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Abstract Cinema and Aesthetic Utopia in the Interwar Period

ABSTRACT
The article attempts to clarify the positioning and the status of abstract cinema of the 1920s and the 1930s within the broader category of *experimental cinema*, and it does so through an analysis of the artistic context in which it emerged and of its visual language. The abstract cinema, or *absolute cinema*, as it was called by those designing it, much unlike the experimental films made during that time, employs an iconoclastic language. Another topic of debate I propose is whether abstract cinema can generate a specific imaginary, given that cinema is, by definition, a story projected onto a screen, in itself a generator of a parallel time for the viewers, where they can build an imaginary. Was this a utopian endeavor or not?

KEYWORDS
Abstract Cinema; Avant-garde; Abstract Art, Experimental Film; *Gesamtkunstwerk*; Constructivism; Narration.

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The phenomenon of abstract cinema was as confined to a certain geographical area as it was conceptually complex with regards to the work of art, opening visionary paths for visual language research in general. The twentieth-century modernism insisted that the re-evaluation of all aspects pertaining to our surroundings should be based on questioning the specific language of each part of the research. The research on this reality was done through questioning language and making inroads into semantics. Modernism collapsed the very boundaries of language proper, aiming at innovating arts language in particular, through various techniques, and beyond genre. For this reason, each *-ism* became an opportunity to renew artistic language and a new source of reference for the following *-ism*, which collapsed the previous one. The present paper aims to offer an overview of the phenomenon and not a detailed analysis of this art.

Abstract cinema is a relatively neglected branch in cinema's history, due to both some methodological confusions, as well as to the context in which it emerged and developed. Confusions arise, first of all, from an analytical reflex of mixing and inventorying under the label *experimentalism* films made by visual artists, and not by filmmakers in the cinema industry. We are talking about obviously experimental productions, with a short timespan, of only a few minutes; with regards to form, it is usually a succession of images with geometrical shapes rhythmically animated. In addition to that, the positioning of this type of cinema in the shadows of the great *figurative cinema* of the twenties (especially the German Expressionist cinema) leads to a neglect of the topic, as people were almost instinctively drawn to the aesthetics of the latter.

These would be some of the reasons why I turn my attention towards analyzing abstract cinema (as a niche arts phenomenon), which was seen during the interwar years as one of the attainable expressions of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, when abstraction itself was regarded as the next level in fulfilling artistic consciousness. Through a very complex and expeditious filtering process, the abstract artists took that spectacular leap towards developing the language of this art, coining radical axioms in the style of avant-garde rhetoric. In the words of Viking Eggeling, one of the pioneers of this type of cinema in the early twenties:

> Abstraction is the new consciousness, casting off any respect for deception. […] Abstraction wants mature, adult consciousness; it wants the absolute. Abstraction is the most monstrous demonstration of the human will for pure visual perception; it is more than just individual will.[1]

The Grounds for the Emergence and the Development of Abstract Cinema

As a concept, abstractivism (less its theses seen as a whole)[2] was radical in its approach to the arts. Through the simple invention and access of a paradoxical, in itself rationally-sensitive situation, abstractivism was declared radically opposed to all the conservative, bourgeois, or narrative art forms, in the historical sense of this triad.

From the inception of abstract art by Wassily Kandinsky around the year 1912, the tendency was to expand the abstractivist research to all the arts. It was also Kandinsky who coined, drawing on the idea of creating a *total theatre*, the abstract colored performance *Sonorité jaune* (1909), by introducing abstraction in theatre. In 1913, Malevich deliberately decided to stop painting in a realist style, thus setting the stage for Suprematism, a type of art advocating for a rational supra-reality, somehow opposed to Kandinsky's sensitive-emotional reality. In 1921, the first abstract film appeared, Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21*, and then in 1923 El Lissitzky designed the first abstract space in Berlin. So, in the twenties, abstract art was claiming almost the entire territory of visual arts, and also part of the territory of music and of literature. This was a manifestation of the power of the avant-garde, which proclaimed the conquest of a new level of artistic consciousness, which could had left no one indifferent, be them artist or audience.

From its inception and throughout the interwar years when it was cherished, abstract art represented for almost all the cultures of Western Europe an art of the utopian future (with unmistakable leftist influences). It proclaimed both a universal language and a universal *liberation* from an ancient state of affairs that was lagging behind times. One could ask whether this same logic could have been applied to cinema, the seventh art. The answer is a definite "Yes." The cinema proved from the onset to be one of the most vital art, if not the most vital, forcefully displaying, from the early stages, its resources of language and imagination. In time, these proved to be almost inexhaustible, continuously absorbing the most unexpected cultural phenomena and delivering the most unexpected aesthetic solutions.

On a different level, however, cinema displayed a paradoxical fixity. Germaine Dulac, film director and theorist, noted with regard to this aspect that "[t]he character of film was fixed from the start. It became a new form of expression for drama and literature; it was mistaken for the continuous plot and put into the service of narrative story."[3] In this firm statement, one can trace the desire to change the form of this type of cinema. In the same article, Dulac also boldly launched the idea of a "new art, an art of the visual idea."[4]

The most powerful artistic movement, which proved to be the link joining these abstract experiments in visual arts and eventually in the experimental film during the interwar years, was Constructivism. A by-product of Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism, Constructivism was regarded in those times as an ideal state reached by abstract art due to three interconnected reasons. The first reason is its intrinsic applicability, as Constructivism is leaning towards the functional. From this particular feature of Constructivism comes the second reason, namely that it had been, for more than a decade, declared an official art in the USSR.[5] The third reason is that, through state propaganda and through the artists' accurate foresight, the Soviet Constructivist doctrines spread rapidly throughout Europe, in artistic milieus already open to abstractivism.[6] By becoming an official art in the USSR, the Constructivist project elicited a profoundly utopian side, as in this way the avant-garde was duplified as state ideology. But in its most active Western European nuclei, where abstractivism was embraced by artists of the radical left, Constructivism did not reach the status of *official art*. Moreover, in Western Europe, other parallel tendencies developed along this trend. In the twenties, Constructivism was working as a sort of socio-aesthetic meta-consciousness for the majority of the European artists involved in the political and the ideological becoming of the new society. Therefore, this pan-national ideological terrain (with more or less firm political commitments) started to grow and mature into a global avant-garde program, with *abstraction* and *functionalism* as keywords accompanying the idea of a total reform of society.

In cinema, this movement generated two types of films. On the one hand, the short abstract film, where the image was made of animated geometrical shapes set in motion and with a dynamics based on principles of temporal composition akin to musical composition. On the other hand, it generated the film without a plot or narrative, which, according to its creators, was also based on principles of musical composition.

We could situate the abstract film in opposition to the figurative film for many reasons. In the *G* magazine no. 5/6 (1926), it was emphatically declared that:

> Film does not exist – just a perverse anomaly of photographed literature!
> The absolute film signifies the foundation of cinematic art!
> Film needs no audience. – Film needs artists!
> The absolute film opens your eyes for the first time to what the camera is, can be, and wants![7]

The opposition expressed so boldly through these statements sits at the core of the language underpinning abstract cinema. And the obvious parallel is that between figurative and abstract art, which the avant-gardists extended to the art of film. I wish to point at the difference in the aforementioned confusion between films with a purely abstract imagery of geometrical shapes and the interwar films which use elements of non-narrative language.

Often, in referring to the interwar period and *experimental* cinema, film histories make the analogy between abstract and the Constructivist and Surrealist cinema. Differently put, these two categories of cinema have been easily placed by the critical discourse under the abstractivist branch. This is similar to saying that the Surrealist painter Magritte, who wrote the famous sentence *"Ceci n'est pas une pipe"* as a caption to the picture of a painted pipe, did so unconsciously, which was a creative method specific to the Surrealists, when in fact the sentence is profoundly rational and it conjures a semantic dilemma. In my opinion, the confusion needs to be dispelled now, in the present. There are huge differences in the approach to film of Hans Richter or Viking Eggeling, on the one hand, and René Claire, Fernand Léger, Dziga Vertov, or Sergei Eisenstein, on the other, even though their films were similarly praised in the *G* magazine as being pure avant-garde, which was absolutely true. The main difference lies in the language produced by the filmed, and then edited, images. As Jean-Michel Bouhours notes, the Surrealists themselves retracted from pure abstraction:

> The Surrealists mocked the "little squares and lozenges" of abstract art in general and of cinema in particular, preferring humor and the absurd in the form of the not so pure figures of slapstick cinema embodied by Harry Langdon and Buster Keaton.[8]

Despite this, the standard classifications of the experimental art cinema of the interwar period subsumes pure abstract movies, those wanting to break the narrative convention, and the Surrealist or Constructivist movies. In the latter, which were filmed and edited following Eisenstein's doctrine, coined while he was making theatre,[9] the image still communicates something, meaning one could see something in the immediately recognizable reality. The camera angle and the montage of these pieces of reality were undoubtedly abstract and unlike the standard working manner and approach to cinema, producing geometrical planes that were further serialized through montage, which resembled more a musical piece, a symphony of images, than a film.[10]

The lack of an explicit plot and its transposition from a narrative to a visual plane is a specific feature of these movies. It is natural that a technique and an aesthetics as new as this triggers excitement and has one thinking about abstract or experimental cinema. The issue to consider is that abstract cinema itself wished to be a type of cinema built on musical principles of composition, which unfolded in time. And this explains why the confusion is so frequent. Malevich, who was directly involved in the art of the cinema of his time, published a few articles on the topic, where he touched upon these particular aspects. The researcher Margarita Tupitsyn notes that:

> Watching Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* and *Eleventh Year*, Malevich accepted the fact that these were not abstract films *per se*, but that some of their "stills" satisfied "the painterly canons" of Modernist genealogy.[11]

The *canons* that Malevich mentioned to support his Suprematist vision were by all accounts formalist, and cutting-edge from the point of view of aesthetics.

Sabine Hake, another researcher of interwar cinema, specialized in German film, presents the situation of abstract film in the following distinctive terms:

> While marginalised by the overwhelming trend towards narrative and verisimilitude, formal experimentation continued to thrive in avant-garde practices. Unlike the documentary, which used non-narrative forms for clearly defined purposes, the abstract or absolute film cultivated the free play with movement, rhythm, light, contrast, and form and maintained strong links to modern painting and photography.[12]

Therefore, one can expect there might already be a clear, language-based distinction between the two types of experimental film, including even a reference to Surrealist films. Moreover, the aforementioned German magazine, edited by some of the cinema's iconoclasts, published an article by the Surrealist painter Fernand Léger ("Painting and Cinema," 1926) in which he decried the obsolete state of the European cinema at the time:

> All the negative values that burden cinema today are the subject, literature, sentimentality – in short, competition with theater. Genuine cinema is the image of an object completely unknown to our eye that makes an impression if one knows how to depict it.[13]

All these different ways of defining modernist cinema say the same thing, namely that the objectless world had already claimed cinema too. Its most radical form was abstract cinema, also called *absolute cinema* by its creators.

The Forms of Abstract Cinema

This type of cinema – apparently limited as visual language and termed *minimalist* by some critics – reveals, upon a closer inspection of its output, extremely flexible plastic forms. These geometric forms were combined in a rhythmical and musical way to form the composition of the film. Moreover, each of the filmmakers of abstract cinema developed their own visual language, although they all shared a common view on principles of creation. The main concept which constituted a point of departure for all these creators was the making of a *painting in motion*. Besides, the first project set up on this principle, but unfortunately never accomplished, dates back to 1914. It belongs to the painter Léopold Survage, who made a series of abstract watercolor paintings and which he wanted to animate. The Gaumont Film Company declined the proposal to finance the project and thus missed the opportunity to produce what would had been the first abstract, animated film. Starting from the same principle of animated drawings or paintings, Viking Eggeling began *drawing* his own movie with an immense series, initiated in 1921 and finished in 1924, the year of the first screening of his *Symphonie diagonale.*

From a technical point of view, the iconoclastic abstract artists of the avant-garde had no visual reference available other than to generate a *photogram*, followed by the frames and the sequences of the self-referential and objectless film. The *photogram*, the unity generating the entire film, was invented by employing a type of image already endorsed by the abstract fine art –

the drawing or the painting. This was a relatively limited repertoire compared to the experimentalist references of Constructivist films, which included other media explored by the avant-garde, such as photography and photographic collage.

In April 1921 in Berlin, Walter Ruttmann did the premiere screening of the first abstract film, *Lichtspiel: Opus I*,[14] which was followed by *Opus II* (1923), *Opus III* (1924), and *Opus IV* (1925). These films were colored manually. Their language is poetic and sensitive, rather than rigidly geometric. The intertwining of different forms and sizes, shapes and colors is so organic that is seemingly reminiscent of fragments from Kandinsky's painting.[15] Later, Ruttmann would use this type of animation even in commercial movies, an industry in which he activated for a while. Geometrism features in Eggeling's and Richter's films. They worked together on developing the language of abstract film. They succeeded in screening in December 1921 an abstract film each: Richter, *Rhythmus 21* and Eggeling, the first version of his *Diagonal-Symphonie.* Phillippe-Alain Michaud wrote about Richter's film in the catalogue of the 2014 retrospective of Richter in Berlin: "The film is no longer reflexive; it no longer tell stories and it does not show a subjective point of view. It is rather a calculated display of successive and simultaneous contrasts."[16]

These are plastic contrasts of form, size, temperature, movement. It was a research of interaction between animated drawings unfolding in time projected onto film. The repertoire of shapes was different with each artist. Richter animated and made rhythmic sequences from rectangular shapes, whereas for Eggeling, the animated unit was the straight or curved line, which, if serialized, animated, and set on a rhythmic sequence generated continuity in motion. It is not by chance that the titles of the two movies reference musical concepts, as it is the case with Ruttmann's films; they both searched in visual rhythm the same harmony of movement. Richter continued his research in this direction with *Rhythmus 23* (1923), *Rhythmus 25* (1924), while working in parallel on other experimental movies. Eggeling died prematurely in 1925.

The repertoire of forms in Oskar Fischinger's films is much more diverse. He met Ruttmann at the Frankfurt preview in 1921. They had corresponded on technical topics regarding the making of different forms of abstract cinema. Fischinger had a background in musical education and was marked by the correlation between image and sound for his entire career. Fischinger wrote: "The flood of feeling created through music intensifies the sensation and the effectiveness of this graphic cinematic expression, and helped to make the absolute film understandable."[17]

In his movies, apart from ingenious ways of producing abstract images, Fischinger used both fixed geometric figures, as well as organic elements, rhythmically distributed in the visual field. He even used spirals – and at this point the analogy with Marcel Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* (1925) becomes obvious, through which he tried to create an illusion of the depth of field (*Spiralen*, 1926). He looked mostly to establishing a rhythm-motion correspondence between music and this animated painting. In 1927, he produced a multimedia performance called *Space Light Music,* with colored sequences which were manually projected onto three screens simultaneously. It obviously was a new type of art, with clear connections to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. He continued his research in the abstract/ absolute cinema until he left for the US in 1936, where he continued working on his oeuvre. He was the only avant-garde artist that did not break free from abstraction.

The radical language employed by the avant-garde, which mirrored the practice and theory of abstract cinema, was accurately described by Clement Greenberg in his famous essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch":

> It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at "abstract" or "nonobjective" art – and poetry too. The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape – not its picture – is aesthetically valid; something given, increate, independent of meanings, similars or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.[18]

One of the most interesting episodes in the history of abstract art was Malevich's visit at the Bauhaus in Dessau in 1927. Malevich, the pioneer of *rational geometric abstract art*, met with Richter and saw his movies. The contact with the purely abstract film of the German artist confirmed his theories about painting in motion in relation to film and, even more, it convinced him to write Richter a screenplay for a Suprematist film. Hans Richter himself said that "[t]he reason for Malevich's visit was the desire to make known and accessible his Suprematist view of the world through a film and to test it through movement."[19] The notation of the storyboard was a succession of geometric (Suprematist) figures, accompanied by a few lines that explained the dynamics and the interweaving and transformation of those figures.[20] The film would had been called *An Artistic and Scientific Film – Painting and Architectural Issues – Approaching the New Plastic Architectural System*. A sophisticated title, matching the ambition of its authors. Unfortunately, the film was never made.

The Utopia of Artistic Endeavor and Its Non-Imaginary

The abstract art of the twenties and the thirties had an utopian character in its programmatic desire to change the historical order. In this endeavor, it had to square two fundamental, metaphysical relations in order to justify its existence: first, between its external relation with history and culture (supposedly trans-historical), and second, its internal relation that concerns the change itself of the human nature and of the human artist. Abstractionism's relation with the history of art was a plainly visionary endeavor. Like any other statement of the avant-garde, those of the promoters of abstract cinema sounded equally alarming, aggressive, and enthusiastic: "Until now film has been largely spared from art history – now art history has got hold of it."[21]

Owing also to the invention of abstract cinema, the avant-garde artists' sense of worthiness with regards to their art changed into an awareness of its direct contribution to the history of art, which was a typical reaction for them. In the same logic, the artist had to change completely, to change their entire philosophy of artistic creation, namely the entire language of the work of art, regardless of genre. Richter described Eggeling's artistic endeavor in the following terms: "His artistic work led him from painting […] toward film as the absolute fulfillment of the will for a pure form-creation of space-time and rhythm, which arouse in the fine arts."[22] According to Richter, what would have made Eggeling a new type of artist in his field was "the knowledge. […] The origin of this knowledge is of a general human kind.”[23]

Making this power of knowledge absolute is something peculiar to the rhetoric of the avant-garde, which imbued the work of art with concepts like *totality* and *the absolute*. The irony is, ideas uttered by Richter match perfectly those of Kandinsky’s as he stated them in his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* which were at the opposite strand of these rationalists. Kandinsky spoke in metaphysical terms about an inner necessity for the act of artistic creation. This was the exact point at which the avant-garde, in its desire to create the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, had unified dialectically its lines of action. In Russian cinema, on the other hand, Vertov was writing in 1922, in “WE: Variant of a Manifesto”, much more radical beliefs about the metamorphosis of the human nature he dreamt of, which was common to the Constructivist avant-garde:

> The “psychological” prevents man from being as precise as a stopwatch; it interferes with his desire for kinship with the machine. In an art of movement, we have no reason to devote our particular attention to contemporary man. […] *For his inability to control his movements, WE temporarily exclude man as a subject for film.* […] *The new man,* free of unwieldiness and clumsiness, will have the light, precise movements of machines, and he will be the gratifying subject of our films.[24]

A natural question to be asked upon an analysis of abstract cinema is whether it can or could have had a signifying potential strong enough to generate an imaginary. The question is pertinent because throughout the previous century, cinema fully satisfied the public’s natural desire to invent and reinvent parallel, sensitive, imaginary realities. Is there an imaginary of abstract art? Is it at all possible to invent an imaginary in the absence of a recognizable form of representation, of any correlation between an image and its correspondent in immediate or imagined reality? The abstract artists offered no answers to these questions other than through omission. This may be due to the fact that they believed reason – as we talk about a mechanical-rationalist era – is the supreme reality, and thus it could not had been possible to relate instinctively and emotionally to certain clichés that generate the imaginary. Paying tribute at his death, Richter wrote about Eggeling’s art:

> However, when he did one [artwork] it contained the result of his objectively universal experience – not an emotion but the vision of his exact, deeply felt world knowledge – something consciousness, disciplined, and unambiguous.[25]

This is, arguably, one of the most concise and precise description of the abstract-conceptual endeavor in visual arts from the interwar period.

For the viewer of *figurative* film, the image, its dynamics, content, the editing of sequences, are base elements which, if combined, generate a story. As the story unfolds and the construct is implicitly shown, the viewer immediately rewrites the parallel narrative sitting in his armchair. But this situation presupposes *story* and *plot* in the real sense of the word. In his excellent book, *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact,* Colin McGinn breaks down the experience of watching a film in a movie theatre in detailed and specific categories pertaining to the language of film, but especially in categories of perception, of projected image and its transformation in mental images opened with the so-called mental eye. He basically says that:

> What we see on the screen is a kind of imitation of consciousness, a modeling of our inner landscape. […] Thus, when mind and movie come into contact, it is one mind finding another; we see ourselves in film – our very consciousness stretched out before us. Moreover, *only* cinema provides this kind of mental analogy – not theatre, not painting, not sculpture. The movie screen is consciousness externalized, reified. It is as if the movie screen had a mind of its own.[26]

Cinema, like theatre, builds stories in time. To build a story, regardless of the artistic domain or genre, has always meant for the human being to invent a parallel and subjective time, precisely in order to elude, through culture, the dramatic passing of the objective time. Too psychologizing and purist from this point of view, McGill's study excludes theatre as an art that can produce, in its turn, transformations in this involuntary consciousness of perception of *the image in time*.[27] We commonly say that *theatre is a different world*, and on good reason: in theatre, as in cinema, time unfolds differently.[28] In relation to this aspect, the dispute over the parallelism between theatre and film is well-known since the early days of film, and it illustrated perfectly the nature and the content of narrative film. Well, none of these innate elements of cinema can be applied to abstract cinema because, beyond the fact that it *unfolds in time*, it offers nothing identifiable to what was known as cinema at that time. It offered, in exchange, the very thing it promised: images (drawings, paintings, montages), abstract and in motion.

It is hard to believe that this type of experimental cinema would have generated a specific imaginary, because it was formalist and had no history of its own. And beyond the rhythmic-compositional correspondence between image and sound, anything else can hardly be concealed. Another known fact is that with each artistic movement, the modernist avant-garde claimed the *year zero* and the zero point of language in art history. Moreover, when the avant-garde and experimentalism became the official art of interwar totalitarian regimes (such as the one in the USSR, and partially the one in fascist Italy), the eradication of history and its new inception with a founding year of a new era (sometimes through changing the calendar) imposed the invention of a new myth. This implied the development of a new imaginary through a new aesthetics. In this way, an emptiness was created, that needed to be filled with images as well. The interdiction of the iconoclastic avant-garde in 1934 in the USSR, as well as the political turn of Italian Futurism in 1922, are phenomena that speak by themselves about an inner necessity to establish a relation with a familiar visual realm.

And yet, in the fifties, purely abstract artists such as Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko do not overthrow aesthetic categories which were initially regarded as conservative by the interwar avant-garde, such as *the beautiful* and *the sublime*. The latter was linked to the aesthetics of the narrative or illusionist painting until the nineteenth century. These aesthetic categories manifest themselves trans-historically; and much more importantly, outside any narrative structure. The conclusions that were articulated by these artists reveal how, in the interwar period, the manifestly eradicated aesthetic categories (faulted in their very nature) are pure and informal, lacking any pre-established form.[29] The second avant-garde wave, in its claims to fall onto the steps of the interwar avant-garde, took a great step by revitalizing the values of abstractivism, although it should be mentioned that this time around artists were no longer anchored in ideologies and utopian revolutionary programs. Abstract cinema did not remain indifferent to this cultural appropriation; instead, it continued the interwar tradition in spectacular forms, but which would not have been possible without the amazing technological progress. Oskar Fischinger is the direct descendant of this art.

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Notes

[1] Hans Richter, “The True Sphere of Film,” in Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design and Film (1923-1926)*, London: Tate Publishing, 2011, p. 223. “G” is the shortcut for *Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, an avant-garde magazine that was issued between 1923 and 1926, and was edited by Werner Graeff, El Lissitzky, and Hans Richter.

[2] The ensemble of abstractivist theses can indicate the general research direction chosen by the abstract artists. Due to the multiple origin of this tendency (Germany, Holland, Russia – and later the USSR, etc.) and especially due to the different contexts that generated abstract art, a thorough analysis for each particular case should be developed.

[3] Germaine Dulac, “We Cinematists!,” in Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 233.

[4] *Ibidem*.

[5] In the midst of the Cultural Revolution in Russia in 1918, Anatoly Lunacharsky was officially proclaiming that art should develop on experimental bases. See Andrey Smirnov, *Sound in Z: Experiments in Sound and Electronic Music in Early 20th Century Russia*, Cologne: Walter König, 2013.

[6] As an official representative of Russia in Berlin in 1921, El Lissitzky played an essential role in this issue.

[7] We suppose it was a text by Hans Richter; in Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 205.

[8] Jean-Michel Bouhours, “Oskar Fischinger and the European Artistic Context,” in Cindy Keefer and Jaap Guldemond (eds.), *Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967): Experiments in Cinematic Abstraction*, Amsterdam: EYE Filmmuseum and Los Angeles: Center for Visual Music, 2013, p. 33.

[9] See his essay “The Montage of Attractions” [1923], in *Selected Works*, Volume I: *Writings, 1922-34*, edited and translated by Richard Taylor, London: BFI Publishng and Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988, pp. 33-38.

[10] I mention here especially these two films: *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Ruttmann) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov). Coincidentally, both present a day in the life of a city – Berlin and Moscow respectively.

[11] Margarita Tupitsyn, *Malevich and Film*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002, p. 66.

[12] Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 38.

[13] Fernand Léger, “Painting and Cinema,” in Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 237. His film, *Anemic Cinema*, was shown in Berlin in 1925 at the event called *Der Absolute Film*, a German-French initiative that presented avant-gardist films by René Claire, Fernand Léger, Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, and Walter Ruttmann.

[14] The film also had a preview in Frankfurt in 1921.

[15] Besides, the titles of Kandinsky’s paintings also have names reminiscent of the musical realm.

[16] Philippe-Alain Michaud, “Der Weg zur vierten Dimension. *Rhythmus 21* und die Genese filmischer Abstraktion,” in Timothy O. Benson (ed.), *Hans Richter: Begegnungen*, Munich: Prestel, 2014, p. 52 (my translation).

[17] Oskar Fischinger, quoted in Jean-Michel Bouhours, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[18] Clement Greenberg, quoted in Jean-Michel Bouhours, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

[19] Phillipe-Alain Michaud, *op. cit.*, p. 55 (my translation). Margarita Tupitsyn mentions that “while watching these films at the Bauhaus, Malevich no doubt recognized that Richter had effectively fulfilled a filmic articulation of what had until then being an immobile Suprematist apparatus” (*op. cit.*, p. 57).

[20] The *abstract* manner of notation for an event unfolding in time was nothing new. The concern for rethinking “score writing” and for inventing new systems of notation for the event (mainly the sound- and performance-based), and in fact for establishing a notation based on a *graphic code* was common in that period.

[21] The editorial team at the *G* magazine (supposedly a text by Hans Richter), in Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 228.

[22] Hans Richter, in Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 197.

[23] *Ibidem.*

[24] Dziga Vertov, “WE: Variant of a Manifesto,” in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, edited and with an introduction by Annette Michelson, translated by Kevin O’Brien, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 7-8.

[25] Hans Richter, in Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 198.

[26] Colin McGinn, *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact*, New York: Vintage Books, 2007, pp. 68-69.

[27] The aforementioned exclusivism of McGinn’s comes from the fact that he

analyses strictly the viewer's relation with the 2D image implicit in the image projected onto a screen. The analogy mentioned here is relevant for the perception of the story as both content and image of the performance, both as story proper, as object, as well as a storyline that unfolds in time.

[28] Theatre is a story told in two distinct temporalities: that of the fictional story on the stage and that of the real time experienced by the viewer in the theatre hall. These two temporalities overlap with a third one, which is the objective passing of time as duration of the performance – not to be confused with the objective temporality. The sensitivity and the perception of each viewer determine subjective passings of time and generate particular reactions with regards to the passing of time in the theatre hall. This perception creates a part of what is called the "scenic illusion." The example can be extended to cinema, but in this case it can be called "the suspension of disbelief."

[29] See Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now," *Tiger's Eye*, vol. 1, no. 6, 1948, pp. 51-53.