

Department of English & Writing Studies
Film Studies Program

NEW QUEER CINEMA and the AIDS EPIDEMIC

Film 3352G (001)

Queer Cinema

Winter 2024

Screenings: Asynchronous weekly screenings—links posted on OWL

COURSE DESCRIPTION

One of the most complex and controversial cycles in the history of independent cinema, the New Queer Cinema of the late eighties and early nineties represented a bold, often experimental, attempt on the part of queer filmmakers to reframe the conventions of screening sexuality. It was a body of work thoroughly informed by and engaged with the political, cultural, and subjective crises of the AIDS epidemic. In most instances, New Queer Cinema was also AIDS Cinema—it captured the disruptive power of the epidemic at the same time that it served as a defiant form of cinematic activism. Focusing on the groundbreaking work of queer filmmakers (and activists) such as Derek Jarman, Todd Haynes, Marlon Riggs, Barbara Hammer, Tom Kalin, and John Greyson, this course will examine the AIDS epidemic through the lens of New Queer Cinema. We will analyze mainstream modes of representing AIDS (and people with AIDS) in the early years of the epidemic in order to contextualize the resistant formal and political strategies of New Queer Cinema. We will also explore the emergence of ACT UP and the use of video and other visual arts by AIDS activists as a form of countering panic-based representations of the disease, informing the public about safer sex, and bearing witness to the diverse experiences of PWAs. The second half of the course will examine transitions in both AIDS activism and queer cinema in relation to the emergence of antiretroviral drug therapies in the mid-1990s. Here we will discuss issues of trauma, survival, historical memory, and global AIDS activism. Throughout the course, our analysis of key New Queer Cinema texts will pay particular attention to their narrative and formal experimentation, their critical engagement with popular genre cinema, and their reimagining of the parameters of illness, identity, and normalcy.

Course Objectives: This course provides a cultural history of the early years of the AIDS epidemic alongside a close examination of a major cycle in international queer cinema. In its exploration of narrative, documentary, and experimental film and video, the course also analyzes the politics of cinematic representation in relation to key debates in queer theory.

Learning Outcomes: In addition to enhancing your critical thinking and historical research skills through class discussion and papers, you will gain valuable knowledge about queer cinema, queer theory, and the AIDS epidemic that can be applied to a variety of research areas in both the sciences and the humanities.

COURSE TEXTS

Required:

1. Michele Aaron, ed., *New Queer Cinema* (Rutgers UP, 2004) [NQC]
2. Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies* (Duke UP, 2009) [RB]
3. Additional readings from E-Journals and scholarly books available on OWL [OWL]

COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING GUIDELINES

- Class Participation [10%]
- Discussion Leading (Questions and Clip Analysis) [10%]
- 4 Reading Quizzes [7.5% each—30% total]
- Midterm Research Paper (2000 words) *or* Digital Media Project [20%] [Due: March 1]
- Final Research Paper (2500 words) [30%] [Due: April 8]

Attendance and Participation: You are required to attend all class meetings. Attendance will be taken regularly. Be sure to come to class fully prepared, having read all the weekly reading assignments, and with your course readings and textbook in hand. Thoughtful participation is highly encouraged and will improve your final participation grade. Lateness, early departures, not having the appropriate readings, texting, or other disruptive behavior will adversely affect your participation grade. More than **THREE unexcused** absences will result in a zero for your final participation grade. Only documented medical emergencies—verified through the Dean's office (see below)—will be considered for paper extensions or exam rescheduling.

Discussion Leading: Working with 1-2 of your fellow classmates, you will lead discussion once during the term on the weekly screenings and readings. I will provide a list of guidelines and tips, but each discussion leader will be responsible for presenting a specific question about the film and/or the course readings as well as engaging your fellow students in a discussion about that element. You will need to coordinate with your co-presenter(s) to prepare and organize the discussion questions/material, and in most cases I will assess the group as a whole based on the overall quality of the discussion leading.

Reading Quizzes: There will be four reading quizzes during the term (see schedule). Reading quizzes will be given at the beginning of lecture/discussion classes and will last roughly 30 minutes. Be sure to arrive promptly. The quizzes may consist of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and/or paragraph response questions based on the course readings. *Quizzes may also include a clip analysis from the weekly screenings.*

Paper Assignments: You will have at least one (possibly two) major research paper assignments for the course. There will be several options for the midterm paper, including an analysis of mainstream media representations of AIDS during the early years of the epidemic and a marketing/reception analysis of a major New Queer Cinema film. The final research paper will ask you to explore the aesthetic, historical, discursive, and/or generic development of a key issue or aspect in the representation of the AIDS pandemic and/or contemporary queer cinema.

Digital Media Project: In lieu of the midterm paper assignment, you may instead produce a digital media project either individually or as a group. These will ideally be inspired by the New Queer Cinema era and/or AIDS-related media from the course. We will both screen and discuss the videos/media projects produced in class.

Late Work: Course papers must be turned in complete and on time. Late papers will be penalized 5% points per day late (including weekends), except in the case of *properly documented* medical emergencies or illnesses (see below). *****While daily late penalties apply, papers that are over ONE week late—without any approved accommodation—will automatically receive a zero.***

Note on Screenings: All weekly film screenings will be available via streaming sources. You are required to view weekly screenings before each Wednesday lecture/discussion. Links to the weekly screenings can be found in the Resources tab on OWL, and they will be posted by Monday afternoon. ***There will also be screening introductions and guiding questions posted each week in the OWL Forum section.***

I encourage you to view the films on as large a screen as possible so that you can pay close attention to the visual style and formal construction of the films. Most screening links will also have optional subtitles/closed captions that you will be able to turn on (or off). You may also make an appointment to view any of the course films in the Film Study Center [UC-1126] by contacting the Film Library Assistant, Paul Cawston (pcawston@uwo.ca) (Phone: x85730).

Note on Course Content: Given the topic, you can expect the course material to deal with sex and sexuality in a frank and direct manner. We will be viewing a variety of films and videos with explicit depictions of bodies and sexual acts. In line with the goals of New Queer Cinema and AIDS activism, the course is meant to interrogate and to counter skittishness, ignorance, moralism, and silence in relation to the expression and representation of sexuality.

Office Hours: I will be available to answer questions, clarify concepts/assignments, and assist you with your coursework during my weekly, virtual office hours (posted above). If you have an occasional conflict, feel free to email me and we can set up an alternative time to meet. I will also be available via email M-F from 9-5 and will do my best to respond to your email within two days. ****Please note, however, that I may not respond to questions about the course that can be answered by simply reviewing the course syllabus.***

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1—January 8-10—The "Gay Plague"

Screening: *We Were Here* (David Weissman, US, 2011) [90 min.]
& *Buddies* (Arthur J. Bressan, Jr., US, 1985) [79 min.]

Reading: Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification" [OWL]
& Brandt, "Introduction: Sex, Disease, and Medicine" [OWL]

Week 2—Jan. 15-17—AIDS in Hollywood

Screening: *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, US, 1993) [126 min.]

Reading: Meyer, "Rock Hudson's Body" [OWL]
& Grundmann and Sacks, "*Philadelphia*" review in *Cineaste* [OWL]
& Cartwright, "Learning from *Philadelphia*" [OWL]

Week 3—Jan. 22-24—Panic, Stigma, and New Queer Cinema

Screening: *The AIDS Epidemic* (John Greyson, Canada, 1987) [5 min.]
& *They Are Lost to Vision Altogether* (Tom Kalin, US, 1989) [13 min.]
& *Letters from Home* (Mike Hoolboom, Canada, 1996) [15 min.]
& *Poison* (Todd Haynes, US, 1991) [85 min.]

Reading: Aaron, "New Queer Cinema: An Introduction" in [NQC]
& Hallas, "Introduction" in *Reframing Bodies* [RB]
& Wyatt, "Cinematic/Sexual Transgression" [OWL]

****READING QUIZ #1—Wednesday Jan. 24 at the Beginning of Class****

Week 4—Jan. 29-31—Documenting Disease

Screening: *Danny* (Stashu Kybartas, US, 1987) [20 min]
& *Identities* (Nino Rodriguez, US, 1991) [7 min]
& *(In)Visible Women* (Ellen Spiro, US, 1991) [26 min]
& *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (Joslin/Friedman, US, 1993) [99 min]

Reading: Hallas, Chapter 3: "Related Bodies" (pgs. 113-133) in [RB]
& Crimp, "Portraits of People with AIDS" [OWL]

Week 5—Feb. 5-7—Proclaiming and Performing Queerness

Screening: *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, US, 1989) [55 min.]
& *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, US, 1991) [78 min.]
& *Sando to Samantha aka the art of dikvel* (Jack Lewis & Thulanie Phungula, South Africa, 1998) [50 min.]

Reading: Rich, "New Queer Cinema" in [NQC]
& Contreras, "New Queer Cinema: Spectacle, Race, Utopia" in [NQC]
& Wallenberg, "New Black Queer Cinema" in [NQC]
& Hallas, Chapter 1, pgs. 35-43; 70-76 in [RB]

Week 6—Feb. 12-14—ACT UP: Activism and the Politics of AIDS

Screening: *Testing the Limits: NYC (Part One)*

(Testing the Limits Collective, US, 1987) [30 min.]

& *Living with AIDS: Doctors, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists*

Say No to Cosmo (Jean Carlomusto & Maria Maggenti, US, 1988) [23 min.]

& *Stop the Church* (Robert Hilferty, US, 1990) [23 min.]

& *Voices from the Front* (Testing the Limits Collective, US, 1992) [90 min.]

Reading: Hallas, Chapter 2: “The Embodied Immediacy of Direct Action” in [RB]

& Schulman, excerpts from *Let the Record Show* [OWL]

****READING QUIZ #2—Wednesday Feb. 14 at the Beginning of Class****

Week 7—Feb. 19-21—Reading Week—No Classes

Week 8—Feb. 26-28—Safety, Risk, and Resistance

Screening: *DiAna’s Hair Ego: AIDS Info Up Front* (Ellen Spiro, US, 1990) [30 min.]

& *Internal Combustion* (Alisa Lebow & Cynthia Madansky, US, 1993) [8 min.]

& *Majorettes in Space* (David Fourier, France, 1996) [6 min.]

& *[SAFE]* (Todd Haynes, US, 1995) [120 min.]

Reading: Crimp, “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic” [OWL]

& Naismith, “Tales from the Crypt” [OWL]

****MIDTERM RESEARCH PAPER or DIGITAL MEDIA PROJECT
DUE to OWL by 5pm, Friday, March 1****

Week 9—March 4-6—Genre and Camp

Screening: *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, US, 1992) [84 min.]

& clips from *Zero Patience* (John Greyson, Canada, 1993)

& clips from *Fig Trees* (John Greyson, Canada, 2009)

Reading: Pearl, “AIDS and New Queer Cinema” in [NQC]

& Davis, “Camp and Queer and the New Queer Director” in [NQC]

& Hallas, Chapter 4 in [RB]

Week 10—March 11-13: Reframing Queer Histories

Screening: *Nitrate Kisses* (Barbara Hammer, US, 1992) [67 min.]
& *Swoon* (Tom Kalin, US, 1992) [82 min.]

Reading: Pick, "New Queer Cinema and Lesbian Films" in [NQC]
& Stamm, *The Queer Biopic in the AIDS Era* (excerpts) [OWL]
& Willis, "Uncommon History" [OWL]

****READING QUIZ #3—Wednesday March 13 at the Beginning of Class****

Week 11—March 18-20—Mourning and Militancy

Screening: *Fast Trip, Long Drop* (Gregg Bordowitz, US, 1993) [54 min.]
& *Blue* (Derek Jarman, UK, 1993) [80 min.]

Reading: Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy" [OWL]
& Hallas, Chapter 3: "Related Bodies" (Pgs. 133-150) [RB]
& Hallas, Chapter 6: "Sound, Image, and the Corporal Implication
of Witnessing" [RB]

Week 12—March 25-27—Cocktails and Caveats: The "End of AIDS"

Screening: *Sea in the Blood* (Richard Fung, Canada, 2000) [24 min.]
& *Adventures of Felix (Drole de Félix)* (Ducastel/Martineau,
France, 2000) [95 min.]

Reading: Pidduck, "New Queer Cinema and Experimental Video" in [NQC]
& McGonagle, "Gently does it" [OWL]
& Cheng, Juhasz, & Shahani, "Dispatches on the Globalizations of AIDS"
[OWL]

Week 13—April 1-3—Transnational New Queer Cinema

Screening: *Head On* (Ana Kokkinos, Australia, 1997) [104 min.]

Reading: Jennings & Lominé, "Nationality and New Queer Cinema" in [NQC]

****READING QUIZ #4—Wednesday April 3 at the Beginning of Class****

****Final Research Essay Due to OWL by 5 pm on Monday April 8****

POLICIES and REGULATIONS

This instructor respects and upholds University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically disabled, visually and/or hearing impaired student; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor. For Film Studies regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters, please consult “Information for Students” on our website at www.uwo.ca/film

Prerequisites: Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students’ personal use within the course, and remain the instructor’s intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor’s content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Accommodation Policies

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Accommodation for Students on Medical Grounds:

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. *Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.*

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

The full policy is set out here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Religious Accommodation:

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence:

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, here. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Mental Health: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

***Note on AI/ChatGPT:** Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized use of AI tools such as ChatGPT to create content that is submitted as one's own. AI tools may *only* be used for general information gathering and preliminary research purposes. In all submitted coursework, students are expected to critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop *their own* ideas, arguments, and perspectives. Students are thus required to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources and avoiding all forms of plagiarism. All course assignments and exams *must* reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work.

Complaints: If students have a complaint concerning a course in which they are enrolled, they must first discuss the matter with the instructor of the course. If students are still not satisfied, they should then take the complaint to the English Department chair. These regulations are in place because a failure to follow these procedures creates the potential for injustices of various kinds affecting either the instructor or the students themselves, or both parties. Concerns should not be allowed to fester but should be raised with the instructor in a timely manner, so that they can be addressed in time to make a difference to the course.

GRADING CRITERIA

A+ (90-100):

Argument: Clear development of a specific, challenging and original thesis. The writer has taken significant risks successfully; in the resulting piece, distinctive ideas and content have discovered their necessary distinctive form. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.

Presentation, structure: Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.

Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors.

Research/scholarship: Evidence of effective, extensive and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

A (80 to 89):

Argument: The writer has taken risks and most of them succeed. Clear development of a specific and challenging thesis, with proper paragraphs. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.

Presentation, structure: Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.

Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors.

Research/scholarship: Evidence of effective and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

B (70 to 79):

Argument: Clear development of a specific thesis, with proper paragraphs. Adequately detailed reference to texts. Ability to expound reasonably sophisticated ideas with clarity.

Presentation/structure: Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. A few typographical errors.

Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, with reasonable range of sentence types and full range of punctuation. Style not too wordy, with errors relatively few and minor.

Research Scholarship: Evidence of adequate research, with proper documentation of sources.

C (60 to 69):

Argument: Reasonably clear development of a thesis, with proper paragraphs. Basic ability to expound ideas, whose development might be rather thin. Effort to support points with references to the text. Tendency to replace analysis with descriptive retelling of plot.

Presentation/structure: Presentation showing lapses in tidiness and/or proofreading. Poor use of paragraphs.

Language Skills: Sentence structure correct, but perhaps overly simple, with tendency to avoid punctuation besides period and comma. Errors relatively few, but occasionally serious, with evident misunderstanding of some point of elementary grammar (comma splices, fragments, semicolon errors, subject-verb disagreements, poorly integrated quotations)

Research/Scholarship: reasonable effort at documentation, but rather thin.

D (50 to 59):

Argument: Difficulty with paragraphing or consecutive thought. Ideas inchoate but clouded by weak expression. Overgeneralization with inadequate support, or examples that run to lengthy paraphrase, with little or no analysis.

Presentation/Structure: Very poor to non-existent use of paragraphs. Inadequate and inaccurate documentation. Multiple typographical errors.

Language Skills: Errors of grammar or diction frequent enough to interfere with understanding.

Research/Scholarship: Little serious effort to research the topic.

F (49 and below):

Argument: Ideas too simple for level of course. Argument completely incoherent. Erroneous content showing little or no understanding of subject.

Presentation/Structure: Very sloppy proof-reading. Documentation virtually non-existent.

Language Skills: writing frequently ungrammatical.

Research/Scholarship: Non-existent. Content largely “borrowed” from sources with no individual distillation, but no apparent attempt to deceive. Failure to follow the course assignment and guidelines.

0 (Report to Department)

Plagiarism with intent to deceive.