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Fall 9-1-2021

MART 442.B01: Experimental Film

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Recommended Citation

Addington, Tobin William, "MART 442.B01: Experimental Film" (2021). *University of Montana Course Syllabi*. 12525.

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EXPERIMENTAL FILM

MAR 442B, Section 01, 3 credits. Prereq: none. Fall 2021

Instructor: Tobin Addington
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Office: McGill 234
Office Hours: Tues. 2-3pm; Wed. 1pm-2pm

Day & Time: Tues 11-1:50
Room: McGill 227

Course Description:

The evolution of the cinematic form has been marked by experimentation from its earliest days. In this course we will begin with some of those first experiments in the use of film technology, and then explore the ongoing strain of avant-garde and experimental cinema that emerged as a distinct set of forms in the 1920s and continues to this day.

Some of the films we examine will invert traditional narrative structures, others will reject “story” altogether. Some will take as their subjects the very photochemical or digital processes that capture their images, while others will use abstraction to illuminate deeper psychological, spiritual, or emotional truths.

Our job this semester is to open ourselves to the unknown, the uncomfortable, the challenging, the provocative. Experimental films require active viewing, they demand to be met halfway (or more), to be grappled with. That’s grappling is the work of the semester.

Course Objectives:

In this course students will engage with the major films, movements, and filmmakers of experimental film. Students will view, analyze, and discuss films; read works written by the filmmakers as well as critics and scholars; produce their own short experimental film exercises adopting the techniques used by the filmmakers they’re studying; write a series of reflection papers exploring their own reactions to the films under discussion; and complete a final project, either a research paper or their own experimental film, including process notes and director’s notebook.

Course Goals:

Analyze a wide variety of experimental films and media	Think critically
Engage in critical responses through writing	Enhance knowledge of film history and culture
Develop analytical “readings” of films, complete with sources and evidence	Clearly understand and apply film language when writing about films
Analyze how formal choices impact audience experience	Reconsider relationships and responsibilities for filmmakers
Enhance and apply research skills OR	Practice experimental film techniques

Time & Effort

When you successfully complete the course, you will earn 3 university credits. The time & effort it takes each of you to complete your assignments will vary. You may find that some weeks require more effort, but if you put in that effort, it will be noticed and rewarded.

Course Workload

In addition to regularly scheduled meeting times, expect five hours of work outside of scheduled class per week for completion of projects and assignments.

Evaluation:

Final grades are based on the following criteria:

Grade Determination:

**** Your grade will be determined out of a possible 100 points. ****

14 points (14%) Participation
 36 points (36%) Reflection Papers (6x6)
 30 points (30%) Film Exercises (3x10)
 20 points (20%) Final Research Paper or Film Project

Attendance & Participation (14%)

Students will arrive to class on time, having read and/or viewed all relevant material and completed all the written exercises, and will participate in class discussions.

Reflection Papers (36%)

Students will write a series of short papers that demonstrate a high level of engagement with the readings, films, lectures and class discussions through observations and questions. Reflection papers are your space to keep a written account of what you find most compelling and/or difficult in the coursework. You are encouraged to use quotations from the readings or specific scenes from the films we screen for class as departure points for your comments.

If you find yourself frustrated by a particular film, this is your place to voice that – and then dig into *why* you felt that way. What techniques did the filmmaker use or withhold that affected your viewing experience? Similarly, if you find yourself particularly intrigued, interested, or excited by a film, reading, or discussion, consider why and articulate it.

Reflection papers should be no fewer than three pages typewritten, double-spaced. They will be collected approximately every two weeks. These are a place to comment on how you are experiencing the substance of the course. The deeper you dig into your own reactions, the more points you will earn.

Students will receive a **check minus** -- (worth 4 points) *indicating acceptable work but could have shown more in-depth engagement/try to read more closely/pose more questions/offer more commentary*; a **check** (worth 5 points) *indicating solid work/keep it up*; or a **check plus** + (worth 6 points) *indicating truly outstanding reflection and revelation of your thought process on both readings, films and discussions*.

These papers will be turned in via Moodle. Check the Calendar of Assignments (below) for due dates.

Film Exercises (30%)

Students will create 3 short experimental film projects over the course of the semester, playing with techniques and modes of cinema discussed during the class. These films will be graded on attention to detail, uniqueness of approach, and on-time completion. Students will not be penalized for a failed experiment, but rather for not experimenting in the first place.

See specific assignments for details.

Research Paper or Experimental Film Project –including revisions (20%)

Students will write a 7- to 10-page research paper on a film, movement, or filmmaker relevant to the history of experimental film. The thesis will articulate some sort of argument with a clear and perhaps counterintuitive point of view. The subsequent paper will use evidence, in the form of outside sources and cited films, to prove their argument.

Alternatively, students will produce a 5- to 10-minute experimental film project using techniques pioneered or inspired by the filmmakers we've studied. These films must include thorough process notes, a pre-filming statement of intent, a post-production director's assessment, and a brief, perhaps provocative, artist's statement.

- Late assignments **will be accepted** for 50% of the original grade for 1 week **after the due date**.
- If you are going to miss class, turn in your paper early via Moodle.
- Do not email me assignments unless I request that method. I will lose it. (The assignment, I mean. Not, like, my temper!)

How to Earn the Grade That You Want

- Arrive to class on time.
- Arrive to class ready to watch and listen with your full attention.
- Take notes during class and during films.
- Schedule regular time to work on the course throughout the week.
- Turn your homework in on time.
- Start your work early so you can ask questions before the deadline.
- Communicate with the professor. Ask for clarifications, ask for help.
- Read all assigned readings, every week. Research other writing about the films.
- Read and know the information on this syllabus! Refer back throughout the course.

Other Course Policies**School Statements**

- COVID-19 policy: The University of Montana requires masks for every course being held in a classroom, lab, or studio until otherwise informed.
- Land Acknowledgement:
The University of Montana acknowledges that we are in the aboriginal territories of the

Salish and Kalispell people. Today, we honor the path they have always shown us in caring for this place for the generations to come.

- **Inclusion Policies:**

The University of Montana values leadership, engagement, diversity, and sustainability, because our institution is committed to respect, welcome, encourage, and celebrate the differences among us. As members of the University of Montana community, we aspire to:

- Respect the dignity and rights of all persons.
- Practice honesty, trustworthiness, and academic integrity.
- Promote justice, learning, individual success, and service.
- Act as good stewards of institutional resources.
- Respect the natural environment.

The College of the Arts and Media at the University of Montana, has chosen to actively pursue equity and access for all persons. In this charge we will be researching, planning, and implementing ways in which our culture can be more accessible, inclusive, equitable, sustainable. It is not enough to be anti-bias in principle without being equitable in action. We will implement these actions organized by a group of students, faculty, and staff across the entire College in an ongoing way.

Student Support Resources

- **Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code:**
This Code of Conduct embodies and promotes honesty, integrity, accountability, and duties associated with citizenship as a student in our community at the University of Montana. This Code exists to protect the interests of the community and dignity of its members, and to challenge those behaviors which are not in accordance with our policies. The Code is available for review online at <https://staging.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/student-code-of-conduct-2021-pdf>
- **Accommodations:** Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting the DSS office. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). For more information, please consult <http://www.umt.edu/disability>.
- **The Writing and Public Speaking Center** provides one-on-one tutoring to students at all levels and at any time in the writing process. Visit now. Visit often. We're ready when you are. www.umt.edu/writingcenter.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy:**
The University of Montana is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, visit <https://www.umt.edu/diversity/resources/mental-health.php>

Stay connected:

Please join SVMA social media to stay informed about events and happenings in our school.

- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/umt_svma/

Class Schedule

WEEK #1: August 31

ORIGINS OF CINEMA (& THE AVANT-GARDE)

Introductions – Description of class and assignments (syllabus) – General questions
What is an “Experimental Film”?

Screening & Discussion

Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat, Lumière Bros. (France, 1895) 50 seconds
Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory, Lumière Bros. (France, 1895) 2 mins.
Edison Short Films, Dickson and Porter (US, 1893-1906) 30-70 seconds
Manhatta, Strand & Sheeler (US, 1921) 10 mins.

WEEK #2: September 7

SURREALISM IN MOTION (PICTURES)

European art movements and experimental film – Surrealism, Dada, etc. – cross influences

Screening & Discussion

Ballet Mechanique, Léger & Murphy (France, 1924) 15 mins.
Entr’Acte, Clair (France, 1924) 20 mins.
L’Etoile de Mer, Ray (France, 1928) 15 mins.
Un Chien Andalou, Buñuel w/ Dali (France, 1929) 16 mins.
The Fall of the House of Usher, Watson w/ Webber & Cummings (US, 1928) 13 mins.
Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis, Ruttmann (Germany, 1927) 64 mins.

READINGS for today:

- “Acquired Taste? The Problem of the Viewer” and “Avant-garde Film Viewing as Problem Solving,” Peterson (from *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*)
- “‘Surrealism’ and the Omnipotence of Cinema,” Magrini (from *Senses of Cinema*)

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- 3-Shot Film

WEEK #3: September 14

CITY SYMPHONIES

The avant-garde cracks a popular genre throughout Europe

Screening & Discussion

Man with a Movie Camera, Vertov (USSR, 1929) 89 mins.
Wochenende (Weekend), Ruttmann (Germany, 1930) 11 mins.

READINGS for today:

- "Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* and the Phenomenology of Perception," Delgado (from *Film Criticism*)

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- Reflection Paper 1 (weeks 1 & 2)

WEEK #4: September 21**IDENTITY AND DESIRE**

American filmmakers of the 1940s – identity and dreamscapes

Screening & Discussion

Meshes of the Afternoon, Deren (US, 1944) 18 mins.

Fireworks, Anger (US, 1947) 14 mins.

READINGS for today:

- "The Interiority of Space: Desire and Maya Dere," Turim (collected in *Avant-garde Film*)

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- City Symphony Film

WEEK #5: September 28**GRAPPLING WITH THE HOLOCAUST**

Filmmakers turn to experimental techniques to make sense of true horror – from investigative memoir to meditative examinations of the Holocaust

Screening & Discussion

Night and Fog, Resnais (France, 1955) 30 mins.

The Ties that Bind, Friedrich (US, 1984) 55 mins.

READINGS for today:

- "Disruptive Histories: Toward a Radical Politics of Remembrance in Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*," Hebard (from *New German Critique*)
- "Su Friedrich: *The Ties that Bind*," MacDonald (from *Avant-garde Film: Motion Studies*)

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- Reflection Paper 2 (weeks 3 & 4)

WEEK #6: October 5**THE POETIC MODE**

The line between experimental and mainstream blurs in this self-reflective take on the classical myth

Screening & Discussion

Orpheus, Cocteau (France 1950) 95 mins.

READINGS for today:

- tbd

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- Interview Film

WEEK #7: October 12**THE MALE GAZE**

Filmmaker/scholar Laura Mulvey created one of the defining theories of contemporary cinema – and then set about making films to prove it

Screening & Discussion

Riddles of the Sphinx, Mulvey & Wollen (US, 1977) 92 mins.

READINGS for today:

- “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- Reflection Paper 3 (weeks 5 & 6)

WEEK #8: October 19**SUPER-STRUCTURES**

The Structuralists of the 1960s and ‘70s break film down to its component parts

Screening & Discussion

Wavelength, Snow (US, 1967) 45 mins.

Fog Line, Gottheim (US, 1970) 11 mins.

Zorns Lemma, Frampton (US, 1970) 60 mins.

READINGS for today:

- “Michael Snow: *Wavelength*,” MacDonald (from *Avant-garde Film: Motion Studies*)

WEEK #9: October 26**A HALLOWEEN-WEEK TREAT**

A modern sci-fi thriller featuring one of the biggest stars in the world turns out to be a secret avant-garde treatise on gender, sexuality, and modern life

Screening & Discussion

Under the Skin, Glazer (UK, 2013) 108 mins.

READINGS:

- "Under the Skin," Romney (from *Film Comment*)
- "Under the Skin: the Perils of Becoming Female," Osterweil (from *Film Quarterly*)

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- Reflection Paper 4 (weeks 7 & 8)

WEEK #10: November 2**EXPERIMENTS IN NARRATIVE FORM**

Scandinavian master examines identity and obsession – critiques of the narrative form

Screening & Discussion

Persona, Bergman (Sweden, 1966) 81 mins.

READINGS:

- "The Imaginary Signifier in Bergman's *Persona*," Michaels (from *Film Criticism*)

WEEK #11: November 9**THE BODY EMBODIED**

Themes of body image, commodified culture, and sexuality are explored

Screening & Discussion**READINGS for today:**

- "The Incredible Shrinking Star: Todd Haynes and the case History of Karen Carpenter," Desjardins (from *Camera Obscura*)

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- Reflection Paper 5 (weeks 9 & 10)
- Research Paper / Film Project Pitch due

Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story, Haynes (US, 1988) 43 mins.

WEEK #12: November 16

'80s AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE

Drawing on his Surrealist forebears, writer-director-sound designer David Lynch brings dream logic to the feature film form

Screening & Discussion

Eraserhead, Lynch (US, 1978) 89 mins.

READINGS for today:

- "Rough Beasts Slouch Toward Bethlehem to Be Born: *Eraserhead* and the Grotesque Infant (Whose Hour Has Come Round at Last)," Taylor (from *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*)

WEEK #13: November 23

INTO THE "ZONE"

This masterpiece of Soviet science fiction relies heavily on experimental film

Screening & Discussion

Stalker, Tarkovsky (USSR, 1979) 161 mins.

READINGS for today:

- "Lost Harmony: Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* and *Stalker*," Dempsey (from *Film Quarterly*)

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- Reflection Paper 6 (weeks 11 & 12)

WEEK #14: November 30

ONE WILD TIME

A celebrated American independent filmmaker finds his voice by breaking the rules

Screening & Discussion

Schizopolis, Soderbergh (US, 1996) 96 mins.

WEEK #15: December 7

AVANT-GARDE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Two filmmakers, one year, two different views of the world

Screening & Discussion

24 Frames, Kiarostami (Iran, 2017) 114 mins.

Anti-Objects, or Space Without Path or Boundary, Hopkina (US, 2017) 13 mins.

FINAL: Thursday, December 16 – 10:10-12:10

FINAL PROJECTS

Screen and discuss your final projects or research papers

Screening & Discussion

Your films!

ASSIGNMENT DUE:

- Research Paper or Experimental Film Project