IV. FILM AS "THEORY": THE AVANT-GARDE

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Apperception on Display: Structural Films and Philosophy

Both filmmakers and scholars have described structural films in terms relevant and important to philosophy. P. Adams Sitney, for example, characterizes the aspiration of structural films as "the cinematic reproduction of the human mind."[1] Annette Michelson, in referring to Michael Snow's landmark structural film *Wavelength* (1967), describes Snow's camera movement as "the movement of consciousness."[2] Even Snow himself compares his project with that of philosophy, claiming: "If *Wavelength* is metaphysics, *Eye and Ear Control* is philosophy, and ↔ will be physics."[3] Snow's bold statement in no way implies that he equates his filmmaking with philosophy. Rather, Snow underscores his preoccupation with some traditional philosophical questions: reality, illusion, motion, energy, and velocity. But what, then, is the relationship between avant-garde films and philosophy? Do they merely share some interests of inquiry or does a more significant relationship exist between the two?

In this essay, I aim to delineate the relationship between avant-garde film and philosophy. Philosophers, concerned with unveiling the philosophical potential and limits of film, have primarily focused on narrative fiction film, putting aside alternative film forms or modes such as documentary or avant-garde films.[4] This may have to do with the fact that many locate the philosophical potential of film in its "narrative," which contributes to the exercising and refinement of one's moral understanding of the world.[5] By shifting the focus from narrative film to avant-garde film, we should be able to examine how the nonnarrative aspects of film may make a philosophical claim or suggest a philosophical hypothesis.

I will first examine Noël Carroll's claim that avant-garde films are not theoretical. I will argue that although avant-garde films do not advance a film theory in a strict sense, their philosophical contribution can be found in their suggestion of new philosophical hypotheses regarding the film medium itself. I will then discuss the relationship between the cognitive value and aesthetic value of avant-garde film by focusing on Kurt Kren's *TV 15/67* (1967).

I. "AVANT-GARDE FILMS ARE NOT THEORETICAL"

In his article, "Avant-Garde Film and Film Theory," Carroll classifies four different ways in which an avant-garde film relates to film theory: (1) it can demand a theory expansion; (2) it can demand a theory contraction; (3) it can exemplify a theory; and (4) it can literalize a theory.[6] A theory, for Carroll, should meet the following two criteria. A theory should first aim to provide a general framework that can be applied to a large group of films, not just to one particular film. This can be called the generality requirement. Second, Carroll claims, the validity of a theory should be tested by evidence.[7] To demonstrate its validity, a theory should be able to present a reasonable amount of evidence or data that would support the theory. This can be called the verifiability requirement.

Carroll's first two postulations about the possible relationships between avant-garde film and film theory (those of theory expansion or contraction) reflect the fact that avant-garde films often challenge existing cinematic norms and conventions. Avant-garde movements in film, as well as in other art forms, prioritize a

subversion of established norms and conventions by deviating from them. Thus, an avant-garde film often provides a recalcitrant example to an established film theory and brings to the fore the necessity to modify either the theory or a common conception of the film medium.

The third relationship between avant-garde film and film theory, that of exemplification, Carroll defines as "being a sample or example of the kind of film or work of art that a given theory either endorses, implies or stipulates."[8] For instance, *Zorn's Lemma* (Hollis Frampton, 1970) may exemplify Kantian aesthetics in the sense that its structure manifests the Kantian idea of "purposeless purposiveness." The film consists of three parts. In the first part, we hear only soundtrack of a woman reciting twenty-four rhymes from the Bay State Primer. The second part of film—the major portion of the film—consists of images of words organized in alphabetical order. In this segment, each shot lasts for more or less one second (between twenty-three and twenty-five frames). As the film progresses, the words are replaced by images. In the last part of the film, we see a man, a woman, and a dog walk from foreground to far background. This last portion is also accompanied by an audio track of six women reading a text.[9] The overall structure of the film is, to a certain extent, symmetrical in the sense that the first and last portions of the film are accompanied by an audio track of female voices reading texts. The second portion of the film makes the viewer anticipate which letter will be displaced next, and as the "C" is finally substituted by images in the last cycle of the film, it provides the viewer a sense of completeness and closure. *Zorn's Lemma* invites the viewer to contemplate both the unity of the film as a whole and the diversity within each of the three parts. Carroll claims that a film like *Zorn's Lemma* can be said to be theoretical in the sense that it embodies a philosophical theory, the postulation of which provides the best explanation for the interpretation of the film. Frampton may or may not have intended to demonstrate Kantian philosophy in his film, but this postulation does illuminate both the structure and the spectatorial effect of the film.

The fourth relationship, the notion of literalization, is harder to grasp compared to the other three. As far as I understand it, a film literalizes a theory when it evokes or aligns itself with the theory by addressing issues associated with it. For example, in *Chelovek s kino-apparatom* [*The Man with the Movie Camera*] (1929), Dziga Vertov aligns himself with proletarian ideology by depicting filmmakers as workers, ones who gather and assemble fragments of the modern world. One of the differences between exemplification and literalization, according to Carroll, is that in the latter, the theory alluded to does not necessarily provide the best explanation for the interpretation of the film in question. Carroll makes an example of Bill Brand's *Works in the Field* (1978), which evokes information theory by superimposing a random dot matrix over images from documentary footage. According to Carroll, Brand somewhat misappropriates information theory's notion of the code to underscore the idea that the editing is coded because the referents of the code in these two cases seemingly differ.[10]

An avant-garde film, in Carroll's view, cannot achieve theoretical status proper by either exemplifying or literalizing a theory. According to Carroll, even if an avant-garde film alludes to a film theory by virtue of being an exemplification of the given theory, it is still far from presenting an actual film theory. Carroll readily acknowledges that many avant-garde filmmakers themselves often propose a film theory. Maya Deren, for instance, not only directed avant-garde films of various kinds, but also purported to define her filmmaking as "vertical filmmaking," which de-emphasizes the linear logic of narrative or drama. Carroll's claim, however, is that the film in question—the film itself—cannot be characterized as proposing a theory. Such an attempt does not pass the second requirement for a theory: verifiability. In Carroll's view, an individual film cannot propose a general theory as well as provide evidence for the theory in question simultaneously. Such a theory would be either skewed or circular.

Carroll is also skeptical about the capability of avant-garde film to prove or disprove a theory by literalizing it. For example, Carroll claims that structuralist/materialist films appear to bring to the fore the idea of "active spectatorship," but these films are unable to explain a set of correlations presupposed in advancing a theory of spectatorship. This, he argues, is because a film in and of itself does not provide a reason

to accept a set of binary oppositions between narrative versus nonnarrative, illusion versus anti-illusion, and passive versus active spectatorship.[11]

The way Carroll characterizes the theoretical arena of avant-garde films—or lack thereof—seemingly makes tenuous the notion of whether an avant-garde film can advance a philosophical thesis or theory. One of the assumptions underlying Carroll's claims is that in order for an avant-garde film to present a theory, the film should provide a theory as well as evidence of some sort to verify and justify that theory. It seems, however, that Carroll sets the standard too high. An avant-garde film rarely states a theory in such an explicit manner. However, this does not indicate that avant-garde film cannot make philosophical contributions, nor does this mean that avant-garde film cannot further one's knowledge. I would like to discuss two ways in which avant-garde films can make a philosophical contribution through means other than advancing a theory: (1) by revealing a new possibility of the medium and (2) by providing experiential knowledge to the viewer.

Given the nature or agenda of avant-garde film theories, especially the ones promoted by filmmakers themselves, Carroll's assessment of the philosophical contribution of an avant-garde film appears to be a bit hasty. Avant-garde film theories advanced by filmmakers themselves are often prescriptive rather than descriptive. By making a film in accordance with the theory or theoretical principles in question, filmmakers propose to adopt and explore a new kind of filmmaking. Carroll entertains such an objection. He considers the possibility of whether making an avant-garde film of a certain kind can be seen as a theoretical recommendation of that type of filmmaking. He rather quickly dismisses this objection, however, by saying, "making a flat film does not supply *a reason* for making other flat films" (emphasis added).[12]

One might argue against Carroll that while the film in question does not provide an *argument* for the adoption of the film style employed, it *reveals* a new possibility for the medium. Despite the ambiguous connotations of the term, I adopt the notion of revelation to reassess some of the philosophical contributions that avant-garde film can make. Monroe

C. Beardsley claims that the notion of revelation often connotes both the suggestion and confirmation of a hypothesis.[13] For instance, if I say, "His behavior at that party revealed something to me," I imply not only that his behavior afforded me an occasion to postulate a new hypothesis about him or his personality, but also that his behavior constituted a strong case for that hypothesis. Beardsley, however, rejects the revelation theory of the cognitive value in art as a comprehensive theory for art in general. In fiction, Beardsley believes, the revelation theory faces a problem because while fiction may suggest a hypothesis about the world, or about the reality external to an aesthetic object, fiction cannot, due to its fictive nature, confirm such a hypothesis.[14]

However, avant-garde films, especially the structural films that I focus on in this essay, do not face the same kind of problems that concern Beardsley. Structural films are mostly nonfiction films. Furthermore, the hypothesis suggested by a structural film is usually not about the world or the reality outside the film; the hypothesis often regards the film medium itself.[15] An avant-garde film may not provide ample evidence for the new hypothesis suggested, since it is only one instance, but still can confirm the hypothesis by presenting a strong case that mandates the postulation of such a hypothesis. For example, Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963), comprised of insect parts, leaves, and various debris inserted between two strips of film, refutes the idea that the film medium is a photographic record of an object or a pro-filmic event that took place in front of the camera. Objects here are literally transported into the filmstrip! In this regard, *Mothlight* does offer a case for a new hypothesis about the film medium.[16] The presentation or reception of such a hypothesis in and of itself may not constitute an act of knowledge. However, it does grant the possibility that avant-garde film can contribute to one's acquisition or expansion of a certain type of knowledge.

As I have mentioned earlier, Carroll denies the possibility that an avant-garde film can explicate any theoretical assumptions underneath a theory by literalizing it. However, Carroll's view does not imply that avant-garde film cannot further one's knowledge: especially experiential knowledge. Snow's *Wavelength* is

often addressed in relation to the famous debate in film studies between Stephen Heath and Noël Burch regarding the primary source of the "subject effect," the viewer's impression that both the story world and its narration process are structured around him or her. Heath argues that the subject effect is rendered via the viewer's alignment with the narrative, while Burch claims that it derives from organized perception via a particular type of film style.[17] The cognitive value of Snow's film does not derive from the fact that it provides such a crucial test case for these film theorists (on a personal note, and for the record, after reading so much about *Wavelength*, when I first saw the film, I thought to myself, "Burch is right!").

Snow must not have made this film to prove or disprove either theory, since his film preceded both Heath's and Burch's writings. Nor did Snow make the film to *illustrate* some philosophical issues. Rather, its significance lies in the fact that a viewer comes to an understanding of the issue at stake via his or her own experience of the film. An experience of the film in and of itself does not constitute knowledge (or the expansion of one's knowledge) until it is combined with the rest of one's knowledge through inference and reasoning. In Snow's case, it is not merely the viewer's experience of certain cinematic effects that furthers one's knowledge about the filmic medium; it does so because it leads the viewer to examine his or her conception of the relationship between the perceptual effects that film as a medium is capable of rendering and the cinematic mechanism that achieves such an effect. James Peterson locates the cognitive value of avant-garde films in this very capacity: their capacity for the viewer to acquire both procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge. That is, the viewer comes to an understanding of filmmakers' concerns, including theoretical issues regarding the film medium itself, via his or her experience of the film.[18]

Avant-garde films, despite their associations with film theories, rarely satisfy the two requirements Carroll set out for a theory—generality and verifiability. To grant an avant-garde film its philosophical contribution, an important distinction should be made. One should note that a philosophical claim advanced by avant-garde film is something for the viewer to *infer*

via his or her own *experience* of the film. Carroll is correct in pointing out that avant-garde film rarely presents a self-contained coherent film theory within a film itself. However, the philosophical significance of avant-garde film lies in the fact that it suggests new hypotheses regarding the film medium. That is, avant-garde film often presents a case in which the viewer must reconsider and revise his or her own conceptions of film, which can subsequently further the viewer's knowledge about the medium.[19] The film-viewing process of avant-garde films often demands philosophical reflection from the viewer, especially with regard to the film medium.

In the remainder of this essay, I will examine the relationship between the cognitive value and aesthetic value of avant-garde film. If we grant that an avant-garde film can make a philosophical contribution by suggesting a hypothesis regarding the medium, a few questions still remain. To begin, how do we evaluate the cognitive value of films? Furthermore, does cognitive value necessarily enhance the aesthetic value of a film?

II. APPERCEPTION ON DISPLAY

The heavy emphasis placed on the cognitive value of avant-garde films tends to neglect the importance of other values avant-garde films offer. In a classroom setting, students often admit that they "get it," but they still do not enjoy avant-garde films. This brings us to an important question regarding the value of avant-garde film, especially the role of cognitive value in relation to the overall value that an avant-garde film embodies. Why is avant-garde film valuable to us? What are some of the reasons to cherish avant-garde films? Does the value of avant-garde film mainly derive from its cognitive value? Does the cognitive value of avant-garde film enhance aesthetic value in any way? I will first discuss ways we can evaluate the cognitive value of avant-garde films and then examine its relation to aesthetic value.

I have suggested in the previous section that the cognitive status of avant-garde film is comprised of its capacity both to suggest a hypothesis regarding the medium and to enable the furthering of one's knowledge of the medium.

How, then, can we compare cognitive value among avant-garde films? It may be more difficult to come up with a list of objective measures to determine how much an avant-garde film expands one's knowledge, as individual viewers have different ranges of knowledge about the film medium. However, there appears to be some consensus in terms of how to evaluate the significance of a hypothesis suggested by an avant-garde film: originality and consistency.

The theoretical contribution of an avant-garde film is often measured against its originality within an historical context. That is, what is significant about an avant-garde film is not the presentation of any hypothesis, but the presentation of a *new* hypothesis and a novel possibility for the medium. For example, some may view that Brakhage's abstract-expressionist films are less original than structural films at the level of cognitive value in the sense that Brakhage's conceptions of the filmmaker as the agent behind the camera and of film as a vehicle to express and convey the filmmaker's perception or vision are rooted in romanticism, already advanced in other art forms such as poetry or painting.

Conceptual consistency provides another criterion for an evaluation of the cognitive value of avant-garde films. If an avant-garde film embodies a philosophical claim, as with any other philosophical claim, it should be consistent. A lack of consistency at the level of the hypothesis inferred not only affects the cognitive status of the film, in that it is less coherent and thus less convincing, but it also can have an impact on the aesthetic value of the film (if, by "consistency," we mean not only consistency at the level of the philosophical claim, but also consistency in the relationship between the hypothesis that the film suggests and the evidence that the film provides as an example of that hypothesis). Lack of consistency (or better coherence between hypothesis and evidence) will have an impact on the unity of the work as a whole. In my view, consistency in the latter sense (in the assertion of a hypothesis and the providing of evidence) is worthy of further examination in that it illuminates the relationship between the cognitive and aesthetic value of avant-garde film. In the remainder of this essay, I offer Kurt Kren's *TV 15/67* as a test case.

Kren, together with Peter Kubelka, is often considered to be the father of European structural film. Malcolm Le Grice praises Kren's *TV* as the first apperceptive film that transfers the primary arena of structuralist activity to the viewing of the film itself.[20] Kren's *TV* is a black-and-white silent film with a running time of less than five minutes. It consists of repetitions of five different shots—most lasting less than two seconds—intercut with short black-leader spacing. All five shots are of the same scene at a dock and are shot from approximately the same camera position. Each shot contains similar components with slight variation, as described below.

Shot 1: Through a window, we see three girls sitting on a pillar in the background with their backs to the camera. Additionally, two men sit in silhouette in the foreground, blocking more than half of the screen.

Shot 2: We see the same girls seen in Shot 1, but their positions have changed: the girls on the left and right in Shot 1 have switched their positions. The girl now on the left in this shot is standing and looking at the other two sitting on the pillar. The girl on the left then turns around and looks back toward offscreen left. We also still see the two men in silhouette in the foreground.

Shot 3: The same three girls are in the background, and we see a woman and child pass by in mid-ground. As the woman and the child walk toward offscreen right, one man in the foreground bends toward screen left and blocks most of the screen.

Shot 4: The three girls in the background watch a ship pass by in distant background. As the ship moves toward screen left, the second man in the foreground moves to left.

Shot 5: There is now only one girl on the pillar and she is looking offscreen left. A man with a child passes by toward screen left in mid-ground. The two men in the foreground are still blocking much of the screen.

These five shots appear to be simple, but each shot mirrors and complements the other by

exploring different planes and differing movements in screen direction. In Shot 1, the depth of the field is established via lighting and staging. Shot 2 is a variation of Shot 1: the two girls on the left and right switch their positions, while the girl in the middle stays in the same position. Two girls are contrasted via their clothing, with one wearing a black top and a light-color skirt and the other wearing a light-color sweater and a dark-color skirt. In Shot 3, the middle ground is explored via the two who pass by outside the window. In addition, the movement of the man in the foreground contrasts with the screen direction of this couple in the middle ground. Shot 4 explores another plane—the distant background—via the movement of the ship. Shot 5 balances out Shot 2. In both shots, the middle ground is explored with figure movement, but in opposite screen directions. Among the five shots, Shot 3 is the most elaborate. In this shot, three distinct planes are explored and figure movement seems perfectly choreographed: as soon as the woman and the child walk by outside the window, the man in the foreground bends over and blocks the whole screen as if it were a wipe.

Each shot is separated by a black screen. There is a longer space after every fifth shot, which suggests the clustering of shots into five-shot sequences. Furthermore, there occasionally are even longer breaks between these five-shot sequences, which suggests an additional level of sequencing, which I identify as "stanzas." The chart below depicts the order, variation, and grouping together of shots in the film. Although the ordering may seem mathematical, it is difficult to find a strict pattern, except that the first and last sequences are transposed. In each stanza, one shot, the first shot shown, becomes salient through repetition and builds up a visual rhythm.

One of the functions of this apparent mathematical structure, as depicted below, is to enable the spectator to reflect on his or her cognitive and perceptual processes while watching the film. First, the spectator tries to identify and differentiate the five different shots. As shots are repeated, the spectator can focus on the shots themselves, on details such as differing spatial planes, and notice the balancing and complementing of screen direction within a single shot or among shots. For instance, in the stanza dominated by Shot 3, due to the repetition of this single shot, we cannot help but notice how beautifully figure movement is arranged. In addition, the apparent systematic permutation of shots in the film engages the spectator in a mental game. After a few sequences pass, the viewer tries to predict which shot will come next. The mental game between the viewer and the film gives rise to pleasure, as well as frustration, in the viewer—depending on how close each guess is.

The aesthetic value, however, of Kren's *TV* does not lie solely in its systematic structure; consider also its poetic imagery. Other structural films often reduce visual components to abstract shapes. For example, Snow's *Wavelength* and Ernie Gehr's *Serene Velocity* (1970) feature a loft and a corridor, respectively, and the visual patterns of these two films become quite abstract, dominated by the rectangular shape of the windows in the loft or the door in the corridor. The images in *TV*, on the other hand, attract us not only as gaming elements, but as beautiful poetic glimpses—evoking Symbolist poetry's interest in the epiphany and the

FIGURE 1. Short sequences in Kren's *TV*.

12345	11345	22451	33512	44513	55313	55133	54321
	11145	22251	33312	44435	55513		
	11141	22252	33313	44434			
		22422		44144			
		23222		45555			

fleeting image as a source of insight and emotive impetus. Shot 5 certainly evokes a mood of loneliness by featuring only a girl with her back to the camera sitting in the background by herself, especially since the previous shots have all shown her in the company of two other girls. The fidgety behavior of one of the girls in both Shots 1 and 2 not only provides rhythm upon the repetition of these shots, but also conveys a sense of boredom and the mundane.

How, then, should we evaluate Kren's film? Is his film aesthetically inferior to *Serene Velocity* or *Wavelength* because his film falls short of living up to structuralist ideals and principles? Or, rather, does his film suggest a new hypothesis regarding the relationship between the representational content of photographic images and their structural system—that is, that the latter cannot completely overwrite the former? To put it differently, is Kren's film aesthetically astonishing—at least to me—despite its lack of theoretic consistency or because of its complexity? In my view, Kren's case falls under the latter.

As Le Grice notes, Kren's film is more concerned with the relationship between apparent mathematical structures, poetic images, and moods manifested in images than with pure systematic structure (the film is not governed by real mathematical formula).[21] Although Kren's *TV* invites the viewer to predict the logic of the permutation, it defies our capacity to grasp the formula. His film also resists the distinction between abstract-expressionism and structuralism—hot versus cool—in terms of their emotive register. Despite the fact that structural films were developed in reaction to abstract-expressionist filmmakers such as Brakhage, whose films manifest the presence of the romantic artist behind the camera, the images of Kren's films are in no way neutral, arbitrary, or convenient fillers for a mathematical system. Images of Kren's films are, if not hot, at least warm. The very juxtaposition between poetic images and an apparent systematic structure adds complexity to his film. Despite the simplicity conveyed through the film's short duration and use of fewer than half a dozen repeated shots, a subtle emotive register certainly lurks in and enhances the aesthetic value of the film.

Kren's film neither betrays nor fails to correspond to structuralist ideals. Rather, it makes a different philosophical claim: that is, the photographic content of a shot can defy the mathematical structure imposed on the image. The complexity of Kren's film, which I have attempted to demonstrate above, should not, however, be confused with inconsistency or contradiction. That is, complexity in this context is not opposed to theoretical consistency or correspondence as defined above, but is rather opposed to simplicity or obtrusiveness.

Certainly, one might question to what extent I can infer such a claim from Kren's film with any authority. Although I perhaps grant such epistemic difficulty embedded in the interpretation of individual films, including this one, such a concession does not seriously damage the point that I am attempting to make here: the cognitive value of an avant-garde film can enhance the value, including the aesthetic value, of the film, but only if it is successfully manifested in the film. That is, the film in question must provide a strong case to postulate a new hypothesis. In this respect, one must suppose some sort of consistency (or coherence) between the theoretical or philosophical claim that a film embodies and the film as an instance or evidence in support of such a claim. If so, then when a student says, "I get it, but I don't appreciate the film," it means either that the film failed to provide a strong case to infer its claim—even though the claim can be detected—or that the fault lies with the student, who in fact did not "get it"!

In this essay, I attempted to examine the relationship between avant-garde film and philosophy. Against Carroll's claim that avant-garde film should be distinguished from theory proper, I have argued that the philosophical potential or contribution of avant-garde films should be found somewhere else—that is, in their ability to propose new hypotheses about the medium and to expand one's knowledge of the medium by reflecting on one's own experience of the films. In the latter half of this essay, I have examined some of the ways in which we can postulate the relationship between the cognitive value and aesthetic value of avant-garde film: the former can enhance the latter only when the claim detected in the film is successfully supported in the film and thus augments the consistency of the film as a whole. In this respect, Kren's *TV 15/67* certainly proves itself to be of high cognitive and aesthetic value.[22]

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1. P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde: 1943–1978*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 370.

2. Annette Michelson, "Toward Snow," in *The Avant-Garde Film Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York University Press, 1978), p. 175.

3. Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 382.

4. Andrew Light, *Reel Arguments: Film, Philosophy and Social Criticism* (Boulder: Westview, 2003); Joseph Kupfer, *Visions of Virtue in Popular Film* (Boulder: Westview, 1999); Bruce Russell, "The Philosophical Limits of Film," Special Interest Edition on the Films of Woody Allen, *Film and Philosophy* (2000): 163–167; Lester Hunt, "Motion Pictures as a Philosophical Resource," in *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An Anthology*, ed. Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

5. Noël Carroll, "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 126–160.

6. Noël Carroll, "Avant-Garde Film and Film Theory," in *Theorizing the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 162–168.

7. Carroll, "Avant-Garde Film and Film Theory," p. 163.

8. Carroll, "Avant-Garde Film and Film Theory," p. 164.

9. Peter Gidal, "An Interview with Hollis Hampton," in *Experimental Cinema, The Film Reader*, ed. Wheeler Winston and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 274–276.

10. Carroll quickly adds two more possibilities in which avant-garde films are linked to a theory: answering and compatibility. With answering, films can answer or refer to other films. By "compatibility," Carroll refers to the fact that a film may be compatible with various theories and invites multiple readings and interpretations. Carroll, however, dismisses the theoretical potential of these two in that the films themselves constitute neither an argument nor evidence for a theory.

11. Carroll, "Avant-Garde Film and Film Theory," p. 166.

12. Carroll, "Avant-Garde Film and Film Theory," p. 165.

13. Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981), p. 379.

14. Bruce Russell finds the philosophical limitations of fiction film for a similar reason. That is, a narrative fiction film can provide a counterexample to a philosophical thesis, but it cannot provide evidence due to its fictional nature. See his "The Philosophical Limits of Film."

15. By this I am not suggesting that all avant-garde films are only concerned with medium specificity. The counter-cultural aspect, often evidenced in punk cinema and other transgressive films, constitutes one of the most important characteristics of avant-garde cinema concerning world and/or dominant culture.

16. In my personal conversations with Carroll, Carroll has acknowledged that avant-garde films such as Ernie Gehr's *Serene Velocity* (1970) can make a philosophical claim in that they encourage the viewer to postulate that what makes film a film is its moving image.

17. Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," *Screen* 17 (1976): 68–112; Noël Burch, "Narrative/Diegesis: Thresholds, Limits," *Screen* 23 (1982): 16–33.

18. James Peterson, "Is a Cognitive Approach to the Avant-garde Cinema Perverse?" in *Post-Theory*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 110–111.

19. I do not indicate that Carroll denies such significance. His contention is rather that such reflection does not necessarily render an original philosophical argument or claim. See Carroll, "Avant-Garde Film and Film Theory," p. 166.

20. Malcolm Le Grice, "Kurt Kren," *Studio International*, November (1975): 188.

21. Malcolm Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond* (MIT Press, 1977) p. 98.

22. This essay underwent various versions, starting as a paper written for the avant-garde film class I took with Ben Singer. I thank Ben Singer for introducing me to the sheer beauty of Kren's films. I also thank Noël Carroll, Murray Smith, and Thomas Wartenberg for their suggestions on subsequent versions of this essay. Vince Bohlinger proofread this essay numerous times whenever I changed its direction. I thank him for that.