

AMST 490D Cinema and the City (3 credits)
O and W focus
Study Abroad London Spring 2024

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Course Description

London is one of the most frequently represented sites in the movies. What can we learn about the city and the social, economic, and political forces that have shaped it through its representation on film? And what in turn can representations of London on film teach us about cinema—about its language, its genres, and its role in constructing the popular imagination of a place or of a nation?

Our course will be structured through a two-pronged approach, as we undertake a survey of postwar representations of London while considering the relationship of film to our own passage through the city. We will use our cinematic itinerary to engage more closely with the city itself—with its landmarks, its localities, and its diverse histories and communities. In addition, we will use these representations of London to develop critical thinking skills about film as both an art form and a cultural artifact. We will familiarize ourselves with different genres including *film noir*, horror, romantic comedy, thriller, and sci fi, and with stylistic elements like *mise-en-scene*, camerawork, editing, and soundtrack, considering how cinema conventions function to construct the image of London in particular ways. Across the semester, we will take up questions of how personal and national identity are and have been negotiated through the representation of London in film. Assignments will include weekly readings and film screenings alongside media projects documenting and reflecting upon your own explorations of London. In tracing out these parallel journeys through film history and the city this history helps to construct, you will gain new knowledge of London, a new fluency in film language, alongside a sharpened set of critical thinking and oral and written communication skills.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course fulfills student learning outcomes of the UHM Study Abroad Center and the American Studies Department, and carries both an Oral Communication and a Writing Intensive focus designation.

By the end of the semester, students will have developed the ability to:

- Identify primary elements of film language and analyze their significance in the context of individual films and film genres.
- Recognize central iconographic, stylistic, and thematic elements governing the representation of London in different historical and generic contexts.
- Communicate ideas effectively through clear, engaging, and well-organized oral presentations.
- Pinpoint central arguments in assigned readings and craft effective discussion questions to highlight and explore these arguments.

- Analyze the relationship of British national identity to the representation of London in film, with an emphasis on questions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality.
- Interpret the relationship of film to their own personal experience of London and of city space in general.

Course Materials

Required texts:

Charlotte Brunson, *London in Cinema: The Cinematic City Since 1945*

J. M. Tyree, *Vanishing Streets: Journeys in London*

All other required readings will be available on Laulima.

Recommended text:

Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*

The Corrigan text offers an accessible and very useful introduction to critical thinking about film, including a glossary of technical terms, in addition to helpful writing tips.

Required films:

Attack the Block (Cornish 2011)

Passport to Pimlico (Cornelius 1949)

Blow-Up (Antonioni 1966)

An American Werewolf in London (Landis 1981)

My Beautiful Laundrette (Fears 1985)

Mona Lisa (Jordan 1986)

Notting Hill (Michell 1999)

Dirty Pretty Things (Fears 2003)

Bend It Like Beckham (Chadha 2002)

Children of Men (Cuarón 2006)

Sherlock Holmes (Ritchie 2009)

Films will be available to stream through either the Roehampton or the UHM library websites. You are also welcome to stream films through a commercial vendor (e.g. Amazon, Netflix, etc.).

Course Expectations and Assignments

Class Participation (20%)

Regular attendance at our weekly meetings, attentive participation in discussion, active listening, and thoughtful engagement with course readings and films are central requirements of this class. You are expected to come to class on time and prepared to contribute, having completed the assigned reading, viewed the assigned film, and reviewed the day's discussion questions. Participation is a crucial component of your performance in the course, and will be evaluated based on your regular attendance and engaged and thoughtful contributions to discussions.

Attendance Policy

You cannot do well in this course if you don't attend regularly. Frequent absences from class will impact your participation grade and your ability to keep up with course material. More than one absence will lower your class participation grade by one full grade per additional absence. More than two absences will also lower your overall course grade by one half grade. More than three absences will result in a F for the course. If you know in advance you need to miss class, please see me beforehand. In the event of illness or emergency, please contact me ASAP to make arrangements.

Classroom Etiquette

Phones must be silenced and put away for the duration of class. Laptops are allowed only if used for note-taking purposes exclusively. If extracurricular laptop use becomes a problem, we will have to institute a laptop-free classroom, so please be courteous to your instructors and fellow classmates and don't abuse this policy.

Film Journals (5%)

Every student is required to **keep a journal on the weekly assigned films**. This journal consists of **two primary elements: screening notes taken while viewing the film, and brief reflections made afterwards**. You are expected to take active notes while viewing films for class, jotting down stylistic or thematic elements which strike you as interesting or significant. Though this kind of note-taking may feel awkward at first, you will get better with practice. In addition, your film journal should include your post-screening reflections—thoughts, questions, or observations about the film made after viewing. Although these reflections may vary in length, they should run no less than 250 words. Film journals will aid in your participation in class discussion and strengthen your critical response posts. Although entries will not be graded individually, film journals will be evaluated at Weeks 5 and again end of the semester. Journals are evaluated on the basis of their completeness and the level of thoughtful engagement they evidence, as well as improvements over the course of the semester. We will talk more in class about the nature and practice of this assignment and do some exercises together to strengthen our film journaling muscles.

Critical Response Posts (20%)

Each seminar participant is required to post to Laulima a brief critical response to the week's readings and film. Though the quality of your engagement with course materials is more important than the length of your post, these responses should run at least 200-300 (and no more than 500) words.

The critical response posts are your opportunity to highlight issues of interest to you while identifying key questions and themes of each week's materials. **In your post, you want to evidence your engagement with the assigned readings by identifying what you take to be their key points and lines of argument**, and relating these to a consideration of the assigned film. Each post should **conclude with one question you'd like to see us take up in discussion**. Please don't forget to proofread these! And please remember, as with all your coursework, the words and ideas reflected in the critical response posts must be your own (see *Academic Integrity* above). **If you quote directly from another work or borrow words or ideas from another source, you MUST provide appropriate citations for this material**. Failure to do so will result in a failing grade for the assignment, loss of credit for the critical response posts, or a failing grade

in the course. Students will receive written feedback on their posts after their third and seventh required posts, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Posts are evaluated based on their thoughtfulness, clarity, and engagement with course materials.

Class Facilitation (10%)

Each student will **serve as facilitator once during the semester**, either individually or in pairs. As facilitator, it will be your responsibility to **generate a set of four to five discussion questions** to help guide our conversation. **Discussion questions should be emailed out to the class no later than 9 a.m. the morning of our class meeting.** Your goal in generating these questions is three-fold:

- to explore the major arguments of the week's readings;
- to make meaningful connections between the readings and the weekly film, and between these materials and issues we've considered in previous weeks;
- to suggest what seems most useful, interesting, or significant in the week's film and readings.

In addition to preparing these discussion questions, facilitators will be responsible for **providing brief introductory remarks** to help orient us to the week's materials. Introductory remarks should **last approximately five minutes**. These remarks may suggest relevant background information on the film, highlight main issues and arguments in the readings, or suggest the significance of this week's materials to our ongoing course discussions. **We will discuss effective presentation strategies in class and I will meet with each student/group individually ahead of your facilitation date, to review your discussion questions and plans for class.** You are encouraged to bring in supplemental materials—e.g. visuals, film clips, etc.—which you think would be helpful to an exploration of the week's central questions and concerns. Introductory remarks should last approximately 10 minutes and may be accompanied by a slideshow or by a traditional hard-copy handout. At the end of each facilitation session, we will take time for both peer and instructor feedback. Students will receive a written evaluation and grade for facilitation.

Midterm Presentation (15%)

In *Vanishing Streets*, J. M. Tyree interweaves his experiences as an American in London with the cinematic history of the city, suggesting how film helps to shape our imagination of place. His account is accompanied by his own snapshots of the city. Taking off from this impulse, in the midterm assignment, each student is asked to prepare a presentation reflecting upon their own experience of London and relating this experience to class materials.

To complete this assignment, each student will select a London location to visit and document—a specific landmark, a particular neighborhood, or a more general site like the Underground or the Thames. You are asked to visually document your site using still photographs, video, or a combination. In your presentation, you will offer an edited selection of these images and an analysis of how they construct your selected site in particular ways. Alongside stylistic features such as framing, camera angle, lighting, or movement, you are invited to consider (as Tyree does) your own personal engagement with or orientation to this site—the associations or expectations it calls forth and how film may relate to these investments. In addition to presenting your own

documentation of the site, you will compare this documentation to a film sequence (from a film we've viewed for class or any other) featuring the same or a similar space, considering how this sequence constructs a sense of place in similar or contrasting ways to your own images. Your goal in these presentations is to hone and practice your public speaking skills by offering an interesting and lively account of your engagement with the space of the city in the context of cinematic conventions and perspectives. Presentations should last no more than 10 minutes and will be evaluated based on their clarity and organization, level of engagement with course materials, and the depth and thoughtfulness of their analysis.

Final Project (30%)

In your final project, you must select two to three London films not viewed for class and compare and contrast the representation of London across these films. The project consists of three parts:

- a brief (one-to-two-page) project prospectus outlining your chosen films and highlighting the general questions or concerns you'll be bringing to them;
- a 10-minute presentation delivered on the last day of class, in which you highlight and illustrate the central insights of your project; and,
- a 6-7 page essay (approximately 1,800-2,100 words) that develops and supports a central argument regarding your chosen films, considering stylistic as well as thematic aspects in the context of our course conversations and concerns.

You may select these films based on genre, historical period, setting, thematic concerns, or any other meaningful grouping. Topics you might consider include:

- The portrayal of a specific landmark or neighborhood, either within a single genre or particular historical moment or across different genres or time periods.
- The representation of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, or class as these relate to the image of London in a specific genre, time period, or locale.
- The relationship of your selected films to the question of British national identity.

On the last day of class, you will present your findings in a 10-minute presentation to the class, highlighting the central points of your argument and illustrating these points with carefully selected images and/or clips. A formal prompt for the final project will be distributed in class during Week 9 and a brief prospectus and annotated bibliography will be due in Week 11 but you're encouraged to make an appointment with me at any point in the semester to discuss ideas.

Citing Sources

Learning how to properly cite your sources is an important aspect of scholarly writing. There are many excellent resources available, including Purdue University's Online Writing Lab at: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html. This site includes citation guidelines for MLA and other styles, alongside many other helpful writing tips. If after consulting this site you still have questions about how and when to cite a source, please ask.

Academic Integrity

You're welcome to draw upon outside sources in developing your ideas and insights about the films we're studying this semester but all submitted work must be your own. The words and ideas of others must be fully and properly cited in all types of writing (and this includes ideas drawn from online sources such as Wikipedia). Failure to cite the words and ideas of others constitutes plagiarism and will be dealt with accordingly. As outlined by UHM policy, academic dishonesty is punishable by grade reduction, course failure, or in serious cases, expulsion. Please refer to the UHM Student Conduct Code for additional information. Please refer to the Student Conduct Code at http://studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/policies/conduct_code/ for more information.

Course Evaluation

Class Participation: 20%

Critical Response Posts: 20%

Seminar Facilitation: 10%

Midterm Presentation: 20%

Final Project (Paper and Presentation): 30%