

Department of English & Writing Studies  
Film Studies Program

**Film 3356G (001)**  
**AVANT-GARDE CINEMA**  
Winter 2024

SCHEDULE: Posted on OWL



**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Many significant films have been regarded as “experimental”, “avant-garde”, “visionary”, “modernist”, “underground”, and even “postmodern”—labels that often overlap but may not necessarily be synonymous. Oftentimes these films are also viewed as interlocked in struggle with the orthodox or conventional forms of cinema, a binary that is also not essential given the surprisingly close proximity of these so-called “minor” films produced by artists, amateurs, and agitators to “major” or commercial cinematic traditions. What then, constitutes “avant-garde cinema”, and by what criteria can such categorization be critically evaluated?

This course explores the history, politics, aesthetics, and stylistic evolutions of American and European avant-garde film practices and their points of contact that give rise to dialectical ways of understanding the parameters of art, film, and cinema. We will examine the development, trends, and techniques of experimental and non-narrative film-making in relation to key art movements and theoretical debates of the 20th and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, including questions around form, convention, narrative, modernism, the (sub)culture industry, ideology, and new media.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. synthesize concepts from a number of theoretical perspectives in order to read and think critically about the potential biases, prejudices, and motivations that privilege certain film productions and traditions;
2. analyze literary, artistic, social, and cultural artifacts that are informed by—or that demonstrate—the tensions, anxieties, and aspirations embedded in film narratives;
3. reflect on their experiences as informed audiences whose personal dealings with reception, fandom, and marketing may offer points of potential intervention;
4. enhance their ability to express themselves both orally (through in-class participation) and in writing (through quizzes, essays, and examinations).

## COURSE MATERIALS

1. Sitney, P. Adams. Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. (available at UWO Bookstore)
2. O'Pray, Michael. Avant-Garde Film: Forms, Themes, and Passions. London: Wallflower, 2003. (available at UWO Bookstore)
3. Additional readings will be posted on OWL.
4. **Course Calendar / List of films to follow**

**A NOTE ON "SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS":** You will find some readings listed as "Supplementary Readings" in the course calendar. These are just that: supplementary, meaning they may be helpful to read if you have interest or time. These may also be used as material for deepening your own knowledge in preparation for the Oral Exam or Critical Essay. They will NOT be included in any tests, quizzes, or examinations.

## TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

1. A stable internet connection for weekly asynchronous viewing (**screenings must be done at your own time**)
2. OWL and UWO library access for screening links; access to online rental platforms

**PREREQUISITES:** **At least 60% in Film Studies 1020E or Film Studies 1022 or permission of the Department.**

**ANTIREQUISITES:** **The former Film Studies 2256F/G.**

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This 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.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS / METHODS OF EVALUATION

Class Participation and Attendance:	10% (8% + 2%)
Oral Exam:	15%
Response Papers:	20% (2 x 1000 words, pair work)
Collaborative Critical Essay:	25% (max 3000 words; pair work)
<u>Final Exam:</u>	<u>30% (TBA)</u>
TOTAL:	100%

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

### 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.

### A. Class Participation and Attendance

All students are expected to (1) complete all reading assignments and (2) participate in class discussions. Being a critical reader and film viewer, manifested in the ability to dialogue with assigned texts and formulate informed questions or opinions, is a skill that this class will try to foster. Remember that ATTENDANCE IS **NOT** PARTICIPATION.

Attendance, or physical presence throughout the entire class time, is mandatory and thus will be regularly checked. If you are not in class, you cannot participate in class discussions. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs. University policy on absences and accommodations for legitimate reasons will be observed.

Participation refers to meaningful immersion with the course material, demonstrated through thoughtful, consistent, and collegial engagement in class discussions, group activities, office hour consultations, and other instances where critical thought can be observably performed. This is a Film Studies course and it is therefore a reasonable expectation that you verbalize your insights around the films in discussion-based formats. Unless you have a documented speech disability or a case of debilitating social anxiety recognized by your academic counselor, I expect your engaged participation in each class.

### B. Oral Exam

The Oral Exam will be a brief dialogue (30 minutes, give or take) between a small group of students and the instructor on predetermined topics. While the format is a roundtable conversation, each student will be marked individually. The topics will vary from week to week, and may come in the form of defining terms, synthesizing concepts, contextualizing an image, explaining a quote or statement, elaborating on a discussion point, etc. The Oral Exam will take place on time slots that students will sign up for at their convenience and will be ongoing throughout the term.

### C. Response Papers

In pairs, students will write two short papers of around 1,000 words each. Students will be assigned to TWO random weeks when they are expected to write their papers.

Students will be asked to analyze clips and/or images related to the assigned films, following a critical prompt based on the week's readings. Students can discuss the overall effect of the audio-visual signifiers, use of craft and technical film aspects, interpret the narrative (if present), etc. A grounding in both film analysis, critical theory, and prior knowledge must be demonstrated to support their response.

### D. Critical Essay

In pairs, students will co-author a 3,000-word max. critical essay. You will be provided a number of prompts of which you have to pick one to respond to. have two options in writing this paired essay assignment.

OPTION 1: Students discuss two films (the films may come from a prescribed list or otherwise pre-approved) that combine elements of aesthetic/semiotic/formal/discourse analysis in relation to theoretical concepts discussed in class. Students can discuss points of intersection, convergences vs. divergences, unity or disunity, etc.

OPTION 2: Students will write about one film but offer two perspectives. Insights could be complementary (e.g., one person focuses on a diegetic interpretation while another focuses on non-diegetic interpretation), contradictory (e.g., offering competing readings on a film), or dialogical (e.g., responding in two ways to an existing reading of a film, or responding to each other's readings of a film).

Further guidelines to be provided.

#### E. Final Exam

The final exams comprise identification, short answer, and essay-type questions. Key terms and concepts will be provided in advance to help students prepare for the exams.

#### **GENERAL COURSE GUIDELINES**

Students are expected to be both physically/virtually and mentally present in class; participation is integral to the learning experience. Use of electronic devices in-class should be for academic purposes only.

#### **A. Email**

Email correspondences will be sent often and the OWL site will be updated regularly. **Please use your UWO email account for official inquiries and correspondences (including Zoom appointments), and please allow up to 24 hours for a response (up to 48 hours over the weekend).** Standard email etiquette is expected. NO ESSAYS SUBMITTED BY EMAIL WILL BE ACCEPTED.

**NO EMAILS EXPLAINING ABSENCES PLEASE.** If you are unable to be present in class, you CANNOT receive attendance or participation marks. If your absence merits reasonable accommodation (for example, for observing religious obligations, representing the University in an official capacity, medical emergencies, compassionate grounds, etc.), please get in touch with your academic counsellor. **Please note that as of September 2022, the Self-Reported Absence tool has been discontinued.**

#### **B. Plagiarism and Academic Offenses**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage of a text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate, and by proper referencing such as footnotes and citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). The University of Western Ontario uses plagiarism checking software. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for 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 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 and Turnitin.com.

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

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

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.

### **Academic Integrity Tutorial**

All students are required to enroll in and complete the Centre for Teaching and Learning's Academic Integrity Tutorial. To access the tutorial, please use the link provided in the Resource tab in the course OWL site. Once the tutorial has been completed, you will receive a downloadable certificate. You must upload the certificate and submit it through the course Assignments tab in order to complete this assignment. The tutorial must be completed by Friday in the second week of term. This tutorial is mandatory in order for you to complete and pass the course. If you have completed the tutorial already for another course, you may upload the same certificate for this course; you do not need to repeat the tutorial. Submitting the CTL certificate will count towards your participation mark for this course.

### **C. Accommodation, Absenteeism, and Deadlines**

All requirements must be submitted in a timely fashion, unless there are serious mitigating circumstances with official, university-approved documentation. Late submissions will incur a 5% Not Following Directions (NFD) penalty if submitted within three days of the deadline, but this may only be allowed ONCE throughout the term. No late submissions will be accepted thereafter.

If you are unable to meet a course requirement due to illness or other serious circumstances, please follow the procedures below:

**Assessments worth less than 10% of the overall course grade:** Please email me within 24 hours of an expected deadline to let me know if you will be unable to complete it. I may be able to accommodate rescheduling or a new deadline.

**Assessments worth 10% or more of the overall course grade:** 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.**

In general, students seeking academic accommodation for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counseling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. The same is true for accommodation requests pertaining to known disabilities or medical conditions. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Please find UWO's Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness here: <https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>

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](#).

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](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](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](#).

#### **D. Grade Review / Re-considerations**

I strive to be as thorough and transparent as possible in all my marking. Thus, rubrics will always be provided for any assignment. In the event that you are dissatisfied with the mark you receive for any assignment, I am open to providing further feedback and hearing requests for reconsiderations on the **basis of rubrics and academic merit ONLY**. This means reasons such as "I am applying for X program or scholarship", "I worked really hard on this assignment", "I need X mark in this course" are never valid reasons for grade appeals. **Any conversation about further feedback DOES NOT constitute automatic grade increases or appeal approvals, and may in fact result in a grade reduction upon further evaluation.**

#### **E. Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning**

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **NOT** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

#### **F. Support Services**

OWL and Technology Support: Western Technology Services (WTS) 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800

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/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

#### **G. Recognition of First Nations Territory**

The department would like to recognize that we are located on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples, and acknowledge the longstanding relationships of the three local First Nations groups of this land and place in Southwestern Ontario.

#### **H. 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](mailto:support@uwo.ca).