This course offers an overview of avant-garde and experimental film, from its beginnings in the early years of cinema through the present day. While emphasis is placed on nonnarrative works, which generally stress nonlinear and/or abstract expression via form, color, and movement, the course also considers narrative films that challenge, question, and problematize traditional kinds of cinematic storytelling. Films by artists known for work in other media (painting, collage, photography) are also analyzed and discussed. Filmmakers studied include Man Ray, Fernand Leger, Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Cornell, Kenneth Anger, Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Bruce Conner, David Lynch, and Su Friedrich. In the spirit of the subject of this course, the schedule given here is open to change if new films, videos, or reading materials become available. Keep a careful record of all names, dates, and titles discussed in class, since they may be somewhat different from those given here.

Required books – available at MICA bookstore
Additional reading assignments will be given in class.

Course schedule:

Part 1: Introduction
August 31
Week 1 – Overview and definitions
Topics: What do the terms “avant-garde film” and “experimental film” mean? A first look at categories, major filmmakers, and key works.
Reading: Sitney, 11-14.
Screening: Films by Cocteau, Ray, Léger, Duchamp, Clarke, and others.

Part 2: Surrealism, trance film, and lyrical film
September 7
Week 2 – Surrealism and the unconscious.
Topics: Drawing on dream imagery. Cutting through rationality, logic, and old ways of seeing.
Reading: Sitney, 17-82.
Brakhage, 48-65, 90-112.
Screening: Films by Cocteau, Buñuel, Deren, Cornell, Peterson, and others.

September 14
Week 3 – The magick of movies
Topics: Anger, magick, and queer cinema.
Reading: Sitney, 83-119.
Screening: Films by Kenneth Anger.

September 21
Week 4 – Lyrical film and mythopoeia
Topics: Beyond trance to new perceptions of reality.
Reading: Sitney, 155-230.
Screening: Films by Stan Brakhage.

September 28
Week 5 – Animation and abstraction
Reading: Sitney, 231-292.
Screening: Films by Smith, Jordan, Breer, Belson, and Brakhage.

Part 3: Anarchic cinema

October 5
Week 6 – Absurdity, grotesquerie, insanity
Reading: Sitney, 293-345.
Screening: Films by Jacobs, Conner, Balch, MacLaine, Nelson & Wiley, Rice, and others.

Part 4: Structural film

October 12
Week 7 – Structural film
Topics: The cinematic apparatus as the subject of cinema. Form = content = form. Radical reflexivity.
Reading: Sitney, 347-370.
Screening: Films by Warhol, Frampton, Lawder, Sharits, and others.

October 19
Week 8 – Film as art / art as film
Topics: New relationships among film, painting, sculpture, architecture, and music.
October 26
Week 9 – Avant-garde documentary
Topics: New approaches to art history. Greenway does Rembrandt.
Reading: tba.
Screening: Rembrandt’s J’accuse…! Peter Greenaway, Netherlands/Germany/Finland, 2008.

Part 5: International perspectives

November 2
Week 10 – Britain
Topics: Derek Jarman and queer cinema.
Reading: tba.

November 2
Week 11 – France
Topics: Robbe-Grillet, the New Novel, and film.
Reading: tba.
Screening: Last Year at Marienbad, Alain Resnais, France/Italy, 1961.

November 9
Week 12 – Thailand
Topics: Avant-garde storytelling. Fiction = documentary = fiction. Community cinema – it takes a village!
Reading: tba.

Part 6: Going to extremes

November 16
Week 13 – Trashing the American dream
Topics: Avant-garde film as antisocial act.
Reading: tba.

November 30
Week 14 – Adventures in vision
Topics: The filmmaker as mad scientist. One-eye 3D cinema. Howls of rage, yowls of laughter, or both?
Reading: Brakhage, 128-147.
Screening: Films by Jacobs and Conner.
Part 7: Conclusion

December 7
Week 15 – Summing up and drawing conclusions
   Topics: Film and memory. Film and photography. Stillness and motion. Avant-garde sci-fi.
   Reading: tba.

Course requirements:

   Students must attend all class sessions, complete all reading assignments in a timely way, and participate actively in class discussions.
   In addition, each student must complete six brief papers (topics and dates will be announced in class) and keep a journal during the course, to be submitted on in class on December 7, the last day of class. Guidelines for journals are given below.
   Final grades will not be calculated according to a rigid formula, but will take account of all work during the course – your weekly papers, your journal, and class participation.
   All written work must be typed.

Attendance and Participation:
   Attendance will be taken every week. It is your responsibility to get to class on time.
   Unexcused absences will result in a lower final grade. If you know you will be absent on a future date, let me know in advance. Absences will be excused only if you provide verification (documentation of a legitimate reason: illness, family emergency, etc.) as to why the class was missed. It is your responsibility to catch up with work missed due to absences, excused or otherwise. This includes all films that have been screened in class; if you miss a film, you must watch it on your own. (Get in touch with me if you aren’t certain how to obtain a film you need to see.) You should participate fully in class discussions, since part of your final grade will reflect class participation.
   No late assignments will be accepted unless the lateness has been excused, and this requires verification (documentation of a legitimate reason: illness, family emergency, etc.) as to why the due date was missed.

Journal rules and guidelines:
   Every student must keep a course journal throughout the semester, to be turned in at the final class. It must contain two to three pages on each week’s subject matter, demonstrating knowledge of the pertinent films and filmmakers, material covered in class discussions, and material covered in the reading assignments. You are encouraged to view additional relevant films outside class and include references to them in your journal entries. This is not a diary – it is an academic journal, meant to record what you are learning and thinking with regard to the course on a weekly basis. You are welcome to include material suggested by reading and film viewing outside class, but the material must be relevant to this course.
Additional information

Academic integrity:

Academic integrity -- the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception -- is an educational objective of this institution. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, submitting work of another person or submitting work previously used without informing the instructor, and tampering with the academic work of other students.

A student charged with academic dishonesty will be given oral or written notice of the charge by the instructor. If students believe they have been falsely accused, they should seek redress through informal discussions with the instructor, department head, dean, or campus executive officer. If the instructor believes the infraction is sufficiently serious to warrant the referral of the case to the Office of Conduct Standards, or if the instructor decides to give a final grade of F in the course because of the infraction, the student and faculty will be afforded formal due-process procedures.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using someone else’s words or ideas without acknowledgment. Submitting work containing plagiarism is grounds for failure of an assignment or failure of the course. Repeat offenses will be brought to the attention of the department chair. To be responsible when summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting, include a citation like:

*** I read in yesterday’s New York Times that…
*** As Simone de Beauvoir famously asserts: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 34).
*** My roommate Pete noticed that…
*** If it’s common knowledge and your own idea, you do not need quotations. The yellow of the Lance Armstrong bracelet suggests bravery.

Document your citations in a bibliography or “works cited” page at the end of your paper and follow standard guidelines such as MLA or Chicago manual style. Familiarize yourself with these guidelines in Diana Hacker’s A Pocket Style Manual, and always check with your instructor before turning in questionable work. You may also check on these and other language-related issues with one of the helpful tutors in the Writing Center, (410) 225-2418. The Writing Center has copies of the Hacker manual as well.

ADA Compliance Statement
The LRC recommends the following statement for use on course syllabi:

Learning Resource Center ADA Compliance Statement Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor
privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: http://www.mica.edu/LRC

Health and Safety Compliance
From the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)

It is the responsibility of faculty and students to practice health and safety guidelines relevant to their individual activities, processes, and to review MICA's Emergency Action Plan and attend EHS training. It is each faculty member's responsibility to coordinate with the EHS Office to ensure that all risks associated with their class activities are identified and to assure that their respective classroom procedures mirror the EHS and Academic Department guidelines. Each of these policies and procedures must be followed by all students and faculty. Most importantly, faculty are to act in accordance with all safety compliance, state and federal, as employees of this college and are expected to act as examples of how to create art in a way to minimize risk, and reduce harm to themselves and the environment. Faculty must identify, within each art making process, and require personal protection equipment use, by each student for each class, when applicable. Students are required to purchase personal protection equipment appropriate to their major. Those students who do not have the proper personal protection equipment will not be permitted to attend class until safe measures and personal protection is in place.