

CMS 342-1 EXPERIMENTAL FILM

Room: G.K.G.1-Guarini Campus, Kushlan Wing, Ground Floor, Room 1

Period: Tuesday 1:30 PM 2:45 PM / Thursday 1:30 PM 2:45 PM /

Prof. Marco G. Ferrari, mferrari@johncabot.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course surveys the major experimental film and video movements of the twentieth and twenty-first century by closely examining the audiovisual works and theories of artists that are in dialogue with and run parallel to commercial cinema industries. Supporting and interweaving this historical review through assignments, students will focus on analysis, engage with curatorial methods and issues, and explore the creative act of experimentation with short audiovisual works through personal mobile device technology.

SUMMARY OF COURSE CONTENT

Experimental film meticulously re-evaluates cinematic conventions, examines our dependence on narrative forms, explores new methods of working and probes the medium's materiality of space and time. From the first experimentations in film to Avant-garde, Surrealist, Structural, Independent, Counter and Post-colonial cinema movements to other approaches from Video Art, Expanded Cinema and Transmedia storytelling, the experimental process is what gives light to the genres we are accustomed to seeing today and is what can ultimately produce new directions.

Experimentation is the action of trying out new ideas, methods, or activities. For artists and thinkers, it is the core of the creative process providing the freedom to question and form new insights. The course will investigate the key qualities and approaches to experimental cinema and how these methods can be applied in analyzing, curating and making audiovisual works today. The course has been organized in weekly sections that examine branches of experimental cinema via works of artists associated with those specific movements, while introducing less visible artists and groups who were integral to form those directions. Weekly lessons will combine historical overviews with screenings of significant works being supported by discussions and curatorial and practical workshops. Theoretical readings, film analysis texts, and exhibition visits will provide material for class discussions, providing insight regarding the films and artists presented.

Though this is a studies-based course, video-making assignments are part of the class structure, which will provide students the ability to explore the materiality of video to better understand qualities of experimental cinema, be it in juxtaposition or in support of the genre, as this conflict is generative within contemporary art. These experimental video assignments will be recorded and edited on personal mobile devices (no prior video making experience is needed). An end of term research project (composed of an analytical paper, presentation and experimental video), which will be developed throughout the semester, is required for the completion of the course. The final group project is a curated public screening of short experimental films/videos that will be organized collectively by the class—noted as an Experimental Cineforum--utilizing promotion, graphic design and event organizing approaches to activate and further discussions within the public sphere (online and in presence).

The course is structured so it can also be an introduction to the DMA Expanded Cinema course, which could be taken a following semester.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students will:

- Gain an understanding of the history and theory of experimental cinema and how it can relate to movements in media
- Expand personal concepts and methods regarding the creative process within film and research-based projects
- Strengthen the ability to develop a visual language using space and time as materials in audiovisual works
- Develop initial analytical and curating skills related to the exhibition of moving image work

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TEXTBOOK

All required texts will be provided to you on the moodle course page and are listed within the weekly sections they are assigned. The honors reading requirement is the only reading that needs to be purchased, which is listed below:

*Fialka, Gerry. *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*. Edited by Rachael (Laughtertears Press, 2020). (available on Amazon as ebook \$5.00; or on reserve <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1233032884>)

Equipment:

Personal recording device (i.e. mobile phone) for the recording and editing of videos.

GRADING POLICY

Assessment methods:

- Experimental video test 10%
- Digital Journal: weekly reading and screening notes, posted on moodle forum 10%
- Group Final Project: curated experimental cineforum (in-presence and/or online) 15%
- Attendance and participation 20%
- End of Term Research Project: 45%
 - analysis paper (15%) *honors section requires 5 additional pages
 - presentation (15%)
 - experimental video (15%)

Assessment criteria:

Grade A characteristics:

Work of this quality directly addresses the question or problem raised and provides a coherent argument displaying an extensive knowledge of relevant information or content. This type of work demonstrates the ability to critically evaluate concepts and theory and has an element of novelty and originality. There is clear evidence of a significant amount of reading beyond that required for the course

Grade B characteristics:

This is highly competent level of performance and directly addresses the question or problem raised. There is a demonstration of some ability to critically evaluate theory and concepts and relate them to practice. Discussions reflect the student's own arguments and are not simply a repetition of standard lecture and reference material. The work does not suffer from any major errors or omissions and provides evidence of reading beyond the required assignments

Grade C characteristics:

This is an acceptable level of performance and provides answers that are clear but limited, reflecting the information offered in the lectures and reference readings.

Grade D characteristics:

This level of performances demonstrates that the student lacks a coherent grasp of the material. Important information is omitted and irrelevant points included. In effect, the student has barely done enough to persuade the instructor that s/he should not fail.

Grade F characteristics:

This work fails to show any knowledge or understanding of the issues raised in the question. Most of the material in the answer is irrelevant.

Grade scale [Please include this. This scale follows standard university policy]

A	=	94-100%	B	=	84-86%	C-	=	70-73%
A-	=	90-93%	B-	=	80-83%	D+	=	67-69%
B+	=	87-89%	C+	=	77-79%	D	=	60-66%
			C	=	74-76%	F	=	0-59%

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ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS

Three late arrivals (more than 10 minutes) are counted as one unexcused absence. Two unexcused absences will result in a full letter drop in the final grade and three unexcused absences will result in failure.

Participation Requirements:

All students are expected to be active participants in their own and each other's learning process. Simply showing up is not attending or participating.

- Please make sure that all observations, comments, and criticisms are constructive, respectful, and spoken in a neutral tone.
- Please silence all electronic devices for the consideration of others.
- Please do not use social media or email during class if it is not relevant to the topic/discussion at hand.
- Sleeping and side conversations in class are not permitted. Excessive occurrences will lead to consequences at the professor's discretion.
- Arriving late to class is extremely disruptive both for your peers and for me. Be on time.

Students unwilling to comply with these policies will be asked to leave the class and will be marked absent for that class period.

Examination policy

A major exam (midterm or final) cannot be made up without the permission of the Dean's Office. The Dean's Office will grant such permission only when the absence was caused by a serious impediment, such as a documented illness, hospitalization or death in the immediate family (in which you must attend the funeral) or other situations of similar gravity. Absences due to other meaningful conflicts, such as job interviews, family celebrations, travel difficulties, student misunderstandings or personal convenience, will not be excused. Students who will be absent from a major exam must notify the Dean's Office prior to that exam. Absences from class due to the observance of a religious holiday will normally be excused. Individual students who will have to miss class to observe a religious holiday should notify the instructor by the end of the Add/Drop period to make prior arrangements for making up any work that will be missed.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

As stated in the university catalog, any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty will receive a failing grade on the work in which the dishonesty occurred. In addition, acts of academic dishonesty, irrespective of the weight of the assignment, may result in the student receiving a failing grade in the course. Instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Academic Affairs. A student who is reported twice for academic dishonesty is subject to summary dismissal from the University. In such a case, the Academic Council will then make a recommendation to the President, who will make the final decision.

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING OR OTHER DISABILITIES

John Cabot University does not discriminate on the basis of disability or handicap. Students with approved accommodations must inform their professors at the beginning of the term. Please see the website for the complete policy.

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SCHEDULE subject to change

(*denotes honors reading material/requirement, available on Amazon as ebook; or on reserve <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1233032884>)

Week 1: First Experiments

- Introduction, lecture, screenings and discussion
- Readings:
 - Sopocy, Martin. 1998. "In the Kingdom of the Shadows: A Companion to Early Cinema . Colin Harding , Simon Popple." *Film Quarterly* 52 (1): 97–98. doi:10.1525/fq.1998.52.1.04a00620. (available as PDF on moodle)
 - Carol Vernallis "Avant-gardists and the lure of pop music" (2017). (available as PDF on moodle)
 - Extra. Tom Gunning "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, edited by Strauven Wanda, 381-88 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006). (available as PDF on moodle)
 - * "Forward, Preface, Chick Strand", in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 2: Dada/Surrealism/Cubism

- Lecture, screenings and discussion
- Readings:
 - Adams P. Sitney "Preface" and "The Graphic Cinema: European Perspectives," in *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, ed. Adams P. Sitney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). (available as PDF on moodle)
 - Karen Beckman and Jean Ma "Introduction," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). (available as PDF on moodle)
 - * "Lynne Sachs", in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 3: Avant Garde Film

- Lecture, screenings and discussion
- Readings:
 - Adams P. Sitney "Meshes of the Afternoon" and "Ritual and Nature," in *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, ed. Adams P. Sitney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). (available as PDF on moodle)
 - Tom Gunning "What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Beckman and Jean Ma (E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). (available as PDF on moodle)
 - Extra: Adams P. Sitney "Meshes of the Afternoon" in *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, ed. Adams P. Sitney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). (available as PDF on moodle)
 - * "George Manupelli", in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 4: Structuralist/Materialist Film

- Lecture, screenings and discussion
- In-class video experimentation assignment (technical and creative aspects in preparation for Final Project)
- Readings:
 - Adams P. Sitney "Structural Film" and "Major Mythopia," in *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, ed. Adams P. Sitney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). (available as PDF on moodle)
 - Juan A. Suárez "Structural Film: Noise," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). (available as PDF on moodle)
 - * "Jay Rosenblatt", in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

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Week 5: Expanded Cinema

- Lecture, screenings and discussion

- In-class video experimentation assignment continued (technical and creative aspects in preparation for Final Project)

- Readings:

- Adams P. Sitney "The Seventies," in *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, ed. Adams P. Sitney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). (available as PDF on moodle)

- Extra. Raymond Bellor "Concerning the Photographic," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). (available as PDF on moodle)

- * "Tom Gunning", in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020). (

Week 6: Independent Cinema

- Lecture, screenings and discussion

- End of Term Research Project—assigned

- Readings:

- Adams P. Sitney "The End of the 20th Century," in *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, ed. Adams P. Sitney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). (available as PDF on moodle)

- Extra. Tomothy Corrigan "The Forgotten Image Between Two Shots: Photos, Photograms and the Essayistic," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). (available as PDF on moodle)

- * "Martha Colburn", in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 7: Counter Cinema

- Lecture, screenings and discussion

- End of Term Research Project—proposal due

- Readings:

- Ursula Frohne "Dissolution of the Frame: Immersion and Participation in Video Installations," in *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London: Tate Publishing/Afterall, 2008). (available as PDF on moodle)

- Teresa de Lauretic "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory" in *Film Theory; an Anthology*, ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Blackwell, 2000). (available as PDF on moodle)

- * "Robert Nelson", in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020). (available on Amazon as ebook; or on reserve <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1233032884>)

Week 8: Queer Cinema

- Lecture, screenings and discussion + Visiting Artists' Talk

- Group Project—assigned

- Readings:

- B. Ruby Rich "Before the Beginning", "The New Queer Cinema", and "Historical Fictions Modern Desires" in *New Queer Cinema: The Directors Cut*, ed. B. Ruby Rich (London: Duke University Press, 2013);

- Sander Holsgens "Dislocation Blues" Review in *Visual Anthropology Review*, Vol. 36, Issue 2, pp. 412–417, ISSN 1058-7187, online 1548-7458. 2020

- Extra. "In-Terracial Conversation: Cheryl Dunye and Alexandra Juhasz" in *Sinister Wisdom* 107, *Black Lesbians - We are the Revolution!*, Winter 2018;

- * "Evan Meaney", in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 9: Radical Cinema

- Lecture, screenings and discussion

- End of Term Research Project—outline due

- Readings:

- Solanas, Fernando, and Octavio Getino. "Toward A Third Cinema." *Cinéaste* 4, no. 3 (1970): 1-10

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- “Defending Black Imagination: The ‘L.A. Rebellion’ School of Black Filmmakers” by Jacqueline Stewart, from the digital archive of the exhibition Now Dig This! Art & Black Los Angeles at the Hammer Museum, 2016

- Extra. “Radical American Film?: A Questionnaire.” *Cinéaste* 5, no. 4 (1973): 14-20

- * “Nina Menkes”, in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 10: Post-colonial Cinema

• Lecture, screenings and discussion

• Readings:

- “Theory by other means: Pasolini’s cinema of the unthought” by Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli (UNESCO 2014. Published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.,)

- “Black Orpheus, Myth and Ritual: A Morphological Reading” by Hardy Fredricksmeier (International Journal of the Classical Tradition, Summer 2007, Vol. 14, No. 1/2 (Summer 2007), pp. 148-175.

* “Larry Gotthem”, in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 11: Video Art & Performance

• Lecture, screenings and discussion

• End of Term Research Project—draft and video rough-edit due

• Readings:

- Gene Youngblood “Hardware: The Videosphere,” Rosalind Krauss “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” David Joselit “Tale of the Tape: Radical Software,” and Janet Kraynal “Dependent Participation: Bruce Nauman’s Environments,” in *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London: Tate Publishing/Afterall, 2008).

- * “Gene Youngblood”, in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 12: New Media & Transmedia

• Lecture, screenings and discussion

• Group Project—workshop

• Readings:

- Anne Friedberg “The end of cinema: multimedia and technological change” in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2003)

- Lev Manovich “Digital Cinema and The History of the Moving Image” in *Film theory and criticism: introductory readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford Press, 2016)

- Extra. Lev Manovich “Principles of New Media” in *The Language of New Media*, ed. Lev Manovich (MIT Press, 2002).

- * “Mike Hoolbloom” in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 13: Site visit (tbd)

• Museum or exhibition venue, meeting with curator

• Group Project—workshop

• Readings:

- Gregor Stemmrich “White Cube, Black Box and Grey Areas: Venues and Values” and Mark Nash “Art and Cinema: Some Critical Reflections,” in *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London: Tate Publishing/Afterall, 2008).

- * “Theo Anthony”, in *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*, Gerry Fiaka (2020).

Week 14: Research Project Presentations

• End of Term Research Project due (paper, presentation and video)

• In-class Presentations

Week 15 Finals Week

• Group Project: Experimental Cineforum (format, place and time tbd)

FINE

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OVERVIEW OF KEY BIBLIOGRAPHIC WORKS FOR THE COURSE

Aaron, Michele. 2004. *New Queer Cinema : A Critical Reader*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press. <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/54374568>

Balsom, Erika. 2017. *After Unique- Ness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation*. Film and Culture. New York: Columbia University Press. <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/980849485>

Beckman, Karen , and Jean Ma. 2008. *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*. E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection. Durham: Duke University Press. <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/680211497>

Elsaesser, Thomas, and Malte Hagener. 2015. *Film Theory : An Introduction through the Senses*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge. <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/892620085>

Fialka, Gerry. 2020. *Strange Questions: Experimental Film as Conversation*. Edited by Rachael Kerr. https://www.amazon.com/Strange-Questions-Experimental-Film-Conversation-ebook/dp/B08GPZ2WM5/ref=sr_1_1

Lippit, Akira Mizuta. 2012. *Ex-Cinema : From a Theory of Experimental Film and Video*. Berkeley: University of California Press. <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/813844013>

Rancière, Jacques. *The future of the image*. London: Verso, 2009.

Rees, A. L. 2017. *A History of Experimental Film and Video : From the Canonical Avant Garde to Contemporary British Practice 2*. Edition, reprinted ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1020006653>

Rich, B. Ruby. *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

Rust, Stephen, Monani, Salma, and Cubitt, Sean, eds. *Ecocinema Theory and Practice : Theory and Practice*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012. Accessed January 29, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Sitney, P. Adams. 2002. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (version 3rd ed.). 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://jculibrary.on.worldcat.org/oclc/59280596>