

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
Film Studies Program

FILM 3371G – Film Theory (2018)



**Instructor: Dr. Tobias Nagl**  
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**Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-2:30 pm**

**Screenings: Wednesday 2:30-5:30pm (3B04)**  
**Lectures: Thursday 2:30-4:30am (3B02)**

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, signification and narratology; ideology and ideology-critique; psychoanalysis and spectatorship; postmodernism and cultural studies. 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 on OWL (<https://owl.uwo.ca>)

**Evaluation**

<b>Participation and attendance</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Weekly reading responses</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Midterm</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Research Paper</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Final exam (see UWO exam schedule)</b>	<b>35%</b>

Students with special permission to watch films on their own time are expected to contact the Film Library (AHB 1G19) to make special arrangements.

**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 me personally or left in the Essay Drop Box outside the English Office (AHB 2G02). Keep a copy of your essay! In addition, essays must also be uploaded to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com). 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 screening, 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.

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 good-faith effort to answer all the questions. Students have to submit the assignments before class via <https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>. In addition, they must bring to class a paper copy and submit it to the instructor at the beginning of the session. 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%!

## **Information for Students, Course Objectives and Grading Criteria for Written Assignments**

### **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 Relevant regulations:**

For Film Studies Department regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions), and other matters, please consult "Information for Students" on our website at [www.uwo.ca/film](http://www.uwo.ca/film)

**Prerequisite:** none

**Antirequisite:** none

**Please Note:** The film screenings for the course are mandatory. If you miss a class or a screening you are responsible for arranging a viewing of the assigned film at the Film Resource Centre in AHB 1G19. Please note that not all films are available at the Film Resource Centre. More than one unexcused absence will be reflected in your attendance mark. Assignments 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.

**1. 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. Scholastic offenses are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offense, at the following website:

[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)

**2. 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](http://Turnitin.com).

**3. 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.

**4. 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. Medical documentation is also required for accommodation of work worth less than 10% of the total course grade. This includes absences (both class and screenings), late assignments or essays, missed exams and quizzes, etc. Medical documentation must be submitted by the student directly to the appropriate Faculty Dean's office and it will be the Dean's office that will make the determination whether accommodation is warranted.

Please go to the following site for information on the university Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/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)

Additional information on student services can be found on the following website: <http://www.westernusc.ca/services/>

**5. 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/>

**6. Registrar:** Please see the following websites for further information related to registrarial services:

<http://www.registrar.uwo.ca> (Registrar)

**7. Electronic Devices:** Electronic Devices will not be allowed during tests, examinations or screenings. Laptops will be permitted for notes only during the lecture. Please do not violate the policy and use your electronic device to access social media or email during class time.

**8. Complaints:** If students have a complaint concerning a course in which they are enrolled, they must discuss the matter with the instructor of the course. If students are still not satisfied, they should then take the complaint to the Office of the Department of English and Writing Studies, Arts & Humanities Building, Room 2G02. 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 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