“The traditional filmstrip embodies the struggle between permanence and transience in complex ways. We can hold the filmstrip up to the light and see the image captured there, but we know that whatever light is allowing us to perceive the series of fixed images along the celluloid strip is causing them to fade ever so slightly, and further, that the formal presentation of the imagery inscribed on emulsion-based cinema accelerates its inevitable destruction: the strong light and the friction embodied in the mechanism of the projector does damage to the print every time it is shown. In the best of circumstances, the damage is minor, even invisible; nevertheless, it is occurring. The original negative of a film can, of course, serve as a protected matrix, but like any other material object, is itself susceptible to the ravages of time.”

~Scott MacDonald, “The Ecocinema Experience”

*Over 80% of silent-era films & 50% of films from before 1950 are lost.*
Narrative films tell stories, they put realism into the service of emotional and moral affect as they invite the viewer to **feel**.

Documentary films address history, politics, and the material world. Documentary films strive for verisimilitude but typically employ narrative techniques as they invite the viewer to **think**.

Experimental films use non-narrative and/or non-realist practices to explore sensory states, intellectual puzzles, memories, dreams and other aspects of human and non-human experience as they invite the viewer to **perceive**.

Cinema is derived from *kinema*, Greek for movement.

Avant-garde is a French military term for advance guard.

**Un Chien Andalou** (Salvador Dali & Luis Buñuel, 1927)

Film was once a “new” media but “new media” refers to such technologies as the internet, video games, cell phones, digital software, tablets, etc.; therefore the genre of digital avant-garde
Although the terms are generally interchangeable –

**Avant-garde film** typically refers to any film that re-imagines the formal properties of cinema to push the boundaries of character and theme rather than plot or narrative action. Who decides what counts as avant-garde is often determined by class, education, and “taste”.

**Experimental film** typically reflect on the material specificity of the film medium and the conditions in which it is experienced by viewers – including intentional scratches on the film stock; visible sprocket holes; play with light and figure movement; provocative editing patterns; and the unique circumstances of projection.
Modernity

a broad stretch of history stretching roughly from the end of the medieval era to the present characterized by a shift from rural to urban lifestyles and secular rather than theological concepts of social governance; also an attitude toward science and technology which embraces the human capacity to shape history
Modernism

Generally refers to a period between the 1910s and 1940s that witnessed an unprecedented explosion of experimentation in filmmaking, literature, painting, music, dance, graphic design, and architecture which sought to capture new experiences of accelerated and disjunctive time, spatial juxtaposition, and psychological fragmentation enabled by such technologies as the railroad, the telephone, electricity, and factories
Post-Modernism

The term “postmodernism” first entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979, with the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by Jean-François Lyotard and has since been used to describe many Post-Structuralist experimental films from the 1960s and the pop art of folks like Andy Warhol. Postmodernism is "post" because unlike modernism, it denies the existence of *any* ultimate principles, and therefore lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody. Postmodernism tend to embrace irony.
1900s — *A Trip to the Moon* (1902, Georges Méliès) shows the potential for film as a perceptual medium through its innovative use of animation, special effects and editing.

1910s-‘20s — European Avant-Garde Movements

- German expressionism – *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1922)
- French impressionism and cubism – *Ballet méchanique* (1924)
- Soviet contractivist movements – *Romance Sentimentale* (1930)
1930s–‘40s — Sound and Vision
- Industrial sound -- Soviet Dziga Vertov’s *Enthusiasm* (1930)
- Abstract visual music -- German Oskar Fischinger’s *Allegretto* (1936)
- *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943)

1950s–‘60s — Post-War Counter-Culture Avant-Garde
- Stan Brakhage and the film medium – *Mothlight* (1963)
- Peter Whitehead – *Tonite Let’s All Make Love in London* (1967)
- **Structuralism** and form – *La region centrale* (Michael Snow, 1971)
1968–’80s — Sound and Vision

- European counter-culture — Weekend (Francois Godard, 1967)
- British post-structuralism — Laura Mulvey’s and Peter Wollen’s The Riddles of the Sphinx (1977); Mulvey is famous for theory of male gaze
- Third Cinema — blurring boundaries — Hour of the Furnaces (1968)

1980s-present — New technologies & new media

- Time-lapse — Koyaanisqatsi (Godfrey Reggio and Phillip Glass, 1982)
- Video/camcorders/television — Video Flag (Nam June Paik, 1985-96)
- Machinima, vidding and other digital innovations — Machina.com
Structural/Organizational Styles

**Associative**: dreamlike logic, juxtapositions, psychological framing and editing for *metaphoric* and *symbolic* associations

**Structural**: medium specific: light, texture, color, exposure; extreme focus on form: sound, cinematography, editing

**Participatory**: audience interaction, gallery installations, performance art, multimedia, fan art, online “environments”
A few styles and perspectives

**Critical**: interrogate form & content; often political

**Participatory**: audience interaction, gallery installations, performance art, multimedia, fan art, online “environments”

**Lyricism**: emphasize director’s personal vision, poetic form

*Fireworks* (Kenneth Anger, 1947)

**Surrealism**: recognizable imagery in strange contexts; a driving force in Europe during the 1920s – *Destino* (2003)