

dms 451  
Avantgarde Cinema  
Tuesday 9-12:50  
CFA 235  
Bernadette Wegenstein  
Assistant: Matthew Katafiaz  
Office hours: Tuesday 2-4pm

## Syllabus

Week 1 Aug 31 Introduction to class

### **Part one: The early avant-gardes**

Week 2 Sep 7

#### Abstract, Dada, Cubism

**Readings:** A. L. Rees, part one "The canonical avant-garde"

**Screenings:** Marcel Duchamp: *Anémic Cinéma* (1926, 3 min silent) (16mm);

Man Ray: *Le retour à la raison* (*Return to Reason*, 1923, 3 min silent) (16mm);

René Clair and Francis Picabia: *Entr'Acte* (1924, 22 min silent) (16mm);

Hans Richter: *Rhythmus 21* (1921, 3 min silent) (16mm);

Fernand Léger: *Ballet Mécanique* (1924, 19 min silent) (16mm)

Week 3 Sep 14

#### Cinéma pur, Dream-cinema, Surrealist features I

**Readings:** The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema: chapter two "*Un chien andalou*" and chapter three "*L'Âge d'Or*"

**Screenings:** Man Ray: *L'étoile de mer* (1928 silent) (VHS)

Salvador Dalí & Luis Buñuel: *Un chien andalou* (1928, 16 min silent) (16mm)

Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí: *L'Âge d'Or* (*The Age of Gold* 1930; 60 min) (VHS)

Week 4 Sep 21

Surrealist features II

**Readings:** Standish Lawder: "The French Avant-garde Tradition and Surrealism" in: *the Cubist Cinema*, NY: 1974;

"The Shadow of the Shadow: Surrealist Writing on Cinema"

**Screenings:** Jean Cocteau (1930): *Le sang d'un poète (Blood of a Poet)* 1932, 50 min) (DVD)

Documentary: Edgardo Cozarinsky (1984): *Autobiography of an Unknown* (DVD)

Week 5 Sep 28

American avantgarde

**Readings:** Jan-Christopher Horak: *The First American Film Avant-garde, 1919-1945 (Experimental cinema Film Reader)*;  
Lisa Cartwright: *U.S. Modernism and the Emergence of the "Right Wing of Film Art": The Films of James Sibley Watson, Jr., and Melville Webber;*"

Joseph Cornell: *Shadowplay Eterniday* (CD-Rom of his oeuvre) 2003

**Screenings:** George Melford: *East of Borneo* (1931, 77 min) (DVD)

James Sibley Watson/ Melville Webber: *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928, 13 min) (16mm);

Joseph Cornell: *Rose Hobart* (1936) (Treasures Program # 4);  
shorts *Centuries of June* (with Stan Brakhage) 1955; *Nymphlight* (with Rudy Burkhardt and music by Debussy) 1957 a.o.;

**Part two: Post WWII American experimental film**

Week 6 Oct 5

Neo-Dada

**Readings:** Bruce Elder: *A Body of Vision*

Anthony Reveaux: Bruce Conner biography

**Screenings:** Bruce Conner: *A Movie* (1958) (16mm), *Report* (1967) (16mm), *Television Assassination* (1995) (16mm)

Week 7 Oct 12

Trance film and the revision of the surrealists

**Readings:** P. Adams Sitney: "Meshes of the Afternoon;"  
Maya Deren: "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality;"

Catherine Russell: "Ecstatic ethnography: Maya Deren and the filming of possession rituals"; Paul Arthur: "No longer absolute: portraiture in American Avantgarde and documentary films of the 60s"

Robert A. Haller: Kenneth Anger

**Screenings:** Maya Deren: *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943, 18 min); (16 mm); *At Land* (1944, 15 min silent) (VHS); *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (1945, 4 min silent) (VHS)  
Martina Kudlacek: *In the Mirror of Maya Deren* (2003, 103 min) (VHS)

Kenneth Anger: *Fireworks* (1947, 20 min) (VHS "Anger Magic Lantern Cycle # 1")

Week 8 Oct 19

**Midterm Essay Exam**

**Screenings:** Brakhage documentary by Jim Shedden (DVD); *Wonder Ring* (1955); *Anticipation of the Night* (1958); *Cat's Cradle* (1959); *Wedlock's House: an Intercourse* (1959); *Eye Myth* (1972); *The World Shadow* (16mm) (1972); *Kindering* (1987); *I... Dreaming* (1988)

**Part three: From the 1960s to the present/ guests**

Week 9 Oct 26

Guest lecture Prof. Bart Testa (University of Toronto, Cinema Studies) on Stan Brakhage (a talk on Canadian avantgarde will be given the same day in the late afternoon)

**Readings:** Stan Brakhage: *Metaphors on Vision* (The Essential Brakhage (2001); *The Camera-Eye-My-Eye*;

Bart Testa: "The Importance of Brakhage's work as an artist,"; Bart Testa: "Back and Forth Early Cinema and the Avantgarde"

P. Adams Sitney: "Major Mythopoeia"

**Screenings:** *Mothlight* (1963); *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959); *Dog Star Man* (1961-64); *The Dante Quartet* (1987);

Week 10 Nov 2

Structuralist Film: guest Tony Conrad

Tony Conrad, Michael Snow, Paul Sharits, Hollis Frampton

**Readings:** P. Adams Sitney "Structural Film"

Regina Cornwell: "Paul Sharits: Illusion and Object" in Bill Nichols: *Movies and Methods*;

Stuart Liebmann: Paul Sharits

Regina Cornwell: *Snow Scenes: The Films and Photographs of Michael Snow*

**Screenings:** Tony Conrad: *Flicker* (1965, 30 min) (16 mm); Michael Snow: *Wavelength* (1967, 45 min) (DVD); Paul Sharits: one of: *N:O:T:H:I:N:G*; *Razor Blades, T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (16mm); Hollis Frampton: *Surface Tension* (1968, 10 min) (VHS from Mechanical Eye # 3 Collection)

Week 11 Nov 9

British experimental film: guest Steven Eastwood

**Readings:** A.L. Rees, part two: "Britain, 1966-98"

Bart Testa: *Tabula for a Catastrophe*: Peter Greenaway's *The Falls* and Foucault's Heterotopia

**Screenings:** Peter Greenaway: *The Early Films* (1968-1975);

Derek Jarman: *Blue* (1998, 90 min)

Week 12 Nov 16

Austrian experimental film:

**Readings:** Lord of the Frames <http://www.hi-beam.net/mkr/kk/kk-bio.html>; <http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0224/maddin.php>; <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/12/cteq/outer.html>; [http://www.brdf.net/interviews/interview\\_peter\\_tscherkassky.htm](http://www.brdf.net/interviews/interview_peter_tscherkassky.htm);  
Matthew Tomkinson: "Dreamwork - soft focus & the genetic aesthetic;"  
Malcolm Le Grice: On Leger, Vertov and The Flicker Film & Kurt Kren  
**Screenings:** Peter Kubelka: *Arnulf Rainer* (1960, 7 min)(16 mm); *Unsere Afrikareise* (1966, 13 min)(16mm); Peter Tscherkassy films (VHS)  
Actionist Films: Kurt Kren; Otto Muehl;  
Valie Export: *Syntagma*

#### **Part four: Experimental cinema in the digital age**

- Week 13 Nov 23 **Readings:** Malcolm Le Grice: Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age; Peter Weibel/Jeffrey Shaw: Future Cinemas  
**Screening:** Peter Weibel: Virtual Words (1993)  
Short student presentations I
- Week 14 Nov 30 **Readings:** Mark Hansen: New Philosophy for New Media (new media art & experimental cinema, in combination with guest talk by Mark Hansen, Princeton University)  
**Screenings:** Jeffrey Shaw installations  
Short student presentations II
- Week 15 Dec 7 Final Essay Exam & Short student presentations III

#### **Course Description:**

The first half of the course examines the history of the so-called avant-garde, focusing on the development of the early European avant-garde of the 1920s to the postwar European

and American experimental milieu. The second half examines more closely certain avant-garde filmmakers (e.g., Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage) and certain movements such as the structuralist film tradition. In addition, we will look at particularly two cultural developments of the avant-garde film tradition: Britain and Austria. The class will consist in a combination of lectures and screenings (16mm, DVD, VHS sources), including several exciting guest appearances such as by the avant-garde theorist Bart Testa, or the video artist Tony Conrad. Since this is a four-hour class, there will be a 20 minute break in the middle of each week's session.

### **Requirements:**

Students must actively attend all lectures/screenings and participate in every week's class session. Attendance will be taken during every class-session. They have to prepare the assigned readings for each week's topic (download as pdf files from online course reserve or course reader). The main course reader A.L. Rees: *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, London: BFI Publishing, 2002 is a requirement, and available at Talking Leaves Bookstore, 3158 Main Street (near South Campus), telephone 716-8378554 for 22.50\$. Absences are supposed to be explained, or excused. Students with more than two unexcused absences will lose percentage points toward their final grade.

### **Examinations/Assignments:**

On October 19 we will hold a one-hour midterm essay exam covering *Part one: The early avant-gardes* (Abstract, Dada, Cubism, Dream-cinema, Surrealism American avant-garde) and *Part two: Post WWII American experimental film* (Neo-Dada, Trance-film). The 4-5 questions in the midterm exam will address issues discussed in both films and readings, testing the students' ability to sum up crucial theoretical points. A final exam on December 7 will respectively ask questions about *Part three: From the 1960s to the present/ guest lectures* (Stan Brakhage, Structuralist Film, British experimental film, Austrian experimental film) and *Part four: Experimental cinema in the digital age*. In addition, students will write a 15 page long critical paper (MLA style) on one avant-garde

film of their choice (either viewed in class or outside), which will be due on December 7. A short proposal on the paper has to be emailed to Matthew Katfiaz mmk9@buffalo.edu by November 2. During the last 3 class-sessions (November 23, November 30, December 7) every student will present a 10 minute kick-off on her or his critical paper in front of the class.

**Grading Policy:**

- 30 % Participation in class; attendance
- 20 % Midterm essay exam
- 20 % Final essay exam
- 10 % Kick-off presentation
- 20 % Critical paper

**Students with Disabilities:**

Students with disabilities (physical, learning, or psychological) which may make it difficult to carry out the course work as outlined, and/or requires accommodations such as recruiting note takers, readers, or extended time on exams and assignments, may contact the Office of Disability Services, 25 Capen Hall, 645 2608, and also the instructor during the first two weeks of class. ODS will provide information and will review appropriate arrangements for reasonable accommodations.

**Incomplete Policy:**

Incompletes are only granted in the case of legitimate, documented emergencies, and only to students in good standing in the course.