

WESTERN UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF FILM STUDIES FILM 2197A ACTION CINEMA
Mondays 5:30-8:30 Arts and Humanities Building 3B02
Wednesdays 2:30-4:30 Arts and Humanities Building 3B02

Course Instructors:

Dr. Michael Raine (course coordinator)
Office: Arts and Humanities Building 1G31
Office Hours: Wednesday 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Email: mraine3@uwo.ca
Phone: 519-661-2111 x.87895

Dr. Barbara S. Bruce
Office: International and Graduate Affairs ON49
Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-4:30 p.m.

Email: bbruce2@uwo.ca
Phone: 519-661-2111 x.80099

Dr. Constanza Burucúa
Office: Arts and Humanities Building 3R16B
Office Hours: Thursday 12:30 to 2:30

Email: cburucua@uwo.ca
Phone: 519-661-2111 x.80496

Dr. Paul Coates
Office: International and Graduate Affairs ON54
Office Hours: By appointment arranged via email

Email: pcoates2@uwo.ca
Phone: 519-661-2111 x.87865

Dr. Tobias Nagl
Office: International and Graduate Affairs ON56
Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-2:30 and Thursday 3:30-4:30

Email: tnagl@uwo.ca
Phone: 519-661-2111 x.80497

Dr. Joseph Wlodarz
Office: International and Graduate Affairs ON60
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00-4:00 and Thursday 2:00-3:00

Email: jwlodarz@uwo.ca
Phone: 519-661-2111 x.86164

Teaching Assistant:

Philip Spurrell
Office: TBA
Office Hours: TBA

Email: pspurrell@uwo.ca

You are responsible for all the following information. Please read it completely and carefully.

Course Description

Depicting heroes and villains in conflict, using innovative special effects and featuring spectacular stunts, Action cinema has proven irresistible to audiences. Rooted in genre films of the classical Hollywood era such as the War film and the Western, Action cinema comes into its own in the 1980s, focusing on the performance of the muscular, athletic body in motion. Films like *First Blood* and *The Terminator*, *The Matrix* in the 1990s, and *Crank* in the 2000s continue this tradition, while increasing the level of spectacle and the adrenalin-inducing stunts to generate huge box-office returns. This course will explore this popular form of filmed entertainment in terms of genre, gender/sexuality,

sensation and embodiment, history, ideology, marketing, and popular and critical reception.

Questions addressed include:

- What is an Action film? Is it its own genre, or a mode of filmmaking that crosses generic boundaries?
- What is the relationship of the modern Action film to its generic antecedents?
- What makes an effective fight scene or car chase? How have action sequences changed over time?
- What is the industrial significance of the Action film?
- How do race, gender and sexuality inflect our understanding of the Action film?
- What role does editing play in structuring our understanding of Action sequences?
- What influence does the cross-cultural traffic in Action images have on Hollywood and other national cinemas?
- Are those bodies "real"?
- What is the relationship between action scenes, spectacle, and violence?
- What is the relation between the "movement" of action and the "movement" of cinema itself?

Topics include:

- Science Fiction
- Martial Arts
- the Western
- the War film
- 1980s Hard Bodies
- Action comedy
- Imperial Adventure
- European and Asian Action Films

Course Aims

This course has been designed to offer students a broad introduction to the study of Action cinema. It will provide an overview of the variety of films made in Hollywood and other nations in the past fifty years, looking at different types of Action cinemas and at different approaches to film: film as art, film as industry, film as communication, etc. The course will also use various critical methodologies to offer close analyses of representative films.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will have a solid grounding in the study of Action cinema: you will have been introduced to key figures, films, movements; you will have an understanding of historical/national perspectives and how social norms and customs and the construction and consumption of films are products of time, events and context; and you will have deepened your knowledge about how the dominant concerns/thematics in an historical period may be used to signify social status, subjectivity, cultural identity, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, political power, and state or ethnic nationalism. You will also have developed further your ability to analyze films critically.

Course Requirements for Success

- All students will attend screenings and seminars prepared to *participate* in discussions based on the week's assigned readings and screenings.
- Notes should be taken during or immediately following all screenings.
- Come to class with questions or comments that have arisen from the readings and screening.

- Make notes during the lectures and class discussions: you will need to express your own view in class and on the midterm and final exams.
- Review lecture slides frequently and ask questions if you are confused.

University Policy on Prerequisites

Unless you have either the requisite(s) 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.

Required Course Readings:

Textbook: Harvey O'Brien. *Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back* (New York: Wallflower, 2012).

Available at the University Bookstore.

All other readings for this course will be made available on the course Owl page under Resources (see the schedule of readings below).

TERM WORK

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE	LENGTH	VALUE
Attendance/Participation	weekly		10%
Weekly pop quizzes	weekly	5 min.	10%
Midterm exam	Wednesday, October 14	1.5 hours	30%
Final Exam	TBA	3 hours	50%

COURSE CONTENT:

To find the lecture outlines for the course, click on the "Course Content" icon found on the Home Page in Owl and then the "Units" folder. You'll see twelve units, each of which corresponds to one week of the course. Click on the appropriate unit to find the lecture outline and other materials pertaining to the week's lecture. Use the menu at the left of the page to navigate through the unit.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to attend all screenings, including films you have already seen, and all lectures, having completed the readings assigned for that week. Attendance is mandatory, and attendance will be taken. Students who miss more than 6 classes (25% of the course) will be barred from the final exam and will fail the course. Please arrive on time.

If you must miss a screening or to prepare for the tests and exam, study copies of the films are available in the Film Library, Arts and Humanities 1G 19, but a screening on a tiny monitor, on a tablet or phone, or even a TV does not substitute for the experience of watching a film as it was intended to be seen, with full-screen projection and an audience. Students with special permission to watch films on their own time and needing to do so during the 2.00-4.30 period should contact Chris Bell in the Film Library (cbell57@uwo.ca) to make special arrangements to do so, as normally the Film Library will be closed during the afternoon. Assignments are based on films screened in class. Taking notes during lectures and screenings is highly recommended, unless of course you have been gifted with perfect

recall. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate.

The Attendance/Participation grade is based on attendance, so it is an easy 10%. That said, participation is also important: it actively enhances your experience in any class and facilitates greater learning. While I understand that not all students are comfortable talking in class, I encourage all students to engage in classroom discussions and to ask questions.

Laptop/iPad Policy

You are welcome to use laptops/iPads to record notes during lecture. However, unless you have special permission to use a laptop/iPad, you must use pen and paper to take notes during screenings, as the light from laptop screens is distracting for other viewers. If laptops/iPads are used for random web surfing, social networking, game playing, or any other activity the instructor deems outside of acceptable usage, your laptop will be banned from this class.

Recording Lectures and Tutorials

Those students who, because of a learning disability or physical impairment, want to record the lectures must get permission from the professors through Services for Students with Disabilities.

Students may not record the lectures or tutorials with the idea of posting them to YouTube, Facebook, or other such website. The lectures are not in the public domain but are each professor's intellectual property. Furthermore, we do not want anyone to refrain from asking a question or from engaging in discussion because s/he is worried that s/he might end up the latest viral sensation.

QUIZZES AND EXAMS

Pop Quizzes: each week you will answer five questions that test your understanding of the films and readings. The questions will be either multiple choice or short answer format. Your best 10 scores will be counted.

Midterm exam: The exam will cover the material in the first four weeks of the course. The exam will comprise three parts: PART 1 – five short answer questions = 20 marks; PART 2 – three out of at least five paragraph questions = 30 marks; PART 3 – one out of at least three essay topics discussing films from the course = 50 marks. Students may not write on any film or issue/topic more than once in Parts 2 and 3. Total: 100 marks, worth 30% of the final grade. The exam will last for 1 hour 30 minutes.

Final exam: The exam will cover the material in weeks 6-13. The exam will comprise three parts: PART 1 – ten short answer questions = 30 marks; PART 2 – four out of at least six paragraph questions = 30 marks; PART 3 – one out of at least three essay topics discussing films from the course = 40 marks. Students may not write on any film or issue/topic more than once in Parts 2 and 3. Total: 100 marks, worth 50% of the final grade. The exam will last for three hours. Final exams are not returned to the students.

Returning Assignments

We will do our very best to return the quiz and tests within three weeks of the date they are written. If you wish to discuss the grade you have received on an essay or test with the marker, *you must wait for at least three days after the quiz/test has been returned to you— no exceptions.*

If you believe a quiz or test has been unfairly graded for whatever reason and you to launch an appeal, you must follow the procedures prescribed by the department. To consult the Grade Appeals document, go to the [Student Forms & Information](#) page on the Department of Film Studies website. In brief, though, you must first consult with the person who marked your tes. If a TA marked your paper and you are still not satisfied after s/he has reexamined test, you must then consult with the course coordinator. The course coordinator will consult with the TA, to ensure the proper procedures have been followed, and if they have, the professor will then review the test and contact you with a decision. If you are still not satisfied after the course coordinator has reexamined the test, you must make a request for academic relief in writing to the Chair of the Film Studies department.

Gradebook in Owl

Students should always keep track of their marks during the term. If a grade posted in Gradebook does not match the grade on a test, let the course coordinator know immediately.

FINAL GRADES

All assignments worth over 5% of your final grade, including the final exam, must be completed; failure to do so will lead to an automatic F for the course. Your final grades are released by the Registrar's Office, not your instructor.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Preamble to the Senate's "Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students": "Members of the University Community accept a commitment to maintain and uphold the purposes of the University and, in particular, its standards of scholarship. It follows, therefore, that acts of a nature which prejudice the academic standards of the University are offences subject to discipline. Any form of academic dishonesty that undermines the evaluation process, also undermines the integrity of the University's degrees. The University will take all appropriate measures to promote academic integrity and deal appropriately with scholastic offences." For a list of scholastic offences, including cheating on tests and exams, go to the "[Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students](#)" page in the Academic Calendar.

TALKING TO YOUR PROFESSOR

Office Hours: each Instructor has two office hours per week when students may drop in or phone to discuss course material. For students who are unable (NOT who can't be bothered) to come to the scheduled office hours, we will book appointments at our convenience.

There may be times—because of illness, bad weather, etc.—when we must cancel our regular office hours. We will try to let you know in advance, but if we can't, then a note will be posted on our respective office doors.

Email: we are happy to communicate with students via email, but there are some provisos: (1) we can't always answer emails instantly; please allow 48 hours for a response, and remember that we might not check email after the end of workdays or on weekends (therefore, emails received Friday to Sunday will be answered by Tuesday); (2) we will respond only to short emails. Extended discussions or questions

about lecture material, essay or test/exam expectations or results, course readings, etc. must be in person or by telephone.

Do not hesitate to contact us to talk or to ask questions about any topic or issue, including assignments, difficulties you are having with the course, suggestions for further reading, or clarification and expansion of issues raised in class.

FURTHER INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, medical issues, or religious obligations. Contact the appropriate person (myself, an academic counsellor, a staff member in Student Services, etc.) as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Medical Illness: Please go to the website for information on the university [Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness](#). *Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.*

If you require accommodation for religious observance, see the [Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#) page in the Academic Calendar.

Students with disabilities should contact the [Student Development Centre](#) to obtain assistance and/or letters of accommodation.

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 Film Studies Office, International and Graduate Affairs Building, Room ON64.

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.

If you are having difficulties coping with the pressures of academic life or life in general, please seek assistance immediately from an academic counsellor in your home faculty and/or from someone in [Psychological Services](#) or [Student Health Services](#). Never hesitate to seek assistance for any problem you may be having. Consult the [Current Students](#) page on Western's website to apprise yourself of all the assistance available to students.

For further information, including the regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters, please see the [Academic Information for Film Students](#) document on the Department of Film Studies' website. See also the [Student Services](#) page in the Academic Calendar and the Western Student Guide, SAO Handbook, and other publications posted on the [Academic Calendars](#) webpage.

Course Schedule

Week 1	September 14/16
Instructor	Dr. Michael Raine
Screening	<i>Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior</i> (Australia, George Miller, 1981, 96m)
Lecture	Introduction to Action Cinema
Readings	O'Brien, Harvey. <i>Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back</i> (New York: Wallflower, 2012), pp. 1-40 Chute, David. "The Ayatollah of the Moviola." <i>Film Comment</i> 18.4 (1982), pp. 27-31
Week 2	September 21/23
Instructor	Dr. Joseph Wlodarz
Screening	<i>First Blood</i> (USA, Ted Kotcheff, 1982, 93m)
Lecture	Hard Bodies: Sylvester Stallone and the Age of Rambo
Readings	O'Brien, Harvey. <i>Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back</i> (New York: Wallflower, 2012), pp. 41-61 Tasker, Yvonne. "Stallone, Ageing and Action Authenticity." <i>The Ultimate Stallone Reader: Sylvester Stallone as Star, Icon, Auteur</i> . Ed. Chris Holmlund. London: Wallflower P, 2014: 241-62.
Week 3	September 28/30
Instructor	Dr. Joseph Wlodarz
Screening	<i>Crank</i> (USA, Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, 2006, 88m)
Lecture	Speed: The Car Chase in Action Cinema
Readings	Romao, Tico. "Guns and Gas: Investigating the 1970s Car Chase Film." <i>Action and Adventure Cinema</i> . Ed. Yvonne Tasker. London: Routledge, 2004. 130-52. Palmer, Lorrie. "Cranked Masculinity: Hypermediation in Digital Action Cinema." <i>Cinema Journal</i> 51.4 (2012): 1-25.

Week 4	October 5/7
Instructor	Dr. Barbara Bruce
Screening	<i>The Matrix</i> (USA, Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski [billed originally as the Wachowski Brothers], 1999, 136m)
Lecture	The Postmodern Action Film
Readings	O'Brien, Harvey. <i>Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back</i> (New York: Wallflower, 2012), pp. 62-86 Edwards, Kim. "Deifying Androgyny and Bending Gender: <i>The Matrix</i> ." <i>Screen Education</i> 50 (2008): 117-22. <i>Proquest</i> . Web. 2 Dec. 2014. Ndalianis, Angela. "The Frenzy of the Visible: Spectacle and Motion in the Era of the Digital." <i>Senses of Cinema</i> 3 (2000): n.pag. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.
Week 5	October 12 THANKSGIVING
Quiz	October 14: MIDTERM EXAMINATION
Week 6	October 19/21
Instructor	Dr. Constanza Burucúa
Screening	<i>The Terminator</i> (USA, James Cameron, 1984, 107m)
Lecture	<i>The Terminator</i> : James Cameron and Arnold Schwarzenegger in Collaboration
Readings	French, Sean. "Defending <i>The Terminator</i> ." <i>The Terminator</i> . London: BFI, 1996: 47-61. Sartelle, Joseph. "Dreams and Nightmares in the Hollywood Blockbuster." <i>The Oxford History of World Cinema</i> . Ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1996. 516-26. <i>MyiLibrary</i> . Web. 4 Dec. 2014.
Week 7	October 26/28
Instructor	Dr. Constanza Burucúa
Screening	<i>Point Break</i> (USA, Kathryn Bigelow, 1991, 122m)
Lecture	A Woman's Take on Action Cinema: The Films of Kathryn Bigelow

Readings	<p>Tasker, Yvonne. "Bigger than Life." <i>Action /Spectacle Cinema. A Sight and Sound Reader</i>. Ed. José Arroyo. London: BFI, 2000. 195-200.</p> <p>Jermyn, Deborah, and Sean Redmond. "Hollywood Transgressor: The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow." <i>The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow</i>. Ed. Deborah Jermyn and Sean Redmond. London: Wallflower P, 2003. 1-19.</p> <p>Redmond, Sean. "All That Is Male Melts into Air: Bigelow on the Edge of <i>Point Break</i>." <i>The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow</i>. Ed. Deborah Jermyn and Sean Redmond. London: Wallflower P, 2003. 106-124.</p>
Week 8	November 2/4
Instructor	Dr. Paul Coates
Screening	<i>Yojimbo</i> (Japan, Akira Kurosawa, 1962, 110m)
Lecture	"The Westerner has walked into the gangster movie" (Pauline Kael)
Readings	<p>Kael, Pauline. "Yojimbo." <i>I Lost It at the Movies</i>. London: Cape, 1966. 239-45.</p> <p>Warshow, Robert. "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner." <i>The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture</i>. New York: Atheneum, 1970. 135-54.</p>
Week 9	November 9/11
Instructor	Dr. Paul Coates
Screening	<i>Once Upon A Time in the West</i> (Italy/USA, Sergio Leone, 1968, 175m)
Lecture	The Gangsters Take over the Western?
Readings	Frayling, Christopher. <i>Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone</i> . London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. 192-216.
Week 10	November 16/18
Instructor	Dr. Tobias Nagl
Screening	<i>Shaft</i> (USA, Gordon Parks, 1971, 100m)
Lecture	A Cinema of Vengeance. Blaxploitation and the Problem of Identification

Readings	Matthew Henry, 'He is a "Bad Mother*\$%@!#": Shaft and Contemporary Black Masculinity', <i>Journal of Popular Film and Television</i> 30(2) (2002): 114–19. Manthia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance" <i>Screen</i> (1988) 29 (4): 66-79.
Week 11	November 23/25
Instructor	Dr. Tobias Nagl
Screening	<i>Men in Black</i> (USA, Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997, 98m)
Lecture	Post-racial 'Bromance'? Will Smith and the Action-Buddy Comedy
Readings	Victor Wong, "Man in Black: Does Will Smith's Race Matter?" <i>Alternate Takes</i> (2005). n.pag. Web. 3 Sept. 2015. Geoff King, <i>New Hollywood Cinema. An Introduction</i> (2002), Chapter 5: Star Power, 147-177.
Week 12	November 30/December 2
Instructor	Dr. Michael Raine
Screening	<i>The Way of the Dragon</i> (Hong Kong, Bruce Lee, 90 mins)
Lecture	Bodies in Action: The Martial Arts Film
Readings	Yip, Manfung. "In the Realm of the Senses: Sensory Realism, Speed, and Hong Kong Martial Arts Cinema" <i>Cinema Journal</i> 53.4 (2014), pp. 76-97
Week 13	December 7/9
Instructor	Dr. Michael Raine
Screening	<i>Edge of Tomorrow</i> (USA, Doug Liman, 2014, 113m)
Lecture	Live. Die. Repeat: Action Cinema and Videogame Aesthetics
Readings	Nick Schager. "Edge of Tomorrow: The Pinnacle of Video-Game Cinema" <i>Vulture.com</i> (2014): n.pag. Web. 3 Sept. 2015 Alicia Lutes. "Emily Blunt's 'Edge of Tomorrow' Role Is Refreshingly & Unapologetically Feminist" <i>Bustle.com</i> (2014) n.pag. Web. 3 Sept. 2015 George Hatzis. "Edge of Tomorrow: How Many Times?" n. pag. Web 3 Sept. 2015