

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND WRITING STUDIES
Film Studies Program

FILM 3356F – Avant-Garde Cinema (Fall 2018)



Instructor: Dr. Tobias Nagl
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Office Hours: Tue 12.30-2:30pm and by appointment

Antirequisite(s): The former Film Studies 2256F/G.

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

Screenings: Wednesday 2:30-5:30pm (UC 1405)

Lectures: Thursday 2:30-4:30am (UC 1401)

Required Texts: P. Adams Sitney, Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002)

Michael O'Pray, Avant-Garde Film. Forms, Themes and Passions (London: Wallflower, 2003)

Course readings available on OWL (<https://owl.uwo.ca>)

This course explores the history, politics and aesthetics of American and European avant-garde film practices. We will examine the development, major trends and techniques of experimental and non-narrative film-making in relation to key art movements and theoretical debates of the 20th century. Topics include formalism, surrealism, political modernism, the culture industry, pop art, and feminism.

Evaluation

Participation and attendance	15%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	30%
Final exam (see UWO exam schedule)	35%

Note: Assignments handed in late without prior approval will be penalized 3% per day. Requests for extensions must be presented as a request for accommodation made through Academic Counselling. 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 Film Dept. Office. Keep a copy of your essay! In addition, essays must also be uploaded to 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 (see section on plagiarism below). 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. Be forewarned that most of these films are not available in commercial DVD rental stores/streaming platforms nor will all of them be on reserve at the Film Resource Center. Some material contains graphic depictions of sexuality or violence and may be offensive to some viewers. Please contact me if you have concerns about the material screened. You should take notes, either during or shortly after the screening.

Week 1 (Sept 6-7) Introduction

No Screening

First meeting/introduction of course on Thursday 6/9

Week 2 (Sept 10-14) Dada

Screening:

Le Retour à la Raison (Man Ray, F 1923, 3m)

Ballet Mécanique (Fernand Léger & Dudley Murphy, F 1924, 14m)

Entr’acte (René Clair, Francis Picabia & Erik Satie, F 1924, 20m)

Anemic Cinema (Marcel Duchamp, F 1926, 7m)

Emak-Bakia (Man Ray, F 1926, 18m)

Ghosts Before Breakfast (Hans Richter, G 1928, 6m)

Reading:

- Fernand Léger, "The Spectacle" [excerpts, WebCT] and "Ballet Mécanique" [OWL]
- Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto 1918" [WebCT]
- Ted Perry, "Entr'acte: Dada as Real Illusion," [OWL]
- O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 8-19
- Recommended (as general introduction): Clement Greenberg, "The Avant-Garde and Kitsch" [OWL]

Week 3 (Sept 17-21) Soviet Constructivism**Screening:**

The Man With A Movie Camera (Dziga Vertov, USSR 1929, 68m)

Reading:

- Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye – The Writings of Dziga Vertov* [excerpts, OWL]
- Yuri Tsivan, "Man with a Movie Camera: Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties" [OWL]
- O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 26-37

Week 4 (Sept 24-Sept 28) Surrealism**Screening:**

Un chien andalou (Luis Buñuel & Salvador Dali, F 1929, 17m)

Le sang d'un poète (Jean Cocteau, F 1930, 50m)

Rose Hobart (Joseph Cornell, US 1936, 19m)

Reading:

- André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)" [OWL]
- Bureau of Surrealist Research, "Declaration of 27 January 1925" [OWL]
- Luis Buñuel, "Notes on the Making of *Un Chien Andalou*" [OWL]
- Germaine Dulac, "Visual and Anti-Visual Films" [OWL]
- O'Pray, 19-25

Week 5 (Oct 1-5) Psychodrama and Trance Film**Screening:**

Meshes of the Afternoon (Maya Deren, US 1943, 14m)

Rituals in Transfigured Time (Maya Deren, US 1946, 15min)

The Cage (Sidney Peterson & James Broughton, US 1947, 28m)

The Potted Psalm (Sidney Peterson & James Broughton, US 1947, 18m)

Fireworks (Kenneth Anger, US 1947, 20m)

Reading:

- Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 3-42, 44-54, 83-92
- O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 48-57

*******OCT 8-12 THANKSGIVING / READING NO CLASS*******

Week 6 (Oct 15-18) Visual Music and Absolute Animation

Screening:

Lichtspiel Opus No. 1 (Walter Ruttmann, D 1921, 10m)
Film is Rhythm (Hans Richter, G 1921, 1m)
Symphonie Diagonale (Viking Eggeling, G 1924, 7m)
Composition in Blue (Oskar Fischinger, US 1935, 4m)
Muratti greift ein (Oskar Fischinger, G 1934, 3m)
Blinkity Blank (Norman McLaren, CAN 1955, 5m)
A Color Box (Len Lye, NZ 1935, 4m)
Rhythm (Len Lye, NZ 1957, 1m)
A Man and his Dog out for Air (Robert Breer, US 1957, 3m)
Mirror Animations No. 11 (Harry Smith, US, 10m)
Samadhi (Jordan Belson, US 1967, 6m)
Yantra (James Whitney, US 1950-1957, 8m)

Reading:

-Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 231-267, 269-283
-O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 13-17, 44-47, 65-68

****** FRIDAY, OCT 18: PAPER 1 DUE in Film Studies Essay Dropbox + TURNITIN!******

Week 7 (Oct 22-Oct 26) Abstract Expressionism: Stan Brakhage

Screening:

Anticipation of the Night (US 1958, 42m)
Mothlight (US 1963, 4m)
Cat's Cradle (1959, 7min)
Window Water Baby Moving (1959, 11m)
Dog Star Man, Prelude (US 1961, 25m)
Commingle Containers (US 1997, 5m)
Love Song (2001, 11m)

Reading:

-Stan Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision" [OWL]
-Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 155-187, 190-230
-O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 58-64

Week 8 (Oct 29-Nov 2): Camp, Pop Art and Underground

Screening:

Flaming Creatures (Jack Smith, US 1963, 45m)
Scorpio Rising (Kenneth Anger, US 1964, 30m)
A Movie (Bruce Conner, US 1958, 12m)
Marilyn Times Five (Bruce Conner, US 1968-73, 12m)
Cosmic Ray (Bruce Conner, US 1961, 14m)

Reading:

-Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" [OWL]
-Jonathan Hoberman, "The Big Heat: Making and Unmaking *Flaming Creatures*" [OWL]
-Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 102-109, 293-300, 322-38
-O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 84-93

Week 9 (Nov 5-9) Minimalism and Structural Film

Screening:

Adebar (Peter Kubelka, Austria 1956-57, 1.5min,)
Schwechater (Peter Kubelka, Austria 1957-58, 1 min,)
Arnulf Rainer (Peter Kubelka, Austria 1958-60, 6.5 min)
T, O, U, C, H, I, N, G (Paul Sharits, US 1968, 12m)
3/60 Bäume im Herbst (Kurt Kren, Austria 1960, 5min)
15/67 TV (Kurt Kren, Austria 1967, 4min)
Little Dog For Roger (Malcom LeGrice, UK 1967, 12min)
Film in Which There Appears... (Owen Land aka George Landow, US 1966, 5m)
Blow Job (Andy Warhol, US 1964, 26min)
Wavelength (Michael Snow, CAN/US 1967, 45min)

Reading:

-Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 347-370
-David Bordwell/Kirsten Thompson, "Structural Film" [OWL]
-Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" [OWL]
-Malcom LeGrice, "Kurt Kren" [OWL]
-Peter Kubelka, "The Theory of Metrical Film" [OWL]
-Stephen Koch, "Warhol's Silence" [OWL]
-O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 93-106

Week 10 (Nov 12-16) Political Modernism

Screening:

Weekend (Jean-Luc Godard, F 1967, 105min)
+ excerpt from *Le Gai Savoir* (Jean-Luc Godard, F 1967, ca. 30 min)

Reading:

-David Bordwell/Kirsten Thompson, "Political Cinema in the West" [OWL]
-Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'Est*" [OWL]
-Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes" [OWL]

Week 11 (Nov 19-22) Feminism

Screening:

Touch Cinema (Valie Export, Austria 1968, 1m)
Fuses (Carolee Schneeman, US 1967, 22m)
Thriller (Sally Potter, UK 1979, 34m)
Me and Ruby Fruit (Sadie Benning, US 1992, 5m)
Sink or Swim (Su Friedrich, US 1990, 48m)

Reading:

-Laura Mulvey, "Film, Feminism, and the Avant-Garde" [OWL]
-Carey Lovelace, "The Gender and Case of Carolee Schneemann" [OWL]
-Kate Haug, "An Interview with Carolee Schneemann" [OWL]
-E. Ann Kaplan, "Night at the Opera: Investigating the Heroine in Sally Potter's *Thriller*" [OWL]
-Chris Holmlund, "The Films of Sadie Benning and Su Friedrich" [OWL]

****** Thursday Nov 22: PAPER 2 DUE in Film Studies Essay Dropbox + TURNITIN!******

Week 12 (Nov 26 - Nov 30) Essay and Diary Film

Screening:

Lost, Lost, Lost [excerpt] (Jonas Mekas, US 1976, ca. 20min)
Sunless/Sans Soleil (Chris Marker, F 1983, 100min)

Reading:

-Robert Rosenstone, "*Sans Soleil*: The Documentary as (Visionary) Truth"
- Catherine Russell, "*Sans Soleil*: The Infirmities of Time"
-Michael Renov, "*Lost, Lost, Lost*: Mekas as Essayist"

Week 13 (Dec 3-Dec 7): Postmodernism: After the Avant-Garde?

Screening:

Passage à l'acte (Martin Arnold, A 1993, 13m)
Hearts of the World (Guy Maddin, CAN 2000, 6min)
Mayhem (Abigail Child, US 1987, 20m)
Altair (Lewis Klahr, US 1994, 10min)
The Scary Movie (Peggy Ahwesh, US 1993, 10m)
The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal (Matt McCormick, US 2000, 17m)
The Hardest Button to Button (The White Stripes/Michel Gondry, US 2003, 3m)
Windowlicker (Aphex Twin/Chris Cunningham, UK 1999, 16m)
Outer Space (Peter Tscherkassky, A 1999, 10m)

Reading:

-Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" [OWL]
-David Bordwell/Kristen Thompson, "Deconstructive Film and the New Narrative" [OWL]

******FINAL EXAM: see UWO EXAM SCHEDULE******

General Course Objectives and Grading Criteria for Written Assignments

Information for Students:

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>

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 experimental film practices and the history of the aesthetic avant-garde in the 20th century, refine critical thinking skills, identify aesthetic influences and strategies, film styles (e.g. Dada, the “trance film”, structural cinema) and directors (e.g. Jack Smith, Andy Warhol, Stan Brakhage) relevant to the course, learn how to analyze avant-garde cinema in its cultural context and become aware of the theoretical/aesthetic questions it raises.

III. Other Relevant regulations:

1. 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

2. 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.

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness: Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 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 UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

For information on the examination services provided by the Student Development Centre, please visit www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd

6. 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/>

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/>

Student Development Centre <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](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