

GCE A LEVEL



WJEC Eduqas GCE A LEVEL in FILM STUDIES

COMPONENT 2

Experimental Film Student Resource GLOBAL FILMMAKING PERSPECTIVES



Experimental Film Student Resource

Component 2

Global filmmaking perspectives

Section D: Experimental film

This is a single-study film where you will be required to study one of the following film options:

- *Vivre sa vie* (Godard, France, 1962)
- *Daisies* (Chytilova, Czechoslovakia, 1965) and *Saute ma ville* (Akerman, Belgium, 1968)
- *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, US, 1994)
- *Fallen Angels* (Wong, Hong Kong, 1995)
- *Timecode* (Figgis, US, 2000)

The films are studied in relation to the following core study areas:

- **Area 1: The key elements of film form; cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, sound and performance.**
- **Area 2: Meaning and response; how film functions as both a medium of representation and as an aesthetic medium.**
- **Area 3: The contexts of film: social, cultural, political, historical and institutional, including production.**

Specialist studies

Learners will be required to approach an experimental film in terms of two specialist studies.

1. Narrative and alternative forms of narrative

Alternatives to mainstream narrative film have been present throughout cinema history. The choice here is of films from 1960 to 2000. Over this period New Waves have often challenged mainstream filmmaking.

2. Auteur

This approach sees filmmakers as creative decision-makers, responsible for the selection and construction process in films which experiment with narrative and film form.

Learners should consider what 'signatures' can be identified for a film as a result of a more experimental approach to the filmmaking process.

Introduction

This resource will offer a number of ways into teaching experimental film. It is directly linked to what is outlined in the specification and how this area is going to be assessed in the examination.

The structure of this resource will be based around lesson tasks and ideas that will supplement the delivery of this part of the course.

1. What is an experimental film?
This will offer some introductory tasks to the concept of experimental film.
2. Specialist studies – looking at and applying narrative and auteur
This will give a sense of how to apply narrative and auteur to the experimental films chosen in the specification
3. Case study – *Vivre sa vie* (Godard, 1963)
This unit will examine ways of teaching this film by focusing on key aspects of the core and specialist areas of study. These methods can be easily transferable to the other films in this section.

What is an experimental film?

An experimental film challenges the spectator. Students may find experimental film strange or distancing. Their

response to the film can form initial discussions about how the film challenged their usual comfortable spectator positioning.

Task: Personal responses

This is an individual task. Answer the following questions:

- How would you define mainstream or conventional films? Consider narrative and the pleasures offered by the familiarity of mainstream films.
- Have you seen any examples of films which are unconventional and in some way experimental? Make a list of films you have seen which you consider to be experimental.
- Choose two films you listed as experimental. What was experimental about these?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light blue gradient background, intended for students to write their personal responses to the questions.

If you have not seen many experimental films, suggest reasons why this might be the case.

Task: Motivations for making experimental films and exhibition of them

In small groups of two or three, discuss the following questions:

- Why might filmmakers choose to make experimental films?
- Where are you most likely to encounter experimental films?

Task: Experiencing an experimental film

Watch a sequence from an experimental film listed on the specification. After watching the sequence, answer the following questions:

- How does the film differ in form from the Hollywood films you have studied so far?
- How does your experience of watching the film differ from your experience of watching mainstream films?

Task: Discussion – defining experimental film

Look at the following terms:

- Avant-garde
- Artistic
- Personal
- Non-conformist
- Playful
- Self-reflexive

Outline what these terms mean in relation to experimental film. You may have to research some unfamiliar terms.

Return to these terms after screening your chosen experimental film. How many of these apply to your chosen film?

Specialist study areas: Narrative and auteur

Directors of experimental films often have a high degree of control over the film and may not necessarily be working for a major studio. The film is their personal vision.

Task: Recap auteur study

Look back at your notes on auteur from your Hollywood comparison study. In small groups, discuss the following questions then feed your responses back to the whole class:

- Define auteur
- To what extent is Hollywood studio filmmaking more of collaboration?
- Can you think of auteurs who work in Hollywood yet still create personal films and have a distinct auteur trademark?
- Do you think that working outside of a large studio and producing more experimental films may give a director more freedom?

Research task: Auteur

In your own time, research the director of your chosen experimental film. Write a short report on your experimental director based on the following questions:

- What are the director's auteur trademarks?
- What are the director's key motivations when making experimental films?
- Who does the director collaborate with (e.g. actors, editor, cinematographer)? What do key collaborators contribute to the overall aesthetic of the director's films?

Narrative

Experimental filmmakers may explore experiences and identities in ways not possible or restricted by conventional narrative forms. Experimental films are therefore free from the constraints and limitations of conventional form and narrative.

Discussion Task: Read the key points from David Bordwell's 1979 essay 'Art cinema as a mode of practice'. This will help prepare you with what to expect of an experimental film.
The full essay is available online: <http://academic.uprm.edu/mleonard/theorydocs/readings/Bordwell.pdf>

David Bordwell identifies the following characteristics of art cinema:

- Narratives are explicitly against the classical narrative mode. Art films are characterised by looser narratives and looser sense of cause and effect. Narratives have a drifting, episodic quality
- A realistic cinema with use of real locations
- Psychologically complex characters dealing with real problems
- Characters may lack defined desires and goals
- A cinema of reaction rather than action – focus on psychological effects and their causes
- May have a documentary factuality and/or an intense psychological subjectivity
- Violations of classical film time and space – e.g. jump cuts, plot manipulations of story order
- Stylistic devices such as the long take, the moving camera and deep focus may be employed
- Foregrounding of the film's author/auteur – director has creative freedom
- The viewer expects stylistic signatures rather than order in the narrative
- Viewers encounter the film and auteur through film festivals, essays, reviews, film education
- Auteur signatures manifest through violations of classical cinema
- An ambiguous cinema, reflecting character ambiguity, the author's signature and "life's untidiness".

Discuss the following questions: What does this list suggest about how narratives of experimental films differ from classical narratives?

Return to this list after the screening of your experimental film. How many of these characteristics apply to your chosen experimental film? Refer to specific examples from the film.