

University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film
FILM 409 (L01): Special Topics in Film Studies:
THE AUDIOVISUAL ESSAY

WINTER 2023: January 9 to April 12 (excluding Feb. 19-25 and April 07 and 10)

Discussion: F 15:00 to 16:50 SS203
Lab M 15:00 to 17:45 SS018 Section 2

In-Person

Instructor:	Ryan Pierson
Office:	SS214
Email:	Ryan.pierson@ucalgary.ca
Web Page:	D2L (access via MyUofC portal)
Office Hours:	M 14:00 – 15:15

Course Description

This course will explore a relatively new genre of film criticism and analysis called the audiovisual essay (sometimes also called videographic criticism or the academic film essay). We will interrogate how the visual essay makes arguments about film using the formal components *of* film (cinematography, editing, sound). In aid of this, we will be performing four kinds of activities:

1. Composing short video exercises, to familiarize ourselves with the software and the possibilities of audiovisual manipulation.
2. Analyzing and discussing audiovisual essays, to see how other professional and academic video essayists have used the form.
3. Analyzing and discussing the theoretical literature on audiovisual essays, to discern how using picture and sound differs from using words on a page.
4. Composing one sustained video essay.

Additional Information

Note that our lab days will be spent in the computer lab, SS018 Section 2. This means that students will be responsible for screening the assigned videos on their own, outside of class.

The weekly schedule of topics and readings can be found at the end of this outline.

Students are responsible for reading and following all course and university policies discussed in this outline.

Software and Computer Lab Information

For this course, you will need access to editing software to complete your assignments. While a number of editing programs are available for free or purchase online, I *strongly* recommend you use Adobe Premiere. This will give everyone in the course a shared basis, and a chance for students to help each other out if and when problems are encountered.

You can choose to download editing software directly to your computer, or you may choose to use the Arts Computer Lab computers and their Adobe Premiere software. You can purchase Premiere online at a discount here:

https://ucalgary.onthehub.com/WebStore/Security/Signin.aspx?rurl=%2fWebStore%2fShopperResources.aspx%3fcmi_cs%3d1%26cmi_mnuMain%3daf78cee8-686b-e911-8115-000d3af41938.

Objectives of the Course

1. To strengthen your knowledge of the basic elements of film language (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound, narrative) and how they work together, through analyzing and manipulating audiovisual materials
2. To strengthen your ability to compose an argument or narrative, by composing a short-form video essay
3. To strengthen your skills of collaboration with peers, in small group work

Readings and Videos

All readings will be available on D2L.

All videos are either openly available on the internet (with links provided), or will be available on D2L. Please note that during weeks 2-5, you will be expected to screen the videos on your own time before discussion day.

Learning Technologies and Requirements

In order to complete courses, University of Calgary students are required to have reliable access to the following technology:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security and malware updates, with current antivirus software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection, and a current and updated web browser;
- A webcam (built-in or external), and a microphone and speaker (built-in or external) or headset with microphone (for online synchronous courses only).

If you need access to other software programs to complete assignments, your instructor will provide relevant information and links.

If you have technical difficulties, contact IT support services. See

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/student-campus-services-information-technologies-it.html>

Policy on the Use of Electronic Communication Devices

Laptops are for note-taking only. In addition, no phones are allowed in class.

Please familiarize yourself with the University's policy on the recording of lectures, which is outlined at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-6.html>, and carefully review the section on Instructor Copyright at the end of this outline.

Assignments and Evaluation

Class Participation (ongoing, Fridays), 15%

Because this course is based around workshopping and small group work, participation is essential. You will be expected to participate in group exercises, as well as group discussions. One in-class comment will get you 50% participation credit that day; two or more comments will get you full participation credit. (Where necessary, special accommodations may be arranged.)

If you miss a day of discussion, please submit by email a 300-word commentary on the week's material within 7 days of your absence.

Notes (ongoing, due Fridays), 15%

During the first half of the course, you will be expected to screen a number of video essays privately each week. You are expected to take notes on every video essay that you screen, paying particular attention to the formal trait relevant that week (editing, sound, etc.). Each video essay should have 8-10 lines of notes.

During the second half of the course, you are expected to take notes on the week's readings. Take about a page of notes (approx. 300 words) on each reading, noting key points of its argument, structure, and style. Quote where appropriate.

Submit each week's notes to the Dropbox on D2L before class time on Thursdays.

Video exercises (Due Jan. 18, Jan. 25, Feb. 1, Feb. 8), 5% each

In order to familiarize you with your video editing software, four of the first five Mondays of the course will be spent doing brief exercises. You will be given a strict set of formal parameters, within which you will need to complete the exercise before the due date (always the Wednesday of that week, by 12 p.m.). You will submit your exercise as an mp4 to a shared folder on a Google Drive that will be shared by the instructor

Do not spend more than 2 hours and 30 minutes on each exercise. When you have finished your exercise, export it to a playable format and upload it to D2L.

If you miss repeated days in class, it is imperative that you nonetheless have completed all the exercises before Week 6.

Project pitch (due Feb. 13), 15%

By Week 6, you should have a firm enough idea for your final video essay that you can pitch the idea to the class, roughly in the manner of a paper proposal. There are two components: a presentation and a write-up.

The presentation should include a clip of the film material you want to analyze, your strategy for how you will analyze it (what structure it will follow, what techniques you will use), and what you hope to discover or achieve. The presentation should be 7-10 minutes long.

The write-up should similarly lay out your strategy and expected outcomes. It should be 300 words in length.

Video Essay, due Apr. 19, 35%

A video essay on a topic of your choice (cleared by the instructor), roughly 3-5 minutes in length. You will submit your video as an mp4 to a dropbox on D2L.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

Note: You must complete all assignments or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

Submission of Assignments

Please submit all assignments by uploading them to the designated D2L dropbox. Include your name and ID number on all assignments. Be sure to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and to submit the proper version.

Private information related to individual students is treated with the utmost regard by University of Calgary faculty. Student assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty, and personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. Please note that instructors may use audio or video recording for lesson capture, assessment of student learning, and self-assessment of teaching practices.

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline will be penalized with the loss of a partial letter grade (A- to B+, B to B-, etc.) for each day late.

Student Accommodations

Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS); SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/. Students who require an accommodation based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. For the full policy on Student Accommodations, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/student-accommodation-policy>

Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) or another legitimate reason should contact their instructors.

Expectations for Writing

Department policy directs that all written assignments and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses be assessed at least partly on writing skills. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.) but also general clarity and organization and proper documentation of research sources. For further information, please refer to the *University of Calgary Calendar* section on writing across the curriculum: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html>

Grading & Department of Communication, Media and Film Grade Scale

The following table outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department of Communication, Media and Film. Final grades are reported as letter grades. For components graded using percentages or numerical scores, those values will be used directly in calculating the final course grade, while for components graded using letter grades, the letter grades will be converted to the midpoint values listed in the final column of the table below in calculating the final course grade.

In this course, letter grades will be used for all assignments.

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%

* Column 4: If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades. Column 5: These percentage equivalents will be used for calculating final grades unless an alternative method of final grade calculation is outlined above.

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. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

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.

For information on citation and documentation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago, IEEE, etc.), visit the Student Success Centre resource links at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support> or the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) Research and Citation Resources at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

If you need help with your writing or have questions about citing sources, consult your instructor or visit the Student Success Centre, Taylor Family Digital Library. To book an appointment, go to <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support>

Instructor Intellectual Property & Copyright Legislation

Course materials created by the instructor (including lectures, course outlines, presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments, and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed, or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the same course section and term may be allowed under fair dealing. Check with the instructor if you have any questions about sharing materials with classmates.

To ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorized sharing of course materials (including instructor notes & electronic versions of textbooks), all students are required to read the *University of Calgary Policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright* at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/acceptable-use-material-protected-copyright-policy> and the requirements of the *Copyright Act* (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>). Students who use material protected by copy-right in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

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, including surveys, interviews, or observations as part of your university studies, you are responsible for obtaining research ethics approval and for following university research ethics guidelines. In some cases, your instructors may apply for course-based research ethics approval for certain assignments, and in those cases, they must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, please see <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/arts-researchers/resources-researchers-and-instructors/ethics>

Deferrals of Course Work and Requests for Reappraisal

For university regulations and procedures related to deferral of term work, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>

For information about deferrals of final examinations, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html>

For information about requesting a reappraisal of course work or of a final grade, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i.html>

Student Support Services and Resources

Please see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines> for information about student support services and resources, including Wellness and Mental Health Resources, Student Success programs and services, the Student Ombuds Office, the Student Union, and Safewalk. For resources on D2L, Zoom, Yuja, etc., see <https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/resources-for-students/>. (Find the topic menu under the icon to the left of the ELEARN banner.)

Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings

Week 1, Jan 13

Introductions: What is a video essay?

Screen and discuss:

Jessica McGoff, Bronson: *A Subversion of the Conventions of the Prison Film*:

<https://vimeo.com/118152112>

Jessica McGoff, *Andrea Arnold's Women in Landscapes*:

<https://vimeo.com/179961614>

Catherine Grant, *Un/Contained: A Video Essay on Andrea Arnold's 2009 Film Fish*

Tank:

<https://vimeo.com/93840128>

Steven Boone, 1973: *Notes on the Greatest American Film of the 1970s*:

<https://vimeo.com/33268440>

Kogonada, *What Is Neorealism?*:

<https://vimeo.com/68514760>

Kevin B. Lee, *What Makes a Video Essay Great?*:

<https://vimeo.com/199577445>

Part one: Skill-Building

Week 2, Jan 16 & 20

Editing

Discuss exercises and:

Ashley Wertz, *Quiet in Moonlight*:

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/244685503>

Christian Marclay, *Telephones*:

<https://vimeo.com/176259496>

Jacob Bricca, *Pure*:

<https://vimeo.com/12133254>

Steven Boone, *Feeling Lucky*:

<https://vimeo.com/208415334>

Editing exercises due Wednesday at 12 p.m.

Week 3, Jan 23 & 27

Sound

Discuss exercises and:

Jessica Phillips, *The Sensitive Side of Men in MMXXL*:

<https://vimeo.com/244695861>

Kogonada, *Sounds of Aronofsky*:

<https://vimeo.com/42191484>

Kevin B. Lee, *Five Ways to Read Leviathan*:

<https://vimeo.com/204440869>

Tony Zhou & Taylor Ramos, *Coen Brothers: Shot/Reverse Shot*:

<https://vimeo.com/156455111>

Sound exercise due Wednesday at 12 p.m.

Week 4, Jan 30 & Feb 3

Image

Discuss exercises and:

Steven Boone, *Low Budget Eye Candy*:

<https://vimeo.com/5980198>

Kevin B. Lee, *Steadicam Progress*:

<https://vimeo.com/56335284>

Jessica McGoff, *Cruel Optimism/Fish Tank*:

<https://vimeo.com/210616472>

Jop Leuven, *Raging Bull – And Cut*:

<https://vimeo.com/229201995>

Image exercise due Wednesday at 12 p.m.

Week 5, Feb 6 & 10

Structure & Narrative

Discuss exercises and:

LJ Frezza, *Nothing*:

<https://vimeo.com/88077122>

Tony Zhou & Taylor Ramos, *F for Fake – How to Structure a Video Essay*:

<https://vimeo.com/123759973>

Patrick Keating, *Motifs of Movement and Modernity*:

<https://vimeo.com/170535380>

Katie Bird, *Feeling and Thought as They Take Form*:

<http://mediacommons.org/intransition/feeling-and-thought-they-take-form-early-steadicam-labor-and-technology-1974-1985>

Structure & Narrative exercise due Wednesday at 12 p.m.

Week 6, Feb 13 & 17

Pitch video projects

Written pitches and video notes due Monday by class time

Week 7, Feb 20 & 24

Break

Part 2: Theorizing audiovisual work

Week 8, Feb 27 & Mar 3

Pitch video projects cont'd

Week 9, Mar 6 & 10

Discuss reading:

Andrew McWhirter, “Film Criticism, Film Scholarship, and the Video Essay” (D2L)

Week 10, Mar 13 & 17

Discuss reading:

In/Transition, 6.1:

<http://mediacommons.org/intransition/journal-videographic-film-moving-image-studies-71-2020>

Week 11, Mar 20 & 24

Discuss reading:

Christian Keathley, “La Camera-Stylo” (D2L)

Week 12, Mar 27 & 31

Discuss reading:

Laura Mulvey, "The Pensive Spectator" (D2L)

Week 13, Apr 3

Lab day only

Week 14, Apr 10

Easter Monday—no class

*Final videos due Apr 19