NEW QUEER CINEMA and the AIDS EPIDEMIC
Film 3315G
Western University
Department of Film Studies 2014
Screening: Mondays 4:30-7:30 pm (UC 84)
Lecture/Discussion: Wednesdays 3:30-5:30 pm (UC 84)

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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, Pratibha Parmar, 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:*
5. Additional readings from E-Journals available on OWL

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING GUIDELINES**

- Class Attendance and Participation [10%]
- Reading Quizzes [25%]
- Video Project or Film/Media Research Paper (2000 words) [25%]
- Final Research Paper (3000 words) [40%]

**Attendance and Participation:** You are required to attend all class meetings and screenings. Attendance will be taken regularly. Be sure to come to class fully prepared, having read all of the weekly reading assignments and with you books and articles 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.

**Laptops, Tablets, Cell Phones:** Laptops/tablets/cell phones are **not** to be used during screenings. You will need to take notes using paper and pens, so be sure to bring these materials to class. Exceptions may be granted in the case of students with special needs, but this will only come with official approval from the Dean’s office. Laptops/tablets will be permitted during lecture, but only on a probationary basis: if the instructor is distracted two times during the semester by non-note-taking/internet laptop use, the instructor will ban ALL use of laptops/tablets for the remainder of the year. In addition, be sure to turn off cell phones and refrain from text messaging during class. This counts as disruptive behavior and will lower your final participation grade.

**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 25-30 minutes. Be sure to arrive promptly. The quizzes will consist of an identification section (key concepts, figures, etc.), short answer questions, and/or a short essay question based on the course readings.

**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.
**Video Project:** In lieu of the midterm paper assignment, you will also have the opportunity to produce an AIDS/queer-themed video project either individually or as a group. These will ideally be inspired by the queer/activist videos of the New Queer Cinema era, and we will both screen and discuss the videos produced in class.

**Late Work:** Course papers must be turned in complete and on time. In order to be fair to the entire class, I will not grant individual extensions on paper assignments, so be sure to budget your time accordingly. 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).

**Note on Screenings:** It is very important that you see the course films projected on a large screen. You are thus *required* to attend weekly screenings on Monday afternoons at 4:30 pm (attendance will be taken). Be sure to arrive to the screenings on time and to follow traditional screening etiquette (turn off cell phones, no talking, no laptops, etc.). If you are ill or have a legitimate excuse, you should set up an appointment to view the film in the study center in UC 1 sometime before Wednesday’s lecture.

**Note on Course Content:** Given the topic, you can expect the material for the course 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.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1—Jan. 6/8—The “GAY PLAGUE”**

**Screening:** *Frontline: The Age of AIDS* (excerpts, 2006) [~65 min]
 & *Longtime Companion* (René, 1989) [96 min]

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

**Recommended Reading:** Dossier of early AIDS articles [OWL]

**Week 2—Jan. 13/15—PANIC, STIGMA, and NEW QUEER CINEMA**

**Screening:** *A.I.D.S.C.R.E.A.M.* (Tartaglia, 1988) [6 min]
 & *This is Not an AIDS Advertisement* (Julien, 1987) [10 min]
 & *They Are Lost to Vision Altogether* (Kalin, 1989) [13 min]
 & *Reframing AIDS* (Parmar, 1987) [35 min]
 & *Poison* (Haynes, 1991) [85 min]

Week 3—Jan. 20/22—DOCUMENTING DISEASE

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

Reading: Crimp, Chapter 4: “Portraits of People with AIDS” & Hallas, Chapter 3: “Related Bodies” (pgs. 113-133) & Bersani: “Is the Rectum a Grave?” [OWL]

**READING QUIZ #1 Wednesday Jan. 22 at the Beginning of Class**

Week 4—Jan. 27/29—PROCLAIMING and PERFORMING QUEERNESS

Screening: Tongues Untied (Riggs, 1989) [55 min] & Khush (Parmar, 1991) [24 min] & Paris is Burning (Livingston, 1990) [78 min]


Week 5—Feb. 3/5—SAFETY, RISK, and RESISTANCE


Reading: Crimp, Chapter 3: “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic” & Pearl, “AIDS and New Queer Cinema” in Aaron & Davis, “Camp and Queer and the New Queer Director” in Aaron & Bordowitz, “The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous” [OWL]
Week 6—Feb. 10/12—ACT UP: ACTIVISM and the POLITICS of AIDS

**Screening:** *Testing the Limits: NYC (Part One)*  
(Testing the Limits Collective, 1987) [30 min]  
& *Living with AIDS: Doctors, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists Say No to Cosmo* (Carlonusto/Maggenti, 1988) [23 min]  
& *Voices from the Front* (Testing the Limits Collective, 1992) [90 min]

**Reading:** Crimp, Chapter 2: “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism”  
& Hallas, Chapter 2: “The Embodied Immediacy of Direct Action”  
& Cvetkovich, “The Affective Public Culture of ACT UP” [OWL]

**READING QUIZ #2 Wednesday Feb. 12 at the Beginning of Class**

Week 7—Feb. 17/19—READING WEEK (No Classes)

Week 8—Feb. 24/26—HISTORY and MEMORY

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

**Reading:** Pick, “New Queer Cinema and Lesbian Films” in Aaron  
& Edelman, “The Future is Kid Stuff” [OWL]  
& Okewole, “Tom Kalin” [OWL]  
& Willis, “Uncommon History” [OWL]

**MIDTERM RESEARCH PAPER or VIDEO PROJECT DUE Feb. 26 in Class**

Week 9—March 3/5—QUEERING GENRE: John Greyson

**Screening:** *Four Safer Sex Shorts* (Greyson, 1987) [5 min]  
& *The AIDS Epidemic* (Greyson, 1987) [5 min]  
& *The Making of “Monsters”* (Greyson, 1991) [35 min]  
& *Zero Patience* (Greyson, 1993) [100 min]

**Reading:** Hallas, Chapter 4: “Queer Anachronism and the Testimonial Space of Song” (pgs. 151-170)  
& Crimp, Chapter 6: “Randy Shilts’s Miserable Failure”  
& Waugh, “Anti-Retroviral” (pgs. 275-305) [OWL]

Week 10—March 10/12—MOURNING and MILITANCY

**Screening:** *Marta: Portrait of a Teen Activist* (Ebert, 1990) [10 min]  
& *Fast Trip, Long Drop* (Bordowitz, 1993) [54 min]  
& *Blue* (Jarman, 1993) [80 min]
**Reading:** Crimp, Chapter 7: “Mourning and Militancy”  
& Crimp, Chapter 15: “De-Moralizing Representations of AIDS”  
& Hallas, Chapter 3: “Related Bodies” (pgs. 133-150)  
& Hallas, Chapter 6: “Sound, Image, and the Corporal Implication of Witnessing”  
& Sturken, “AIDS as Kitsch” (pgs. 168-175) [OWL]

**READING QUIZ #3 Wednesday March 12 at the Beginning of Class**

**Week 11—March 17/19—THE TROUBLE WITH NORMAL**

[Monday March 17]:
- **Screening:** Safe (Haynes, 1995) [120 min]  
- **Reading:** Warner, Chapter 2: “What’s Wrong with Normal?”  
& Doane: “Pathos and Pathology” [OWL]

[Wednesday March 19]:
- **Screening:** Head On (Kokkinos, 1998) [104 min]  
- **Reading:** Warner, Chapter 3: “Beyond Gay Marriage”  
& Jennings/Lomine, “Nationality and New Queer Cinema” in Aaron

**Week 12—Mar. 24/26—COCKTAILS and CAVEATS: The “End of AIDS”**

- **Screening:** Letters from Home (Hoolboom, Canada, 1996) [15 min.]  
& Leaving the Way it Came (Gaffney, 1997) [2 min]  
& Positive (Hoolboom, Canada, 1997) [10 min]  
& Sea in the Blood (Fung, Canada, 2000) [24 min]  
& Adventures of Felix (Drole de Félix) (Ducastel/Martineau, France, 2000) [95 min]

- **Reading:** Crimp, Ch-1: “Melancholia and Moralism” (pgs. 1-16)  
& Warner, “Conclusion: The Politics of Shame and HIV Prevention”  
& Hallas, “Introduction” (pgs. 26-31)  
& Pidduck, “New Queer Cinema and Experimental Video” in Aaron  
& Sullivan, “When Plagues End” [OWL]

**Week 13—March 31/April 2—HISTORY and MEMORY II: SEX and the 70s**

- **Screening:** Tell Me Why: The Epistemology of Disco (Di Stefano, 1991) [25 min]  
& K.I.P. (Nguyen, 2002) [5 min]  
& Velvet Goldmine (Haynes, 1998) [124 min]

- **Reading:** DeAngelis, “The Characteristics of New Queer Filmmaking” in Aaron  
& Muñoz, “Ghosts of Public Sex” [OWL]  
& Castiglia/Reed, “Battles Over the Gay Past” [OWL]  
& Rich, “A Queer and Present Danger” [OWL]

**READING QUIZ #4 Wednesday April 2 at the Beginning of Class**
Week 14—April 7—GLOBAL ACTIVISM

Screening: Fig Trees (Greyson, 2009) [105 min]

Reading: Hallas, Chapter 4: “Queer Anachronism...” (Pgs. 171-183)
& Longfellow, “Ten Propositions on Operatic Subversions and
the ‘Charge of the Real’ in John Greyson’s Fig Trees” [OWL]

**FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE at the Beginning of Class**

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 Department 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

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Students must write their essays in
their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a 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. In this course, citation of all material
other than students' own ideas must be completed according to the guidelines established
in *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 6th Edition*. For additional
information on plagiarism see:
www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

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 of Western Ontario and *Turnitin.com*.
You should register immediately as a new user by going to http://www.turnitin.com. I
will provide you with the Class ID # and password as soon as possible. Assignments not
handed in to turnitin.com will receive a 0.

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.
**UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:** Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and or assignments must apply to their Academic Counseling Office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Please go to the following site for information on the university Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness: [www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)

For information on the examination services provided by the Student Development Centre, please visit [www.sdc.uwo.ca/SSD](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/SSD)

**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/](http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/)

**Disabilities:** Please consult with me during the first three weeks of class regarding disabilities that might require special accommodations.

**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, UC-79. 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.

**Office Hours:** I will be available to answer questions, clarify concepts/assignments, and assist you with your coursework during my weekly 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.
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.

0 (Report to Department)

Plagiarism with intent to deceive