

-Research Article-

The Film Structure of Andy Warhol in American Experimental Cinema and “Underground” Cinema Culture

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Abstract

Experimental film movement, which is one of the important breaking points of the history of cinema, has an important place in the formation of many new techniques and different forms. It is possible to find traces of the movement all over the world in the American Experimental Cinema since the 1920s. World War II caused cultural damage in America. Especially, viewers caught up in Hollywood magic met with films that encourage thinking. After this situation, the concept of real underground “underground” cinema emerged. “Underground” movie mold represents a whole created in America in the history of experimental cinema. Undoubtedly Andy Warhol, who directs today’s art understanding plays an important role in “American Underground Cinema”. The structure that can be observed in Warhol’s films is perhaps like a poem, music, or, more accurately, an aura (atmosphere). Aura is a tangible thing that an individual can see as much as they want. Warhol was labeled the modern form of legal electric execution as typical American business. He created bundles of images in his factory to react to Hollywood cinema that poisoned the system with its unreal illusions until the end of the ‘60s. However, after facing his fear of death, his struggle to turn life into art, which is his purpose, has decreased day by day. It even disappeared. At the end of the ‘70s, its factory, which had an important role in the formation of its purpose, was closed and film production was stopped.

Key Words: Andy Warhol, Experimental Cinema, Underground Cinema, Popular culture

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-Araştırma Makalesi-

Amerikan Deneysel Sineması ve Yeraltı "Underground" Sinema Kültüründe Andy Warhol'un Film Yapısı

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Özet

Sinema tarihinin önemli kırılma noktalarından biri olan deneysel film akımı, birçok yeni tekniklerin ve farklı biçimlerin oluşmasında önemli bir yere sahiptir. 1920'li yıllardan itibaren Amerikan Deneysel Sineması'nın dünyanın dört bir yanında akımın izlerine rastlamak mümkündür. II. Dünya Savaşı'nın, Amerika da yaratmış olduğu kültürel tahribattan sonra özellikle Hollywood büyüüne kapılmış film izleyicileri düşünmeye sevk eden filmlerle tanışma fırsatı bulmuştur. Bu durumdan sonra gerçek yeraltı "underground" sinema kavramı ortaya çıkmıştır. Yeraltı "Underground" film kalıbı deneysel sinema tarihi içerisinde Amerika'da oluşturulmuş bir bütünü temsil etmektedir. Hiç kuşkusuz günümüz sanat anlayışına bir yön veren Andy Warhol, "Amerikan Yeraltı Sineması" için önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Warhol'un filmlerinde gözlenebilen yapı belki bir şiir, bir müzik ya da daha doğru bir ifadeyle bir aura (atmosfer) gibidir. Aura ancak bir başkasının görebileceği ve ne kadar görmek isterse, o kadarını görebildiği somutsal bir şey'dir. Warhol, yasal elektrikle idam etmenin modern şeklini tipik Amerikan işi olarak etiketlemiştir. Fabrikasında 60'lı yılların sonuna kadar gerçek olmayan yanılısamlarıyla sistemi zehirleyen Hollywood sinemasına tepki olacak şekilde imaj demetlerini oluşturmuştur. Fakat ölüm korkusuyla yüzleştikten sonra amacı olan hayatı sanata çevirmesindeki mücadelesi gün geçtikte azalmıştır. Hatta yok olmuştur. 70'lerin sonunda amacının oluşmasında önemli bir role sahip olan fabrikası kapanmıştır ve film üretimi durdurulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Andy Warhol, Deneysel Sinema, Yeraltı Sineması

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Introduction

The structure of underground films is freer and more individual, in direct contrast to conventional films. A group of directors, actors, film writers, critics, and distributors who thought that the cinema was rotting from within, superficial, and aesthetically obsolete, pursued the truth and what was seen, not the highly polished fake films. The structure of the reality and the visible is referred to by the term "Underground" which is a sub-type of American experimental cinema.

"Campbell's Soup Boxes, Coca-Cola Bottles" etc., which enables experimental cinema and underground cinema to reach and popularize the world. Andy Warhol the owner of many works and the founder of pop-art. In this study "Underground" cinema, which completely rejects the commercial, classical cinema concept, and the reflections of this understanding in cinema culture will be examined through the film works that Andy Warhol has created with his understanding of art that is divided into.

Underground Cinema

American Underground Cinema Culture

Today films produced and distributed in the field of international cinema, other than commercial films, are called underground. Usually, the same person produces, directs, writes and edits. The director reflects his artistic attitude more freely in terms of form, technique, and content (Can, & Aytas, 2008, p. 112).

"Underground" cinema mold represents a whole created in America within the history of experimental cinema. According to Renan "... the term was first used by the critic Manny Farber to describe macho adventure films in the thirties and forties. In the Spring 1959 issue of Film Culture magazine, Lewis Jacobs used this term to mean "cinema that sustains a significant part of its existence underground" in its article titled "The Exodus of Underground Cinema". Since 1959 it includes all kinds of films made personally and for art in the United States (Kaliç, 1992, p. 12).

The first striking point in these films is that the difference between the experimental and commercial cinema industry is not that great in any other country in the world. Experimental film directors in America produced films that attacked, questioned, and even insulted the value judgments of the middle class as much as possible. But in some special cases, Cassavetes, Warhol, etc. even Hollywood has seen no harm in working with the artists. The concept of underground contains more of an amateurishness. In time some people called themselves only experimenters instead of amateurs (Kaliç, 1992, pp. 53-54). Most of the American directors dislike the term "underground" because it gives a "sense of secrecy and sneaky "and prefer the term" Independent Cinema" instead.

Underground cinema recognition, was influential in the 1947 Venice Film Festival with the work "*Dreams That Money Can Buy*", which was realized with surrealist painters such as Hants Richter, Fernand L ger, Max Ernest, Marcel Duchamp, Alexander Calder, and Man Ray (Onaran, 1999, p. 146).

The formation of the American underground cinema culture covers fifty years, starting from the early 20s until the end of the 70s. In the 20s, when the avant-garde movement gained momentum in countries such as the Soviet Union, France, and Germany and was under the influence of the whole world cinema, the first non-commercial experimental studies outside

Hollywood started in the USA ( oşkun, 2017, p. 250). Researcher-writer Sabir Kaliç named the first-period experimental film studies created in this period as the "pioneers of the pioneers" period.

The first works of American underground cinema are the films "*Mannahatta (1921)*" by the painter Charles Sheeler and photographer Paul Strand and the films *Twenty-four Dollars Island, 1925* "by Robert Flaherty. The feature of these films is that they are the least films with European influences. American underground cinema emerged in 1927. (Last Moment), made by Paul Fejos, is considered the first independent film (Kaliç, 1992, pp. 53-56, Akbulut, 2012, p. 87).

Most of the early experimental films bear traces of German expressionist cinema. Limited funds and possibilities allowed experimental film directors to limit their creativity and fearlessness (Kaliç, 1992, p. 56). American writer and cultural critic Gilbert Seldes stated, "They were trying to create their systematic worlds in naturalism, without using star actors, being heavily influenced by Caligari and relying on nothing but the camera and the actor."

In the same days, films began to be produced in a direction that was in direct contrast to the expressionist trend. Those who did these are a group influenced by French experimentalists (Clair, Leger, Deslaw ...). The most popular person affected by this trend is Ralph Steiner (Kaliç, 1992, p. 58).

In bad economic times, American experimentalists had the opportunity to meet with Russian directors. Especially in the field of fiction the influence of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Vertov's writings and films started to be evident in the newly shot experimental films. One of the first films to show this effect was Charles Vidor's (Spy-1931-32) "movie. American experimentalists who met with Dziga Vertov's Sine-eye manifesto identified "news-film is the foundation of the art of film" with their works. As a result, the era of cine-poetry and urban symphonies has emerged. The best examples of this period are John Hoddman's (*Prelude to Spring*) and (*A City Symphony*); Emlen Etting's *Oramunde and Laurette*; Irwing Browning (*City of Contrasts*) and many examples can be listed (Kaliç, 1992, pp. 58-59).

With the emergence of sound in cinema, many American experimentalists had to quit cinema due to economic difficulties. Watson and Weber made the first sound experimental film example of Underground cinema with the movie "*Lot in Sodom (1933-32)*". However, silent films are still being shot in these years. Two important silent films shot in those years were Joseph Schillinger, Lewis Jacobs, Marry Ellen's trio "*Synchronization (1934)*" and Mike Seibert's "*Olivera Street (1934)*".

With the II. World War, experimental film production was interrupted, as was everything in America. When the war ended, production resumed with great hunger. Copies of films in the Museum of Modern Art Film Archive were sent to schools, universities, and film clubs all over the country, together with explanatory booklets, so that the previously made works were presented to the audience. Thus, the ground has been prepared for the production of new ones. For the first time, people have stepped out of the classic American narrative. By meeting all kinds of non-commercial films, they have gained a cinematic eye closer to watching experimental cinema. The first experimental filmmaker of this period was American dancer Maya Deren (Kaliç, 1992, p. 61). Deren's experimental works, which question the concepts of time and space, stand out with their completely individual, intellectual and independent, absolutely non-commercial aspects, and will develop in the following years and it is very important in terms of laying the groundwork for experimental cinema movements called "Alternative Cinema", "Underground Cinema", "Independent Cinema", or "American New Cinema" (Çoşkun, 2017, p. 251). Experimental cinema in America has reached a level that can compete with Europe, thanks to Deren and historical facts. Deren's 1943 film, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, was made with different accusations such as a poetry movie, a dream movie, or a trance film, and was made under the influence of avant-garde movements in Europe, especially Surrealist films. This film played a major role in the development of American experimental cinema (Akbulut, 2012, p. 87, Çoşkun, 2017, p. 252).

After the war, for some American experimentalists (Kenneth Anger, Curtis Harrington, Sidney Peterson, and James Broughton), the storyboard has become not only a production line but also a tool for generating emotional results. Despite the technical mistakes made, these films have a different structure than the experimental films before the war, especially in terms of their approach to sex. No trace of the European avant-garde is seen from these films. What they do is to create symbolic images and thus the competence of film language itself is enhanced. But at the same time, many different experimentalists have worked on abstract films. They take their roots from the Eggelin-Richter-Ruttman line and saw themselves as a continuation of the European avant-garde in the 20s. The most important feature of these abstract experimental films is the number of possibilities they have and the little use of their fields. In this period, there is a group opposite the “abstractors” who made films. These are a group that tried to bring subjective perspectives to objective facts rather than subjective facts. The most important artist of this group is Slavko Vorkapich’s “The Life and Death of a Hollywood Figures (1928)”. This group of filmmakers is also formalist artists. The only thing expected of this group’s films was to be individualistic and to describe the world the artist lived in (Kaliç, 1992, pp. 63-68).

In the ‘50s, the American “underground” cinema culture was fully formed. Between the ‘50s and the ‘70s, many American experimentalists succeeded in reflecting their images and styles on the big screen. Generally, directors of this period defended the traditional understanding of cinema as “an indivisible individual expression” that does not allow Hollywood’s creativity, “morally corrupt, aesthetically outdated, dramatically boring and superficial”. They have adopted a new understanding of cinema, which they call “New American Cinema”. At the same time, they are in favor of a “new man”, not a new understanding of cinema (Çoşkun, 2017, p. 260). However, in these years, the person who created works in the “New American Cinema” with his first period films and is the most accepted by Hollywood is the founder of the pop-art movement and “Campbell’s Soup Boxes”, “Coca-Cola Bottles”. ‘Andy Warhol, who became famous for his works.

Andy Warhol’s Transition to Cinema

Warhol emerged as a notable artist on the New York art scene in the early 1960s. The first Manhattan exhibition to take place at the Stable Gallery includes Coca-Cola, Dance Diagram, Do It Yourself, Elvis, Marilyn, and disaster paintings. In 1963, he moved to his studio known as Factory at 231 East 47th Street. Warhol hired art school student and poet Gerard Malanga as a studio assistant at the same time. Malanga introduced Warhol to underground filmmaker and poet Marie Menken and Willard Mass. They took Warhol to Jonas Mekas Filmmakers Coop and the movie screenings at the Charles Theater (Bridgett & Erdoğan, 2017, pp. 113-114).

During the summer of 1963, Warhol regularly organized visits to the guest house in Old Lyme, Connecticut, rented by his friend Magical Realist painter Wynn Chamberlain. One weekend in Old Lyme, Warhol said he had the idea to shoot an 8-hour movie of the sleeping man. Warhol’s movie *Sleep* is in the silent film category that focuses on stagnation and duration, just like his other early films (*Blow Job*, *Eat*, *Empire*, and *Henry Geldzahler*). In these early films, Warhol has brought a new interpretation of the concept of “time” by overlapping the concepts of “daily time and screen time” on the screen (Kaliç, 1992, p. 77).

Warhol began filming his parodic films during a fame-seeking journey in the autumn of 1963. The first of these is the movie *Tarzan and Regained ... Sort of* (1964) (Bridgett & Erdoğan, 2017, pp. 114-117).

In the 1960s in New York, art became increasingly interesting, and many people wanted to play in Warhol’s movies or be in the Factory. Although most of this community was made up of people with emotional and mental problems, Warhol was tolerant (until hit) with

incompatible personalities.¹ Being seen as a kind of leader by the community, he has had the opportunity to manipulate the people he needs while at the same time experiencing a magnificent purification.

Warhol filled the interior of the Castelli Gallery with silver helium balloons (Silver Clouds) in 1966. While expressing what balloons mean, he stated that he switched to the cinema.

"I don't want to paint anymore, and I thought the best way to stop painting is to let them go. That's why I made these silver rectangles for everyone to fill with helium and release it from their windows."

Andy Warhol's Film Structure

The structure that can be observed in Warhol's films is perhaps like a poem, music, or, more accurately, an aura (atmosphere). Aura is a tangible thing that an individual can see as much as they want. The image reflected in Warhol's paintings and films is only a relative concept.

Transforming emotion into the cold, digitized language of the computer, Warhol experiences the embodiment of the Systems Theory. As Habersman discusses in his "Philosophical Discourse of Modernity," System Theory opposes Hegelian pan-subjectivity with an utterly consuming objectivity: System functionality allows subjects to degenerate into systems. This functionality hits the "end of the individual" as an implicit seal, which Adorno surrounds with its negative dialectic and opposes it as a self-made destiny. Losing himself in raw objectivity, Warhol produces obsessive painting, cinema, and literary works that fascinate him by being there altogether (Tata, 2017, p. 9).

Andy Warhol's films are generally analyzed in different periods. Warhol was under the influence of the American film producer Jack Smith in the early stages of his cinema. Smith especially the films in which he told unlimited fantasies of homosexuality formed a fundamental theme in Warhol's film career. Instead of an aura of openness and emotion that glorifies homosexuality because of Warhol's popular anxiety, rather uses it mockingly with movies of all kinds of sexuality. In his first film, "*Tarzan and Jane Regained As ... (1963)*" and as it is noticed in many aspects, it is easily seen that it has a direct effect on Warhol (Kaliç, 1997, p. 23).

Warhol's films from this period are quite similar in terms of both technical and content. All in black and white, all quiet, all based on fairly minimal images, and many of them are quite tall.² The provocative amateurism, lack of technical skills, and apparent lack of effort can be noticed, pretending to challenge both Hollywood and avant-garde cinema (O'Pray, 2000, pp. 23-27).

The camera has an almost absolute stillness and viewers are ready to consume an image that never changes throughout the film (Kaliç, 1997, p. 24). Warhol does nothing in his early films, offering something in tandem with his delicious overproduction. Desired objects are hidden off the screen, just like in 1963's *Blow Job*, which never gives visual access to the act of oral sex itself, only showing the face of a rebel given oral sex: most things in *Blow Job* are not verified. It is not known whether it is a man or a woman who gives oral sex to the actor. Maybe a few different men and women, maybe just one person. It may even be suspected that Warhol himself is serving the star player while someone else is using Bolex. So he looks like a trade (the heterosexual man who lets other men give him a blowjob, especially if he gets paid) (Tata, 2017, p. 11).

¹ Andy Warhol, <https://indigodergisi.com/2014/04/andy-warholun-fabrikasi/>, (Date of Access: 05/06/2020)

² Warhol's films are truly silent, unlike the so-called silent cinema with music always accompanied by music.

Peter Gidal says that the concept of time was lost during this period of Warhol: “Another element that stands out in Andy Warhol’s early films besides the light and shadow play. Time. Warhol has made a new interpretation of the concept of “time” by overlapping the concepts of daily time and screen time, and explains the very long-time shots of his films that reflect this time. When people go to a show today, they don’t understand at all. A movie like *sleep* brings them back into it (Gidal, 1971, p. 49, Çoşkun, 2017, p. 67, Kaliç, 1997, p. 29).

Sleep is the viewing of a man sleeping in a bed for a twenty-minute shot from various angles, but these shots are “reproduced” and “ready for consumption” by repeatedly using - just like Warhol drew fifty soup boxes on the canvas (Kaliç, 1997, p. 25).

Watching Sleep (1963), *Eat* (1963), *Henry Geldzahler* (1964), or any of the hundreds of screen experiences Warhol shot is a completely different experience from anything that cinema’s early pioneers suggested (O’Pray, 2000, p. 24). The most important reason for the films of this period is that they are the perfect cinematic reflections of “an attitude towards producing, creating,” making art “and increasingly living”, which is seen in all his works. For this reason, a pure Warholist cinema can only be mentioned from Andy’s first period. The film, which collects all the features of this period, is the movie *Empire* (1964), in which the top of the famous Empire State Building in New York is seen continuously for eight hours from dusk to dawn (Kaliç, 1997, p. 27, Çoşkun, 2017, p. 267).

While Harlot (1964), made by Warhol in 1965, is shown as the first film of the second period in various sources, it is seen as a film that prepared the background of the second period in other sources. The Harlot movie has an important role in the formation of Warhol’s film structure. The film, which lasted for seventy minutes, was black/white; but it is a movie that is shot instantly with sound. The transvestites used in the film have become the symbol of the concept of “womanhood”. Mae West, Marilyn Monroe, and Jean Harlow portray certain goddesses (Kaliç, 1997: 29-30).

The audio camera allowed Warhol to shoot movies in a more theatrical way using gays, drug addicts, transvestites, beautiful women and men, dangerous people, exhibitionists, and friends who came together at the Factory (O’Pray, 2000, p. 27).

Some of his films during this period include *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1965), *Poor Little Rich Girl Vinyl* (1965), *Kitchen* (1965), *My Pimp* (1965), *Paul Swan* (1965), *Girls from Chelsea* (1966), and *The Lonely Cowboys* (1967) movies are now indicative of Warhol’s use of cinematic language effectively.

Looking at the common features of the films of this period, the “silence, black-white, immobility length” Warholist understanding has been gradually abandoned, and cinematic elements such as sound, color, movement, acting, dialogue have started to be used instead (Kaliç, 1997, p. 33).

In short, even though the films that were created in the second period, in the Warhol cinema infrastructure, were formed in a certain order and interpreted the understanding of contemporary cinema, it was possible to observe a completely simplified and standardized structure after the film *Chelsea Girls*.

One of the examples that reflect this background, the importance of *Girls with Chelsea* movie is that it has the title of the first movie and reflects the realities of invisible life rather than providing a certain commercial gain, while at the same time capturing the continuity of not feeling mechanical in the face of human anger (Kaliç, 1992, p. 79).

Another example is the movie *The Lonely Cowboys*. According to the indications of Peter Gidal ‘... observed attitudes, politics, vulgarity, superstars, script and time. Sexuality is

displayed in the film and homosexuality, which has existed in cowboy culture for a long time, is revealed in all its dimensions. In fact, at one point in the film, it was very natural for cowboys working on the plains for months without seeing a woman's face, except for the prostitutes in the bar in the town, to establish relationships with each other under the conditions of that; He stated that what is unnatural is the attitude of Hollywood Westerns who ignore such an existing relationship (Kaliç, 1997, p. 44).

After Warhol was attacked by a fan in the last years of his second term, his desire to make films disappeared completely. So he left the management to his assistant Paul Morrissey. Thus, the third period of Warhol cinema began.

Even though the impression seen when looking at the films of the third period seems to be a structure based solely on the feeling of pleasure, like the examples of porn movies, it is noticed that an attitude towards emotions is shown, not the desired sexual pleasure.

Sex Movie (1968) is the first film of this structure, but it is a good example. In this ninety-minute film, Viva is making love with her partner Louis Waldon, while on the other hand they talk about the difficult or enjoyable aspects of acting in porn, such as the sharing of information that exists in the structure of documentary films, about the war in Vietnam, and even spending time cooking and showering³ (Kaliç, 1997, p. 49).

Other films made during this period are "*Garbage (1970), Rebel Women (1972), Heat (1972), Love (1973), Andy Warhol's Dracula (1974), and Andy Warhol's Frankenstein (1974)*" 'technically it looks a bit more like commercial films; elaborate shots, regular plots, etc. Warhol cinema, which was formed in Paul Morrissey's thoughts with elements, has now moved away from the concept of "What is a Movie". However, thanks to these films made in the late 60s and 70s, the concepts of sex, drugs, and immorality were accepted by Hollywood.

In short, thanks to the films that Warhol created during his life "to be able to turn working alone, production, not work, but life into art" its purpose has been shown to the world.

Critics, art books say that Andy Warhol's real life, both in his works, is more a compiler than a creative; He is open to all the effects of his time and evaluates the strongest ones (especially television, all communication tools, advertising, photography, etc.); He emphasizes that he is in high demand for simplicity, superficiality, brilliance, and striking and that this is why it has become so widespread. Those who try to infer more "deep" meanings from his works, describe all of Warhol's works as a "search for identity" and talk about the fact that Andy Warhol is expressing this loss of people today under the domination of technology. They characterize this as a "rebellion" against the consumer society (Baydur, 1987, p. 35).

Conclusion

In America, to spoil the magic of the audiences who were hypnotized by Hollywood cinema, under the name of "underground movie", low-cost works that appeared in the 20s and have different meanings according to the eye have emerged. Considering the main purpose of these works, it is seen that they criticize commercial cinema.

World War II is an important breaking point in underground cinema. Films could not be shot for a long time due to the destruction that occurred during the Second World War, so after the war was over, the copies of the films found in the Museum of Modern Art Film Archive were presented to the audience with explanatory booklets. For the first time, viewers who went beyond the "Classic American" understanding started to reach the consciousness that could understand experimental cinema.

³Andy Warhol Fuck Film, <https://warholstars.org/andy-warhol-blue-movie.html>, (Date of Access: 15.06.2020)

For this reason, the works created in the 1950s began to be popular with the audience. Pop-art's founder Andy Warhol started to shoot his movies in these years when the population increased.

Looking at Warhol's filmography, a structure consisting of many eras is seen. While the first-period films were long, colorless, and as static as possible, criticizing the current structure of Hollywood cinema, this situation started to deteriorate in the second and third periods.

With the discovery of sound in the second period, Warhol abandoned the static frames, enchanted by the cinema. Although he criticizes Hollywood cinema in terms of semantics in his second-period films, when the structural whole is examined, a structure is seen in a way that is indistinguishable from Hollywood cinema except for minor nuances

Warhol started to move away from cinema and art due to the misfortune he experienced in his real life in his third and last period. During this period, his assistant, Paul Morrissey, started shooting sex movies using Warhol's title. The films made by Morrissey are not semantically intended to reveal the feeling of sexual pleasure like a normal porn movie, but rather like a documentary narrative of the plot in that porn film. But during this period, the technical reflections of Hollywood cinema are noticed in the films that Morrissey shot. Movies created under the name of Warhol lost their value day by day. By the end of the 1970s, the factory where the films were created was closed and the Warhol cinema came to an end.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author of the article declared that there is no conflict of interest.

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