

# Structural film

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**Structural film** was an experimental film movement prominent in the US in the 1960s and which developed into the Structural/materialist films in the UK in the 1970s.

## Contents

- 1 Overview
- 2 Context
- 3 Characteristics
- 4 Key Films
- 5 Bibliography

## Overview

The term was coined by P. Adams Sitney who noted that film artists such as Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, George Landow, Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, Joyce Wieland, Ernie Gehr, Kurt Kren, and Peter Kubelka had moved away from the complex and condensed forms of cinema practiced by such artists as Sidney Peterson and Stan Brakhage. "Structural film" artists pursued instead a more simplified, sometimes even predetermined art. The shape of the film was crucial, the content peripheral. This term should not be confused with the literary and philosophical term *structuralism*.

See also European filmmakers Malcolm LeGrice (UK), Peter Gidal (UK), Gábor Bódy (Hungary) and Ladislav Galeta (Croatia).

## Context

The film society and self-financing model of the pre-war era continued over the next two decades, but by the early 1960s, a different outlook became perceptible in the work of American avant-garde filmmakers. Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* exemplified a shift from personal confessional to abstraction. Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* was an inverted musical of sorts and a camp commentary on Hollywood mythology. Jack Smith and Andy Warhol incorporated camp minimalism into their work.

Some avant-garde filmmakers moved further away from narrative. Whereas the New American Cinema was marked by an oblique take on narrative, one based on abstraction, camp and minimalism, Structural-Materialist filmmakers like Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow created a highly formalist cinema that foregrounded the medium itself: the frame, projection, and most importantly time itself. By breaking film down into bare components, they sought to create an anti-illusionist cinema.

## Characteristics

Sitney identified four formal characteristics common in Structural films, but all four characteristics are not usually present in any single film:

- fixed camera position (an apparently fixed framing)
- flicker effect (strobing due to the intermittent nature of film)
- loop printing
- rephotography (off the screen)

It has been noted by George Maciunas that these characteristics are also present in Fluxus films.

## Key Films

- *Wavelength* (1966-67) Michael Snow
- *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (1968) Paul Sharits
- *One Second in Montreal* (1969) Michael Snow
- *Zorns Lemma* (1970) Hollis Frampton
- *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (1971) George Landow

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