



Lopetrone and Kosaka

## AN INTRODUCTION TO EXPERIMENTAL FILM

Seminar Leader: BRITTANY LOPETRONE; House Leader: SATOKO KOSAKA

June 10th, 2014

### Course Description

What is film? Unfortunately, most people will think of movie theaters and famous actors when presented with this question, however, film has a much greater significance and complexity. In fact, film has a rich history as a creative art form, and film could not have developed as it is today without the contributions of past experimental filmmakers. Experimental film, a rather obscure topic, refers to the exploration of film as an art form. For instance, true filmmakers understand how to manipulate not only the image the viewer sees, but also the physical film itself, the light used to project the film, or the continuity of movement observed by the viewer.

Students do not need any background knowledge of film or art. Students in this seminar will gain a better understanding of film as an art form by exploring the philosophy and works of three prominent experimental filmmakers – Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, and Hollis Frampton – each known for their unique approach to film. Each seminar will consist of a discussion of the pre-assigned readings, a showing of the artists' films, as well as discussion of the similarities and differences between each of the discussed filmmakers. Students are also encouraged to discuss the general artistic quality of the films and their personal reaction to the films.

\*\*Because some films contain flickering light effects, students with epilepsy are advised not to take this seminar

### Message from the Seminar Leader

Hello everyone! My name is Brittany Lopetrone, and I'm a rising sophomore at Princeton University. I'm studying mechanical engineering, and while that seems completely unrelated to experimental film, I am incredibly interested in the overlap between science and art. I enjoy keeping a balance between engineering classes and hobbies like playing French Horn, drawing, singing, hula hooping, and writing. I wanted to teach this particular seminar because, after taking a similar class myself, I was incredibly impressed by the films I saw and it completely changed my perspective, not only about film, but about the way I think in general. I'm really looking forward to meeting you all! If you have any questions about the films or readings or anything at all, feel free to email me at Cheers!

### Message from the House Leader

Hello! I'm Satoko Kosaka, a graduate student in the University of Tokyo. Born in Komatsu, raised in Nomi, and studying in Tokyo, I can't say I have any background other than Japanese. As a student in School of International Health, I'm currently interested in "double burden of



malnutrition” households, where undernutrition coexists with overnutrition within the same households, especially in urban settings in developing countries. Since my research field is in Bandung, Indonesia, I’m studying bahasa indonesia (Indonesian language) as well. I’m not familiar with experimental film any more than you are, but I believe it must become amazing experience to get to know it in this seminar. I hope you will enjoy this seminar as an opportunity to think differently as Brittany says above! If you have anything to ask, feel free to send an email to

## Pre-Assignments

- Film Clips and Readings; see Day-to-day Course Schedule.

## Course Schedule

YouTube Playlist: <http://tinyurl.com/kssseminar>

\*Note: this playlist includes a very long list of films including those shown in the seminar

### Day 1: *Introduction to Film*

First, we will explore the idea of film as an art form as something significantly different than commercial film most people are accustomed to seeing. Students will develop a new understanding of the basic components of filmmaking and how those components can be altered to make experimental films. In the second half of the class, I will give quick introductions for each of the filmmakers we will discuss over the course of the week – Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, and Hollis Frampton. After each short film, the students will discuss what elements of the medium or story intrigued them the most and we will discuss in what ways experimental films are different than commercialized film.

[Pre-reading assignment]

- *Circles of Confusion*, by Hollis Frampton “A Lecture” pp.193-199

[Film Showings]

- Stan Brakhage’s *Mothlight* (3’)
- Maya Deren’s *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (4’)
- Hollis Frampton’s *Surface Tension* (9’)

[Key Questions]

- What is film? What is required to create a film?
- What is filmmaking?
- What is experimental film?

### Day 2: *Introduction to Maya Deren*



Students will be introduced to Maya Deren with a discussion of the excerpt from *Essential Deren*. We will debate in what ways films can implement the ideas she discusses, then watch one or two of her films and discuss the artistic elements as well as the implementation of her philosophy in her approach to film.

[Pre-reading assignment]

- *Essential Deren*, by Maya Deren, “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality” pp. 110-128. Focus on “Reality and Recognition,” “Abstractions and Archetypes,” and “Twentieth Century Art Form”

[Dren Film Showings]

- *Meshes of the Afternoon* (13’)
- *At Land* (14’)

[Key Questions]

- What is storytelling?
- What makes film an art form?
- What do films need to convey an idea? Sound? Plot? Protagonist? Recognizable images?

**Day 3: Introduction to Stan Brakhage**

Students will be introduced to Stan Brakhage with a discussion of the excerpt from *Essential Brakhage*, after which we will discuss and debate in what ways Brakhage’s theory of film is different from Maya Deren’s philosophy. We will then discuss the core ideas of Brakhage’s excerpt and how he implements his ideas in his filmmaking.

[Pre-reading assignment]

- *Essential Brakhage*, by Stan Brakhage, “my eye” pp. 32-34

[Brakhage Film Showings]

- *Dante Quartet* (6’)
- *Machine of Eden* (8’)

[Key Questions]

- What is storytelling according to Brakhage versus Deren?
- How are Deren and Brakhage similar in their approach to film? How are they different?
- Do films need a plot or characters to convey an idea?



**Day 4:** *Introduction to Hollis Frampton*

Students will be introduced to Hollis Frampton with a discussion of the excerpt from *Circles of Confusion*. We will then discuss and debate the similarities and differences between his philosophy versus Deren and Brakhage. After watching the film, we will then discuss similarities and differences between the filmmakers' approaches to portraying ideas through film. We will then conclude the class by having a brief presentation by each student of the differences between a particular experimental film of their choice (may be a film shown in class or a film from the playlist) and a favorite film of his/hers.

[Pre-reading assignment]

- *Circles of Confusion*, by Hollis Frampton, “Ox House Camel Rivermouth” pp.7-11

[Film Showings]

- *Nostalgia* (36') (transcript will be provided before showing)

[Key Questions]

- What is continuity in film?
- How does continuity and sense of setting affect the viewer's experience?
- What is logic? Does film need logic?
- How does the use of language affect the viewer's experience? (consider *Nostalgia*)