

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

Film Studies FILM 301.20 L01

TOPIC IN NATIONAL CINEMA (Independent American Cinema)

Fall 2018

September 6—December 6 (excluding Nov. 13th and Nov. 15th)

Labs: Tuesdays 9:30AM—12:15, Lectures Thursdays 10:30—12:20PM

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30 - 1:30

Course Description

The course will examine the phenomenon of American Independent Cinema since roughly 1980. Traditionally, national cinemas have defined themselves against the globally dominant Hollywood cinema of America. “Independent” cinema in the United States has similarly developed as a national cinema movement within the dominant country itself, dealing specifically with American society and defining itself against the global blockbuster mentality of Hollywood. Examples from this movement will be analyzed in order to consider how alternative visions have or have not been able to exist within this industrial structure that is much more “co-dependent” than strictly independent. Consideration will also be given to how these films have negotiated the centre-margin relationship within American culture.

Objectives of the Course

In addition to learning specifically about the topic of the American independent cinema, students will learn broader skills in film analysis and visual literacy.

Textbooks and Readings

King, Geoff. *American Independent Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.
Other readings will be available through D2L.

All readings are *required*.

Internet and electronic communication device information:

During screenings: no use of laptops or personal devices. Offenders will be asked to shut off devices or leave. During lectures: laptops and personal devices should be used for the purposes of note taking only; ideally Wi-Fi should be disabled except when instructed otherwise.

Warning

This is a university course in film studies. As adults, you are expected to be able to distance yourself from the material being presented. Some of the films may be disturbing and/or offensive to you personally.

Assignments and Evaluation

10% **Oral Report**

Each student will provide a short report of 5 minutes on a key American independent filmmaker. Further details and a list will be provided early in the class; students are welcome to make other suggestions. A schedule will be developed thereafter.

20% **Short Essay**

Compare at least three conceptions of “independent cinema” that we have encountered in our readings. You will be evaluated on your understanding of and ability to perceptively compare and contrast different “versions” of the American independent cinema.

3-4 pages. Significantly under-length assignments may fail regardless of their quality. Consult the style guide provided on D2L and follow it fully. No essay that lacks proper citations (page numbers included) will pass.

Due: October 2

5% **Research Essay Proposal/Annotated Bibliography**

This is a proposal for the Research Paper (see below). It consists of two parts. 1: a one-page description of your topic and preliminary argument, outlining the shape your essay will take. 2: a 2-3 page annotated bibliography that lists the primary and scholarly sources that you will use and provides a brief (2-3 sentence) explanation of the relevance of each. See more thorough instructions on D2L.

Please read the style guide on D2L and follow it fully. This assignment will be graded on a pass/fail basis, but no Research Papers will be accepted without a Proposal first having been received.

Due November 1

25% **Research Paper**

You may write about a film from our course or another American independent feature of your own choice. You will produce a contextual analysis of a film, focused on how it expands our understanding of the American independent film in some industrial, formal, technological or cultural dimension. 6/7 pages. Please read the style guide on D2L and follow it fully. No essay that lacks proper citations (with page numbers) will pass.

Due December 4

30% **Final Exam** (scheduled by registrar)

The final exam will cover all the course material, including readings, films and lectures. It will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions.

10% **Participation**

Students are expected to both attend both lectures and labs and participate in classroom discussion. Marks will be assigned determined by the quality and volume of participation. A

student who attends regularly but does not participate in classroom discussion can expect no more than 5/10.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: YES

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

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

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

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.pdf>.

- Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should advise their instructors in advance if they will be missing quizzes, presentations, in-class assignments, or group meetings.
- 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.

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	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations* *
4.00	Outstanding performance	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent performance	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70	Approaching excellent performance	A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30	Exceeding good performance	B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good performance	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70	Approaching good performance	B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30	Exceeding satisfactory performance	C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory performance	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70	Approaching satisfactory performance	C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Marginal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00	Minimal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Failure. Did not meet course requirements.	F	0 - 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. It is the student's responsibility to educate him or herself on what is and is not plagiarism; ignorance of the rules will not be considered a defense for having

violated them.

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, MLA, and others), visit <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
STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE	http://ucalgary.ca/ssc

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App 	http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents
STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps • Student Ombudsman 	https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/ http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds
SU WELLNESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Services • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips 	403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health 403-266-HELP (4357) http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus <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 of Lectures and Readings

All readings are from Geoff King's *American Independent Cinema* except where noted.

September 6

General Introduction

September 11/13

Week 1

Defining Independent Cinema

Happiness (Todd Solondz, 1998) 140 min

King. "Introduction." 1-10.

Staiger, Janet. "Independent of What? Sorting Out Differences from Hollywood." *American Independent Cinema: Indie, Indiewood and Beyond*. Eds. Geoff King, Claire Molloy and Yannis Tzioumakis. London: Routledge, 2012. 15-27.

September 18/20

Week 2

Hollywood and Its Other

The Player (Robert Altman, 1991)

King. "Chapter 1: Industry." 11-57.

Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema: Indie, Indiewood and Beyond*. Eds. Geoff King, Claire Molloy and Yannis Tzioumakis. London: Routledge, 2012. 28-40.

September 25/27

Week 3

Form and Innovation

Slacker (Richard Linklater, 1990)
King. "Chapter 2: Form." 59-104.

October 2/4

Week 4

Narrative

Stranger than Paradise (Jim Jarmusch, 1984)

King. "Chapter 3: Narrative." 105-64.

Short Essay is due October 2

October 9/11

Week 5

Genre and Indie

Killing of a Chinese Bookie (John Cassavetes, 1976)

King. "Chapter 4: Genre." 165-96.

October 16/18

Week 6

The Smart, the Ironic

Bottle Rocket (Wes Anderson, 1996)

Sconce, Jeffery. "Irony, Nihilism and the New American 'Smart' Film." *Screen* 43.4 (Winter 2002): 349-69.

October 23/25

Week 7

Quality, Marketing and the "Major Independent"

Sex, Lies and Videotape (Steven Soderbergh, 1989)

Perren, Alisa. "Sex, Lies and Marketing: Miramax and the Development of the Quality Indie Blockbuster." *Film Quarterly* 55.2 (Winter 2001/2): 30-9.

Wyatt, Justin. "The Formation of the 'Major Independent': New Line and Miramax."

Contemporary Hollywood Cinema. Eds. Steve Neale and Murray Smith. London: Routledge, 1998. 74-90.

October 30/November 1

Week 8

Indie Horror and the *Blair Witch* Phenomenon

The Blair Witch Project (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999)

Telotte, J.P. "The Blair Witch Project Project: Film and the Internet." *Nothing That Is:*

Millennial Cinema and the Blair Witch Controversies. Eds. Sarah L. Higley and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 37-52.

Research Essay Proposal/Annotated Bibliography is due November 1

November 6/8

Week 9

Women's Cinema and the Independent Cinema

Walking and Talking (Nicole Holofcener, 1996)

King. "Chapter 5: Alternative Visions: Social, Political and Ideological Dimensions of Independent Cinema," 197-260.

November 20/22

Week 10

Black American Independent Cinema I

Do the Right Thing (Spike Lee, 1989)

Diawara, Manthia. "Black American Cinema: The New Realism." *Black American Cinema*. Ed. Manthia Diawara. New York: Routledge, 1993. 3-25.

November 27/29

Week 11

***There will be a screening but no lecture class this week.**

Black American Independent Cinema II

Daughters of the Dust (Julie Dash, 1991)

Bambara, Toni Cade. "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: *Daughters of the Dust* and the Black Independent Cinema Movement." *Black American Cinema*. Ed. Manthia Diawara. New York: Routledge, 1993. 118-44.

December 4/6

Week 12

The New Queer Cinema

Poison (Todd Haynes, 1991)

Fabulous! The Story of Queer Cinema (Lisa Aides, Lesli Klainberg)

Rich, B. Ruby. "New Queer Cinema." *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Michele Aaron. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004. 15-22.

Research Paper is Due December 4