SURREALISM AND CINEMA

ENGLIT 3464 (CRN 40512), Spring 2005, Tuesdays 6-10pm, CL 444
Dr. Adam Lowenstein

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Course Description. Some might say that cinematic Surrealism was “born” when the razor met the eyeball in the infamous opening of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali’s Un Chien andalou (1929). But if the disorienting spirit of Surrealism appears in formulations such as Lautréamont’s “fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella,” then isn’t there something inherently cinematic about Surrealism? And something powerfully Surrealist about cinema as a medium? In this sense, has cinematic Surrealism ever really “died”? This graduate seminar engages the aesthetic and political debates produced by the conjuncture of Surrealism and cinema – debates first given shape by such major philosophers as André Breton, Georges Bataille, and Walter Benjamin in the years between the two world wars, but still vital to present-day questions concerning culture and representation, when the legacy of Surrealism touches institutions as varied as the modern art museum and MTV. The seminar will investigate cinematic Surrealism from a variety of vantage points, including an historical excavation of canonical Surrealist films and writings; an exploration of the Surrealist fascination with cinematic figures and genres ranging from Charlie Chaplin to the horror film; and an experimental survey of “living” Surrealism(s) in films by directors from East and West, from Hollywood and the avant-garde and a variety of points in between. Seminar participants will be expected to pursue advanced independent research in relation to the questions posed by the seminar, and to share their findings in presentations and essays.

Prerequisites. None. Previous work in film studies is advisable, and a working knowledge of the textbook Film Art: An Introduction by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson is strongly encouraged, as seminar members will be required to speak and write about film technique (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound) using the technical vocabulary presented in Film Art. Other recommended textbooks for review of basic film studies terms include The Film Experience: An Introduction by Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White and A Short Guide to Writing About Film by Timothy Corrigan. All of these titles are available at the University of Pittsburgh Book Center and on Hillman reserve.

Course Requirements. 1. Active, vocal, engaged class participation. 2. A journal with short, typed, weekly entries focusing on analysis of each unit’s readings, including observations to raise in class and points of connection with previous films/readings/discussions. These journals should be brought to each class, as they may be collected periodically or shared with classmates. 3. An oral presentation based on independent research. 4. A short midterm paper. 5. A final research paper that applies the seminar issues to original areas of scholarly inquiry. Please note that all due dates are FIRM; extensions will not be granted.

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you
are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

**Course Texts** (available at the University of Pittsburgh Book Center and on Hillman reserve): The two-letter abbreviations following each title provide a key to their appearances in the course schedule:

- Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) [VE]
- Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920; New York: W.W. Norton, 1961) [BP]
- Xeroxed articles on reserve in Crow Room, CL 526 [X]
- Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience: An Introduction* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004) [recommended]

**Course Schedule**

**WEEK 1, JAN. 11 – INTRODUCTION: “INTENTIONAL” AND “ACCIDENTAL” SURREALISM**

Screening: *Un Chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1929, France) 17m; *A Trip to the Moon* (Georges Méliès, 1902, France) 21m; *Xtro* (Harry Bromley Davenport, 1983, Great Britain) 82m

**WEEK 2, JAN. 18 – REALISM AND SURREALISM, AESTHETICS AND POLITICS**

Screening: *L’Age d’or* (Luis Buñuel, 1930, France) 62m; *Las Hurdes: Land Without Bread* (Luis Buñuel, 1933, Spain) 27m

WEEK 3, JAN. 25 – THE HUMAN ANIMAL, PART I
Screening: Blood of the Beasts (Georges Franju, 1949, France) 22m; Eyes Without a Face (Georges Franju, 1960) 88m
Reading: Maurice Nadeau, “Ch. 1: The War” and “Ch.6: The Foundation of the Movement” [HS]; André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism” [MS]; James F. Lastra, “Why Is This Absurd Picture Here?: Ethnology/Heterology/Buñuel” [RR]; Georges Bataille, “The Big Toe” and “Mouth” and “Formless” and “The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade” [VE]; Jean Cocteau, The Art of Cinema (on Franju) [X, pp. 119-121]

WEEK 4, FEB. 1 – THE HUMAN ANIMAL, PART II
Screening: Los Olvidados (Luis Buñuel, 1950, Mexico) 88m

WEEK 5, FEB. 8 – SUBJECTS AND OBJECTS OF SURREALISM
Screening: Blood of a Poet (Jean Cocteau, 1930, France) 55m; Meshes of the Afternoon (Maya Deren, 1943, USA) 18m; Ritual in Transfigured Time (Maya Deren, 1946, USA) 15m

WEEK 6, FEB. 15 – INCLUSION, EXCLUSION, AND ETHNOGRAPHIC SURREALISM
Screening: The Last Wave (Peter Weir, 1977, Australia) 106m
***MID-TERM PAPER DUE***

WEEK 7, FEB. 22 – MAD LOVE AND CONVULSIVE BEAUTY
Screening: Careful (Guy Maddin, 1992, Canada) 100m
Reading: André Breton, “Beauty Will Be Convulsive or Will Not Be At All” and “L’Amour Fou, L’Amour Unique” [HS, 312-316]; André Breton, “Soluble Fish” [MS]; George Toles, “From Archangel to Mandragora in Your Own Backyard: Collaborating with Guy Maddin” [X]

WEEK 8, MAR. 1 – STORIES OF THE EYE
Screening: Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960, USA) 109m
WEEK 9, MAR. 8 – ***SPRING BREAK***

WEEK 10, MAR. 15 – MAPPING THE DREAM
Screening: *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (Germaine Dulac, 1928, France) 9m; *Eraserhead* (David Lynch, 1977, USA) 89m

WEEK 11, MAR. 22 – LAUGHING MATTERS
Screening: *The Adventurer* (Charlie Chaplin, 1917, USA) 31m; *Animal Crackers* (Victor Heerman, 1930, USA) 97m

WEEK 12, MAR. 29 – PLEASURE/UNPLEASURE: SACRIFICE AND MUTILATION
Screening: *In My Skin* (Marina de Van, 2002, France) 93m

WEEK 13, APR. 5 – PLEASURE/UNPLEASURE: DESTRUCTION AND EXPENDITURE
Screening: *Visitor Q* (Takashi Miike, 2001, Japan) 84m
Reading: Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [BP, 40-78]; Georges Bataille, “The Notion of Expenditure” and “The Psychological Structure of Fascism” [VE]

WEEK 14, APR. 12 – UNCANNY DEVIATIONS
Screening: *Little Otik* (Jan Švankmajer, 2000, Czech Republic) 125m

WEEK 15, APR. 19 – CONCLUSION: SURREALIST PASTS AND FUTURES
Screening: *Les Vampires* (Louis Feuillade, 1915, France) serial; *Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 1996, France) 97m
Reading: Maurice Nadeau, “Epilogue: Conclusions” [HS]; André Breton, “On Surrealism in its Living Works” [MS]
***FINAL PAPER DUE***