

The European Avant-Garde in the 1920s

Documentaries & and the Avant-Garde

By the 1920s - desire to explore the capacities of film

- 3 main esthetic film impulses

1. Fiction film – stories w/ actors and sets – predominant artistic & commercial form
2. Documentaries
3. Experimental films

Documentaries & experimental films

- rebelled against fiction film
- explore new ways of using the capacities of film
- what can film do best?

Artistic origins

Documentary – from the verisimilitude of the photographic image

Avant-Garde – comes out of modern painting

Plays w/ time

space

Concepts impacting film avant-garde

Cubism – Picasso, Braque, Leger

Mondrian (geometric, non-representational)

Psychoanalysis & Surrealism – dreams & sexuality

New literature – Proust, Joyce

Three styles of Avant-Garde cinema

1. ABSTRACTIONISM

Abstract and non-narrative made by painters & photographers

Viking Eggeling – *Diagonal Symphony* 1925

Hans Richter – *Rhythmus 21* 1921

Charles Sheeler & Paul Strand *Manhatta* 1921

based on Walt Whitman poem about New York

Fernand Leger – *Ballet mecanique* 1924

explores rhythmic relationships of images in motion

Man Ray – *Emak-Bakia* 1927

2. SURREALISM

Inspired by psychoanalysis

Rooted in dreams & the unconscious

Experimental films – but not coming from a documentary impulse

Bunuel & Dali - *Un chien andalou* (An Andalousian Dog) 1929

L'âge d'or (The Golden Age) 1930

Jean Cocteau – *The Blood of a Poet* 1930

3. IMPRESSIONISM

Placed emphasis on space/time relationships

Looks at life as it unfolds – the modern city as the subject

genre: “the city symphony”

Alberto Cavalcanti – *Rien que les heures* (Only the hours) 1926

Walter Ruttmann - *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* 1927

Joris Ivens – *Rain* 1929

Jean Vigo – *À propos de Nice* 1930

End of the Avant-Garde

The coming of sound makes filmmaking more costly & complex

Change of intellectual & esthetic preoccupations

1920s – esthetic innovations, art for art sake,
experimentation

1930s - social & political issues at the forefront
Depression, rise of fascism

Evolution exemplified by Joris Ivens

Walter Ruttmann

Alberto Cavalcanti

