

Exhibiting Structural Film?
Annette Michelson, Between
Criticism and Curating
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Cover of *New Forms in Film*, exhibition catalogue, Montreux 1974

In his critical account of *New Forms in Film*, an exhibition devoted to the most current research of American independent cinema, and organized by Annette Michelson in 1974 in Montreux, Switzerland, Dominique Noguez, one of France's foremost theoreticians and promoters of experimental film, criticized the retrospective for being too structured.¹ For Noguez, if *New Forms in Film* acted both as an assessment and a manifesto of New American Cinema, offering one of the first “readings” of “American filmic modernity,” the plurality of works that could be included under the umbrella term of New American Cinema² was cut off from everything produced on the West Coast—a production distinguished, according to him, by more exuberance and irrationality than its New York counterpart—to favor films characterized by rigor and austerity. Yet, as partial as it might have been, Noguez nevertheless acknowledged Michelson's

selection for being coherent and intelligent, a choice able to show the newest and most remarkable directions of what henceforth could appear, as he wrote, as a “New New American Cinema.”³

Widely known as an early editor of *Artforum* before going on to found the journal *October* together with Rosalind Krauss in 1976, in parallel to her main activities as a critic, editor, translator, and professor, Annette Michelson also participated—if we allow ourselves to reframe it in contemporary terms—in the constellation of curatorial practices. In the wake of the so-called “cinematic turn” in contemporary art, *New Forms in Film*, as well as other “exhibitions” or film programs in which Michelson was involved as organizer, could shed light on the increasing interest surrounding the status of film and the moving image in the field of contemporary art, and more specifically on the integration of experimental cinema into museum and gallery contexts, as these events represent specific historical examples of attempts to present structural cinema within the context of art spaces. As Noguez remarked in the same passage, Michelson’s *New Forms in Film* differed from the previous, usual, modes of showing experimental film as “furtive presentations at the Cinémathèque” or in “muddled white nights.”

Montreux, 1974

New Forms in Film took place from August 3–24, 1974, in the town of Montreux on the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland. Advertised in the press release as “weeks of American avant-garde cinema in Montreux,” *New Forms in Film* consisted of a survey that brought together the work of Bruce Baillie, Stan Brakhage, Robert Breer, Hollis Frampton, Barry Gerson, Ernie Gehr, **Ken Jacobs**, Peter Kubelka, George Landow, Jonas Mekas, Yvonne Rainer, Paul Sharits, Harry Smith, Michael Snow, and Joyce Wieland, and took the form of a series of screenings, each presenting the production of one of the 15 filmmakers and artists individually. According to the catalogue, Annette Michelson was invited to Switzerland to curate *New Forms in Film* by curator and art critic René Berger, who was at the time director of the Musée des Beaux-arts in Lausanne, and by Galerie

Impact, also in Lausanne. Berger had early on championed video art through his theoretical writings, and the integration of the medium into exhibition spaces in Switzerland.⁴ Financial support was provided by the local tourist board, which also loaned its newly built Convention Centre for the event. Over the course of three weeks, the audience could engage in sustained viewings of, for instance, choreographer Yvonne Rainer’s *Lives of Performers* (1972), a film associated with minimalist and postmodern dance; Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* (1967), which at that point had become a landmark in experimental filmmaking and pivotal for the formation of Michelson’s discursive apparatus; or, as on the evening of August 8, attend a joint screening and roundtable discussion of works by Michael Snow, Jonas Mekas, and Robert Breer, with all three filmmakers present.⁵ There were two daily screenings, starting at 5pm and 9pm, each introduced by Michelson, and concluding with a public discussion. Five of the filmmakers (Michael Snow, Jonas Mekas, Robert Breer, Peter Kubelka, and Ernie Gehr) were present to talk about their work. Kubelka gave two lectures in addition to screenings of his complete works: the first was entitled “Metric Cinema” (the name he gave to his theory of montage based on principles of seriality and permutation in music), while in the second he addressed the question of “Articulation in Cinema.”⁶

This presence of filmmakers and the inclusion of theoretical debates and talks in *New Forms in Film* were part of Michelson’s agenda to define a specific mode of presenting and experiencing films made under the label of New American Cinema, a vague term designating the range of films made outside the studio system, and combining a reduced economy of means with a quest for alternative regimes of visual representation. Indeed, as Michelson wrote in the press release:

New Forms in Film has been planned as more than merely a series of screenings. It is designed as an occasion for intensive contact between a new audience and a contemporary art form. For this reason we have invited five filmmakers to be present for several days of conversations, talks, and demonstrations. It is

our hope that contact will be both formal and intensive.⁷

Even though this passage is obviously aligned with the marketing dimension any press release is intended to fulfill, Michelson's insistence on the event as being more than just "a series of screenings" is worth looking at critically. *New Forms in Film* did not take place in a film theater, nor in an informal venue where the "muddled white nights" of underground cinema mentioned by Noguez were usually organized. It was not a clear example of an attempt to integrate the moving image into museum or gallery spaces, as was the case with the exhibition *Prospect 71—Projection* (1971) for instance; nor was it intended to situate experimental cinema in large-scale art exhibitions, as in *Sonsbeek 71* (1971) and *documenta 5* (1972).⁸ Rather, the films were presented according to the spectatorial conventions of the "traditional" film apparatus, a projector and chairs being arranged in one room of the Montreux Convention Centre. Helene Kaplan, who worked as Michelson's assistant on the show, projected some of the films, while filmmakers present in Switzerland, such as Ernie Gehr, projected their work themselves. In this respect, *New Forms in Film* is similar to other surveys of avant-garde film, including P. Adams Sitney's *New American Cinema* that toured Europe in 1964 and 1967, as well as *EXPRMNTL*, the Experimental Film Festival of Knokke-le-Zoute in Belgium (1947–1974).

Reviews of *New Forms in Film* referred to it as either "weeks of American Avant-Garde Cinema," as a "festival," or as an "exhibition"; yet, as Michelson pointed out in the catalogue, the project was "conceived more on the lines of an exhibition than a festival."⁹ This insistence on her survey as an exhibition rather than a festival was briefly thematized by Michelson in an article written by French film critic Louis Marcorelles in *Le Monde*:

[she] insisted that the event be called an "exhibition," no pun intended or snobbery, but to emphasize a qualitative difference. Films are not spectacles to be consumed, but must be looked at as in a painting exhibition, and one should be able to dwell upon

particular details, as well as, accordingly, analyze a work.¹⁰

Further on in his critical review, Marcorelles reported that this analogy between film and painting was recalled by Michelson after each screening by way of the notion of "materiality," a term that refers to the politics of modernist film practice in the way it "is considered to be a refutation of the transparency of conventional film technique through the full exploration of the material properties of cinematic expression," and, unlike and contrary to dominant cinema, in the way it operates an "anti-illusionist" critique.¹¹ Even if only briefly touched upon, it can be understood that, if *New Forms in Film* proposed a conceptualization of spectatorship and of the modes of exhibiting films (as art exhibition), it did so by applying a model of viewership borrowed from the visual arts to film. Hence, by the same token, it suggested their closeness in phenomenological terms to the extent that both participate in the same regimes of visibility.

If, at the time of this exhibition in Switzerland Michelson was already mostly known as a theorist of avant-garde cinema, her interpretative frame of structural film having become the dominant analytical mode of this body of work, before a more marked transition into writing about cinematic arts, her previous published work had mostly dealt with the practice of visual artists. In his study of the modes of film analysis, historian David Bordwell acknowledges Michelson's writing on film as having integrated avant-garde cinema into the canons of modernist art history and criticism, and as having constructed a frame for film analysis he termed "interpretative," in which the work of artist-filmmakers becomes a model for knowledge and cognition.¹² If Michelson established a critical canon for writing about experimental cinema, to understand how her works on the moving image and on the visual arts informed each other, and what this interaction might tell us about the relationship between criticism and modes of exhibition in turn, it is necessary to look at the ways in which her discursive strategies and concepts have circulated, as well as how they have been translated between her work on different art practices.

Art and Film (Criticism) as Epistemologies

In her seminal essay of 1969 on sculptor Robert Morris, Michelson identified a crisis in art criticism ushered in by emerging artistic practices, notably those presented in the exhibition *10x10* at the Dwan Gallery in 1967, which included works by Robert Morris and other future major minimalist artists, whose “new attitude” and “new sensibility” created a situation in which art became, according to her, “apodictic.”¹³ This gave shape to a new aesthetic landscape that revealed the insufficiencies of the art criticism of the time, founded, wrote Michelson, on a form of “idealism.” Hence, what Morris undertook was a critique of traditional sculptural conventions, and of the virtual space it both produces and rests upon to generate, following her reading of *Untitled (Corner Piece)* (1964), “a space common to object and beholder.”¹⁴ This conception of sculpture as an exploration of concrete space, of its sensible parameters, and of the laying bare of the structures of the sculptural object prompted Michelson to bring it close to philosophical activity, most specifically to phenomenological inquiry:

It is the commitment to the exact particularity of experience, to the experience of the sculptural object as inextricably involved with the sense of the self and of that space which is their common dwelling, which characterizes these strategies as radical.¹⁵

Further on in the essay, making analogies between Morris’ sculptures and postmodern dance, as well as with the French *Nouveau roman* of Alain Robbe-Grillet, the explorations of objects and bodies in their spatial settings initiated in these three fields constitute, she wrote, “a central focus for modern epistemological inquiry.”¹⁶ If, in the context of minimal art, Michelson grounds her argument in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, her defense of an epistemology (rather than an aesthetics or history, for instance) of modernism can be seen as a generic epistemic stance that traverses her critical work. In a lecture delivered at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1970 on “Art and the Structuralist Perspective,” Michelson mentioned, as Krauss later reminded us, “the disappointment of Structuralism’s

hostility to abstract art, a philistinism unworthy of the movement’s extraordinarily formal thinkers,”¹⁷ and rightly raised the question of their similarities: “How can a scientific methodology so closely analogous to that of modern aesthetics reject contemporary aesthetic form?”¹⁸; it is henceforth with and against them (in this specific instance, Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *Anthropologie Structurale*, 1958) that she staged her own encounter between structuralist thought and modernist art, both, she wrote, inhabited by the same “crisis of the real.” The “Great Divide”—between world and representation; object and subject; thing and sign—which defines modernity has triggered conceptual and aesthetic proposals which try to bring these poles back together or inhabit the gap between them; yet, they have fostered the chiasmus between a linguistic apprehension of the world and the movement toward the concreteness of modern art. Michelson noted, however, “there is an epistemology of modernism that questions the object as it questions the word, thereby questioning the sign.”¹⁹

If many practitioners and writers have relativized or even rejected the association between film practice and structuralism as understood in philosophy and the social sciences, there is no doubt that, in the case of Michelson, her interest in minimal art, postmodern dance, avant-garde film and modernist culture in general, is part of a wider interest in a rewriting of modernity largely supported by her exposure to structuralism and French thought.²⁰ In the “Foreword in Three Letters” to a special issue of *Artforum* devoted to film that she edited in 1971, replying to British filmmaker and theorist Peter Gidal’s criticism addressed to her essay on Michael Snow,²¹ in which he raised the issue of “structuralist film terms,” Michelson came up with the following answer:

To my own limited mind, perhaps by formation in the Paris of the 1960s, “structuralist terms” simply cannot suggest themselves with any clarity or relevance in the context of our particular discussion [...] I now invite you to consider how it is that writers of such obvious temperamental differences as yourself and myself should care so passionately for the same film [...] It is true that my conviction as to

the nature and importance of that transcendence and its redefining function is grounded in an interest in critical traditions richer than that of film—in the history and criticism of art and music, in certain methodological options offered by contemporary philosophy.²²

Film scholar Malcolm Turvey has rightly noted that Michelson's work escapes disciplinary boundaries, and that the heterogeneity of the theoretical sources she employs in her writing makes it barely possible to find any strict allegiance to a single school of thought or to a single thinker for, he asserts, "she is instinctively a *critic*, not a theorist."²³ If I tend to agree with this reading, by reconstructing Michelson's articulation of structuralist ideas with structural film, my intention is certainly not to imply that she conceives of the latter as a formalization, a literalization, or an embodiment of the former. Yet, if her critical enterprise is marked by such a theoretical "agnosticism" it is so to the extent that it enabled her to interpret a situation marked by the convergence of "epistemological inquiry and cinematic experience [...] in reciprocal mimesis."²⁴ This is a move we could read as an attempt to affirm the subversive value of New American Cinema and of minimalism in its renegotiation of the avant-garde/traditional dialectics, and to eschew the autonomy of the art work by integrating politics into what Gregory Taylor has called her "reflexive phenomenology."²⁵ Already in the concluding paragraphs of her essay on Robert Morris, the strategy of the minimalist artist producing a sculptural form expanding into the actual space of human action is brought close to the "revolutionary tradition of constructivism," in particular Alexander Rodchenko and Vladimir Tatlin. Morris' work, she writes, "moves into the real space of the functional while preserving the aesthetic non-functional character of sculpture."²⁶ It creates a relation between form and function that draws a homology between the artist and the engineer, and on the respective modes of production of the artistic and industrial spheres, suggesting the labor dimension of the artist's work. In addition, she draws a parallel between the reception of Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* (1919–1920) and the hostile tone of the discussions that welcomed Morris' early

work,²⁷ concluding that it is "the conception of a structural order, grounded in the 'culture of materials' as the condition of a fundamentally, radically transgressive movement, which Morris inherits from a revolution and its aesthetic innovations."²⁸ Here, the core ideas of the critical agenda of *October*, as the editorial of the first issue would put it, are already recognizable, named "in celebration of that moment in our century when revolutionary practice, theoretical inquiry, and artistic innovation were joined in a manner exemplary and unique."²⁹

"Radical Aspiration" in the Museum

By developing a critical apparatus enabling the interpretation of minimalism and structural film (as well as dance and even blockbuster films such as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968) as mimetic, reflexive models of human cognition and perception (sculpture about space as such; film about the act of seeing itself; dance that dissects movement per se, etc.), as illustrated in her writing about Morris, the move away from the object and its analysis opened it to its apprehension both on the levels of its contexts of production and reception.³⁰ In the case of film, this positioning of the political alongside the attack on illusionism operated by structural film was formulated in an essay published on four occasions, entitled "Film and the Radical Aspiration."³¹ In a movement analogous to her treatment of Morris in which she established a trans-historical link between minimalism and constructivism, with film Michelson also turned to the Russian historical avant-gardes, most specifically to the "intellectual cinema" of Sergei Eisenstein. As film scholar Gregory Taylor has shown, the connection she built between Stan Brakhage's cinema—which she herself described as "hypnagogic," and as having moved from "Abstract Expressionism, severing every tie to that space of action which Eisenstein's montage had transformed into the space of dialectical consciousness"—and that of the Russian filmmaker and theorist enabled her to inscribe him as part of the group of filmmakers she turned to in order to champion "the assault upon the space of representation,"³² the idea defended throughout "Film and the Radical Aspiration." More precisely she wrote:

The New American Cinema must therefore be seen as a powerfully explicit critique of the existing economic and social order upon which Hollywood, like Detroit, is founded. The formal radicalism of these artists is to be understood as grounded in the economic and social radicalization of the filmmaking process itself.³³

Gregory Taylor has shown that this theoretical politicization of the New York filmic underground into Marxist and utopian traditions—a political stance previously more familiar to European streams of film criticism—enabled her to “assume a privileged position in the American avant-garde’s progression, this time (in accordance with the European model) away from art production and criticism altogether, and into the realm of cultural/political theory.”³⁴ As for D. N. Rodowick, he has pointed to the way Michelson’s formulation of anti-illusionism conflated “ontological and epistemological arguments” in the context of film theory and “political modernism.”³⁵

If both arguments certainly underline some of the complexities regarding specific instances of the articulation of art, theory, and politics in the protean work of Michelson, a look at concrete situations—to go back to *New Forms in Film*—namely modes of film exhibitions, might illuminate the way some of her discursive constructions, as well as their underlying aesthetic and political agenda, were practically unfolded and renegotiated. Indeed, as she commented herself in the second version of “Film and the Radical Aspiration”:

The discomfort and hostility of many, indeed most, film critics to those aspects of contemporary cinema which bypass, contradict, or transcend the modes and values of psycho-social observation is familiar; *they provide, in fact, both context and target for this series of occasions known as a “festival.”*³⁶

As an exhibition apparatus, *New Forms in Film* raised a few questions. As stressed by Michelson herself, the Montreux exhibition was really intended to create and sustain a

European audience for the New American Cinema. If articles in the local press encouraged people to see some of the films, they nevertheless expressed misunderstandings and the public’s sometimes shocked reactions, and betrayed the fact that, apart from actors from the European film and art scenes, very few people attended.³⁷ Nevertheless, in a discussion between P. Adams Sitney and Michelson published in *Artforum* in 1975, Sitney acknowledged that *New Forms in Film*—along with the Hamburg Film weeks and the expansion of distribution networks—was one of the factors that enabled access to the American underground in Europe.³⁸ And in fact, the movement toward public forms of presentation and discussion—complementary as well as expanding the format of the written essay—can be traced back further. Throughout the 1960s the way experimental cinema was engaged with and presented was most often associated with the creation of counter-public spheres, whose existence was often ephemeral but allowed for moments of intense and alternative sensorial experiences or gatherings related to radical politics. Looking both backward and forward, the history of radical politics includes the occupation of film theaters by workers’ movements in France in the 1910s, expanded cinema events in the 1960s, and the “film discos” in Vienna in the 1990s.³⁹ If *New Forms in Film* unfolded in the form of a hybrid apparatus (a projector and chairs mimicking a cinema within a room of a convention center at a slick lakeside resort in Switzerland), it can be seen as a reterritorialization of structural film into the field of art, for it represented both the continuation of former events as well as their expansion into European territory.

As a matter of fact, in 1974 *New Forms in Film* was a Swiss iteration as well as the extension of a former film program organized by Michelson in 1972 at the Guggenheim Museum as part of its *Summer Arts Festival*. Taking place from August 2–13, the series aimed to present “recent tendencies in advanced filmmaking and to show major, large-scale works not often seen in public.” If critic Bill Simon wrote in the pages of *Artforum* that “most of the films shown can be categorized as structural films [. . .] this group of films, more than ever, invites a reconsideration of the conditions and characteristics of the structural film,”⁴⁰ Michelson’s

intention was to present these filmmakers and their work “as a group [. . .] for the rigor and innovative energy with which they have questioned the convention of cinematic illusionism, thereby attaining, in the late 1960s and 1970s, a maturity which is now that of the New American Cinema.”⁴¹ Yet, regardless of the question of the cohesion of this “group” and the multiple labels by which it was identified, what the event contributed was, according to art historian Philip Glahn, “identifying a break in the history of film and bringing about a shift in the critical debate.”⁴²

If her writing gained recognition to the point it defined the standard approach in writing about experimental film, this was possible through the double dynamic of reappropriating it into the sphere of the museum, as well as by consolidating (with all the exclusions this entailed) the categories of structural film and of New American Cinema.⁴³ However, this integration of film into art spaces did not result in attempts at spatializing film—as contemporary debates emphasize, referring to the question of site or of apparatus (schematically the white cube and the black box)—but as another gallery show involving the expertise of Michelson suggests, it revolved around issues of the specificity of film, the authorial status of filmmakers and artists, as well as around their institutional inscription. In 1973 the exhibition *Options and Alternatives: Some Directions in Recent Art* presented to the audience of the Yale University Art Gallery current research in painting, sculpture, performance, and film, this last section being organized by Michelson. In an accompanying text written by curator Klaus Kertess, the problem of exhibiting film and performance was explicitly raised. Entitled “Notes on the Anatomy of an Exhibition,” Kertess discussed the place of non-object-based art such as film and performance over several paragraphs. Regarding the status of film in the exhibition, he wrote that:

The weight given to filmmakers, beyond the individual merits of the works, and their inclusion in the painting and sculpture section of the exhibition, is to underline their role as artists. Until quite recently, filmmakers were seldom dealt with on the “art-scene” [. . .] The efforts of critics like Annette Michelson, as well as the increasing number of painters and

sculptors now involved with film and video, have gone a long way in breaking down useless barriers. Perhaps this exhibition is another step in that direction.⁴⁴

The solution for including these non-object-based works was as follows: the performance part—that is a concert of Philip Glass’ *Music in Twelve Parts* and Yvonne Rainer’s film *Lives of Performers*—took place in the sculpture hall, while Rainer’s work, along with the body of work Michelson called, following Eisenstein, “intellectual cinema,” was shown inside the gallery, but in a traditional film-screening setting, with a fixed schedule.

Today, as contemporary art seems to be increasingly reshaped, in a process of “becoming-cinema,” and as the renewed interest in forms such as expanded cinema, paracinema,⁴⁵ and “cinema by other means”⁴⁶ complicate the landscape and the objects that present themselves to critics, theorists, and historians, raising questions as to the ontological status of the cinematic, Annette Michelson’s relentless defense of structural cinema, and her trajectory between writing, editing, translating, teaching, and, as we have seen, curating, is exemplary. The “radical aspiration of film” and what we might be tempted to call the “Michelsonian apparatus,” i.e. the system of relationships between art and film, the spectator or audience, the critical frames, as well as the institutional contexts through which they become intelligible and unfold, represent a singular object, both from a contemporary and a historical perspective. Indeed, experimental cinema, once an autonomous sphere punctually intersecting with the fields of art and film, is now more and more shown in the context of art museums and galleries and reinscribed in the “attention economy” of exhibitions saturated by multiple temporalities and audiovisual fluxes, which turn museums into sites of permanent cognitive labor. Michelson’s insistence on a sustained if not conventional spectatorial activity of avant-garde film, and on its aesthetic-political underpinnings might thus serve as a case to historicize our contemporary moment. Also, while working at the intersections of diverse media such as film, sculpture, dance, and painting, the Michelsonian apparatus seems at odds with contemporary paradigms such as

systems or information art, the broad nexus of practices falling under the general term of art and technology, or even expanded cinema (which she criticized for its technophilia and proximity to commerce), which might constitute another point in a genealogy of exhibited moving image work. As a matter of fact, they anticipate the same real-time economy that shapes contemporary art in the post-digital era, and indeed, our lives today. It is with these two prospects in mind, at least, that one might contemplate anew the relevance to the present of Annette Michelson's radical aspiration.

- [1] Dominique Noguez, *Eloge du cinéma expérimental* [1978], Paris Expérimental, Paris 2010, p. 114–115.
- [2] See for instance Gregory Battcock, *The New American Cinema: A Critical Anthology*, E.P. Dutton, New York 1967.
- [3] Dominique Noguez, *Eloge du cinéma expérimental*, p. 114–115.
- [4] See François Bovier, Adeena Mey (eds.), *René Berger. L'art vidéo*, JRP|Ringier, Zurich 2014.
- [5] Montreux Tourist Office, *New Form in Film*, program leaflet, Montreux, 1974. While the catalogue edited by Annette Michelson is entitled *New Forms in Film*, the promotional material published by the Montreux Tourist Board kept “form” in the singular. I am following the spellings as they are printed.
- [6] Montreux Tourist Office, *New Form in Film*, program leaflet, Montreux 1974.
- [7] Annette Michelson, *New Form in Film. Press Release*, Montreux 1974.
- [8] The exhibition *Prospect 71—Projection*, curated by Konrad Fischer and Hans Strelow at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, which included films by artists associated with minimal, postminimal, conceptual, and land art, as well as works by experimental filmmakers, constituted, according to film scholar Maxa Zoller, “film projection-based exhibitions,” and exposed the film apparatus itself for a lack of appropriate ways of exhibiting films in museums. See Maxa Zoller, *Places of Projection. Recontextualizing the European Film Canon*, PhD Thesis, London, Birkbeck College, University of London, School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media, 2007, p. 131–164. Conceived as a site of “activity” rather than a traditional exhibition, and curated by Wim Beeren, *Sonsbeek '71* presented works by conceptual, minimal, and land artists, outdoors, across Holland. It included an inflatable pavilion designed by the British artists' collective Event Research Structure Group, in which films such as Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt's *Swamp* (1969), Michael Snow's <—> (*Back and Forth*) (1969), and Robert Morris' *Gas Station* (1969) were screened. As part of Harald Szeemann's documenta 5, a film cycle entitled *Documenta Filmschau* was included at the Kino Royal. It presented seven sections devoted to “New American Cinema,” with films by Barry Gearson, Larry Gottheim, Andrew Noren, Paul Sharits, Joyce Wieland, Stan Brakhage, Michael Snow, David Rimmer, George Landow, Ken Jacobs, Tony Conrad, Hollis Frampton; three sections of “New European Cinema” with films by Werner Nekes and Dore O., Klaus Wyborny, Birgit and Willem Hein; a section devoted to Russ Meyer and “Erotic Cinema” with films by Stephen Dwoskin and Irm and Ed Sommer; two sections of “Sozialistischer Realismus” with films from China; and additional showings of political films and “Trivialpornographic.” See *Documenta Filmschau: vom 1. 7. bis 5. 7. '72 im Kino Royal*, program poster, documenta 5, Kassel 1972.
- [9] Annette Michelson (ed.), *New Forms in Film*, Corbaz, Montreux 1974.
- [10] Louis Marcorelles, “Le nouveau cinéma américain. Une ‘exposition’ du septième art,” *Le Monde*, August 27, 1974, p. 1. Author's translation.
- [11] David N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism. Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1994, p. 4–5. Here Rodowick explicitly draws on Michelson to identify this specific feature of political modernism in the field of film and film theory.
- [12] David Bordwell, *Making Meaning. Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge/London 1989, p. 57–64.
- [13] Annette Michelson, “Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression,” Julia Bryon-Wilson (ed.), *Robert Morris*, October Files 15, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2013, p. 7–49, originally published in *Robert Morris*, exh. cat., Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC 1969.
- [14] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- [15] *Ibid.*, p. 24–25. In the paragraph following this sentence, Michelson supports her argument referring to her notes from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's lectures at the Collège de France which, as the footnote suggests, she attended, and which were subsequently edited as Claude Lefort (ed.), *Le visible et l'invisible, suivi de Notes de Travail*, Gallimard, Paris 1964.
- [16] Annette Michelson, “Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression,” p. 37.
- [17] Rosalind Krauss, “Preface,” Richard Allen, Malcolm Turvey (eds.), *Camera Obscura Camera Lucida. Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2003, p. 9.
- [18] Annette Michelson, “Art and the Structuralist Perspective,” *On the Future of Art*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, A Viking Compass Book, New York 1970, p. 51.
- [19] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- [20] The relationship between structural film and structuralism deserves further and more careful attention. In fact, there exists very little consistent literature on this specific issue, which is more complex than a simple attitude of differentiation toward theory on the part of filmmakers. P. Adams Sitney who first coined the term “structural film” mentions the emergence of “academic critics under the influence of Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan” without singling out structuralism in *Visionary Film. The American Avant-Garde 1943–2000* (Third Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 2002, p. 410). His own take on the notion is indeed more indebted to Greenberg, Filmmaker and writer Malcolm Le Grice who is associated with the British structural/materialist film theorized by Peter Gidal, wrote the following on the relationship between structuralism and structural films: “The development of experience depends on developments of structuring. I see the movement from Cezanne to Analytical Cubism as the historical basis of visual structural art. Structuralism in art would seem to imply a broadly representational, or more accurately, homological, condition. This ‘homology’ is defined by Lévi-Strauss as an analogy of functions rather than of substance. In *The Structuralist Activity*, Roland Barthes talks of a process whereby the structuralist decomposes the real and then recomposes it. The reconstructed ‘object,’ which I take to imply mainly the structuralist art object, is described as a simulacrum of the ‘natural object’ and is seen as ‘intellect added to object’ [...] It is perhaps this concentration on structure as process or activity which most recommends the project to the time-based film medium at the present time. However inadequate it might be later, I would like for now to confine the use of the term ‘structuralism’ in film to situations where the space/time relations of a filmed situation are reformed or transformed through a definable structuring strategy into a new ‘experiential’ (as opposed to didactically conceptual) homology.” Malcolm Le Grice, “Kurt Kren's Films,” Peter Gidal (ed.) *Structural Film Anthology*, BFI, London 1978, p. 60–61.
- [21] Annette Michelson, “Toward Snow (part I),” *Artforum*, IX (June 1971), p. 30–37.
- [22] Annette Michelson, “Foreword in Three Letters,” *Artforum*, X, (September 1971), p. 9.
- [23] Malcolm Turvey, “Introduction,” Malcolm Turvey, Richard Allen (eds.), *Camera Obscura Camera Lucida. Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, p. 24. Original italics.
- [24] Annette Michelson, “Toward Snow (part I),” p. 30. Michelson's insistence on avant-garde film as epistemology

- is also articulated in an article devoted to Dziga Vertov, published at a later date than both her essays on Snow and Morris, in which she applies this model to Vertov. As she puts it: "If the filmmaker is like the magician, a manufacturer of illusions, he can, unlike the prestidigitator and in the interest of instruction of a heightening of consciousness, destroy illusion by that other transcendently magical procedure, the reversal of time by the inversion of action. He can develop, as it were, 'the negative of time' for 'the Communist decoding of reality.' This thematic interplay of magic, illusion, labor, filmic techniques, and strategy, articulating a theory of film as epistemological inquiry, is the complex central core around which Vertov's greatest work [*Kino Glaz*] develops." Annette Michelson, "From Magician to Epistemologist. Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*," P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *The Essential Cinema*, New York University Press, New York 1975, p. 95–111.
- [25] Gregory T. Taylor, "The Cognitive Instrument in the Service of Revolutionary Change": Sergei Eisenstein, Annette Michelson, and the Avant-Garde's Scholarly Aspiration," *Cinema Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Summer 1992), p. 52.
- [26] Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," p. 43.
- [27] "For Trotsky, it is a nonfunctional intrusion, a luxury in the devastated city of the postrevolutionary period. The *Monument* provoked a discussion, which in fact recalls those who greeted the appearance of Morris' early work. It was a kind of 'primary structure' for its contemporaries." *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- [28] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- [29] "About October," *October*, no. 1 (Spring 1976), p. 3.
- [30] Hence, as Branden Joseph puts it, following Maurice Berger's and Hal Foster's readings, Morris' "anti-formalist dynamic will become the foundation on which the anti-institutional of the later work of Morris, Smithson, and others is built." Branden W. Joseph, "Robert Morris and John Cage: Reconstructing a Dialogue," *October*, vol. 81 (Summer 1997), p. 64–65.
- [31] Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," *Film Culture*, no. 42, Fall 1966, p. 34–42. Reprinted in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *The New American Cinema. A Critical Anthology*, E.P. Dutton, New York 1967, p. 83–102; P. Adams Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, Praeger, New York 1970; reprinted Cooper Square Press, New York 2000, p. 404–422. A subsequent, revised version was published as the introduction to the catalogue of *New Forms in Film*: Annette Michelson (ed.), *New Forms in Film*, Montreux 1974, p. 9–16. Engaging with film as a revolutionary practice, a medium in this regard taken she says between "convergence and dissociation," Michelson devotes her essay to Truffaut, Godard, and Resnais. In the 1974 revised version, the section she devotes to the French New Wave Filmmakers is replaced by reflections on Deren's poetics and her role in a genealogy of the American avant-garde that has shifted toward "the epistemological mode of discourse," which allows her to write a few concluding remarks on some of the filmmakers presented in Switzerland (Jacobs, Sharits, Frampton, Gehr, Landow, Wieland, Snow).
- [32] See her edited volume, "Eisenstein/Brakhage. Special Film Issue," *Artforum*, XI, no. 5 (January 1973).
- [33] Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration: An Introduction," *New Forms in Film*, p. 11.
- [34] Gregory T. Taylor, "The Cognitive Instrument in the Service of Revolutionary Change": Sergei Eisenstein, Annette Michelson, and the Avant-Garde's Scholarly Aspiration," p. 56.
- [35] David N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, p. 154.
- [36] Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *The New American Cinema. A Critical Anthology*, E.P. Dutton, New York 1967, p. 89. My italics.
- [37] Interview with Annette Michelson, September 8, 2011, New York. If the aim of building an audience for the New American Cinema gave average results, Annette Michelson had managed to finance new prints of each film presented, which filmmakers were able to keep after the exhibition. As for the reception of *New Forms in Film*, the local paper *L'est vaudois* covered the event throughout August 1974.
- [38] Annette Michelson, P. Adams Sitney, "A Conversation on Knokke and the Independent Film Maker," *Artforum*, vol. XXIII (9–May 1975), p. 63–66.
- [39] See for instance Anna Schober, "Political Squats: Cinema and City as Movers of the Real," in Christian Emden, Catherine Keen, David Midgley (eds.), *Imagining the City, Vol. 1: The Art of Urban Living*, Peter Lang, Oxford 2006, p. 249–271.
- [40] Bill Simon "New Forms in Film," *Artforum*, vol. XI, no. 2 (1972), p. 78.
- [41] "Summer Arts Festival '72 at the Guggenheim Museum," press release, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archive, 1972. The filmmakers and artists presented at *New Forms in Film 1972* were: Jonas Mekas, Hollis Frampton, Stan Brakhage, Michael Snow, Harry Smith, Joyce Wieland, Ernie Gehr, Paul Sharits, Barry Gerson, Yvonne Rainer, and Ken Jacobs.
- [42] Philip Glahn, "Brechtian Journeys: Yvonne Rainer's Film as Counterpublic Art," *Art Journal*, vol. 68, no. 2 (Summer 2009), p. 80. In this regard, Glahn's reading aligns with Bordwell's.
- [43] This break was summed up the same year by Michelson herself in the catalogue of a Vancouver exhibition called *Form and Structure in Recent Film* which she helped organize, through a rhetorical line she repeated on numerous occasions, asserting that the common feature of the exhibited artists (here Frampton, Gehr, Jacobs, Landow, Sharits, Snow, and Wieland) was their "assault on the space of representation" which suggests a shift toward "an epistemological concern with the nature of filmic process and experience, which will require another space, another time, those of a new cinematic discourse." See Annette Michelson, "An Introduction to Form and Structure in Recent Film," Dennis Wheeler (ed.), *Form and Structure in Recent Film*, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, 1972. This coincides with Branden Joseph's analysis of Tony Conrad's *Yellow Movies* (1973), produced after his return from Europe where he encountered Wilhelm and Birgit Hein, Otto Muehl, and the Viennese actionists. According to Joseph, the *Yellow Movies* represent Conrad's enterprise of subverting the category of structural film as Sitney had defined it in *Visionary Film*. Thus, 1972 marks a moment of crisis of the notion of structural film, and Michelson's and Conrad's takes, and reworkings of it might be read as representing two divergent branches in a genealogy of the notion. See Branden W. Joseph, *The Rob and the Cooked: Tony Conrad and Beverly Grant in Europe*, August Verlag, Berlin 2012.
- [44] Klaus Kertess, "Notes on the Anatomy of an Exhibition," *Options and Alternatives: Some Directions in Recent Art*, exh. cat., Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut 1973, p. 9–10.
- [45] See, for instance, Jonathan Walley, "The Material of Film and the Idea of Cinema: Contrasting Practices in Sixties and Seventies Avant-Garde Film," *October*, no. 103 (Winter 2003), p. 15–30.
- [46] Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 2012.