

WESTERN UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & WRITING  
STUDIES  
Film Studies Program

FILM 3371F-001 – Film Theory (Fall 2023)



This course offers a critical and historical overview of the key questions and problems discussed in Film Theory during the last century. In this class we will look at both “classical” film theories (from the silent era up to the mid-1960s) and “contemporary” film theory (since 1968). We will also engage, at the end of the course, with recent attempts to re-evaluate both paradigms. Issues discussed include: the relationship between cinema and the other arts; notions of medium-specificity; film and mass culture; film and/as language; semiotics and the cinematic image; formalism; ideology and ideology-critique; psychoanalysis and spectatorship; cinephilia and the digital image. This is a reading-intensive course which focuses not so much on specific films and their contexts, but on a wide array of critical concepts, including their sometimes challenging methodological and philosophical underpinnings. Please plan your time accordingly.

**Required Texts:**

-Course Pack available at UWO book store (hardcopy)

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

**Antirequisite:** none

**Evaluation**

Participation and attendance	10%
Weekly reading responses	15%
Midterm	15%

<b>Research Paper</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Final exam (see UWO exam schedule)</b>	<b>35%</b>

\*\*\*\*The short weekly reading responses are due *before* class on OWL. They are graded on a pass/fail basis (see passage below).

**Note:** Research papers handed in late without prior approval will be penalized 3% per day. You must request an extension *before* the due date, and extensions will be given at my discretion. Essays must be submitted to OWL. Keep a copy of your essay! An essay wholly or partly plagiarized will receive a mark of 0 and may not be rewritten—other penalties as detailed in the English Department’s Regulations for Students will apply. Familiarize yourself with this document. Attendance will be taken at every class and, and three or more absences will be reflected in your attendance mark. Please note that this mark is for both attendance *and* participation, and thus simply showing up for class is not sufficient. You are expected to participate in class discussions. The screenings are necessary for success in the class. You should take notes, either during or shortly after the screening.

### **Reading Responses**

The short, one-page weekly reading responses are graded on a pass/fail basis —that is, students will receive 100% if they submit them on time and make a serious, *good-faith effort* to engage with all the questions. Students have to submit the assignments before class via OWL. Late online reading assignments will be calculated as a 60%, unacceptable or non-submitted weekly reading responses will receive 0%. A template and instructions for the weekly reading assignments can be found on OWL. The purpose of the reading assignments is to give students an incentive to prepare for class. If you do the readings, it is easy to score 100%! Even if you only submit half of the responses on time, you can still reach an average of 80%. The purpose of the reading responses is to be an incentive for doing the readings *before* class.

### **Screenings/Streaming Sources**

The films can be screened through Kanopy, Criterion on Demand, Audio Ciné Films, McIntyre Media, Lumière or alternatives which are available through Weldon library website: under “Databases”. Links for films available through McIntyre Media, Lumière or other alternatives will be posted by the instructor to the class individually on OWL, the UWO online learning platform. For each weekly screening, there is a source listed on the syllabus.

### **Information for Students:**

#### **I. General Course Objectives:**

Understanding, capacity for argument, judgment and analysis will be fostered by essays, presentations and other assignments, and by in-class small-group and whole-class discussion. Communication skills will be imparted through in-class discussion and credit will be given for frequency and quality of contributions. Essays and other written assignments are marked in accordance with the grading criteria listed below and include benchmarks for the expectations associated with each grade. Awareness of the limits of knowledge will be enhanced by exploring the legitimate differences of opinion and methodology within the field, and by requiring students to negotiate the formulation of their own opinions in-class with the terms and knowledge brought to discussions by other students and the instructor. The ability to argue and decide on complex issues will be fostered by essays and in-class

discussion. Time management skills will be fostered by the need to prepare properly for class and to deliver assignments in a timely manner. Academic responsibility will be developed by the need to source assignments accurately.

## **II. Specific course objectives:**

Develop critical awareness of film theory and the history of the study of film in the past century, refine critical thinking skills, identify theoretical influences and traditions (e.g. formalism/realism), the philosophical foundation of certain film aesthetics (the “silent film paradigm,” montage, indexicality) and theorists (e.g. Arnheim, Benjamin, Bazin) relevant to the course, learn how to analyze cinema in its cultural context and become aware of the theoretical/aesthetic/political questions (narrative and ideology; race and gender, reception and spectatorship) it raises.

## **III. Other Regulations**

For English Department regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions), and other matters, please consult “Student Information” on our website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>

### **Accommodation Policies**

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](#).

### **Academic Consideration for Student Absence**

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student’s final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student’s final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student’s Home Faculty.

### **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](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](#).

### **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](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.

### **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>.

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.

### **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).

### **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/>

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.

## **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 down)**

·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.

**0 (Report to Department)**

·Plagiarism with intent to deceive