

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

Film Studies FILM 409 L01
Special topics in film studies:
FILM IN THE DIGITAL AGE
WINTER 2016

Monday, Jan 11 – Monday, Apr 11
Discussion, F 10:00 – 11:50
Lab (film screening), M 10:00 – 12:50

Instructor: Ryan Pierson
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Office Phone: 220-6720
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Web Page: D2L
Office Hours: M 13:00 – 14:00, F 12:00 – 13:00

Course Description

This course explores issues related to the ongoing digitization of film. Since the 1970s, movies have become increasingly dependent on computers in their production, distribution, and exhibition. This course engages in some of the questions that arise when a celluloid-based art becomes based in information. In particular, the course familiarizes students with issues of medium-specificity, the changing poetics of digitally-driven images, and the structures of feeling that digitally-driven films offer.

Objectives of the Course

This course will focus on developing three major skills. First, observing and analyzing formal elements of film; second, reading high-level historical and theoretical film scholarship; third, writing about film and developing an original argument. These skills will come together in the final research paper; shorter assignments and in-class discussions will develop these skills as well.

Textbooks and Readings

Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality, by Stephen Prince (Rutgers, 2012)
Spectacular Digital Effects: CGI and Contemporary Cinema, by Kristen Whissel (Duke, 2014)
Other readings will be posted on D2L.

Internet and electronic communication device information

Laptops and tablets may be used only for taking notes and consulting the readings for discussion; they may not be out during screenings. Other screen devices (cell phones, etc.) may not be used at any time. Violations will affect your participation grade.

Assignments and Evaluation

Participation (ongoing): 10%

Each day, you will be graded for the number of contributions you make to class discussion: full credit (10/10) for two or more comments, half credit (5/10) for one comment, no credit (0/10) for no comments. If you miss a day of class, you may receive half-credit by submitting by email a 200-word response to another student's discussion board post within one week of the absence. (This will not substitute for attending without participating.) These days' grades will be averaged at the end of the term.

Note: If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to contact your classmates about anything you missed, including important terms from discussion and class announcements. Each week will build on material from previous weeks; if you are absent, you should be able to step back into class discussion without missing a beat.

Discussion board posts (ongoing): 15%

Every other week, you will post on the D2L discussion board your reflection on the week's material. Your post must be at least 250 words long, speak about some aspect of the week's film, and quote the reading. Each post will be graded on the following scale:

Meets word count, discusses film and reading: 10/10

Meets word count, discusses film: 6/10

Fails to meet word count and/or discuss film/reading and/or is (up to 72 hours) late: 4/10

More than 72 hours late or missing: 0/10

Posts are due Tuesday at noon.

Group presentations/discussions (ongoing): 20%

Each week, a small group will lead discussion on the week's material. This should include a brief (~10 min) presentation on the major terms and issues from the reading, noting key passages; a film clip (which need not come from the week's feature); and a few questions to frame the discussion. The group will also be responsible for keeping discussion going and on-topic. Students will pick the week of their presentation from a sign-up sheet.

Quiz (in class Feb. 5): 10%

A short in-class quiz will test students on basic concepts and arguments from the first three weeks of material. Format will be short answer.

Paper Proposal (due in class Mar. 28): 10%

A short document proposing a topic and approach for your final research paper. The proposal should include a brief description of your major research questions or arguments, and roughly how you plan on executing them. It should also include a formatted bibliography.

Final Research Paper (due Apr. 18): 35%

An 8-10 page research essay on an approved topic of the student's choice and related to the course themes and materials. Full details will be provided in Week 8.

All assignments and exams must be completed in a timely manner, or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: NO

Submission of Assignments: Please hand in your essays directly to your tutor or instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS 320 after classes have ended. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

Note: It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments.)

Policy for Late Assignments

For late assignments not already specified, ten points will be subtracted from the assignment for each 24-hour period.

Student Accommodations

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services; SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/.

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor.

The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy_0.pdf.

Please note:

1. Students seeking accommodations for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors directly. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
2. When accommodations are granted, they may take forms other than make-up tests or assignments. For example, the weight of a missed grade may be added to another assignment or test.
3. For information on Deferrals of Final Exams and Term Work, see sections G.6 and G.7 of the *University Calendar* at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html> and <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness

(grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Grading & Grade Scale of the Department of Communication, Media and Film

Final grades are reported as letter grades. Assignments, exams, and other work in this course will be graded using letter grades.

The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in the Department. If letter grades are used for an assignment or other course component, the percentage equivalent in the final column will be used for calculating the final grade:

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Department grade scale equivalents	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations
4.00	Outstanding	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70		A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30		B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good--clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete.	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70		B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30		C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter.	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70		C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00		D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements.	F	00 - 49.99%	0%

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <https://ucalgary.ca/ssc/resources/writing-support/436> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/resources/ethics>

Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about . . .	Visit or contact . . .
ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (ASC)	SS 102 403-220-3580 artsads@ucalgary.ca
CAMPUS SECURITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calgary Police Service • Emergency Text Messaging • Emergency Evacuation & Assembly • Safewalk Program 	http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333 403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911 http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/
DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT help line 	http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students 403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca

<p>STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	<p>http://ucalgary.ca/ssc</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents</p>
<p>STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps • Student Ombudsman 	<p>https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/</p> <p>http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds</p>
<p>SU WELLNESS CENTRE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Services • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips 	<p>403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health</p> <p>403-266-HELP (4357)</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus</p> <p>If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.</p>

Schedule:

Week 1 (Jan 11): Cinema's end and future
 Andre Gaudreault & Philippe Marion, "Cinema is not what it used to be" (D2L)
 Whissel, "Conclusion"
 Screen: *Melancholia* (Lars von Trier, 2011)

I. Ontology debates

Week 2 (Jan 18): Analog image
 Stanley Cavell, "Sights & Sounds" (D2L)
 Andre Bazin, "In Defense of Rossellini" (D2L)
 Screen: *Stromboli* (Roberto Rossellini, 1950)

Week 3 (Jan 25): Algorithmic image
 Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index?" (D2L)
 Stephen Prince, "Introduction"
 Screen: *Birdman* (Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, 2014)

II. Affect in the network age

Week 4 (Feb 1): Games
 Steven Shaviro, "Gamer"
 Screen: *Gamer* (Nevelndine/Taylor, 2009)

quiz (10%)

Week 5 (Feb 8): Affective labor

Shaviro, "Gamer" cont'd

Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, "Postmodernization, or the Informatization of Production" (D2L)

Screen: *Sleep Dealer* (Alex Rivera, 2008)

Feb 15: READING WEEK, NO CLASS

Week 6 (Feb 22): Neurocinema

Shaviro, "Gamer" cont'd

James Cutting et al., "Attention and the Evolution of the Hollywood Film" (D2L)

Screen: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015)

III. History in digital images: the emblem

Week 7 (Feb 29): Verticality

Whissel, "Introduction" and "The New Verticality"

Screen: *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004)

Week 8 (Mar 7): Multitudes

Whissel, "The Digital Multitude as Effects Emblem"

Screen: *World War Z* (Marc Forster, 2013)

Week 9 (Mar 14): Vitality

Whissel, "Vital Figures: the Life and Death of Digital Creatures"

Screen: *The Host* (Bong Joon-Ho, 2006)

Week 10 (Mar 21): Metamorphosis

Whissel, "The Morph: Protean Possibility and Algorithmic Control"

Screen: *Dark City* (Alex Proyas, 1998)

Mar 25: GOOD FRIDAY, NO CLASS

IV. Digital aesthetics: issues in mise-en-scene

Week 11 (Mar 28): Lighting

Prince, "Painting with Digital Light"

Screen: *Zodiac* (David Fincher, 2007)

paper proposals (10%) due

Week 12 (Apr 4): Performance

Prince, "Actors and Algorithms"

Screen: *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (Fincher, 2008)

Week 13 (Apr 11): Depth

Prince, "Immersive Aesthetics"

Screen: *Coraline* (Henry Selick, 2009)

final papers (35%) due 4/18