



Religious Studies 2235G (670)
Philosophy of Film
Summer 2025-2026

Instructor: Dr. Charles Burnetts

Email: cburnet6@uwo.ca

Course Information

Calendar Description:

What makes film unique? How has film changed the way we think and feel? Can film change the world? We explore philosophical questions asked about film since its rise in the early 20th century, covering Marxist, psychoanalytic, semiotic and cognitivist thought and such thinkers as Benjamin, Eisenstein, Bazin, and Deleuze.

Extra Information: 3 hours.

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category B

Subject Code: PHILOSOP

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This 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.

The Reel and the Real: Philosophy of Film

Course No: 2235G 670 (Summer 2026)

Instructor: Dr. Charles Burnetts

Sessions: Asynchronous

Classrooms: Online

E-mail: cburnet6@uwo.ca

Office Hours: By appointment.

What makes film a unique artform? How has film changed the way we think and feel? Does film have the potential to change the world? This course will address these and other philosophical questions posed in relation to the cinema since its rise to prominence in the early 20th century, covering Marxist, psychoanalytic, semiotic and cognitivist theories of film and such thinkers as Benjamin, Eisenstein, Bazin, Metz and Deleuze. It will cover some of the central philosophers, topics and themes from classical film theory, structuralist-psychoanalytic spectatorship theory of the 1960s /70s and onwards to contemporary concerns with history, cognition and aesthetics. Topics covered will include the specificity of film, realist aesthetics, ideology and social critique, psychoanalysis and gender, postmodernism and the advent of digital technology.

Course Objectives

To develop an understanding of the rich tradition of philosophical speculation on cinema as a medium and artform, refine critical thinking skills, and develop a basic knowledge of film history. You will also learn the basics of analyzing film language (the construction of film images, systems of film editing, film sound, and the varied modes of organizing these core elements).

Course Requirements:

Preparation and Participation

Readings: Students should have read the applicable chapters or journal articles prior to watching the lecture video posted for that week. The study guides provided on OWL are intended to encourage students to think deeply about the material covered in the readings.



Films: Students should also ensure they have seen the applicable films and/or clips before the week's lecture. Link will be made available to films and excerpts on OWL.



Class Format

Goals



Information, or ideas? Are we cramming more things into our brain, or are we rewiring our brain in different ways? At university, we should aim for the highest level learning we can achieve. Here is a commonly accepted (Bloom's) taxonomy of learning:



1. Knowledge:

  Recall data or information


  Verbs: describe, identify, recall, arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, memorize, name, order, recognize, reproduce state.



4. Comprehension:

  Understand the meaning of a problem, be able to translate into own words.



  Verbs: comprehend, give example, classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate,



7. Application:

  Use a concept in a new situation



  Verbs: apply, change, construct, compute, choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write.



10. Analysis:

  Can split concepts into parts and understands the structure



  Verbs: analyze, break down, relate, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, make inferences, find evidence, test.



13. Synthesis:

  Produce something from different elements (e.g a report).

  Verbs: summarize, arrange, combine, categorize, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write.

16. Evaluation:

  Make judgments, justify a solution, etc.

  Verbs: appraise, interpret, argue, assess, attach, compare, defend, estimate, judge, predict, rate, core, select, support, value, evaluate, prove, deduce.

Do we want to get stuck at #1? I very much hope not. Unfortunately, #1 is all we can achieve if we're passive. Have you ever had the experience of thinking you understood something, only when you try to explain it to someone else you get a bit lost? As soon as we are forced to be active, like explaining an issue to someone else, we actually start heading towards a higher level of learning.

Late Paper Policy:

Late papers may be penalized at the rate of 5 marks for the first day, and 2 marks for every subsequent day late. If an assignment is late due to illness or other legitimate reasons, students must contact their tutorial leader as soon as possible with supporting documentation. If a student feels he or she has a reasonable request for an extension for an assignment, he or she must discuss this with the course lecturer.

Assessment:

Online Discussion Contributions (OWL): 40%

Each week, a discussion thread will be opened in advance of a lecture posting where students are encouraged to contribute their thoughts on the films, clips and/or readings assigned that week. Students will be graded on the timeliness and frequency of engagement with topic questions and others' responses, as well as the quality of responses. By "timeliness", we mean that student contributions should be ongoing and sustained through the course timeline.

Content Test: short answer format: 30%

PLEASE NOTE: Examinations in this course may be conducted using a remote proctoring service, such as Proctortrack. By taking this course, you are consenting to the use of this software and acknowledge that you will be required to provide personal information (including some biometric data) and the session will be recorded.

Completion of this course may require you to have a reliable internet connection and a device that meets the technical requirements for this service.

More information about this remote proctoring service, including technical requirements, is available on Western's

Remote Proctoring website at: <https://remoteproctoring.uwo.ca>.

[Course Policy on use of generative AI: it is prohibited on this course as a valid method of approaching multiple choice and written assessments, most particularly where it is deemed to have misrepresented the appropriate level of study and effort students are expected to allocate to their success on this course.]

- Length: 2 hrs online
- Short- and Medium-length answer format; no essays.
- Will cover lectures and readings.
- *If there is a valid medical or other reason mid-term exam cannot be taken when administered, documentation must be provided to the appropriate Faculty Dean's Office. Students who receive medical or other accommodation will take a make-up exam. Students who do not receive a medical or other accommodation and miss the mid-term exam will receive a 0 as a mid-term exam mark. The Policy on*

Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf). *The required Student Medical Certificate can be found at:*
http://www.kings.uwo.ca/pt5/assets/File/SMC_Revised_March_2011.pdf .

Essay: 30%

- Approximate length: 2000 words.
- Essays due 11:59pm, June 9th. For every day that it is late, you lose percentage points. Get it in on time!

Readings

Compulsory: Available on OWL

Schedule

Wk	Date posted	Topic	Readings/Viewings (available on OWL under Lessons)
1	May 5	Introduction: <u>Philosophy OF Film and Film Philosophy</u>	In-lecture excerpts from <i>Waking Life</i> (dir. Richard Linklater, 2001, USA) and <i>2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle</i> (English: Two or Three Things I know About Her, dir. Jean-Luc Godard, 1967, France). <u>READING:</u> Murray Smith, 'Film and Philosophy,' in Douglas & Renov (eds.), <i>SAGE Handbook of Film Studies</i> , (London: SAGE, 2008), 147-163.
2	May 7	Lecture Topic: <u>Formalism: The Close-Up & The Face</u>	Clips from <i>The Joyless Street</i> (German: <i>Die Freudlose Gasse</i> , dir. P.W. Pabst, Germany, 1925); <i>The Passion of Joan of Arc</i> (French: <i>La passion de Jeanne d'Arc</i> , dir. Carl Dreyer, 1928, France); various films starring Asta Nielson; <i>Blade Runner</i> (Ridley Scott, 1981, USA) <u>READING:</u> Béla Balázs, 'The Close Up' & 'The Face of Man', in <i>Theory of the Film</i> , reprinted in Braudy and Cohen (ed.s), <i>Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings</i> (Oxford UP, 1999), 304-311.

3	May 12	Lecture Topic: <u>Formalism: Soviet Montage</u>	<p>Clips from <i>Battleship Potemkin</i> (Sergei Eisenstein, USSR 1925); <i>The Untouchables</i> (Brian de Palma, 1987, USA); <i>Ballet mécanique</i> (Fernand Leger, 1924, France)</p> <p><u>READINGS:</u> Sergei Eisenstein, 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,' in Eisenstein and Leyda (ed. and trans.), <i>Film Form: Essays in Film Theory</i>, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1949 (1-6);</p> <p>Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram,' in Eisenstein and Leyda (ed. and trans.), <i>Film Form: Essays in Film Theory</i>, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1949 (28-44).</p>
4	May 14	Lecture Topic: <u>Realism and "Neorealism"</u>	<p>Clips from <i>Bicycle Thieves</i> (Vittorio de Sica, Italy, 1948); <i>Miracle in Milan</i> (Vittorio de Sica, Italy, 1951); <i>The Wire</i> (TV series, 2002-2008)</p> <p><u>READINGS:</u> Andre Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image,' & 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,' in Bazin & Gray (ed. and trans.), <i>What is Cinema? Essays Selected and Translated</i>, Vol. 1, (U of California P, 1967), 9-16 & 23-40.</p>

5	May 19	Lecture Topic: <u>Ideology and Society</u>	<p>Clips from <i>Weekend</i> (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967, France); <i>Fahrenheit 911</i> (Michael Moore, 2004, USA); <i>Tongues Untied</i> (Marlon Riggs, 1989, USA)</p> <p><u>READINGS:</u> Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author', <i>Image, Music, Text</i>, 1977.</p> <p>Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" in Bill Nichols (ed.), <i>Movies and Methods: an Anthology</i>, U of California P, 1976 (22-30);</p> <p>Optional: Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter Cinema: <i>Vent D'est</i>" in <i>Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies</i>, NLB, 1982, 79-91.</p>
6	May 21	Lecture Topic: <u>Psychoanalysis/ Feminism</u>	<p>Clips from: <i>Vertigo</i> (Alfred Hitchcock, US 1958); <i>Peeping Tom</i> (Michael Powell, 1960, UK).</p> <p><u>READINGS:</u> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in Philip Rosen (ed.), <i>Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: a Film Theory Reader</i>, (Columbia UP, 1986) 198-209;</p> <p>Janet McCabe, "Visual Pleasures and Questions of Spectatorship" in <i>Feminist Film Studies: Writing the Woman into Cinema</i>, Wallflower, 2004 (29-36).</p>
7	May 26	Lecture Topic: <u>Film & "Remarriage"</u>	<p>Clips from <i>Bringing Up Baby</i> (Howard Hawks, 1938, USA); <i>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</i> (Michael Gondry, 2004, USA)</p> <p><u>READINGS:</u> Stanley Cavell, <i>Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage</i>, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) 111-132.</p>

		Content Test (2 hours on OWL)	
8	May 28	RECAP + Lecture Topic: <u>Postmodernity and Pastiche</u>	Clips from <i>Cabin in the Woods</i> (Joss Whedon, 2012, USA); <i>Pulp Fiction</i> (Quentin Tarantino, 1994, USA) <u>READING:</u> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in H. Foster (ed.), <i>The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture</i> , (Bay Press, 1983), 127-144.
9	June 2	Lecture Topic: <u>Film and "Learning How to Desire"</u>	Clips from <i>The Pervert's Guide to Cinema</i> (dir. Sophie Fiennes, 2006, UK) <u>READING:</u> Slavoj Žižek: 'Looking Awry' in <i>Everything You Wanted to Know about Lacan: (but were afraid to ask Hitchcock)</i> , (London: Verso, 1992), reprinted in Stam & Miller (eds.), <i>Film and Theory: An Anthology</i> , (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 524-238.
10	June 4	Lecture Topic: <u>Movement, Time and Humour</u>	Clips from: <i>L'Eclisse</i> (Michaelangelo Antonioni, 1962, Italy); <i>Duck Soup</i> (Leo McCarey, 1933, USA); <i>Helpmates</i> (James Parrot, 1932, USA) <u>READINGS:</u> Gilles Deleuze, 'The Affect as Entity' & 'The Crisis of the Action Image', in <i>Cinema 1: The Movement- Image</i> , London: The Athlone Press, 95-101.
11	June 9	Review for Final Exam Hand in Course Essay	
		OWL discussion forums topics close.	

Statement on Academic Offences:

King's is committed to Academic Integrity.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>.

PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING ARE SERIOUS SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES

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>). Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Additional Information:

Support Services

The web site for Registrarial Service at King's University College is www.kings.uwo.ca, and Counselling and Student Development Services are linked from <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/dos>.

Tests/Examinations

Students are responsible for seeking accommodation with appropriate documentation, **prior** to writing tests/examinations, if they are of the view that their performance may be affected by extenuating circumstances.

Faculty Office Hours: Faculty office hours can be found on the King's website at: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/files/file/OfficeHours.pdf>, and are also posted on the bulletin board across from the Faculty Secretaries' Office on the 2nd floor of Dante Lenardon Hall.

Unless otherwise noted by your Professor, the following policy is in effect:

Use of Electronic Devices:

You are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations.

July 2, 2009

King's University College General Course Policies 2025-2026

1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences

Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at [here](#).

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course. Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course. For further information, please see:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/exams/index.html.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

2. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King’s University College:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/personal-counselling>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King’s University College:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>

GBSV Support:

King’s is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/campus-safety-and-reporting/gender-and-sexual-violence>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing Care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western’s Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by [email](#) or by calling 519-661-3568.

See also https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/campus-safety-and-reporting/student-code-of-conduct>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

4. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at [here](#).

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

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; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/OriginalityReports-TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

5. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member.

Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

6. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

7. Policy on Attendance

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.