

INSIDE/OUTSIDE: a selection of UoR Film Student films

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Within Professor Philippe Mather's film studies course Film 480AZ: Micro-Cinemas

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Over the years, students have come to expect that the subject of film studies is the canon of filmmakers, the legends of Hollywood, the pioneers of European art cinemas, and other icons of cinema. However, one does not need to be Hitchcock or Kubrick to be worthy of critical analysis. All films can be studied and learned from.

Student films are a peculiar breed of film. They are not a genre. They have no continuity and do not follow any universal rules. In fact, the audience is so small (relative to television or mainstream cinema) that reviews and critical writing about them is nearly non-existent. The things that unite them are external forces; the tight time lines, the inexperience of some or all of the people involved, the economic limitations, the technical limitations, the non-commercial nature of the content, and the looseness of control over the project by a producer. These rules vary from school to school. Many non-university "film schools" give students access to state of the art equipment and professional consultants. This usually goes hand-in-hand with tighter control by the instructors over the production such as limiting project lengths (Vancouver film school films are all 10 minutes long) or conventions such as strict adherence to character-driven three act structure. At most university-based film programs, control (or non-control) over the nature and parameters of the student films is at the discretion of the professors.

So while student films are not a genre per se, there are still some recurring clichés and stereotypes which viewers, and especially professors, see emerge. For example, there is the pretentious poetry/art film (you won't believe how deep I am), the suicide film (you won't believe how much pain I am in), and the violent crime film (you won't believe how much I know about drug dealing and murder from watching movies in my safe suburban home).

Many clichés disappear as the student either works out his/her issues or, more commonly, is embarrassed out of using them by their peers. The community of film students has a way of self governing, even censoring, the content and approach to film student films. Approaches rise and fall with the group interests; comedy, mockumentary, zombie, formalist experimentation, and many others are created in waves. It is unpredictable how these waves start but it is certain that they come out of the student communal creative atmosphere.

The study of filmmaking as a group gives the students this community, something they cannot get when they are self taught through videos or books. When professors arbitrarily put students into random work groups or attempt to engage a class in an open discussion, this is not some sort of grade school time-filler, it is a part of a strategy to reinforce the students' ability to network with their colleagues and to grow stronger and wiser individually.

My personal take on being a film professor is to step back and see what types of creativity a group of students is inclined towards, nudge them to try new things, and step in occasionally to give advice on how to strengthen their particular vision. As difficult as it is to make a student film, the challenges beyond the academic walls are much higher.

While learning the rigors of the real world is essential, I often lean more towards wanting my students to leave with an unrealistic sense of success rather than a realistic sense of failure. Perhaps this is because I really enjoy student films and believe in the hope behind each shot. Not all of them are good, obviously. There are always hopeless train wrecks, but most contain a seed of passion, of unique wit, or of youthful enthusiasm which pleases and excites me.

In choosing the films to show in this program, I began by listing films which lingered with me, that still occasionally come to mind. Many of the films have some aspect of the clichés I mention above, but in each case they overcome that handicap and deliver their idea or humour powerfully. Looking at the list, I found I'd selected work which exhibit certain themes. Primarily, these are films about inside and outside. In some cases, this is figurative such as with Jill Tilley's inner thoughts described through an external voice over or Drew Reimer's use of absurd pseudo-animation to tell a story of a man who is both inside and outside of an eclectic series of communities. Jason Shabatoski creates a performance video which creates comedy by confusing us about what is in the real world and what is in the imaginary while simultaneously creating a tension between characters inside a room versus outside of it. Chad Hudson's take on inside/outside in his point-of-view exploration is a highly uncomfortable comedy, striking cords that few professionals manage. In the films by Gossner and Dallin, the emotional impact of the inside/outside of a house is explored. The untitled experimental film by Krystal Lewis is a more about layers and surfaces but gives the viewer a sensation that another world exists through her celluloid barrier. Nicholas Treeshin and Ayako Onishi create sophisticated dialectics of the inside/outside theme; Treeshin through his literal confinement of his character inside a machine, and Onishi through her characters obsession with bones (the inside of the body).

One may also analyze the act of a curator. As I review this selection, I am struck with the realization that while I did select a gender balance, I selected films in which the male students created absurd or irreverent comedy and the female students create textured or atmospheric film experiences. This is something I will need to contemplate the reasons for and might be an interesting ground for discussion.

Enjoy.

University of Regina Film Student Films

Growing Curve	Jill Tilley	3 minutes, 2005
Bone	Ayako Onishi	18 minutes, 2004
The Face	Jason Shabatoski	3 minutes, 2003
Ingotting	Kate Dallin	9 minutes, 2004
Charlie's Lovely Date	Drew Reimer	8 minutes, 2005
Machine 11	Nicholas Treeshin	17 minutes, 2000
The Fire	Brittany Gossner	4 min , 2010
Untitled	Krystal Lewis	2 min 2009
Warm Heart, Warms Hands	Chad Hudson	4 minutes, 2004

Thank you Philippe for inviting me into your class.