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MAR 442.01: Experimental Film

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COURSE SYLLABUS – AUTUMN 2014
MEDIA ARTS 442-01: EXPERIMENTAL FILM

Instructor: ANDREW SMITH
Wed 1:10am–4pm
McGill 227
Phone: 396-5052

Office/Hours: room 232
TH 11am-1pm
or by appointment
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Course Description:
Surveying a wide range of experimental and avant-garde cinema (film, video & mixed media) from 1923 to 2013, with a central focus being artistic practice in the context of historic, industrial and cultural concerns. Students will study, conduct independent research on, and create projects that explore film/video both as a form of personal expression and as an artistic medium, rather than as mass entertainment.

Course Expectations:
1. Attendance is mandatory. 3 unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.
2. There are no make-up exams, or extensions given for projects or written work. All written work must be turned in on time. Emailed versions of written work is accepted, as long as they are accompanied by a hard copy.
3. Late projects or assignments will result in a loss of ½ letter grade for that project/assignment per day late.

Course Requirements: weight
1. Attendance/Participation 20%
2. Journal of films 10%
3. Mid-Term Test 15%
4. Shooting/Processing/transfer 16mm 15%
5. Final film project 25%
6. Research presentation 15%

Film Journal
You will keep a notebook on the films in this class, as well as others you are watching on your own time. These notes will ultimately cohere into a written “manifesto” that you will turn in and present to the class—a personal and considered summary of your reactions and emotions (loves, hates, inspirations, repulsions). I’m particularly interested in unexpected jolts of recognition, ideas of dream capture, unforeseen pathways into your sense of self, new tools in your sense of cinematic possibility.

Research Presentation
Each of you will give a 10-minute presentation that links the film work you are doing to one of the filmmakers— or collectives— or film movements— that pertains to this class. The idea is to present your film (or work-in-progress) in the CONTEXT of the rich history of 100 years of experimental film work. More details on this forthcoming.
Film Project
Each of you will get to work in an “analog” medium; that is to say, you will load, shoot, and develop at least one 3-minute roll of 16mm film, which will be the basis of your experimental work. You are happily encouraged to shoot more rolls than that, and you are also encouraged to use mixed media (e.g., direct editing, video effects, animation, etc.) in combination with your cinema. But at least one of your works in this class will be grounded in actual film-making. You will transfer your film to digital format, and edit your film, as much as you need, in digital media (we do not have film editing equipment).

Grading Criteria for Experimental works
Experimental works, by their very nature, are extremely subjective, and therefore difficult to grade on an artistic basis. However, it’s easy to detect lackluster effort and/or sloppy work, as well as work that is late or poorly planned and executed. You also will be expected to give a coherent & relevant presentation and short “manifesto” (written description) of your work.

The non-subjective criteria for grading your films is as follows:
- Turned in on time and completed;
- Ability to write about, discuss and justify process;
- Ability to write about, discuss and justify goals and expectations;
- Ability to write about, and justify content in a historical and cultural context.

Reading
I will present, via Xerox or email, chapters & excerpts from these, among other, texts:


Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code
All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/Index.cfm/page/1321.
Schedule of Topics—Experimental Film

I. Origins & Structures: 1919-1939
Tour a la Raison 1923, Man Ray
Ballet Mécanique 1924, Fernand Leger
Anémie Cinématographique 1926, Marcel Duchamp
Emak-Bakia (“Leave Me Alone”) 1926, Man Ray
L’Etoile De Mer 1928, Man Ray
The Fall of the House of Usher 1928, Watson & Webber
Un Chien Andalou 1929, Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali
Man With A Movie Camera 1929, Dziga Vertov
L’Age d’Or 1930, Luis Bunuel
Blood of a Poet 1930, Jean Cocteau
The Hearts of Age 1934, Orson Welles

II. Trances & Rituals: 1940-1971
Meshes of the Afternoon 1943, Maya Daren
Fireworks 1947, Kenneth Anger
Scorpio Rising 1961, Kenneth Anger
Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome 1954, Kenneth Anger
Works of Stan Brakhage 1952-2003
Brakhage (1999, documentary by Jim Shedden)
Flaming Creatures 1963, Jack Smith
37 Fluxus Films 1963-66, Fluxus Group
Shadows, 1959, John Cassavetes
The Connection 1961, Shirley Clarke
Main Banana no. 1 1964, Andy Warhol
Wavelength 1967, Michael Snow
(nostalgia) 1971, Hollis Frampton

Film No. 3: Interwoven (1947-49) Harry Smith
Rose Hobart (1945), By Night with Torch and Spear (1940?) Joseph Cornell
Odds & Ends (1959) Jane Belson Shimane
Aleph (1956-66) Wallace Berman
7362 (1967) Pat O’Neill
[Diaries, Notes, and Sketches]
Notes on the Circus (1966) Jonas Mekas
IV. Midnight & Beyond: 1969-1977
Midnight Movies Documentary
El Topo 1970, Alejandro Jodorowski
Pink Flamingos 1972, John Waters
The Harder They Come 1973, Perry Henzel
Short Films of David Lynch
Eraserhead 1977, David Lynch
Hold Me While I’m Naked George Kuchar
I, an Actress 1977, George Kuchar
It Came From Kuchar (documentary, Jennifer Kroot)

IV. Impulse & Influence: 1977-2013
Trapped in Canton (1973) William Eggleston
No More Workhorse Blues (2005), Harmony Korine
Alone: Life Wastes Andy Hardy, Martin Arnold
Sweetgrass (2010); Leviathan (2013) Lucien Casting-Taylor
The Cremaster Trilogy, Matthew Barney

V. If Time Permits: but you need to be aware of:
ANDREJ TARKOVSKY
BILL VIOLA
NAM JUN PAIK— various works
TRINH T. MINH-HA
YVONNNE RAINER
JAMES BENNING
ERNIE GEHR
DAVID RUSSO— Bringer of War
WILLIAM GREAVES— Psychosimbiotaxiplasm
GUS VAN SANT— Mala Noche
JON JOST— Belle Diamond, Sure Fire, Last Chants for a Slow Dance…
JIM JARMUSCH— Permanent Vacation
RICHARD LINKLATER—
SLACKER, IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO LEARN TO PLOW BY READING BOOKS
MICHEL GAGNE—SENSOLOGY (2010)

…And Films of your choosing/discovery/ warning…