

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG**  
**ENGL – 4741 – 001**  
**Topics in Screen Studies: The Essay Film**

Term: Spring 2017  
Time: Tuesdays/Thursdays 9.00am-12.30pm  
Room: 3C27  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12.30pm-2.30pm

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The essay film is a hybrid form, drawing on the energies and conventions of a whole range of literary, theoretical, and cinematic genres. This course investigates the formation and development of the essay film and maps its connections to other film modes and genres, from its relationship to documentary film to its association with experimental cinema. The course takes stock of the essay film today and examines the wide range of contemporary productions that fall into this very elastic category, whether they are crafted for the cinema, designed for the gallery, or most at home on the internet. The power to create and circulate images, as well as the ability to critique and recontextualize already existing ones, stands at the very heart of the essay film. The convergence of the personal and political that defines the genre resides in the essay film’s practice of thinking with sound and image.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Alter, Nora and Timothy Corrigan, eds. *Essays on the Essay Film*. New York: Columbia UP, 2017.

**RECOMMENDED TEXTS**

Students should have access to a style guide that provides details on proper MLA formatting and documentation. The 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* by Joseph Gibaldi is the authoritative resource for all questions of style, format, and documentation. A legitimate online source of information regarding MLA documentation is Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

**ASSIGNMENTS**

Rapid Response #1	(750-1000 words)	Due by May 18th	20%
Rapid Response #2	(750-1000 words)	Due by June 6th	20%
Research Essay	(2500-3000 words)	Due July 7th	50%
Attendance and Participation			10%

**PARTICIPATION RUBRIC**

Participation is based on attendance, but more importantly on the quality of your contributions to class discussion and demonstrated evidence that you have read and thought about the material in advance of class. The rubric below is freely adapted from the guidelines provided by the University of Winnipeg’s Senate Curriculum Committee.

**Outstanding (9.0-10):** Consistent on-time attendance and participation in class discussions and activities that demonstrate thorough preparation for the class. Collegial interaction with peers and

professor that builds insightfully on discussion and formulates original questions about the course material. Demonstration of exceptional in-class ability.

**Excellent (8.0-8.9):** Consistent on-time attendance and participation in class discussions and activities that demonstrate thorough preparation for the class. Collegial interaction with peers and professor that builds on discussion and formulates interesting questions about the course material. Demonstration of excellent in-class ability.

**Very Good (7.5-7.9):** Consistent on-time attendance and participation in class discussions and activities that demonstrate strong preparation for the class. Collegial interaction with peers and professor that shows the ability to contribute to discussion and to formulate interesting comments and questions about the course material.

**Good (7.0-7.4):** Consistent on-time attendance and participation in class discussions and activities that demonstrate satisfactory preparation for the class. Collegial interaction with peers and professor that shows the ability to contribute to discussion and offers some insights into course material.

**Fair (6.5-6.9):** Inconsistent on-time attendance and participation in class discussions and activities that suggest partial or inadequate preparation for the class. Collegial interaction with peers and professor, but characterized by some level of disengagement or the inability to grasp, communicate, or formulate questions about fundamental aspects of the course material. Occasional distracting behavior (mobile phone use, inattention) that takes away from the collegial atmosphere and collective work of the course.

**Poor (6.0-6.4):** Inconsistent on-time attendance and participation in class discussions and activities. Participation marked by disengagement with the course material resulting in infrequent or irrelevant contributions to class discussions. Frequent distracting behavior (mobile phone use, laptop or tablet use, other forms of inattention) that takes away from the collegial atmosphere of the class and compromises the collective work of the course.

**Very Poor (5.0-5.9):** Inconsistent on-time attendance or extended absences that compromise ability to participate fully in the work of the course. Frequent distracting behavior (mobile phone use, laptop or tablet use, other forms of inattention or misbehaviour) that takes away from the collegial atmosphere of the classroom and compromises the collective work of the course.

**Fail (0.0-4.9):** Frequent absences and consistently poor preparation that compromise required classroom contributions. Frequent distracting behavior (mobile phone use, laptop or tablet use, other forms of inattention or misbehaviour) that takes away from the collegial atmosphere of the classroom and compromises the collective work of the course.

### **GRADING SCALE**

A+	90 - 100%	GPA 4.50	C+	65 - 69%	GPA 2.5
A	85 - 89%	GPA 4.25	C	60 - 64%	GPA 2.0
A-	80 - 84%	GPA 4.0	D	50 - 59%	GPA 1.0
B+	75 - 79%	GPA 3.5	F	Below 50%	GPA 0
B	70 - 74%	GPA 3.0			

## **NOTES**

1. This course outline should be considered a guideline only. Time constraints and other unforeseen factors may require that some of the above topics be omitted or covered in less detail than indicated.
2. Work submitted for evaluation must be either typed or text processed.
3. Cellular phones and other electronic devices **MUST** be turned off during classes.
4. It is the student's responsibility to retain a photocopy or digitized copy of **ALL** assignments submitted for grading; in the event of loss or theft, a duplicate copy is required.
5. Students are advised to read the pertinent pages of the current course calendar for the rules regarding Registration, Voluntary Withdrawals, Academic Misconduct including plagiarism, and Appeals. **Concerning plagiarism, please note** that as a general rule, an F in the course will be the penalty recommended by the English Departmental Review Committee to the Senate Committee on Academic Misconduct for plagiarism on major assignments in English Department courses.
6. Accessibility Services:  
Students with documented disabilities, temporary or chronic medical conditions, requiring academic accommodations for tests/exams (e.g., private space) or during lectures/laboratories (e.g., note-takers) are encouraged to contact Accessibility Services (AS) at 786-9771 or [accessibilityservices@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:accessibilityservices@uwinnipeg.ca) to discuss appropriate options. All information about a student's disability or medical condition remains confidential <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/accessibility>.
7. The University of Winnipeg promotes a scent-free environment. Please be respectful of the needs of fellow classmates and the instructor by avoiding the use of scented products while attending lectures. Exposures to perfumes and other scented products (such as lotion) can trigger serious health reactions in persons with asthma, allergies, migraines or chemical sensitivities.
8. Students facing a charge of academic or non-academic misconduct may choose to contact the University of Winnipeg Students' Association (UWSA) where a student advocate will be available to answer any questions about the process, help with building a case, and ensuring students have access to support. For more information or to schedule an appointment, visit our website at [www.theuwsa.ca/academic-advocacy](http://www.theuwsa.ca/academic-advocacy) or call 204-786-9780.
9. Please note that registering in this course commits you to the date and time of the course final examination. If you are aware of possible conflicts with that date, please see me immediately during the first week of the course, in case you need to register in another course to accommodate the conflict. For appeals for deferred exams, please see the Calendar.
10. **Thursday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017** is the final date to withdraw without academic penalty from courses that begin on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 and end on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in the 2017 Spring term.

11. Late Assignment Penalties: 10% will immediately be deducted from any late assignments with an addition 5% for each weekday thereafter. No assignment more than a week late will be accepted.
12. The English Department wishes to ensure your right to privacy regarding handing in and getting back assignments is protected. Most assignments will be handed in and handed back in class or at the Instructor's office. If assignments are to be handled in another way and you are concerned about others having access to your work, you should attach to your assignment a self-addressed envelope that can be sealed. If this is not done, it is assumed that you have waived your concerns in this area.
13. Students will not be asked for identification when writing a test or examination.
14. Students are advised that the UW Bookstore may run out of textbooks early in the term. Also, the bookstore always ships textbooks back to the publisher if they are not purchased within the first few weeks of term. Students are responsible for communicating directly with the bookstore if they need to order texts or ask for texts to be held for them.
15. No unauthorized material or equipment may be brought with you to the final exam.
16. For more information regarding the English Department, please refer to our website at <http://english.uwinnipeg.ca>
17. Students who plan to conduct research interview, focus groups, surveys, or any other method of collecting data from any person, even a family member, must obtain the approval of the UHREB before commencing data collection. Exceptions are research activities in class as a learning exercise. See <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/research-human-ethics> for submission requirements and deadlines.
18. All students, faculty and staff have the right to participate, learn and work in an environment that is free of harassment and discrimination. The UW Respectful Working and Learning Environment Policy may be found online at [www.uwinnipeg.ca/respect](http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/respect)
19. Students may choose not to attend classes or write examinations on holy days of their religion, but they must notify their instructors at least two weeks in advance. Instructors will then provide opportunity for students to make up work examinations without penalty. A list of religious holidays can be found at <http://uwinnipeg.ca/academics/calendar/docs/important-notes.pdf>

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

1. When it is necessary to cancel a class due to exceptional circumstances, instructors will make every effort to inform you via uwinnipeg email, as well as the departmental assistant and Chair/Dean so that class cancellation forms can be posted outside classrooms.
2. Your uwinnipeg email address will normally be used for course related correspondence.
3. Please note that withdrawing before the VW date does not necessarily result in a fee refund.

4. Class make-up days are scheduled at the end of term for courses that conflict with holidays. July 26, 2017 for classes normally held on June 30 when the University is closed in lieu of Canada Day
5. August 14 for Jump Start classes normally held on August 7 when the University is closed for Terry Fox Day
6. No classes: May 30 for courses in the 8 week term May 1 – June 27. June 13 for courses in the 12 week term May 1 – July 26

## **SCHEDULE**

Tues, May 2	<b>Screening:</b> Introduction + <i>Letter from Siberia</i> (Chris Marker, 1958, France)
Thurs, May 4	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Sans Soleil</i> (Chris Marker, 1982, France) <b>Reading:</b> André Bazin. "Bazin on Marker." <b>Reading:</b> Georg Lukacs. "On the Nature and Form of the Essay." <b>Reading:</b> Hans Richter. "The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film."
Tues, May 9	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Man With A Movie Camera</i> (Dziga Vertov, 1928, USSR) <b>Reading:</b> Timothy Corrigan. "On the History of the Essay Film: Vertov to Varda." <b>Reading:</b> Theodor Adorno. "The Essay as Form." <b>Reading:</b> Alexandre Astruc. "The Future of Cinema."
Thurs, May 11	<b>Screening:</b> <i>News From Home</i> (Chantal Akerman, 1977, USA) <b>Reading:</b> Laura Rascaroli. "The Essay Film" <b>Reading:</b> Phillip Lopate. "In Search of the Centaur."
Tues, May 16	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Incident at Restigouche</i> (Alanis Obomsawin, 1984, Canada) <i>Mobilize</i> (Caroline Monnet, 2016, Canada) <b>Reading:</b> Paul Arthur. "Essay Questions." <b>Reading:</b> Michael Renov. "The Electronic Essay."
Thurs, May 18	No class – Professor away!
Tues, May 23	<b>Screening:</b> <i>The Black Power Mixtape 1967-75</i> (Göran Hugo Olsson, 2011, Sweden) <b>Reading:</b> Raymond Bellour. "The Cinema and the Essay as a Way of Thinking"
Thurs, May 25	<b>Screening:</b> <i>The House is Black</i> (Forough Farrokhzad, 1963, Iran) <i>Close-Up</i> (Abbas Kiarostami, 1991, Iran) <b>Reading:</b> Thomas Elsaesser. "The Essay Film: From Film Festival Favorite..."
Tues, May 30	<b>Screening:</b> <i>The Gleaners and I</i> (Agnès Varda, 2000, France) <b>Reading:</b> Rea Tajiri. "Essay Documentary"
Thurs, June 1	<b>Screening:</b> <i>The Stuart Hall Project</i> (John Akomfrah, 2013, UK) <b>Reading:</b> Isaac Julien. "From <i>Ten Thousand Waves</i> ..."
Tues, June 6	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Lovely Andrea</i> (Hito Steyerl, 2004, Germany) <b>Reading:</b> Hito Steyerl. "The Essay as Conformism?"
Thurs, June 8	<b>Screening:</b> <i>Exit</i> (Sharon Lockhart, 2008, USA) <i>Workers Leaving the Factory</i> (Harun Farocki, 1995, Germany) <b>Reading:</b> Nora Alter "The Political Imperceptible..." <b>Reading:</b> Harun Farocki and Christa Blüminger. "The ABCs of the Film Essay."
Fri, June 9	<b>Screening:</b> TBA!

**ENGL-4741-001**

**Topics in Screen Studies: The Essay Film**

**Rapid Responses (2x20%)**

**RR#1: Due by May 18**

**RR#2: Due by June 6**

Given the accelerated format of this course, this assignment asks you to submit two written responses, of 750-1000 words each, to films exactly a week after they have screened in class. Keeping with the spirit of the essay film, the shape and form of the assignment should be both exploratory and experimental. I do not want simple or straightforward summaries or standard reviews of the films. Instead, I want you to adopt the spirit of the essay film itself and proceed in the “methodically unmethodical” fashion that Theodor Adorno says characterizes the form. This could take the form of tenaciously pursuing the significance of a minor detail from the film, creatively making associations triggered by its images or ideas, or speculatively formulating connections between the film and other films, literature, theory, or visual or audio forms. These pieces can discuss the film as a whole or zero in on specific images or sequences. As Georg Lukács writes, the essay at heart takes the form of “thoughts occasioned by...” This assignment asks that you treat these films as an opportunity to open up your thought to the ideas, connections, associations, arguments, and observations that they occasion.

This assignment will be evaluated on its richness of the ideas, the clarity of the writing, and the extent to which this leap into the unknown and openness to the unexpected illuminates and elucidates the film that occasioned it. Citations should be provided in MLA format and the assignment should include a works cited that includes any films discussed.

## ENGL-4741-001

### Topics in Screen Studies: The Essay Film

#### Research Essay (50%)

Due July 7

For this research essay you are asked to write a 2500- to 3000-word paper on one of the topics below or on a topic of your own devising. You are asked, whichever option you choose, to provide me, either by email or in person, with a brief overview of your proposed paper by June 15th. Your paper should address course topics and draw on course material, but you may include in your analysis films and readings that we have not had the opportunity to discuss in class or have only mentioned in passing. Should you decide to go beyond the assigned material, though, it is especially important that you run your idea by me to ensure that it engages sufficiently with the course topic.

Your paper can take the form of a traditional academic paper using MLA format, a blog post with academic citations as well as images, clips, or hyperlinks, a video essay with accompanying 1500 word director's statement (which may be an expansion of the video essay's narration if you choose to go that route), or another experimental format that has been approved by me. Your paper should actively engage with secondary materials, both scholarly (articles and books) and more broadly intellectual (film studies blogs and journalism). Be astute in the way you bring together critical theory and online commentary, academic film studies research and informed cinephilia.

1. **Gleaning and scavenging.** As we've seen, the film essay often relies on found footage to do its work. What is the cinematic, political, and cultural significance of such absorption and reframing of textual materials? How does it connect with other forms of aesthetic, political, and social practice? How does it work in a contemporary regime or economy of images?

2. **Cognitive Mapping.** Borrowing the term Fredric Jameson uses for that process whereby we attempt to situate ourselves in a contemporary world-system that is staggering in its immensity and complexity, how does the essay film constitute a kind of cognitive mapping? From Chris Marker's globetrotting efforts to present an alternate or secret history of the twentieth century to John Akomfrah's casting of Stuart Hall as the twentieth-century's preeminent public intellectual whose life was defined by the movement and migration, how does the essay film combine the cognitive and the cartographic, the exploratory and the essayistic, the migratory and the meditative?

3. **The traumas of history.** Related to the previous question, but slightly different in orientation: how does the essay film demonstrate the inescapability of history, whether it is personal, civic, national, or international? And how might those histories be mobilized rather than immobilizing? From *Man With a Movie Camera* to *Incident at Restigouche* to *News from Home* to *Lovely Andrea*, how does the essay film deal with the traumatic and the historical? How does it communicate and engage with the historical complexities of race, of class, of gender?

4. **Your own topic.** Interested in pursuing an idea that falls outside or beyond the topics presented here? Not a problem. Develop a topic that addresses, builds on, expands, or elaborates the central concerns and dilemmas of the essay film that we have explored in class.