

ENG 4310: Contemporary Avant-Garde Film

Professor: Dr. Trevor Mowchun

Term: Spring 2025, 4 credits

Office hours (TUR 4364): Monday 4 - 5pm, Wednesday 4 - 6pm

Email: tmowchun@ufl.edu

Class (TUR 2334): Wednesday Period E1 - E3 (7:20 PM - 10:10 PM)

Film screening (ROL 115): Tuesday Period 9 - 11 (4:05 PM - 7:05 PM) – Projectionist: Christopher Hernandez

*laptops/cellphones prohibited during screenings

Course Description

This course is a continuation of LIT 3362: Avant-Garde Film, a course offered during the Fall 2023 semester and which traced the rich history of avant-garde film, starting from the major movements of the 1920s (i.e., Surrealism, Dada), through the visionary and structuralist movements of the 60s and 70s, to experiments in flicker and found-footage filmmaking practices. The films covered in the first course are all, literally, *films*, which is to say they were made on celluloid, a medium which vied with the advent of TV/video and has now been all but supplanted by the digital revolution. After a brief “primer” session on the history of avant-garde film, Contemporary Avant-Garde Film (this new course) will commence with the shift in medium from celluloid to digital and will follow this technological current through the various digital experiments in form and subject matter from the late 20th and early 21st centuries. However, as the digital turn in the medium solidifies, experimental films made on celluloid (short and feature length works) do not disappear completely; in fact, their continued existence can serve to bring the medium of celluloid to the forefront in ways that were not possible when celluloid was the dominant or only medium of choice. Running parallel to contemporary avant-garde film is also “expanded cinema”—films made for the art gallery or public spaces, often displayed on multiple screens and in performative or participatory contexts. A key question throughout will be how the medium of film (be it celluloid or digital or expanded) impacts the avant-garde, and how the digital medium in particular can continue to cultivate the avant-garde’s radical spirit of innovation into the 21st century.

New perspectives from film scholars and critics will make up the readings and shape the screenings. Emphasis on experimental film organizations, distributors, collectives and film festivals will provide a more complete picture of contemporary avant-grade film, informing the film selections as well.

Students who completed LIT 3362 in Fall 2023 are encouraged to take this course. Students who did not take the first course should not feel dissuaded from studying contemporary avant-garde film. While students from the first course will have more background knowledge of the field, new students who are open to the obscurity and novelty of this type of cinema, holding high ideals for the arts in general, are welcome.

Texts

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film* (Palgrave 2024)
- All other readings will be available via Ares or Canvas.

Course Plan

- *Subject to change
- *Many of the films will be surprising and/or challenging in form and content.

Week 1 (Jan. 14-15): Primer – The image of the eye in the history of avant-garde film

- Tuesday film: *Man With A Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929)
- Wednesday films: *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (Richter, 1928), *Un Chien Andalou* (Bunuel & Dali, 1929), *The Cage* (Peterson, 1947), *Window Water Baby Moving* (Brakhage, 1959), *La Region Centrale* (Snow, 1971) *excerpt

Week 2 (Jan. 21-22): Primer – Key texts in the history of avant-garde film and contemporary surrealism

Texts:

- Andre Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924)
 - Maureen Turim, “Abstraction in Avant-Garde Film” (Chapters 1 and 2)
 - Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Futurist Manifesto”
 - Stan Brakhage, Metaphors on Vision (sections: “Metaphors on Vision,” “The Camera Eye,” “My Eye”) *starting after the interview with P. Adams Sitney
- Tuesday film: *The Phantom of Liberty* (Bunuel, 1974)
- Wednesday film: *Blue Velvet* (Lynch, 1986) *excerpt

Week 3 (Jan. 28-29): Setting up the current medium – From analogue to digital cinema

Texts:

Analogue film/consciousness:

- Andre Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”
- Stanley Cavell, “Excursus: Some Modernist Painting,” in *The World Viewed*

Digital film/consciousness:

- Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (pp. x-61)
- Holly Willis, *New Digital Cinema* (Introduction, pp. 1-18)

Tuesday films: *Gloria!* (Frampton, 1979), *Ringu* (Nakata, 1998)

Wednesday film: *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick & Sánchez, 1999)

Week 4 (Feb. 4-5): Palgrave + Lake Ivan Film Journal (blog - part 1)

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-36
 - *Lake Ivan Film Journal* (experimental film blog by David Finkelstein – via Substack): first half
- *read in reverse chronological order

Films: TBD

Week 5 (Feb. 11-12): Palgrave + Lake Ivan Film Journal (blog - part 2)

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 3 and 4, pp. 37-74
 - *Lake Ivan Film Journal* (experimental film blog by David Finkelstein – via Substack): second half
- Films: TBD

Week 6 (Feb. 18-19): Palgrave + The Filmmaker's Cooperative (USA)

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 5 and 6, pp. 75-106
 - Research The Filmmaker's Cooperative digital archives (<https://film-makerscoop.com/>)
- Films: TBD

Week 7 (Feb. 25-26): Palgrave + Light Cone (France)

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 7 and 8, pp. 107-144
 - Research Light Cone digital archives (<https://lightcone.org/en>)
- Films: TBD

Week 8 (Mar. 4-5): Palgrave + New York Film Festival + Toronto International Film Festival

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 9 and 10, pp. 145-184
 - Research NYFF Projections/Currents and TIFF Wavelengths digital archives
- Films: TBD

Week 9 (Mar. 11-12): Palgrave + Ann Arbor Film Festival + Media City Film Festival

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 11 and 12, pp. 185-226
 - Research Ann Arbor and Media City digital archives
- Films: TBD

*SPRING BREAK

Week 10 (Mar. 25-26): Palgrave + International Film Festival Rotterdam

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 13 and 21, pp. 227-252 and pp. 383-400
 - Research IFFR digital archives
- Films: TBD

Week 11 (Apr. 1-2): Palgrave + Festival du nouveau cinéma + Wide Open Experimental Film Festival

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 22 and 23, pp. 401-452
 - Research FNC Les nouveaux alchimistes and WOEFF digital archives
- Films: TBD

Week 12 (Apr. 8-9): Palgrave + La Lumiere/Visions (film collective/microcinema)

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 24 and 25, pp. 453-489
- Research La Lumiere/Visions digital archives

Films: TBD

Week 13 (Apr. 15-16): Palgrave + Videoex Experimental Film & Video Festival + Experiments in Cinema (New Mexico)

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 17 and 18, pp. 313-344
- Research Videoex and EIC digital archives

Films: TBD

Week 14 (Apr. 22-23): Palgrave + To Each Their Own Cinema (alternative cinema blog)

Texts:

- *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*: Chapters 19 and 20, pp. 345-382
- *To Each Their Own Cinema* (alternative cinema blog, various authors – via Substack)

Films: TBD

Coursework

- Group presentation on a film organization/distributor, film festival or film collective. Approximately 60 minutes long, including the screening of 1-2 short films and discussion. = **20%**
- Group written report on the chosen film organization/distributor, film festival or film collective (8-10 pages, include some film analysis of noteworthy films). **Due one week after the presentation = 25%**
- Short essay (4-5 pages): summarize, analyze and evaluate one essay from the assigned chapters from *The Palgrave Handbook of Experimental Film*. **Due Friday Apr. 4 = 20%**
- Final essay (6-8 pages): on one film, filmmaker or aspect of contemporary avant-garde film that you would like to explore in greater depth. *A filmmaking option is possible with approval from the instructor – come discuss your idea with me during office hours. **Due Friday Apr. 25 = 20%**
- Participation = **15%**

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- Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://drc.dso.ufl.edu/>).
- Information on current UF grading policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>
- Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Students will be notified when the evaluation

period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

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