Course Description: This course examines the history of avant-garde and experimental film production with a view to understanding our contemporary screen ecologies. It begins from the presumption that, despite the relative youth of the cinematic medium, filmic modes of representation have standardized quickly, reproducing visual conventions time and again in the service of narrative development, audience accessibility, or genre participation. In this light, our seminar maintains that experimental film production presents a unique occasion to rethink the possibilities of the moving image and what animate media might suggest, if anything at all, about our shared world and the role of media within it. Over the course of the semester we will trace the development of the moving image from its prehistory in nineteenth-century photography and philosophical toys to the proliferation of digital media artworks in the present. Central themes for this seminar include (1) the relationship between truth and representation, (2) the communication of subjective experience through mechanical means, and (3) the ontology of ‘experimental’ cinema.

Grading Schema: As this course demands significant work outside the classroom, notes you take on the readings and on the supplemental films will constitute a majority of your grade. Notes are expected to be thorough, nuanced, and meaningful to a readership that might be unfamiliar with the material. Cross-references you might draw between films will result in a better grade at the end of term, since any connections you draw will demonstrate significant engagement with the assigned texts. The remainder of your grade will derive from midterm and final examinations.

Notebooks – 50%
Midterm – 20%
Final – 30%

All course exams will follow the standard format of slide identifications, term definitions, and short essays. A study guide will be distributed in advance of the two exams to facilitate your preparation.

Classroom policies: Cellular devices must be turned off before entering the classroom. Course policy and grading requires that you submit a paper notebook (of your choice) on a monthly basis, so the use of personal computers during our meetings will be advised against with exception, of course, for those who receive permission from the instructor.

Additionally, plagiarism and profiting from the work of a classmate will not be tolerated. In the event of suspicious overlap between students’ work, suspected parties will be asked to visit office hours before to discuss the specific assignment or exam. All
instances of documented plagiarism will be submitted to an academic judiciary committee and result in failing marks for the semester.

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** This seminar complies with all provisions granted by the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), and will accommodate any circumstance in line with the mandates therein. If you require accommodation, or suspect that you may qualify for it, please contact Stony Brook Disability Support Services (DSS) at dss@stonybrook.edu or (631) 632-6748. All interactions between DSS, the student, and the instructor of record remain strictly confidential and will not affect your grade.

**Required course materials:** In lieu of a textbook, this seminar takes readings from academic journals, books, and the personal writings of filmmakers. You will be asked to print out articles before each class for ease of reference. Additionally, the purchase of a large ruled notebook will be necessary for the notes component of the final grade.

**Course Schedule:**

**8/29** – Introduction to ARH 210: Art and the Moving Image: syllabus overview, explanation of course initiatives, and shot analysis chart exercise. **HW:** Perform a shot analysis for Alfred Hitchcock *Psycho* shower scene.

**8/31** – Introduction to the history of photography, Peircean semiotics (index, icon, and symbol), and mapping the image between art and science. **HW:** Erkki Huhtamo, “Global Glimpses for Local Realities: The Moving Panorama, a Forgotten Mass Medium of the 19th Century” (24 pgs.).

**9/5** – No session in observance of Labor Day. **HW:** Francois Arago, “Report” (10 pgs.); Roland Barthes, “Leaving the Movie Theater” (4 pgs.).


**9/12** – The Origins of Documentary Cinema and “the creative treatment of actuality.” Watch *Nanook of the North*. **HW:** John Grierson, “First Principles of Documentary (1932-1934)” (12 pgs.);

**9/14** – From actuality to artistry with Buñuel and the burgeoning avant-garde. Watch Luis Buñuel *Land without Bread* (1932) – 27 min. **HW:** Bill Nichols, “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde” (20 pgs.) Watch Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand *Manhatta* (1921) – 10 min.

**9/19** – The sleepwalking vanguard: somnambulism, cinematic space, and two departures from profilmic orthodoxy. Watch Luis Buñuel *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) – 16 min. **HW:**

9/21 – The sleepwalking vanguard (part two): somnambulism, cinematic space, and two departures from profilmic orthodoxy. Watch Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid Meshes of the Afternoon (1942) – 18 min. HW: Dziga Vertov - “We: A Variant of A Manifesto” (5 pgs.), Kinoks: A Revolution (10 pgs.); Watch Dziga Vertov Man with a Movie Camera (1929) – 120 min.


10/17 – Midterm Examination. See above for format and expectations.


10/24 – Blow jobs and other off-screen phenomena as epistemic events. Watch Andy Warhol Blow Job (1963) – 35 min. and Hollis Frampton Lemon (1969) – 7min. HW: Peter Gidal “Theory and Definition of Structuralist/Materialist Film” (20 pgs.)

10/31 – Found footage as shrapnel. Watch Bruce Conner *Crossroads* (1976) – 36 min. Submit notes. HW: Stan VanDerBeek “Culture: Intercom and Expanded Cinema” (10 pgs.)


11/23 – No class session in observance of Thanksgiving. HW: catch up on notes and missed films.


12/19 – Final examination 11:15 – 1:45 (standard meeting place).