practice of Handmade digital cinema and cross between mediums they do present an avant-garde capability. Should avant-garde and experimental cinema be a class in fine arts studies? Yes, avant-garde and experimental cinema emerged from the arts field rather than film and cinema, what makes it closer to fine arts and media studies than cinema. The workshop can be easily applied in any school or class, even experienced in a personal DIY style. The internet provides massive information for research and the practice of experimental cinema. The access to online communities, an environment for sharing knowledge and media, allows for easy collaboration between artists, scholars and curators, which provokes an increase of innovative moving images across borders and without limits. This dissertation was a crucial personal journey, both for my artistic experience and professional upcoming. Filled my need for deeper knowledge about avant-garde and experimental cinema movements, its techniques and contemporary practices, improving my abilities as student and media artist. I acquired skills of organizing lectures, practice in communication and teaching the students by presenting what they can do with digital media as painters and do not turning them into software experts or programmers. The idea of artistic avant-garde is now understood through the use of software and by crossing mediums, analogue and digital. Experimental artists are bringing us new visions for the moving images with innovative practices of digital video, handmade digital cinema, live performing, installation and interaction, presenting an avant-garde approach in a new territory, the digital. Tomorrow something else will cross borders and limits, as for the medium as for the practice, but never forgetting its influences, the avant-garde and experimental cinema.
"Live cinema creators' goals appear to be more personal and artistic than those of VJs, and their work tends to be presented in different context, like museum or theatre, and often to an audience similar to that of cinema: sitting down and watching the performance attentively.” Mia Makela, 135

If so far we were exploiting the formal aspects of cinema with the workshop “from film to digital”, in the second semester of the lecture year of 2012 was presented the Live Cinema workshop: “Out of the canvas” as an additional workshop wondering the live practice of avant-garde and experimental cinema that resulted in a live performance, projector and projection. “Live cinema performance can be experienced as “live painting” as well as “live montage”. By experimenting with projection, live montage and collaboration between students, they experienced the real-time video, live video manipulation and montage, video feedback, electronic music and sound manipulation, throughout exploring software (Resolume Avenue, Max MSP, Adobe Audition and Garage Band). The performance is divided in 3 acts. Act 1: film and found footage, interpreted as "childhood"; Act 2: live video and feedback, interpreted as "adult life"; Act 3: the digital medium, interpreted as "death". The performance emphasis the moving image as an art medium thought carrying on the avant-garde and experimental cinema practice and its approach to painting. Improvisation, failure and mistakes were the basis for the performance.137

135 The Practice of Live Cinema, Mia Makela, 2008, p. 1
136 The Practice of Live Cinema, Mia Makela, 2008, p. 2
137 Performance video excerpt: https://vimeo.com/64884782
Attachments

Theoretical classes:
https://sites.google.com/site/pedroferreiraworkshop/

Vimeo channel:
https://vimeo.com/channels/fromfilm2digitalworkshop

“From film to digital” - making of (19min):
https://vimeo.com/53838371

“Out of the canvas” - performance excerpt (11min):
https://vimeo.com/64884782
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http://www.handmadecinema.com
pedrodanieldacostaferreira@gmail.com
pedroferreira.tk