

SM3742: MICRO-NARRATIVES

Effective Term

Semester B 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Micro-Narratives

Subject Code

SM - School of Creative Media

Course Number

3742

Academic Unit

School of Creative Media (SM)

College/School

School of Creative Media (SM)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

SM2202 Micro-Narratives

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

The many new forms of (digital) screens for moving images sprouting in our urban space indicate the need to reconsider established methods and standards of imaging. "Micro-narratives" is a neologism created for such a purpose: (1)

to reflect upon the unspoken (historical) assumptions of existing norms and conventions in order to (2) facilitate free experimentation with new possibilities in making moving images by seeking new sources of inspiration.

In the form of a 13-week concept-driven laboratory in videography, an overall sentiment of the course is partly to critique a moving image practice that is dominated by Hollywood traditions, as well as to open up the idea of ‘narrative’ as a conceptual tool to incite innovations. Narrative-making, therefore, becomes the main subject of the laboratory work in this course: we play with the idea of narrative and the activities of making narratives (narrativity) in order to discover new aspects of image-making and ask forgotten questions about the moving image. This also means we refuse to accept “experimental film/video” as just a genre with a history of styles. Instead, through the 13-week activities, we ask the question of what it means to experiment, and we provide ethical arguments to why experimentation is essential.

The discovery-driven inspiration that make up this laboratory draws from the following sources:

- a. Early Cinema (1895 to 1905-7): this is the moment when the moving image was still in a flux, therefore most exciting with many experimented possibilities, and before business interest gradually reduced cinema to the service of story-telling premised upon the norms of 19th-century realist novel. The idea of “micro-narratives” asks us not to hastily equate cinema with plot-based story-telling, but, instead, to go directly to the low-level components of the moving image: composition and configuration of space within the frame, motion, duration, movement, montage, performance, contrast, sight and sound relations and so on – to rediscover the potency of images that move.
- b. Intermediality at the core of experimentation: “intermedia” is a key concept in contemporary art since the post-WWII era, but also a characteristic pregnant in many Early Cinema experiments. Suspending the notion of a “pure medium,” ‘intermedia’ celebrates the in-between territories created when the features and concepts of more than one medium are inter-playing in dialog. Many videographic exercises in this course openly invite the using knowledge from painting, literature, music, scoring and notation. The use of the term ‘micro narrative’ is itself a method of open experimentation.
- c. Philosophy: the idea of time and space, especially Gilles Deleuze’ s “time-image” / “sound-image” and “moving image” drawing upon the French New Novel and Henri Bergson’ s philosophy of time and so on, converged into a materialist cinema, arguing that cinema is not just a carrier of style and film method, but a new form of consciousness: it enables us to see, perceive and experience the world differently. How does this affect how a moving-image maker think of the meaning of his/her works to the viewers?
- d. Theory of film and photography: Walter Benjamin’ s discussion of the optical unconscious in the photographic image and Andre Bazin’ s thesis on the moving image’ s indexical transparency refresh the videographer’ s attention to the descriptive power of the moving image.
- e. Innovative narrative experiments that deconstruct ‘narrativity’ : e.g. the works of Raul Ruiz, Jean Luc Godard, Peter Greenaway, Alain Resnais, Vera Chytilova, Chantel Akerman etc. with many others normally considered experimental filmmakers reflecting upon and revising existing norms, conventions and forms of moving image creation.

We want to challenge, in particular, the popular assumptions and conventions of narrative in mainstream moving image practice, typically:

- bound by (causal) linearity;
- entrenched belief in realisms;
- assuming passive viewing contexts and a language of continuity and narrative absorption, whether in scene constructions or editing style; and
- equating perception/reception with story comprehension with an over-emphasis on progression and plot-development;

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if DEC-A1 DEC-A2 DEC-A3 app.)			
1	Reason with relevant histories and theories in film and video practices: a.Account for factors that charge image-making with the task of experimentations in the history of cinema; b.Provide reasoned arguments for the use of the term “micro-narratives”		x	x	

2	Respond to important theses in film theories via creative designs in sight and sound works;		x	x	
3	Attend to the anatomy of a shot/scene/sequence and the full orchestration of fine elements of sight, sound and movements by maximizing intra-frame possibilities;		x	x	
4	Re-invent one' s video-making practices a.Create works that encourage active viewing and hearing;		x	x	x
5	b.Create works that open up experiences, perception and consciousness of time and space; and		x	x	x
6	c. Create “possible” worlds via the fabrication of non-realist sounds and noises			x	x
7	Discuss and defend one' s creative works intelligently a. Defend the construct of their works against the context of viewing and exhibition		x	x	x
8	b. Discuss one' s own work in relation to historical and contemporary examples based on self-initiated research		x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

	LTAs	Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lectures	screening of film/video examples with discussion	1, 2, 3	
2	Lectures	Class discussion; work presentation	1, 2, 5	
3	Lectures	Various video and sound projects;	2, 3, 4	
4	In-class group exercises	light sources, lighting, shot and design and composition, field recording etc.	2, 3, 4	
5	Technical workshops	Technical workshops	3, 4	

6	Take-home video assignments	on still/moving image dynamics, single-shot, still-frame, tableau set-up, soundscape, polyphonic structure, serialism, and the exploration of a “time/sound image”	2, 3, 4, 5	
7	Project	Semester-end project + Artist statement + a short review essay	1, 4, 5	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Project One: a series of 2 videos on Intermedia experiments (individual work) - still/moving image experiment - videography based on graphic notations for sound **Artist' s statement required (4% of 20%)	2, 3, 4, 5	20	-	No
2	Project Two: Sound Practice (individual work) - exploration with field recording using a still shot ** Artist' s statement required (3% of 15%) ** initiated in in-class exercises	2, 3, 4, 5	15	-	No
3	Project Three: Micro-narrative integration: soundscape + time-image + tableau (vivant) (group) ** Artist' s statement required (4% of 20%) ** initiated in in-class exercises	2, 3, 4, 5	20	-	No
4	Semester-end Creation (individual work)	2, 3, 4, 5	25	-	No

5	Semester-end short review essay extended from Artist' s statement for Semester-end Creation	1, 5	15	-	No
6	Class participation (for in-class participation in critique & discussion)	1	5	-	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

1. Class Participation and Discussion

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the presentation sessions of individual narratives of creative path. The evidence of 'negotiation', the sign of discovery, lies in students' pre-class preparation and interpersonal sensitivity to his/her peer members.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, strong ability to stimulate class discussion and comment on other points
- In-depth pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret others' views with an open mind and ready to negotiate
- Readiness to share personal insight via analysis and synthesis with informed views
- Constructively critical, thus facilitating the discovery of new issues

Good (B+, B, B-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate class discussion and comment on other points
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret opinions effectively

Fair (C+, C, C-)

- Attentive in in-class participation, listening with comprehension, but only infrequently contributing
- Adequate pre-class preparation but little familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Fair ability in interpreting opinions

Marginal (D)

- Unmotivated to participate in class discussion or comment on other people' s views
- Little pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Poor ability in interpreting opinions

Failure (F)

- Unwilling to participate in class discussion and comment on other points, even when requested by the teacher
 - No pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
 - Minimal ability in interpreting opinions
-

Assessment Task

2. Artist Statement / Review Essay

Criterion

This assessment will grade on rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment. The threshold of ‘discovery’ lies in a student’s ability to negotiate a position that is informed, defensible, and standing on personal insight.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

- Rich content, excellent ability to interpret and integrate various resources
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, systematic composition
- Precision in argument, well defined and reasoned points of view grounded in insightful interpretation of existing literature
- Readiness to respond to peer opinion and other views initiated in class discussion
- Discussion shed light on new dimensions of the issue

Good (B+, B, B-)

- Adequate content, sufficient ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Reasonable organization with balanced structure and composition
- Clear elaboration of ideas that sticks to the point, with clearly differentiated issues, ability to interpret opinions independently
- Sufficient responses to peer comments to sustain a discussion

Fair (C+, C, C-)

- Adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Fair organization with adequate structure and composition
- Relevant points made to the subject matter in question
- Ability to respond to other statements and engage in class discussion

Marginal (D)

- Weak content, limited use of resources
- Poor organization, structure and composition
- Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions
- Ability to respond to other comments in simple terms

Failure (F)

- Inadequate content, no/ irrelevant use of resources
- No organization, structure or/and composition
- Irrelevant points to the subject matter, no ability to interpret opinions
- Fail to respond to other comments

Assessment Task

3. Take Home Videography / Semester-end Creation

Criterion

Students should demonstrate ability to utilize primary and secondary sources, execute creative ideas and projects. The threshold of ‘discovery’ lies in a student’s proactively turning theory into praxis, to transform course material into self-owned authorship.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

- Work has strong affective quality and the articulation of personal styles and signature
- Excellent appreciation, exploration and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium
- Work raises questions and instill insights about the process of conception, creative strategization and production
- Innovative exploration by combining knowledge from different disciplines (e.g. mathematics, psychology, physics, anthropology, etc.) to create an inter-disciplinary project

- Efficient adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc) available with constructive adjustment

Good (B+, B, B-)

- Strong appreciation, exploration and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium
- Ability to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Proper adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc) available and constructive feedback/ suggestions

Fair (C+, C, C-)

- Basic appreciation and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium
- Limited ability to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc) available

Marginal (D)

- Marginal appreciation of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium
- Marginal ability to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Limited adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc) available

Failure (F)

- No appreciation of the aesthetics and expressive qualities of the medium
- Fail to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration
- Minimal adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc.) available

Additional Information for AR

All A+/A/A- grade assignment should comply with the highest performance of Discovery-oriented learning.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Early cinema, intermediality, Cinema of Attraction, tableau, tableaux vivants, shot as scene as sequence, Time Image, Movement Image, duration, multiple space and time, polyphonic structure, combinatorial logic, serialism, phenomenological reduction, French New Novel, new realism, parametric narration, description, the optical unconscious, Andre Bazin, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Raul Ruiz, Andrei Tarkovsky, Peter Greenaway, John Cage, film history, experimentation, theory as praxis, the use of history

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

	Title
1	Bazin, Andre. "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." What is Cinema? Volume 1 & 3. Essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969-71.
2	Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Illuminations: Essays and Reflections. New York: Schocken, 1968. (Or other versions in various anthologies)
3	Bordwell, David. "Parametric Narratives." Narration in the Fiction Film. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 1985.
4	Deleuze, Gilles. Cinema 1: the Movement-image; translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
5	_____. Cinema 2: the Time Image; translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta.
6	Elsaesser, Thomas, ed.. Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative. London: BFI, 1990.
7	Griffiths, Paul. "Serialism." Modern Music: a Concise History. Thames & Hudson, 1994. Pp. 81-145.

8	Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-garde." Robert Stam and Toby Miller (eds.) <i>Film Theory: an Anthology</i> . Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000. Pp. 229-35.
9	Higgins, Dick. <i>Horizons: the Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia</i> . Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983.
10	Kahn, Douglas. "John Cage: Silence and Silencing." "The Parameters of All Sounds: Loud Sounds; Conceptual Sounds." <i>Noise Water Meat: a History of Sound in the Arts</i> . Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1999.
11	Le Grice, Malcolm. "Towards Temporal Economy" [1980]. <i>Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age</i> . London: BFI, 2001. Pp. 184-211.
12	Lai, Linda. "Retrieving an Old Thesis: Gazing at the Screen" ; keynote essay for the "Third Text: Image + Media 03," an international experimental media art festival, May 26-June 6, 2003, School of Creative Media, the City University of Hong Kong.
13	----- [in Chinese] "Affective Vectors of the Moving Images," <i>Artism Bimonthly</i> June 2003, by Hong Kong: International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong). Markey, Constance. <i>Italo Calvino: a Journey Toward Postmodernism</i> . Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999.
14	----- "Serial Thinking: the Infinity and Limits of Modernism; Extension from Danny Yung' s Memorandum of the Rock." <i>From Close. From Afar</i> ; a publication issued to accompany the exhibition "Tree/Man: Danny Yung' s Solo Exhibition," by 1aSpace, November, 2003.
15	Robbe-Grillet, Alain. "Three Reflected Images: The Dressmaker' s Dummy" and "Time and Description in Contemporary Narrative" (1963). <i>Snapshots and Towards a New Novel</i> . London: Calder and Boyars, 1965. Pp. 3-5, 142-52.
16	Ruiz, Raul. <i>Poetics of Cinema</i> . Paris: Dis Voir, 1995.
17	Lischi, Sandra. <i>The Sight of Time: Films and Videos by Robert Cahen</i> . Edizioni ets, 1995.
18	Lai, Linda Chiu-han. "Video Art in Hong Kong: Organologic Sketches for a Dispersive History." <i>Visual Art Yearbook 2014</i> . Fine Arts Department, CUHK, 2015.

Additional Readings

	Title
1	Web-site for "Micro Narratives: Invented Time & Space," a exhibition of video sculpture and installation, April 2006: http://sweb.cityu.edu.hk/sm2202/inventedtimespace
2	Wees, William C.. "Taking Another Look: Early Cinema and Recent Avant-Garde Film." http://www.sixpackfilm.com/veranstaltung/festivals/earlycinema/symposion/
3	(May 16, 2003)
4	Testa, Bart. "Screen Words: Early Film and Avant-garde Film in the House of the Word." http://www.sixpackfilm.com/veranstaltung/festivals/earlycinema/symposion/
5	Stiegler, Bernard. <i>Symbolic Misery volumen 2: the katastrophe of the sensible</i> . Polity Press, 2005.