

First-Year Seminar II

Section 14: Avant-Garde Film and Video Art

ENGLISH 1005-014 | Winter 2016

Thursday, 9:00 AM–12:00 PM, Lakeview Building, Rm 203

Instructor: Ian Bryce Jones, Department of Liberal Arts
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Following the general mission of First Year Seminar, this course teaches English writing, close reading, and composition, with an eye towards the unique needs of writing about experimental moving images. The work of analytical description of images moving in time already presents unique problems and opportunities for writers—how is this further complicated when one is working with highly abstract moving images, shorn free of the narrative trappings that usually govern commercial cinema? Arranged by topics, covering both the films themselves and prior writing about them, this course contains a broad survey primarily of U.S. avant-garde cinema, occasionally branching out into films from Spain, the UK, Sweden, and Austria, as well as including some examples of more contemporary video art. Throughout, one of the major concerns of the course will be how film critics have positioned the works they write about, and the various options open for essayists attempting to describe, analyze, and make persuasive arguments about their encounters with avant-garde moving-image works.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

- **Attendance and class participation.** Students are expected to attend all classes regularly and on time. Unexcused absences for more than **two** class sessions will put students in jeopardy of receiving no credit for the course. A string of unexcused and unexplained absences will be call for immediate failure of the course. (*Attendance is not included as a component of the course credit breakdown—it should be considered a separate rule set by which one can receive no credit in the course.*)
- **Nine substantial posts** on the course’s discussion board, in response to weekly prompts. By substantial, I mean somewhere **in the range of 300-400 words**. Ideally, by the end of the course, this will tally up to somewhere around 3,100 words, or **the equivalent of nine double-spaced pages**.
- **First written assignment**, a six-page deep comparison-and-contrast analysis of two texts. **First draft** due **Friday, March 4th**, electronically. **Revised and final draft** due **Friday, March 18**, again electronically.
- **Second written assignment**, an eight-page research paper, to be written on one or more films shown in the course, with three required sources (including some outside of course reading). **First draft** due **Friday, April 22**, electronically. **Revised and final draft** due **Friday, May 13**, again electronically.

See the *Course Credit Breakdown* supplement for an exhaustive review of assessment policies, and how the exact division between credit/no credit will be managed.

COURSE POLICIES: WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

- Page numbers for the two written assignments refer to **double-spaced** pages, in **12 point Times New Roman** font, with margins not exceeding **1.25 inches**.
- All writing should consistently include **proper citations**, following the guidelines of either MLA or the Chicago Manual of Style. References for proper citation will be provided for the course.
- All papers are due electronically, by 11:59 PM on the due date listed on the syllabus. **Preferred formats include .doc, .docx, and .rtf**. PDFs are allowed, but discouraged, as they are more difficult to add marginalia to. **Mac users:** Please convert .pages format files to a different standard before sending them. **Google Drive users:** Sharing a paper via Drive is great, but make sure that you share it in a way that allows me to comment on it. We'll troubleshoot this as necessary.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

From the SAIC Student Handbook: Academic misconduct includes both plagiarism and cheating, and may consist of: the submission of the work of another as one's own; unauthorized assistance on a test or assignment; submission of the same work for more than one class without the knowledge and consent of all instructors; or the failure to properly cite texts or ideas from other sources.

Academic integrity is expected in all coursework, including online learning. It is assumed that the person receiving the credit for the course is the person completing the work. SAIC has processes in place, including LDAP authentication, to verify student identity.

A quick guide provided by the Flaxman library on how to avoid plagiarism is accessible here: http://www.saic.edu/media/saic/pdfs/campusresources/academicadvising/plagiarism_quickGuide.pdf

A longer, more in-depth detailing of school policy is available here: http://www.artic.edu/webspaces/portal/library/plagiarism_packet.pdf

ACCOMMODATIONS STATEMENT

SAIC is committed to full compliance with all laws regarding equal opportunities for students with disabilities. Students with known or suspected disabilities, such as a Reading/Writing Disorder, ADD/ADHD, and/or a mental health condition who think they would benefit from assistance or accommodations should first contact the Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC) to schedule an appointment. DLRC staff will review your disability documentation and work with you to determine reasonable accommodations. They will then provide you with a letter outlining the approved accommodations for you to deliver to your instructors. This letter must be presented before any accommodations will be implemented. **You should contact the DLRC as early in the semester as possible.** The DLRC is located within the Wellness Center on the 13th floor of 116 S Michigan Ave. and can be reached via phone at 312.499.4278 or email at dlrc@saic.edu.

Please note that accommodations can **never be applied retroactively**. They must be submitted to the instructor as early as possible to ensure that they are taken into account when assessing students.

FURTHER ELABORATION ON THE SCHOOL'S ATTENDANCE POLICY

SAIC policy states that students are expected to attend all classes regularly and on time. Students should miss class only with reasonable cause. If a student needs to miss class with reasonable cause, it is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor to receive instruction for how to make up for the missed class. It is the instructor's responsibility to give this information to the student as his/her/their schedule permits. Missing class for other than a reasonable cause may jeopardize the student's academic standing in the class.

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS

Students are not required to purchase any reading materials. All course readings will be posted on Canvas. Students should check Canvas regularly, as some readings on this version of the syllabus are still TBA.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, 2016-01-28

Components of arguments

In-class screening on 2016-01-28, for discussion Week 2:

Wavelength (Michael Snow, Canada/USA, 1967)

Week 2, 2016-02-04

Argumentation in action

Readings for week 2:

Steve Reich, "*Wavelength* by Michael Snow"

Scott MacDonald, "Michael Snow: *Wavelength*"

Elizabeth Legge, "Room Zoom Sine Wave" and "Time and Space" (from *Michael Snow: Wavelength*)

Week 3, 2016-02-11

Words and their limits: the vocabulary of moving-image analysis

Readings for week 3:

Sections entitled "Mise-en-scene" and "Cinematography" on the Yale Film Analysis website

Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting"

In-class screening:

Mothlight (Stan Brakhage, USA, 1963)

In-class screening on 2016-02-11, for discussion Week 4:

Mesbes of the Afternoon (Maya Deren with Alexander Hackenschmied, USA, 1943)

Blonde Cobra (Ken Jacobs, USA, 1963)

Week 4, 2016-02-18

Encounters

Readings for Week 4:

Maya Deren, "A Letter"

Ara Osterweil, "Introduction" (from *Flesh Cinema*)

In-class screening on 2016-02-18, for discussion Week 5:

(nostalgia) (Hollis Frampton, USA, 1971)

Zorns Lemma (Hollis Frampton, USA, 1970)

Week 5, 2016-02-25

From Encounters to Ideas:

Contestable Claims lead to Productive Arguments!

Readings for Week 5:

P. Adams Sitney, “Structural Film”

James Peterson, “Film That Insists on Its Shape: The Minimal Strain” (from *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*)

In-class screening on 2016-02-25, for discussion Week 6:

A Movie (Bruce Conner, USA, 1958)

The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal (Matt McCormick, USA, 2001)

Stranger Comes to Town (Jacqueline Goss, USA, 2007)

Week 6, 2016-03-03

Constructing an argument

No readings for this week.

In-class screening on 2016-03-03, for discussion Week 7:

Land Without Bread (Luis Buñuel, Spain, 1933)

The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes (Stan Brakhage, USA, 1971)

DUE ELECTRONICALLY: FRIDAY, MARCH 4th:

First draft of written assignment 1

Week 7, 2016-03-10

Documentary, Truth and the Avant-Garde

Readings for Week 7:

Vivian Sobchack, “Synthetic Vision: The Dialectical Imperative of Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes*”

Bart Testa, “Seeing with Experimental Eyes: Stan Brakhage’s *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*”

In-class screening on 2016-03-10, for discussion Week 8:

Sailboat (Joyce Wieland, Canada, 1967)

Patriotism (Joyce Wieland, Canada, 1964)

Rat Life and Diet in North America (Joyce Wieland, Canada, 1968)

Sink or Swim (Su Friedrich, USA, 1990)

Week 8, 2016-03-17

Biographical Grounds

Readings for Week 8:

Lauren Rabinovitz, “Joyce Wieland and the Ascendancy of Structural Film” (from *Points of Resistance*)

In-class screening on 2016-03-10:

Fake Fruit Factory (Chick Strand, USA/Mexico, 1986)

O'er the Land (Deborah Stratman, USA, 2009)

DUE ELECTRONICALLY, FRIDAY, MARCH 18:

Revised and final draft of written assignment 1

Week 9, 2016-03-24

SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS OR ASSIGNMENTS

Week 10, 2016-03-31

The Avant-Garde Essay Film

NO CLASS MEETING DUE TO PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL CONFLICT

INSTEAD: Please do the following ...

Take-home viewing assignment, for discussion Week 11:

Hold Me While I'm Naked (George Kuchar, USA, 1966)

Fuses (Carolee Schneemann, USA, 1967)

Additional viewing opportunity – *highly* recommended:

Down Hear: The Films of Mike Henderson (Conversations at the Edge series)

Thursday, March 31 at 6:00 PM at the Gene Siskel Film Center

Week 11, 2016-04-07

The personal ...

Readings for Week 11:

B. Ruby Rich, “Carolee Schneemann’s *Fuses*,” “A Woman’s Declaration of Secession from the Avant-Garde,” “Sex and Cinema” (all from *Chick Flicks*)

In-class screening on 2016-04-07, for discussion Week 12:

Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1989)

Week 12, 2016-04-14

... and the political

Readings for Week 12:

Scott MacDonald, “Desegregating Film History: Avant-Garde Film and Race at the Robert Flaherty Seminar, and Beyond”

In-class screening on 2016-04-14, for discussion Week 13:

Jack’s Dream (Joseph Cornell, with Larry Jordan, USA, c.1930s)

Children’s Party (Joseph Cornell, with Larry Jordan, USA, c.1930s)

Lost Motion (Janie Geiser, USA, 1999)

False Aging (Lewis Klahr, USA, 2008) [tentative, may be replaced TBA]

Week 13, 2016-04-21

Childhood ...

Readings for Week 13:

Marjorie Keller, “Joseph Cornell: The Symbolic Equation” (selections from chapter) (from *The Untutored Eye*)

In-class screening on 2016-04-21, for discussion Week 14:

Schmeerguntz (Guvnor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley, USA/Sweden, 1965)

My Name Is Oona (Guvnor Nelson, Sweden/USA, 1969)

Martina’s Playhouse (Peggy Ahwesh, USA, 1989)

DUE ELECTRONICALLY, FRIDAY, APRIL 22:

First draft of written assignment 2

Week 14, 2016-04-28

... and parenthood

Readings for Week 13:

TBA

In-class screening on 2016-04-28, for discussion Week 15:

Wide Angle Saxon (Owen Land [as George Landow], USA, 1975)

Vertical Features Remake (Peter Greenaway, UK, 1979)

Week 15, 2016-05-05

Critically-literate filmmaking

Readings for Week 14:

Hollis Frampton, “A Pentagram for Conjuring Narrative”

In-class screening on 2016-05-05, for discussion Week 16:

Abstronic (Mary Ellen Bute and Ted Nemeth, USA, 1952)

Peyote Queen (Storm de Hirsch, USA, 1965)

Unsubscribe #4: The Saddest Song in the World (Jodie Mack, 2010)

Night Hunter (Stacey Steers, USA, 2011)

Week 16, 2016-05-12

Animated Epilogues

No readings for this week.

Is This What You Were Born For?, pt 7: Mercy (Abigail Child, USA, 1989)

[others TBA ... I'll be taking requests!]

DUE ELECTRONICALLY, FRIDAY, MAY 13

Revised and final draft of written assignment 1

Syllabus Addendum: Content Warnings

First-Year Seminar: Avant-Garde Film and Video Art

Please note the following content warnings for material in this course.

***Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren with Alexander Hackenschmied, USA, 1943)**

Suicidal themes.

***Blonde Cobra* (Ken Jacobs, USA, 1963)**

Verbal recounting of BDSM fantasies which contain coercive, abusive, or otherwise non-consensual sexual acts, some of which include minors. Intimations of violence, sexual and otherwise.

***Land Without Bread* (Luis Buñuel, Spain, 1933)**

Cruelty towards the disabled, ill, and economically disadvantaged.

***The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (Stan Brakhage, USA, 1971)**

Explicit views of nude human corpses in various states of dismemberment and decay.

***Sink or Swim* (Su Friedrich, USA, 1990)**

Explicit recounting of verbally abusive parenting. Implicit thematic concern with growing up queer in an unsupportive environment.

***Fuses* (Carolee Schneemann, USA, 1967)**

Nudity and explicit depictions of consensual heterosexual sex.

***Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1989)**

Verbal recounting of homophobic verbal abuse. Verbal recounting of homophobic violent assault. Nudity and explicit depictions of consensual homosexual sex.

***Martina's Playhouse* (Peggy Ahwesh, USA, 1989)**

An exploration of child psychology, including childhood sexuality (includes child nudity).