

Kleinhans

The course is an introduction to experimental film broadly defined: avant-garde, African, lyric, personal, counter-cinema. We will examine and discuss a wide variety of films in the context of recurring interests/issues/problems/questions of experimental film. Although the course is not historically arranged, we'll cover various periods and movements. The course will cover the same topics several times. For example, topics such as films about the materiality of film or films showing sexual taboos will be covered with various films shown at different times. For this reason, attendance and participation in discussion will be important.

The format will concentrate on film viewings and discussion. Supplementary readings will provide background and occasional lectures will attempt a synthesis of the discussion. The discussion will begin with students ~~express~~ called on to give some comments on or reactions to the film. The response may be descriptive, analytical, evaluative, personal, abstract, or whatever. There's only one rule: any evaluation must be explained. (For example: "I hated it because....")

Grading: participation in discussion, take-home midterm essay, and final (student's choice: in-class final exam or paper analyzing one film). Graduate students will be required to do wider reading, arranged ~~with~~ individually with the ~~major~~ instructor.

Required Texts:

American Federation of Arts, A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema \$4.95
P. Adams Sitney, Visionary Film \$13.95

The History should be read by the mid-term; Visionary Film by the final.

Scheduling. There may be some changes in the following schedule due to various external problems. Let's all keep our fingers crossed. The class will meet Tuesday and Thursday 9-11. On two Mondays we will meet from 10-11: Monday April 11 and Monday April 25. We may, due to unforeseen--but possible--changes, have to add one more Monday meeting.

Off-campus class. On four days we will meet at the regular time but at the Film Center of the School of the Art Institute. This may be a transportation problem for some who have classes following this one, but the Film Center collection of experimental films is exceptionally good, and this provides an unusual opportunity to films we couldn't possibly afford to show in class. The Film Center screenings (lasting about 3 hours--9-12--for those who can stay) will take place April 12, 26, May 3, 26.

Other experimental film showings. This term provides an exceptional opportunity to see experimental films in the Chicago area. I hope you can go to as many of these events as possible.

At the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 E. Ontario. The seven program A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema. This is an historical survey of the US scene from the 40s to the early 70s, selected on ~~the~~ rather formalist grounds. One of our texts is the catalogue of the exhibit. Students: \$1.00 per show.

beginning 4/5

Film Center, SAIC, Columbus at Jackson, Chicago (series tickets)

April 5 Hollis Frampton in person with films from his Magellan Cycle. 5:30

April 7 Yvonne Rainer in person with Kristina Talking Pictures. 6:00

April 8 Noroit by Jacques Rivette.

In later half of May: Straub-Huillet's Moses and Aaron

May-June: a Godard retrospective

Filmgroup at NAME Gallery. 9 W. Hubbard, Chicago

A regular program, usually on Saturday nights, of local and international experimental films. The filmmakers will be present for most shows in the next two months.

April 7, 8 pm. Hollis Frampton (with more films from his Magellan Cycle)

May 14, 8 pm. Will Hindle.

NU--May 11, 12 Makavejev's Sweet Movie.

Week One

Tues ~~3~~ Mar 29

Norman McLaren Begone Dull Care (1949)

Joris Ivens Rain (1928)

Standish Lawder Runaway (1970)

Cocteau, Beauty and the Beast, Ch. 11, 10:30

Thurs Mar 31

? Larry Jordan Our Lady of the Spheres (1969)

Man Ray Etoile de mer

Luis Bunuel Le Chien Andalou (1928)

Stan Brakhage Flesh of Morning (56-57)

Hollis Frampton Hapax Legomena III (Critical Mass)

Sat. April 2 8 pm NAME Paul Kaiser in person with films and statement/manifesto

Week Two

Tues April 5

Eisenstein Strike

~~Santiago Alvarez~~ Now

Film Center: 5.30 Hollis Frampton

MCA: 6pm first History program

Thurs April 7

Melies A Trip to the Moon

Rene Clair Entr'acte (1924)

Man Ray Emak Bakia (1926)

Ferdinand Leger Le Ballet Mecanique (1924)

Bruce Connor 5:10 to Dreamland

James Broughton High Kukus

PROJECTION

Thurs April 7 (cont'd) Film Center, 6 pm Yvonne Rainer
NAME, 8 pm Hollis Frampton

Fri April 8 Film Center Rivette Noroit

Sat April 9 NAME, 8 pm Ruth Klassen and Diane Banda, Chicago filmmakers

Week Three

Fragment of Seeking, Curtis Harrington

Tues. April 12 class meets at Film Center

Diana Barris, Annunciation

Stan Brakhage, Wonder Ring, Dog Star Man, Blue Moses, Mothlight,
The Horseman, the Woman and the Moth

plus additional films TBA

5x Marilyn

MCA, second History program, 6 pm

Thurs. April 14 Cosmic Ray } Connor

Hans Richter Ghosts before Breakfast (27-28)

Len Lye A Color Box

Len Lye Rhythm (1953)

James Whitney Lapis (63-66)

Stan Brakhage Mothlight

Ed Emshwiller Thanatopsis

Sat April 16 NAME, Gary Atkins, Boston filmmaker

Week Four

U Tues. April 19

Bruce Connor Report

Eisenstein Potemkin (Odessa steps sequence)

Dziga Vertov Man with a Movie Camera

Thurs April 21

~~Marx Bros.~~ Monkey Business (excerpt)

Yippie Yippie

Robert Nelson O Dem Watermelons

John Jost ~~Something~~ Turning Point in Lunatic China and other films

Sat 23 Name
Rob Danielson

Week Five *** Special Monday Class, 25 April 10-11 (Ray & Dulac films?)

Tues April 26 class meets at Film Center

Brakhage Text of Light

Robert Breer, Inner and Outer Space, Un Miracle, Man and His Dog

Out for Air, Horse over Teakettle, PBL no. 2, 69, Gulls and Bouys

Bunuel, Un Chien Andalou

Cassell FX

plus additional films TBA

Thurs. April 28

Man Ray Les Mysteres du Chateau de Dé

Germain Dulac The Smiling Madame Beudet (1922)

Ann Severson Near the Big Chakra (1972)

Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen Pentheselia

Week Six

Tues. May 3 Film Center screening

Films by James Broughton
Cocteau, Blood of the Poet
Chaplin, Easy Street
and additional films, TBA

Thurs. May 5

Maya Deren Ritual in Transfigured Time
Maya Deren A Study in Choreography for the Camera
Chris Marker La Jolie
Jon Jost Speaking Directly

Week Seven

Tues. May 10

Norman McLaren Mosaic
Hans Richter Film Study (1926)
Scott Bartlett Melina
Bruce Baillie Casino Street

Thurs. May 12

~~Jean Genet Un Chant d'Amour~~
Jack Smith Flaming Creatures
George Kuchar Hold Me While I'm Naked
Stan Vanderbeek Science Friction
Standish Lawder Dangling Participle

Sat May 14 NAME Will Hindle

Week Eight

~~xxxxxxx~~

Tues May 17

Maya Deren Meshes of the Afternoon
Jean-Luc Godard Le Gai Savoir

Thurs May 19 David Rimmer Real Italian Pizza

Joann Ela: Rape
Michele Citron Parthenogenesis

Week Nine

Tues May 24

Germaine Dulac The Seashell and the Clergyman
~~Jan Huger Bells of Atlantic~~
Suzann Litt-Kraning Jefferson Circus Songs
Storm de Hirsh Peyote Queen
Brakhage Sirius Remembered

Thurs May 26

Special program at Film Center TBA

Sat ^{May} 28 NAME Helene Kaplan

Week Ten

Tues May 31

Man Ray Le Retour a la raison (1923)

Makavejev WR: Mysteries of the Organism

Thurs ~~bx~~ June 2

Joyce Weiland Fat Life and Diet in North America

Paul Sharitz T, o, u, c, h, i, n, g

Marcel Duchamp America Cinema

Ernie Gehr Serene Velocity

Sat June 4 NAME Cieve, German experimentalist

Kleinhans
Experimental Film

The following books have been placed on two-hour reserve for purposes of reference.

Sitney, P. Adam Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde (required reading)

Renan, Sheldon An Introduction to the American Underground Film

A broad survey, pretty uncritical, of New American Cinema in the mid-60's

Standish Lawder, Standish D. The Cubist Cinema

Excellent study of Cubist tendencies in the Twenties

Mekas, Jonas Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959-71

Collected columns from his Village Voice journalism

Youngblood, Gene Expanded Cinema

A broad survey of computer films, intermedia, mixed media, video experiments, etc. in the late 60's.

Sitney, P. Adam The Film Culture Reader

Selected articles from the critical magazine of the American avant-garde

Battcock, Gregory The New American Cinema

Another anthology

Vogel, Amos Film as a Subversive Art

Interesting for descriptions of a wide variety of films

Tyler, Parker Underground Film (survey of New American Cinema)

Curtis, David; Experimental Cinema

An often sketchy historical overview of the international avant-garde

Grad students are required to do wider reading in addition to the two required course books. I would like a list of what you intend to read, if you have a clear idea already. If you would like some suggestions, see me (office hours: Tu and Fri 11-12 and by arrangement). The goal of the reading should be suited to your own needs and interests. Thus some might read from the above set of books to broaden their knowledge. Others might choose to study the criticism of a specific critic (eg. Annette Michaelson) or to read what's been written about a particular filmmaker. It is also possible to work in near related areas: eg. the surrealist movement in the various arts.

Examination on the reading ⁶ can be done in different ways: oral discussion with the instructor, written presentation, or it could be incorporated into the final paper (which is itself an option) analyzing one film. Monday, May 23 is the deadline for oral or written presentations.

* { All students who choose the final option of writing a paper: it is due Monday, June 6. If you don't have it in then, you'll be required to take the final exam. In other words, there are no incompletes.

How is taking a course in experimental film like watching the Gong Show?

March 29. We tried to define the "film" part of experimental film. The minimal definition seemed something like this: a celluloid strip that moves and is projected, which seems to involve light and a surface on which to project the image. An audio track could possibly be added. Even this minimal definition seemed to have some problems: did it have to be projected on a surface? An essentialist definition like this seemed to have its limits. To be meaningful does definition have to be relative (relative to something else)? We had defined film in terms of its apparatus (actually only part of its potential apparatus at that--we left out the camera and even the emulsion as not strictly necessary). We could also define it, including the filmmaker and the audience, as a communication process.

We tried to define "experimental." Some definitions stressed the scientific meaning: an experiment to try something new, to test, to discover. Discover and invent were part of some definitions. Original was offered as the key. But all of these raised the question of "relative to what?" To mainstream Hollywood film? To documentary and industrial film? To the received codes and/or conventions of film? Perhaps other words are better. Independent? Independent of what? Are these words descriptive? Do they imply a value judgement? Does originality, say, carry with it a means of evaluating films? Are some more original than others (and therefore better)?

Originality is a relatively modern word. It came into common use in English from [the later 18th Century] ... In the case of works of art there was a transfer from the retrospective sense of original (the first work and not the copy) to what was really a sense close to new (not like other works). ... Originality... became a common term of praise of art and literature, A work was good not by comparison with others, or by a standard, but 'in its own terms.'

--Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society
(NY: Oxford UP, 1976) pp. 192-193

The theatre of plays in which audience and performers are separated, characters develop along linear paths, and a story told without disruptive variation is the tradition we are most familiar with. It is a tradition wrought over five centuries of European history, with roots in ancient Greek and Roman theatre. It is a Western tradition, closely linked to our own kind of sequential logic and our historic faith in individual destiny. Our logic is causal and assumes that personality, social structures, and experience develop "organically." Such a system has no proper premises to deal forthrightly with "randomness," "disorder," "anarchy," and "simultaneity." We understand these phenomena, but think of them as "unnatural." And thus our understanding is prejudiced. But other cultures have other ways and different systems--systems that include associational and suggestive logic, random development, and patterns that are subjectively (and not necessarily individually) ~~dis~~ discovered rather than objectively presented.

--Richard Schechner, Public Domain (NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), p. 214.

If the word revolution is used seriously and not merely as an epithet for this season's novelties, it implies a process. No revolution is simply the result of personal originality. The maximum that such originality can achieve is madness: madness is revolutionary freedom confined to the self.

--John Berger, "The Moment of Cubism," in The Look of Things (NY: Viking 1974) p. 135

Nobody should experience anything they don't need to, if they don't need poetry bully for them, I like the movies too. And after all, only Whitman and Crane and Williams, of the American poets, ~~are~~ are better than the movies. As for measure and other technical apparatus, that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to bed with you. There's nothing metaphysical about it. Unless, of course, you flatter yourself into thinking that what you're experiencing is "yearning."

--Frank O'Hara, Personism: A Manifesto in The Poetics of The New American Poetry, ed. Donald M. Allen and Warren Tallman (NY: Grove, 1973) p. 354

I used to think so. When in doubt, be ironic. When in pain, be ambivalent. When enraged, parody. Strike an attitude like a match, and while you consume yourself, grimace. This is modernism, the literature of fire alarms and dangerous toys. Open up the box: either it explodes in our faces or we find, inside, a dead mouse. . . .

I have been reading, and rereading, and it occurs to me that I no longer believe most of our serious writers, any more than I believe TV commercials. What are they selling? Blood on a crust of dread, instead of horsemeat and un-cola. Where do we live? At a dead end, in a country called Catatonia. What do we see when we look in a mirror? The abyss. What, when we aren't watching television, do we do with our time? Rape, incest, cannibalism, fratricide, booze, needles and ~~peas~~ pills. Who are we? If we are men, we are monsters of insensitivity, sexual pirates. If we are women, we are whiners or castrating bitches. If we are children, we are victims. . . .

How come the people in their novels don't have friends? People in 19th-century novels used to have friends. So did people in novels by Proust and Joyce and Mann.

Friends, of course, stand in the way of the abyss. Their telephone calls interrupt us while we are theorizing about pain and anguish, while we are wrapping our little boxes full of dead mice and mailing them to the world as though they were ~~valentines~~ valentines. . . . Irony means never having to say you're sorry. . . .

I refuse to believe that all our modern novelists know of life is pratfall, complaint, insanity and tough darts. I think they're lying.

--John Leonard, "Falling off the Train " NYT Book Review , April 3, 1977, pp. 3, 31

(P. Adams Sitney) Then let me ask one question which concerns all of your work. You talked about your own dog, you've talked about your family and so on. Aren't some critics in a way justified when they say that this is, not quite narcissistic, but very limited in scope as opposed to Eisenstein who posits his personal drama in historical context in IVAN THE TERRIBLE or in comparison to Stroheim, or someone who works in a more objective form?

(Stan Brakhage) . . . I would say I grew very quickly as a film artist once I got rid of drama as prime source of inspiration. I began to feel that all history, all life, all that I would have as material with which to work, would have to come from the inside of me out rather than as some form imposed from the outside in. I had the concept of everything radiating out of me, ~~and~~ and that the more personal or ego-centric I would become, the deeper I would reach and the more I could touch those universal concerns which would involve all man. What seems to have happened since marriage is that I no longer sense ego as the greatest source for what can touch on the universal. I now feel that there is some other concrete center where love from one person to another meets; and that the more total view arises from there. . . .

--"Introduction" by Sitney to Brakhage, Metaphors on Vision, 2nd Ed. (NY: Film Culture, 1976), no page nos.

THE
On MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA:

...Vertov's (effects) are minutely devised. He stops the film at a certain point to show a photograph of the film, cutting to a joining girl at work on the first copy. Rolls of the scenes we have just seen glint from the neat shelves. A woman driving along the streets, petrified to a single frame in the film strip of the woman driving along the streets. Long shot from the roof of a house; a camera pans down into the picture. A cameraman climbs a girder. We see him taking a picture, we see the picture he has taken. We are frightened for the safety of the unseen cameraman. Astral projection of self!

--Oswell Blakeston, "Two Vertov Films," in Louis Jacobs, ed., The Documentary Tradition p. 51; originally Close-Up, Aug. 1929 (NY: Hopkinson and Blake 71)

The silliest part about it is that many things in THE MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA--especially the scenes showing the cameraman shooting other scenes--must have been set up with a good deal of care and forethought. (We ought to have been shown the rehearsals.) But this film, mainly by virtue of its failings, performs a valuable function. It enables us--indeed, invites us--to speculate on the nature of screen truth; and it provides a happy and palatable indication of a direction in which cinema cannot hope to proceed. Events must be contrived for the camera; and to make the audience aware of the contrivance is to fall into the absurdity of an endless regression.

--Dai Vaughan, "THE MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA," Films and Filming, Nov 1960; rpt. Jacobs, p. 58

The evolution of his work, and of the master work with which I'm now concerned, renders insistently concrete, as in another dialectical icon, that philosophical phantasm of the reflexive consciousness, the eye seeing, apprending itself through its constitution of the world's visibility.

...
The multiple themes of THE MAN WITH ^{the} A MOVIE CAMERA --the life of man from birth through marriage and death, the progress of a day, the making and projection of a film--will be articulated not only through the use of metaphor, synecdoche, simile, comparison, rhyming images but through the freeze-frame, acceleration, split-frame, superimposition, all the "anomalies of his own inventory, and many more.

The result, articulated most powerfully through the presentation of the filmmaking editing and projection process, is a revelation, and exposure of the terms and dynamics of cinematic illusionism. And this ~~is~~ it is--and not the speed, complexity, formal virtuosity, "obscurity"--that produced the shock, the scandal, the bewilderment in its beholders. It is the manner in which Vertov questions the most immediately powerful and sacred aspect of cinematic experience, disrupting systematically the process of identification and participation, generating at each moment of the film's experience a crisis of belief.

...Vertov had produced a film...taking cinematic consciousness as its theme...

...
(Michelson elaborates "a brief and partial inventory" of Vertov's strategies; details are summarized here--ck)

1. The continual reminder of the presence of the screen as a surface. (trans/projection screens)
2. The intrusion of animation techniques into the action. (magician/carrousel/animation of inanimate objects/poster-athlete)
3. The ~~alternation~~ alternation within one large sequence of slow and "or" "normal" speeds.

*

(speeds)

(athletes/spectators) The implication of shared spectacle is therefore subverted as one is made made conscious of this disjunction.

4. The subversion and restoration of filmic illusion acting to distend and contract the filmic image. (cyclist/theatre)
5. The subversion of the cinematic illusion, through processes of distortion and/or abstraction. (split screen trams/visual gags--exercising with dumbbells/stopping temporal flow by supers~~ions~~-impositions)
6. The process of intellection so constantly solicited by the complex structure, the entire texture of this most assertively edited film.

--Annette Michelson, "From Magician to Epistemologist" in P. Adams Sitney, The Essential Cinema vol. 1 (NY: Anthology Film Archives and NYU, 1975) pp 103, 108, 109. orig. Artforum 10:7 (Mar 72) 60-72.

I've managed to make THREE SONGS ABOUT LENIN (at least to some degree) accessible and comprehensible to millions. But not at the price of cinematographic language; and not by abandoning the principles which had been formulated earlier. No one would demand this of us.

The important thing is not separate form from content. The secret lies in unity of form and content. In refraining from shocking the spectator by introducing objects or devices ~~which~~ which are unnatural or extraneous to the work.

...

Practice has shown that my assumptions were not wrong or useless. And practice is the criterion of truth.

Dziga Vertov, "Kinoks-Revolution," (selections) Film Culture no 25 (summer 62) 45-61. rptd in Geduld, Filmmakers on filmmaking and Sitney, Film Culture Reader.

Critics of rather better than average standing have said in recent years that after socialism has been achieved it's likely there will be no further use for poetry, that it will disappear. This comes from nothing ~~less~~ else than a faulty definition of poetry--and the arts generally. I don't hear anyone say that mathematics is likely to be outmoded, to disappear shortly.

--William Carlos Williams, "Author's Introduction (1944)" to "The Wedge" in The Collected Later Poems (Norfolk CT: New Directions, 1950) p. 3.

The reason why Taoism and Zen present, at first sight, such a puzzle to the Western mind is that we have taken a restricted view of human knowledge. For us, almost all knowledge is what a Taoist would call conventional knowledge, because we do not feel that we really know anything unless we can represent it to ourselves in words, or in some other system of conventional signs such as the notations of mathematics or music. Such ~~is~~ knowledge is called conventional because it is a matter of social agreement as to the codes of communication.

Alan Watts, The Way of Zen (NY: Vintage, 1957) p. 4

I say that you have to be a seer, make oneself a seer.

The poet makes himself a seer by a long, immense, and rational disordering of all the senses. All forms of love, suffering, madness; he searches himself, he absorbs all the poisons in them and keeps only their quintessences. Unspeakable torture for which he needs all his faith and superhuman strength, and for which he becomes the the great invalid, the great criminal, the great damned one--and the supreme Wise Man--Because he arrives at the unknown! Because he has cultivated his own soul, already rich, more than anyone! He reaches the unknown, ~~into~~ and even if, crazed, he ends up by losing his understanding of his visions, at least he has seen them! Let him die in charging ~~his~~ through those unspoken, unnamable things. Other horrible workers will come. They will begin from the horizons where he has fallen!
--Continued in six minutes--

--Arthur Rimbaud, letter to Paul Demeny, 15 may 1871.

In order to understand the powerful, total, definitive, absolute originality (I am not exaggerating, I am trying simply to define, and so much the worse if my enthusiasm carries me away) of films like ANIMAL CRACKERS and, at times (at any rate in the whole last part), MONKEY BUSINESS, you would have to add ~~to~~ to humor the notion of something disquieting and tragic, a fatality ~~is~~ (neither happy nor unhappy, difficult to formulate) which would hover over it like the cast of an appalling malady upon an exquisitely beautiful profile.

...
If Americans, to whose spirit this genre of films belongs, wish to take these films in a merely humorous sense, confining the material of humor to the easy comic margins of the meaning of the word, so much the worse for them; but that will not prevent us from considering the conclusion of MONKEY BUSINESS as a hymn to anarchy and wholehearted revolt, this ending that puts the bawling of a calf on the same intellectual level and gives it the same quality of meaningful suffering as the scream of a frightened woman, this ending that shows, in the shadows of a dirty barn, two lecherous servants freely pawing the naked shoulders of their master's daughter, the equals at last of their hysterical master, all ad amidst the intoxication-- which is intellectual as well--of the Marx Brothers pirouettes. And the triumph of all this is in the kind of exhaltation, simultaneously visual and sonorous, to which these events attain among the shadows, in their intensity of vibration, and in the powerful anxiety which their total effect ultimately projects into the mind.

--Antonin Artaud, "The Marx Brothers" in The Theatre and its Double tr. Mary Richards (NY: Grove, 1958) pp 143, 144.

Kleinhaus -

Experimental Films at SAIC Film Center

9-12 Thursday May 26

Patrick O'Neill	Saugus Series	18
Ann Severson	Riverbody	5.5
Oskar Fischinger	Allegretto Circles	3.5 5
George Landow	Institutional Quality	5
Marie Menken	Dwightiana	3
	Glimpse of the Garden	5
	Hurry, Hurry	3
	Visual Variations on Noguchi	4
Ruby Burkhardt & Joseph Cornell	What Mozart Saw on Mulberry Street	6
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Ex Film Class	R & R	5
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Stan VanDer Beek	Breath Death	15
Frank Mouris	Frank Film	9
Sally Cruikshank	Chow Fun	4.5
Stan Lawder	Necrology	11
Bruce Connor	White Rose	7.5
Curt McDowell	Wieners & Buns Musical	13
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Collective Effort	Stand and Stretch Stretch	5

Experimental

C.O. Nelson	Halsted St	10
Kirsanoff	Menilmontant	10
Bruce Baillie	Valentin de Las Sierras	10
R. Breer	Horse over Teakettle	6
Kenneth Anger	Kustim Kar Kommandos	3.5
	Invocation of my Deafman Brother	11
George Landow	Film that Rises to the Surface of (Clarified) Butter	8

Tues - May 30
option

① SAIC Film Center 9-12
Chaplin old RusL

Bruce Connor (all in collection)

Maya Dorn - archive prints and outtakes
plus visiting researchers.

② in class

Jan Ray Retour de la Raison
Lakavejev WR: Mysteries of the organism