A Symphony of Light: An exploration of light as a filmic concept and artistic medium

Lauren Bailey
University of Colorado Boulder

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses/230

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Honors Program at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
A Symphony of Light:
An exploration of light as a filmic concept and artistic medium

Lauren Bailey
Film Studies
28 March 2012

Adviser: Christina Battle, Film Studies
Honor Council Representative: Melinda Barlow, Film Studies

Committee Members:
Alex Sweetman, Art and Art History Department
Kira van Lil, Art and Art History Department
Abstract

My interest in light as a film concept began my sophomore year in college. I had just been introduced to 16mm film: the texture of the grain, the depth and range of the intermixed white, grey, and black with palettes of green, blue, and yellow was astounding. The possibilities of creation were now limitless, for not only was color intensified but the film frame was now an individual piece of art. Film is composed entirely of light. It cannot exist without a light source, light bouncing off a subject onto the film’s emulsion in order to create an exposure. I became fascinated with light as my central concept because it was the element that makes the entire medium possible, yet it was not being explored in an artistic approach, which has been my goal from the start: to create a film that is aesthetically pleasing while also non-verbally addressing the endless capacity of light to act as a captivating illuminator of one’s environment.

Early experiments and test rolls were primarily concerned with capturing light from an interesting point-of-view or reinterpreting familiar settings, like car headlights or streetlamps, from a new perspective. These experiments evolved as I’ve spent this last year shooting my thesis film, taking what I’ve learned and applying it to different conceptions, such as using a sheet of plexiglass as a filter. I work entirely in natural light, making the sun my primary source of wattage, yet I am interested in the layering of differing landscapes atop one another and connecting the superimposed images with a string of either rhythmic time-lapsed traffic lights or hidden behind hand-painted plexiglass filters. The use of time-lapse and painted plexiglass is to highlight the light’s form by placing it against a separate backdrop, to focus on the shape of the artificially produced headlights or light’s refraction through the semi-transparent paint. If light were photographed head-on, it would appear white, having removed all the film’s emulsion and appearing as an overexposed image.
The final cut of my thesis film combines four sections, each focusing on a different form, framed as miniature essays or experiments. The first and last sections, both in color, initially explore the idea of layering: what does it mean to superimpose a landscape of trees with a moving plane of glass that obstructs the background? This idea is introduced briefly in the first section before investigating the same premise in black and white. Section two furthers the notion of superimposing light over a landscape – in this case, a single-framed symphony of silhouetted tree branches, once again focusing on the form of the landscape – by emphasizing the artificial light of car lights. Rhythm is the key component to sections two and three, for the single-framed trees are coupled with overlapping time-lapsed headlights moving diagonally across the frame. Section three removes the external landscape and focuses entirely on following the light’s range of motion, from firework explosions to still images to techno-induced light shows, and transferring from one element to the next through layering. The forth and final section once again returns to the painted plexiglass as the main focus before combining the reflection of light in relation to a character, and ultimately what it means to put a person on film.

The four sections effortlessly transition from one to the other without external context or commentary, for the images are constructed to speak for themselves and explore the structure of light as a storytelling agent. Through the process of developing my thesis, I have embarked on a journey to create short essays about the nature of light, which has led me to realize that the natural world is more than simply the environment in which one lives, it is the source of inspiration for my artistic endeavors. To me, it makes sense to turn my camera to the outside world. Film is an organic medium; constructing a movie on 16mm allows this natural material to decay and physically evolve through its lifetime, just like the landscapes I shoot. My explorations of light have been through an artistic eye rather than a scientific gaze. Or perhaps
more importantly, how to create an image out of the material necessary to make said image possible.
A Symphony of Light

The form of the landscape is the backbone of the film: how does light exist in its natural environment, how does this interpretation change when imposed on an unrelated setting, and most importantly, what is the form of light as a concept? My approach to filmmaking is based on my environments, it is not constructed on paper or conveyed through a set; rather, I take my ideas and stretch the boundaries of creation by placing my camera outside of a constructed space. The further I expand my concepts of what qualifies a film subject, the more infinite my ideas are able to become. This series is concerned with light, not only is it the root behind all photographic images, it also has the power to punctuate a landscape, to reveal or conceal subject details, and to construct a new perspective through either its presence or disappearance. I view my thesis not as an experiment with a concrete answer but as a series of essays each aimed at studying the properties of light as the unique creation of both film and photographic images. Light is expansive and whether it takes the form of impressionist paintings or experimental cinema, each avenue has inspired my exploration of the element’s properties and ultimately, what light can achieve as a means of artistic expression.

In order to make sure my terms of real and reality aren’t completely enigmatic and open-ended, I would like to define my interpretations in order to make my meanings more concise. In terms of real: adj. 1 actually existing or occurring in fact; not imagined or supposed; and 2, a more philosophical approach, related to something as it is, not merely as it may be described or distinguished.¹ And reality: n. 3 the state or quality of having existence or substance.² An image portrayed on a canvas or a film frame is not reality itself but a mere representation; an imprint of

the artist’s perspective on the world, yet even though the image no longer exists outside of its frame, it does not mean it is less real. The constructions of a canvas and film frame are inherently different, even though a film frame is composed of a single image that progresses through time. Both preserve a moment in time: a film is composed of photographs moving through space, immediately capturing a moment as it occurs, while a painting takes a subject and through an assortment of paint, interprets an instance after the moment has already transpired.

Time is not a linear progression, nor does it physically exist. Its effects can be tangible and while it can weigh down the body or one’s thoughts, it does not reside in a physical form, even though its creations do. The physical hours it takes to conceive an idea, execute it, process and edit it, often span months at a time; however, the physical form of minutes ticking off a clock do not have to be felt upon viewing the work. One should not be constantly aware of the hours it took for the time-lapsed car lights to fill thirty feet of unexposed 16mm film, nor should one count down the minutes till the end credits. My interest in time is not based in the advancement of numbers on a clock, but the effect a work has upon one’s visual experience. A single film frame is essentially a photograph that runs through a projector, flickering twenty-four times a second, twenty-four frames passing before one’s eyes, creating a sensation of space and motion. The compressed three-dimensional image lives on a two-dimensional screen, yet through the process of projection, the image is no longer a flat portrait of a landscape, but is vibrantly restored to its original form.

For photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption. […] The film is no longer content to preserve the object, enshrouded as it were in an instant, as the bodies of insects are preserved intact, out of the distant past, in amber.
[…] Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were. Those categories of resemblance which determine the species photographic image likewise, then, determine the character of its aesthetic as distinct from that of painting (92 – 93).

No longer is the image confined to a single frame, it replicates the external world by existing in a medium that allows light to give it depth, to create the image through a beam of light. A canvas can exist without an external context. A painting relies on an artist’s interpretation of reality as he or she transforms the physical world to a two-dimensional space, and while it does require a sense of involvement with a spectator, just like film, it can exist separately from a viewer’s gaze. The painting lives on when hung on a gallery’s wall, yet a film only exists in the moments it is being projected; once a roll has run its course, it has to be reset before seen again in its entirety. It cannot exist in that same moment ever again. A film is a piece of the present, constantly evolving and reinventing itself as the reality surrounding its existence changes. A Charlie Chaplin film, for example, is not contextually confined to Hollywood’s silent era; it evolves with each viewing to fit one’s modern conceptualization by drawing on the relevance it has to each viewer.

André Bazin argues that a creative work is not only an embalmment of time, but also a capturing of an artist’s fingerprints, for the process of creation places a piece of the artist in the final work. “All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence. Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower

---

or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty”

the fingerprints of an artist are left behind, in a metaphorical sense, because the work is a product of one’s thoughts and the circumstances leading to a work’s creation are inherent in its final construction. An artist’s relationship to a work is not visible to the audience, for the work itself has to live without an external commentary. Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane* (1941) lives on the screen not only as a representation of its time, but also as a philosophical exploration of one man’s quest for the American dream that ends in devastation and shattered illusions. Welles presence as performer and director is most certainly felt, but the film exists outside of his creative influence: it is a work of timeless creation that constantly evolves to fit the circumstances of a new generation. The image does not physically live in the present, but through the act of projection, the film is able to exist on the screen as if for the first time.

It is not quite right to say that the cinematographic image is in the present. What is in the present is what the image ‘represents’, but not the image itself, which, in cinema as in painting, is never to be confused with what it represents. The image itself is the system of the relationships between its elements, that is, a set of relationships to time from which the variable present only flows. [...] What is specific to the image, as soon as it is creative, is to make it perceptible, to make visible, relationships of time that cannot be seen in the represented object and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present

---

4 André Bazin. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.”
Gilles Deleuze furthers Bazin’s notion of time embalmment. The process of creation is not limited to a particular time-period or film style, for the conception of ideas is a constant occurrence that references the events of the past and explores the possibilities of the future.

The beauty is in the interpretation. The circular walls of the Museé de l’Orangerie transcend reality, for Claude Monet’s representation of his Giverny water lilies are breathtaking. Standing before *The Water-Lily Pond with Willows* series last summer, on a rainy Paris morning, I was taken by the depth of each panel. With each glance the panels change. Up close the brushstrokes are visible and abstractly constructed, drawing my interest into their composition and elegant composure of color. From a close-up perspective, the paint does not build the larger image; rather, it is a form of its own that can stand independently of an external context, which is one of the primary reasons Monet’s water lily series are my favorite. The texture and movement change depending on which angle or section one views, yet with steps back, the paint once again transforms into a skillful interpretation of reality. The work of the impressionists, Monet in particular, have been the keystone in my work as an artist, for not only is each painting skillfully reinterpreting the world the artist observes, it also offers a rich texture of depth that reflects the original environment as well as the perspective of the viewer.

The canvas has movement. It does not appear the same at each corner of the room, nor does one’s visceral reaction remain constant. Just as the paintings shift depending on one’s focal relationship, so does one’s interaction. A piece of art should be fluid, not designed to please one viewer over another, but a means of fulfilling the artist’s desires and intent, which extends itself to open interactions of all those who see it. *The Water-Lily Pond* series, also portrayed in four panels, capture fleeting moments in time: a sunset, a green reflection, morning, and the passing of clouds, my personal favorite, stand on l’Orangerie’s circular walls, transfixed in their moment of
completion. Both series were completed from 1914-1918, save for *The Water-Lily Pond, Clouds* which was completed from 1915-1926. Europe was engaged in World War I while Monet painted the transformation of his garden. The world was evolving outside his studio in the same fashion that his life was forever changing with the deaths of his wife (1911) and son, Jean Monet (1914), yet the world depicted is at peace. *The Water-Lily Pond, Green Reflections*, for example, is serenely layered with combinations of green and blue. The movement of the water and the patches of lily-pads are conveyed through circular accents of bright green, white, and pink colors upon the dark blue/green background. The style of representation, a mode of blending and layering colors, creates a sense of timelessness that goes beyond painting. His smallest brushstrokes shape one’s perspective: it’s not a question of whose interpretation is more correct or whether or not these panels are painted in a “realistic” style, for the art work speaks for itself and does not need to be placed in a specific time period or movement to be powerful and awe-inspiring. The majestic quality of each series is overwhelming, yet upon closer inspection, the burst of life each inch offers to its viewer is extraordinary, opening a new world of vision that does not seem to exist outside the canvas.

At the age of eight, I walked among the ponds brimming with water lilies, across the footbridge and beneath the willow trees of Giverny. The world Monet painted became the world imprinted on my young mind, a world that continues to exist through brushstrokes. I do not view this series as merely an interpretation of his environment; rather, I see reality as he saw it. I see the details of the world in the water, the colors and the texture that punctuates the land, the movement and life of nature in each painting. Not a representation of what the ponds should resemble but what they do. The power of Monet’s paintings lies in the endless and meticulous details he includes. He studied the elements and knew their properties: air, water, color, light.
The thematic movement of time from dawn to dusk accentuates his canvases, for the experiences of life are found in each frame. Human lives are not reflected in the water or flowers, but one’s thoughts, ideas, or musings are ever present, for creative works constructed by men inherently contain some aspect of the human experience, even if it is not overtly presented. The aesthetic beauty of this overarching series remains so powerful because Monet painted what he loved to study and observe, the feeling of capturing a moment that may never occur again: such as the light reflecting on the water causing an arrangement of colors that could never be replicated. The canvas is filled with the water’s surface, as the painter appears to be altering the angle of view by playing with perspective.

The verisimilitude of his seas gleaming in the sun is so diverse that it cannot be due to some systematic and unvarying process; the countless discrepancies transcribed by the artist are simply a translation of the immediate sensory data of the eye. Another fact that should be borne in mind relative to the sea-scapes […] is Monet’s tendency to increase the impact of the water surface by inclining the plane to the vertical and viewing it from above. […] The view from above is such that the water surface occupies the whole canvas, much as it was later to do in the Water Lilies⁶ (42).

The external world is captured on the canvas while simultaneously featuring a new way to view the reflective fields. Each brushstroke of color is a note in the canvas’s symphony, octaves that are expressed through the arrangement of color. Through each arrangement and assortment of shape, perhaps appearing as a void to some viewers, a blockage that restricts interaction with the

piece, Monet presents the brilliance of nature at work by delivering “a new image beyond depiction”\(^7\) (69). Paint on a canvas does not create meaning; rather, one’s interaction with the work opens the doors to interpretation, allowing an experience beyond the visual to take root in the viewer.

*Water Lilies* (1908), *The Water-Lily Pond* (1917-19), and *Water Lilies* (1914-17) could be interchangeable since most of his water paintings have the same name and similar palettes. These three paintings in particular, present transitions through time: beginning with the tint of yellow and green to the vibrant blues and teals, while also displaying a sense of visceral reception. Repeated paintings of ponds with lily-pads may be just as redundant as a series of photographs of trees, yet the capturing of the natural world through an art medium can never repeat itself: “The water he seldom excluded from any picture reigns supreme and runs through his work in every possible form: snow, river, canal, sea, rain, ice, fog. Not a single aspect of it, fluid, solid, or vapor, is neglected”\(^8\) (69). The subject matter may appear redundant as it forms the basis of twenty-years work but each canvas is not identical just as nature, time, and one’s perspective will not remain static. Reinterpreting the same theme does not mean one is stuck or cannot think of new ideas, it simply accounts for the possibility that there is more to explore in the details of light and shadow, form and content, as it relates to an overarching theme. The vibrancy of *Water Lilies* (1914-17) is not seen elsewhere in Monet’s oeuvre for the hue and ombric transition through the water’s movement is unique to this one moment. Just as the process of painting and creating a completed canvas will inevitably appear different each time, even if the subject matter and location remains the same, but that is the beauty and appeal to the

\(^7\) Jean-Dominique Rey and Denis Rouart. *Monet: Water Lilies The Complete Series.*  
\(^8\) Ibid.
art form. No two works will ever appear the same because the mind will not occupy the same thoughts or motives or desires each time one paints or films. The transitional quality of producing creative works and the inherent imperfections of the medium is what creates its beauty and awe-inspiring magnificence.

Just as Monet works with his surroundings and the process of incorporating his ideas and/or perspectives into his *Water Lilies*, I do the same as I play the role of observer and interpreter to my environment. I am interested in exploring the art and practice of telling stories without the use of dialogue or sound or a three-act structure. The element of light has been my primary focus with this film as I attempt to capture the form and pattern of nature through the intersecting lines of trees, layering the lines and form of nature’s landscape with painted glass placed before the camera and superimposed with artificial lights over the natural setting. There is fluidity to the layering because the transitional movements between shots are staggered. I will often begin by filming a natural setting or a sequence of scenes, rewind the film, shoot through a painted plexiglass hand-made filter, rewind the film, and possibly shoot the lights on top of the composited image. The frame appears cluttered as if there is no movement or place to go; yet it is not claustrophobic for each image is deliberately and thoughtfully placed with purpose. This form of shooting sometimes manifests in different arrangements or approaches, yet the overall theme of layering is present through a manipulation of time and space.

What does it mean to capture a landscape through a lens, and then superimpose a different landscape overtop? The spatial relationship between distinct landscapes no longer exists due to the compression of space. Once an image is photographed it becomes a simulacrum: an image or representation of someone or something. Taking two or three distinct landscapes, imposing the shape and form of each locale over another unrelated landscape
reconstructs the image into a new reality. This reality does not exist in the external world but is solely a filmic property, conceived as a superficial (or surface) contraction of spatial planes. The space of a film frame is “a continuous area or expanse that is free, available, or unoccupied.” Even the superimposition of lights atop a backdrop of double passed film creates a new expanse of uninhibited movement. The frame is arranged compositionally in order for the multiple layers to interact and build off of the previous image without feeling confined; such as in the concluding green section where the multiple perspectives of light on the water are the backdrops for the rhythmically moving hands. The extreme close-up of the woman’s mouth is momentarily revealed without the aid of the fore-grounded plexiglass. Just as imperfections lie in the painted plexiglass and natural landscape, the fingerprint of the filmmaker takes a physical form by placing herself as the final image: the voice to the piece resounds in her creation, herself becoming part of the landscape she has reconstructed through layering.

The mathematical precision of Rose Lowder’s Les tournesols (1982) is constructed according to a similar compositional focus. The frame contains a sense of uninhibited movement, alternating between single framed images of the same sunflower field. The field reveals an expansive landscape without moving the camera. Lowder shoots one frame at a time, alternating between a single frame of sunflowers and a single frame of black. The film would then be rewound by hand, each frame meticulously counted, before she repeated the process this time shooting the black frames and by-passing the already exposed frames. Les tournesols explores the possibilities of juxtaposition: the way the mind perceives motion even if it does not exist. Through projection, the individual frame appears invisible as the filmstrip moves through space as if one continuous event.

---

Experimental film is rooted in the exploration of new ideas and innovative techniques. Lowder’s investigations of movement and rhythm are the key elements that stabilize the film’s structure. *Les tournesols* is constructed as if it were the notes from a laboratory experiment: the process of exploring a topic or method of expression, such as punching holes in alternating frames in order to examine the brain’s perception of motion.¹⁰

There’s lots of talk of the smallest unit of cinema being the frame, but in fact, that’s not the case at all. As these experiments demonstrated, pieces from different frames can make up what you’re seeing on the screen. In other words, you can construct an image on the screen with bits from different frames. You can change very slightly parts of a frame or several frames – change the color, the thickness of the lines, whatever – and a completely different thing happens.¹¹

Each frame alters one’s perception of reality. The film uses color dissolves, which establishes the ordinary yellow and green sunflowers as symbols of normalcy before drastically altering how one interprets the landscape. The use of filters transforms the yellow and green sunflowers to a hue of magenta. By focusing on individual frames, the entire work appears to be in focus and work together, but in fact, a film like *Les tournesols* may qualify one’s perception of motion. Each frame alternates from being in focus to out of focus: “You’re focusing on successively different flowers all over the field, and together they look in focus. But when the images were

---


¹¹ Ibid.
shot, parts of every frame were out of focus.”¹² The painted plexiglass I use in the opening and concluding sequences evolve through the shooting process. Paint will flake away or show crease lines with time, yet the changeability of the paint adds to the texture of my film. The plexiglass is often placed right against the lens and photographed out of focus, leaving the background image in focus. Just as Lowder explores the possibilities of the individual frame, I too am focused on the altering of one’s perceptions.

The paintings of Mark Rothko, particularly his series of three ink drawings titled *Untitled, 1961*, construct the illusion of boundaries, for the canvas assumes the role of a frame. The black ink lines establish a sensation of movement, as if the uneven combination of width and direction are a source of tangible vibrations. Rothko’s geometrical images are confined to their own spatial plane. The geometrical squares on a single canvas work in the same fashion as a filmstrip: the boxes connect and evolve as one progresses from the top of the canvas to the bottom. *Untitled, 1961*, is attempting to escape the confines of the canvas, trying to push the boundaries of limitations as the squares metaphorically attempt to push their shape onto the next canvas. Such a departure from form results in chaos as the lines dissolve to reveal the outline of the previous shapes. Rothko’s lines are able to operate outside of the confines of time and space. *Razor Blades* (Paul Sharits, 1965-1968) eliminates the gap between painting and film because it is constructed according to the same geometrical principles of Rothko and the flash-frame distortion of space in Lowder’s *Les tournesols*.

Paul Sharits constructs his 16mm film *Razor Blades* as an interlude between the past and present, the soundtrack resembling the consistent tapings of Morse code. A split-screen divides the two opposing blocks of color. Each featuring a flashing background of alternating shades

¹² Scott MacDonald. “Rose Lowder Interviewed.”
with a circle placed in the center, it too alternates between a state of dilation and constriction. Projecting two reels side by side onto one large screen creates the split-screen effect: the two screens/projectors should be identical in order to achieve the intense alternating interaction between each image. For even though the circles are eventually taken over by diagonal lines intercut with images of a man brushing his teeth, the same alternating pattern established with the circles remains intact. *Razor Blades* challenge one’s perceptions through a sensation of overloading stimuli. While the geometric shapes appear as if each construction should be confined to a white canvas and hung in a gallery, the flicker effect of the single framed images creates a rapid montage effect that is uniquely cinematic. Sharits bridges the two mediums through the design of his artwork. Each pattern appears hand constructed and is photographed as a still image before rhythmically perceived at twenty-four frames per second.

Sharits creates figures that don’t represent anything in time; such geometrical figures have no correlation in the real world. His work explores the difference between objects being photographed to the photograph as the object. The production of creating a work that does not exist in reality harkens back to Man Ray’s rayographs, in which he too, constructed a new reality that did not exist outside of the image for the arrangement of objects being photographed were the product of a moment that was manipulated. Man Ray’s images represent an instance in time and an arrangement of objects that doesn’t exist beyond the photograph; the image remains but the moment no longer exists, which ultimately calls attention to the mechanism of its creation. “He [Sharits] seems intent going against the grain of our perception and feelings, and we are forced to either stop the flow of images or to dive into them fully with total abandon. If we can do this we find the film deeply satisfying, because it is conceived to break down our defences

---

and then to work on a subconscious level to initiate us into a new level of awareness”\(^{14}\): both Sharits and Ray are interested in the camera as a recording mechanism that can alter one’s reality and perception of time and space. By constructing arrangements of objects that do not exist in the natural world, both are initiating a discussion with the spectator: causing one to question the nature of an image’s representation and form, and how the formation of either a film or photographic image can impact a spectator’s perception of reality.

The man brushing his teeth does not change position for he does not actually exist outside the frame, for once his image has been photographed, he cannot return to the moment of creation. He cannot escape the emulsion or the time of his embalmment, as Bazin would describe his photographic preservation. Just as the subject cannot exist outside of the frame, neither can my still images of London, taken on 35mm black and white film in August 2011, be removed from their superimposed state. Both are mere representations of an image, yet neither can be separated from the film because they are preserved to be replications of a specific moment in time. The geometrical figures are taken out of their normal content and momentarily displaced, just as the images of London have been secluded from their natural environment before being placed in a new context.

“No one believes any longer in the ontological identity of model and image, but all are agreed that the image helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death. […] It is no longer a question of survival after death, but of a larger concept, the creation of an ideal world in the likeness of the real, with its own temporal destiny”\(^{15}\) (90): Bazin’s notion of capturing an image makes the image itself a sign of itself. Jean Baudrillard’s

---


\(^{15}\) André Bazin. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.”
theory of the simulacra explores the connection between an image and its sign. The sign exists outside of the physical image, as it becomes a theoretical construct of the real. Baudrillard establishes four successive phases of the image: “1) it is the reflection of a basic reality, 2) it masks and perverts a basic reality, 3) it marks the absence of a basic reality, and 4) it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum”\(^\text{16}\) (173). These phases are not bound in concrete timeframes, often moving back and forth between phases as a paintings or film’s representation alters. Phases one and two can be considered in the context of the hyperreal, while phase three can be considered in the context of simulation. Phase four is the culmination of all the phases.

First: the original idea now exists in a hyperreal state, which is when the sign of the real replaces the real. For example, a postcard of the Mona Lisa is a representation of the original painting but it is considered more real than the actual painting. The painting becomes a representation of the postcard, which is a representation of the painting. In terms of my film, the photographic images of London are considered more real than the actual skyline, even though the photograph is a reflection of a real place. It is perceived as being more real because it does not appear to be a representation but a new reality that exists solely in the image. Second: the stage of simulation constructs the way one perceives the sign. It is also the stage in which one acts as though one has something that he or she doesn’t have. For example, a doctor cannot tell the difference between the person really ill and the healthy person who is pretending to be ill. An original idea can be considered part of the simulation phase since the presence of the unconscious idea, such as believing one is ill when actually healthy, creates an absence of a basic

reality due to the altering of one’s perception. In terms of my film, the simulation one perceives is based on the imaginary. The world constructed in a film is bound in a dismissal of reality because the real no longer exists. The image becomes a representation of the object photographed because it acts as a filter between one’s perception of reality and reality itself.

Cécile Fontaine redefines what it means to record the natural world by eliminating the discussion of what is real or not real. Her work *Abstract Film en Couleurs* (1991) is created without a camera, yet the emulsion is still exposed to light in order to create an image by manually being “advanced past the gate of a cassette […] in order to create a series of abstract luminous pulsations.”¹⁷ The pulsations construct images that are made entirely of multi-colored light, employing light as an instrument of expression. Her images cannot be found in the natural world nor are they a representation of an external image. The dancing of color and light exist solely in the frame because Fontaine creates a representation of how she conceives light to function. It is as if this fast-paced dance is occurring in one’s mind: a personification of the brain’s synapses in action. *Abstract Film en Couleurs* most closely parallels my intention of capturing light as an artistic medium. I did not set out to film the natural world in order to be a mere observer; rather, I wanted to reconstruct my perspective of nature and project my vision in an interesting and concise manner. I layer lights over the silhouetted branches of trees in order to draw out the pattern and structure of my location, but also as an attempt to question the properties of my environment. The relationship between internal and external, the world of the cerebral and the physical is very interesting to me, not only in terms of how someone forms an idea but also the way thoughts and individual perceptions shape an artist’s voice and the way one

perceives the universe. Fontaine’s film transports me to the moment of creation, a supernova of inspiration that makes the creative process tangible.

As an artist, whether painter or filmmaker, one holds reality in his or her hands, molding its properties in order to create the image he or she imagines. Whether it follows the practical lines of logic are irrelevant for once an idea has been conceived, it no longer exists in the realistic external world but the world of the mind. All logic is suspended when constructing an experimental film, for the mental exploration of the elements is what grounds my work, not the rules of other’s perceptions. An artist holds “reality at their command” and molds “it at will into the fabric of their art”\(^{18}\) (91). All images are a representation of something: either an object or subject one photographed, a landscape used as the backdrop for an idea, or an array of paint splatters as a means of expressing the beauty of life’s chaos.

\(^{18}\) André Bazin. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year 1-2</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year 1-2</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figures**

Claude Monet

*The Water-Lily Pond, the Clouds*

1915-26, triptych  
Musée de l’Orangerie, Paris

*The Water-Lily Pond, Green Reflections*

1914-18, diptych  
Musée de l’Orangerie, Paris

*The Water-Lily Pond, Morning*

1914-18, four panels  
Musée de l’Orangerie, Paris

*The Water-Lily Pond, Sunset*

1914-18  
Musée de l’Orangerie, Paris
The Water-Lily Pond with Willows, Morning with Willows
1914-18, triptych
Musée de l’Orangerie, Paris

The Water-Lily Pond with Willows, the Two Willows
1914-18, four panels
Musée de l’Orangerie, Paris

The Water-Lily Pond with Willows, Bright Morning with Willows
1914-18, triptych
Musée de l’Orangerie, Paris

The Water-Lily Pond with Willows, Reflections of Trees
1914-18
Musée de l’Orangerie, Paris
Right
*Water Lilies*
1908
oil on canvas
private collection

Bottom
*Water Lilies*
1914-17
oil on canvas
Neue Pinakothek
Saatsgalerie Moderner Kunst
Munich
Rose Lowder

A series of 16mm film frames from *Les tournesols* (1982).

*The Water-Lily Pond*
1917-19
oil on canvas
Folkwang Museum
Essen
Mark Rothko

*Untitled*, 1961
pen and ink on paper
National Gallery of Art, Washington

*Untitled*, 1961
pen and ink on paper
National Gallery of Art, Washington

*Untitled*, 1961
pen and ink on paper
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Paul Sharits

Screen captures from *Razor Blades* (1965-68)
Cécile Fontaine

Screen captures from *Abstract Film en Couleurs* (1991)
Bibliography


Gidal, Peter. “Introduction: Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film.”

*Structural Film Anthology*. London: British Film Institute, 1976.

Gunning, Tom. “Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality.”


Locke, John. “Some Further Considerations Concerning Our Simple Ideas of Sensation.”


Germany, Fall 1997. Web. 5 March 2012.


