

BEFORE STONEWALL: QUEER CINEMA and AMERICAN CULTURE from WWII to GAY LIBERATION

Film 3352G/WST 3357G—Queer Cinema

Western University—Winter Term 2021

Screening: Wednesdays 11:30 am-2:30 pm (online/asynchronous)

Lecture/Discussion: Thursdays 11:30 am-1:30 pm (synchronous via zoom)

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Online Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:30-4:30 pm; Thursdays 1:30-2:30 pm and by appt.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Although the Stonewall rebellion has long served as a foundational moment in the history of gay liberation and queer visibility, its iconicity tends to overshadow the crucial transformations of queer identity, community, culture, and politics that took place in the U.S. and abroad from WWII to that fateful summer night in 1969. For not only did the postwar era witness the development of queer urban spaces and homophile political groups, but it also marked a significant expansion of queer visibility in literature, theater, and cinema. Examining the conventions *and* the gradual undoing of what Vito Russo famously called “the celluloid closet,” this course will explore key shifts in queer representation in American cinema of the postwar era. We will analyze the queer typology (sad young men, dangerous dykes, queer killers, etc.) of a variety of Hollywood genres (horror, noir, melodrama) as well as the often subversive work of figures like Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers, and Alfred Hitchcock in the context of Cold War homophobia and gender normativity. We will then frame the eventual breakdown of Production Code restrictions on “sexual perversion” in relation to the development of queer alternatives via avant-garde, underground, and documentary cinema. The final section of the course will concentrate on a group of films from the Stonewall era that will allow us to grapple with the aesthetic, cultural, and political consequences of the shift from silence and oppression to an era of presumed liberation. What’s gained—and perhaps lost—for queer subjects in the transition from invisibility to visibility, from subculture to mainstream, and how has this key historical moment shaped our contemporary notions of queer culture and identity?

Course Objectives: This course explores the history of queer artists, communities, and politics in the U.S. in relation to the forms, genres, and industrial strategies of the Hollywood studio system. 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 American history that can be applied to research areas in the humanities as well as to a variety of social and professional contexts.

COURSE TEXTS

1. Benshoff, Harry M. and Sean Griffin. *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005
2. Readings from E-Journals/Books available on OWL

COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING GUIDELINES

- Class Participation (synchronous online and/or online forums) [10%]
- Discussion Leading (Questions and Clip Analysis) [10%]
- Take-Home Exams [15% each—30% total]
- Queer Film Analysis *or* Digital Media Project (1500 words) [20%]
- Final Research Paper (2500 words) [30%]

Class Participation: Students are highly encouraged to attend and to participate in the weekly zoom-based class discussions at 11:30 pm on Thursdays. If you cannot attend one or more of these discussion sessions, however, you may also participate asynchronously by responding to questions/clips that will be posted in the Forum section of OWL. Your final Class Participation grade will be based on the quantity *and* quality of your participation in these discussion sessions and forums.

Discussion Leading: Working with at least one of your fellow classmates, you will lead discussion once during the term on the weekly screenings. I will provide a list of guidelines and tips, but each discussion leader will be responsible for presenting a specific question about the film and/or the course readings as well as engaging your fellow students in a discussion about that element. You will need to coordinate with your group member(s) in order to prepare and organize the discussion questions/material, and in most cases I will assess the group as a whole based on the overall quality of the discussion leading. Discussions will take place synchronously via zoom and the clips/questions will also be posted in an online forum.

Take-Home Exams: There will be *two* 90-minute take-home exams for the course. The exams will be posted to OWL at least 24 hours before the submission deadline in order to allow for any potential technological or accommodation-based issues that may arise. The exams will include clip analysis, identification, short answer, and/or essay questions. Take-Home Exams will be due at 12:30pm on Thursdays so that you also have the first hour of the tutorial session to complete them.

Paper Assignments: You will have at least one (possibly two) paper assignments for the course. The first paper will ask you to examine the coding of queerness (narratively, formally, ideologically, etc.) in a WWII-era queer film that we are *not* screening in the course. The final paper for the course is a more extensive research paper that will provide you with an opportunity to explore key films, figures, and/or cultural events from either the pre-Stonewall OR the gay liberation period in a North American or international context. Your final research essay for the course can also be a *revision* and *expansion* of your first essay with a more extensive research component.

Digital Media Project: In lieu of the midterm paper assignment, you will also have the opportunity to produce a queer-themed digital media project either individually or as a group. These projects may take a variety of forms, but they should be focused on queer representation in film and media from WWII to the Stonewall-era in American culture. We will both screen and discuss the videos/media 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: You are required to view weekly screenings before each Thursday lecture/discussion. All weekly film screenings will be available via streaming sources. Links to the weekly screenings can be found in the Resources tab on OWL, and I will try to have screening links posted by Monday of each week. There will also be screening introductions and guiding questions posted each week in the OWL Forum section.

I encourage you to view the films on as large a screen as possible so that you can pay close attention to the visual style and formal construction of the films. Most screening links will also have optional subtitles/closed captions that you will be able to turn on (or off). Finally, you may also make an appointment to view any of the course films in the Film Study Center [UC-1126] by contacting the Film Library Assistant, Rachel Gunn (rgunn4@uwo.ca) (Phone: x85730).

Office Hours: I will be available to answer questions, clarify concepts/assignments, and assist you with your coursework during my weekly, virtual 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. **Please note, however, that I may not respond to questions about the course that can be answered by simply reviewing the course syllabus.*

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1—January 13-14—Coding Queerness in Hollywood Cinema

Screening: *Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933, 97 min.)
& excerpts from *The Celluloid Closet* (Epstein/Friedman, 1996)

Reading: Dyer, “Seen to Be Believed”
& Stryker, “A Hundred Years of Transgender History”
& Benschhoff/Griffin, “Introduction” and “From Pansies to Predators”
(in *Queer Images*)

Week 2—Jan. 20-21—In the Shadows: Queer Noir and the Lavender Scare

Screening: *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944, 88 min)
& *Strangers on a Train* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1951, 101 min.)

Reading: Johnson, “Introduction” to *The Lavender Scare*
& Dyer, “Queer Noir”
& Goldberg, “Chapter 2: Critical Interludes,” *Strangers on a Train*

Week 3—Jan. 27-28—Camp, Gay Fandom, and the Hollywood Musical

Screening: *The Pirate* (Vincente Minnelli, 1948, 102 min.)
& Judy Garland Clips

Reading: Dyer, “Judy Garland and Gay Men,” from *Heavenly Bodies*
& Tinkcom, “Working Like a Homosexual”
& Benschhoff/Griffin, Chapter 3, *Queer Images*

Week 4—February 3-4—Gender Trouble: Exploitation and Social Problem Cinema

Screening: *Caged* (John Cromwell, 1950, 96 min.)
& *Glen or Glenda* (Edward Wood, Jr., 1953, 71 min.)

Reading: Butler, “Introduction” to *Undoing Gender*
& Mayne, “Caged and Framed”
& Benschhoff/Griffin, Chapter 5, *Queer Images*

****Take-Home Exam #1 Due to OWL by 12:30 pm, Thurs. Feb. 4****

Week 5—Feb. 10-11—Adapting Tennessee Williams, Coding Gay Desires

Screening: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Richard Brooks, 1958, 107 min.)

Reading: Noriega, “‘Something’s Missing Here!’”
& Bronski, “The Eroticized Male Body” (excerpt)
& Savran, “Tennessee Williams 1”

Week 6—Feb. 17-18—READING WEEK

Week 7—Feb. 24-25—Troubled Teens: Screening Queer Youth

Screening: *Tea and Sympathy* (Vincente Minnelli, 1956, 122 min.)
 & *Boys Beware* (Sid Davis, 1961, 10 min.)
 & *Fireworks* (Kenneth Anger, 1947, 14 min.)

Reading: Gerstner, “The Production and Display of the Closet”
 & Bruhm/Hurley, “Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children”
 & Dyer, “Fireworks”

****Queer Film Analysis Essay or Digital Media Project
 Due to OWL by 11:30 am, Wednesday, Feb. 24****

Week 8—March 3-4—Apparitional Lesbians and other Queer Horrors

Screening: *The Seventh Victim* (Val Lewton, 1943, 71 min.)
 & *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963, 114 min.)

Reading: White, “Female Spectator, Lesbian Spectre”
 & Benschhoff, “The Monster and the Homosexual”

Week 9—March 10-11—Rumors, Gossip, and the Closet

Screening: *The Children’s Hour* (William Wyler, 1961, 107 min.)
 & *Rock Hudson’s Home Movies* (Mark Rappaport, 1992, 61 min.)

Reading: Benschhoff/Griffin, Chapter 4, *Queer Images*
 & Erhart, ““She Could Hardly Invent Them!””
 & Love, “Introduction” to *Feeling Backward*

Week 10—March 17-18—Underground Cinema and Queer Spaces

Screening: *Scorpio Rising* (Anger, 1963, 28 min.)
 & *Flaming Creatures* (Smith, 1963, 43 min.)
 & *My Hustler* (Warhol, 1965, 67 min.)
 & *Ron and Chuck in Disneyland Discovery* (Rocco, 1969, 12 min.)

Reading: Staiger, “Finding Community in the Early 1960s”
 & Escoffier, “Beefcake to Hardcore”
 & Smith, “The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez”
 & Davis/Needham, “Warhol and Gay Cinema” from *Warhol in Ten Takes*

****Take-Home Exam #2 Due to OWL by 12:30 pm, Thurs. March 18****

Week 11—March 24-25—Documenting “Deviance”

Screening: *CBS Reports: The Homosexuals* (March 7, 1967, 45 min.)
 & *Behind Every Good Man* (Nikolai Ursin, 1967, 9 min.)
 & *Portrait of Jason* (Shirley Clarke, 1967, 105 min.)
 & *The Queen* (Frank Simon, 1968, 68 min.)

Reading: Alwood, “Becoming Front-Page News”
 & Butt, ““Stop that Acting!””
 & Tsika, ““I Have My Choice””

Week 12—March 31-April 1—Coming Out Under Fire: Gays in the Military

Screening: *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (John Huston, 1967, 108 min.)

Reading: Benshoff, “Representing (Repressed) Homosexuality...”
 & Hsu, “Desiring Brotherhood”

Week 13—April 7-8—Anticipating Stonewall: Gay Bars on Screen

Screening: *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, 1968, 138 min.)

Reading: Benshoff/Griffin, Chapter 6, *Queer Images*
 & Hankin, “Lesbian Locations”
 & Love, “Epilogue: The Politics of Refusal”

****Final Research Paper Due to OWL by 5:00pm, Monday April 12****

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 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

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.

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. 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.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see [Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see:

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

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.

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/>

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/>

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 English Department chair. 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.

Recordings: All of the remote learning sessions for this course will be recorded. The data captured during these recordings may include your image, voice recordings, chat

logs and personal identifiers (name displayed on the screen). The recordings will be used for educational purposes related to this course, including evaluations. The recordings may be disclosed to other individuals under special circumstances. Please contact the instructor if you have any concerns related to session recordings.

****NOTE: Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor.***

Statement on Online Etiquette

Some components of this course will involve online interactions. To ensure the best experience for both you and your classmates, please honour the following rules of etiquette:

- please “arrive” to class on time
- please use your computer and/or laptop if possible (as opposed to a cell phone or tablet)
- ensure that you are in a private location to protect the confidentiality of discussions in the event that a class discussion deals with sensitive or personal material
- to minimize background noise, kindly mute your microphone for the entire class until you are invited to speak, unless directed otherwise
- [suggested for classes larger than 30 students] In order to give us optimum bandwidth and web quality, please turn off your video camera for the entire class unless you are invited to speak
- [suggested for cases where video is used] please be prepared to turn your video camera off at the instructor’s request if the internet connection becomes unstable
- unless invited by your instructor, do **not** share your screen in the meeting

The course instructor will act as moderator for the class and will deal with any questions from participants. To participate please consider the following:

- if you wish to speak, use the “raise hand” function and wait for the instructor to acknowledge you before beginning your comment or question
- remember to unmute your microphone and turn on your video camera before speaking
- self-identify when speaking.
- remember to mute your mic and turn off your video camera after speaking (unless directed otherwise)

General considerations of “netiquette”:

- Keep in mind the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the course.
- Be courteous toward the instructor, your colleagues, and authors whose work you are discussing.
- Be respectful of the diversity of viewpoints that you will encounter in the class and in your readings. The exchange of diverse ideas and opinions is part of the scholarly environment. “Flaming” is never appropriate.

- Be professional and scholarly in all online postings. Cite the ideas of others appropriately.

Note that disruptive behaviour of any type during online classes, including inappropriate use of the chat function, is unacceptable. Students found guilty of Zoom-bombing a class or of other serious online offenses may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.

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. Failure to follow the course assignment and guidelines.

0 (Report to Department)

Plagiarism with intent to deceive.