

Englit 1470
Spring 2004
Lowenstein, A.

Lit 1470

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FILM DIRECTORS:

DAVID CRONENBERG AND WES CRAVEN

ENGLIT 1470 (CRN 38783), Spring 2004, Tuesdays 1-5pm, LAWRN 207
Dr. Adam Lowenstein

Office Hours: CL 517F, Wednesdays 3-5pm, and by appointment
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Course Description. Directors David Cronenberg (b. 1943) and Wes Craven (b. 1939) have each carved distinctive reputations for themselves by skillfully manipulating the conventions of a popular generic form: the modern horror film. This course juxtaposes their work in order to pose questions concerning the intersection of genre and authorship. How does each director negotiate the transition from marginalized, independent cinema to more mainstream, studio-supported films? How does each draw upon and/or challenge an established genre vocabulary? How might we place Craven's recent association with the self-referential, "postmodern" horror film alongside or against Cronenberg's gravitation toward the art film? Does Cronenberg's Canadian nationality cast his films in a different light than Craven's American work? Demanding, critically complex readings will open up our discussion of such questions, and students will pose (and answer) questions of their own in essays and journals. NOTE: The films we will study feature graphic, often very disturbing sex and violence. This content is crucial to the films and to the course as a whole, so please do not enroll if you do not wish to engage such representations in a serious, critical manner.

Prerequisites. Film Analysis is STRONGLY recommended; a working knowledge of the textbook *Film Art* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson will be assumed, as this is an upper-level course in film studies. Students will be expected to speak and write about the interaction between film technique (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound) and film narrative using the technical vocabulary presented in *Film Art*.

Course Requirements. Grades will be determined through evaluation of the following (percentages are rough, not exact): weekly journal entries (20%); a mid-term essay (20%); a final essay (40%); and attendance/class participation (20%). Because your grade depends heavily on a number of different factors, passing the course requires that you MUST: attend all lectures and screenings; have all reading assignments and journals completed before that week's class; participate actively by raising questions and observations during class; and turn in all assignments by the deadlines specified in the course schedule, as NO late assignments will be accepted. Come to each class prepared with written questions/comments to share based on your weekly journal entry. Journal entries are due each week, must be at least one single-spaced, typed page each, and must answer the following questions: What are the main points of this week's readings? How do this week's readings cause you to reflect upon previous films/readings/discussions in the course? How would you relate your reflections to this week's unit title on the syllabus? Arriving late or leaving class early counts as an absence, and more than TWO unexcused absences may result in automatic failure of the course. No plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will be tolerated – any such activity may result in expulsion. If you have a disability for which you are or

may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Course Texts (available at the University of Pittsburgh Book Center and on Hillman reserve):

The two-letter abbreviations following each title provide a key to their appearances in the course schedule:

- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, seventh edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003)
- Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) [FG]
- Virginia Wright Wexman, ed., *Film and Authorship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003) [FA]
- Course Packet (available only at the Book Center) [CP]

Course Schedule

WEEK 1, JAN. 6 - INTRODUCTION: ART FILM AS HORROR FILM?

Screening: *The Virgin Spring* (Ingmar Bergman, 1960, Sweden) 88m

In-Class Writing Exercise

WEEK 2, JAN. 13 - HORROR FILM AS ART FILM?

Screening: *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972, USA) 84m

Reading: Michael Brashinsky, "The Spring, Defiled: Ingmar Bergman's *Virgin Spring* and Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left*" [CP]; Robin Wood, "Neglected Nightmares" [CP]; David Bordwell, "Authorship and Narration in Art Cinema" [FA]

WEEK 3, JAN. 20 – FILM POLITICS: "PROGRESSIVE" AND "REACTIONARY" TEXTS

Screening: *Shivers* (David Cronenberg, 1975, Canada) 87m

Reading: Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film" [CP]

WEEK 4, JAN. 27 – DEFINING GENRE AND AUTHORSHIP ACROSS ECONOMIES OF VIOLENCE

Screening: *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977, USA) 89m

D.N. Rodowick, "The Enemy Within: The Economy of Violence in *The Hills Have Eyes*" [CP]; Andrew Tudor, "Genre" [FG]; Virginia Wright Wexman, "Introduction" [FA, pp. 1-12]

WEEK 5, FEB. 3 – FILM BODIES: MOTHERHOOD, MELODRAMA, MONSTROSITY

Screening: *The Brood* (David Cronenberg, 1979, Canada) 91m

Reading: Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama" [FG]; Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" [FG]

WEEK 6, FEB. 10 – REVISING THEORIES OF GENRE AND AUTHORSHIP

Screening: *Summer of Fear* (Wes Craven, 1978, USA) 100m

Reading: Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" [FG]; Andrew Sarris,

“The Auteur Theory Revisited” [FA]

WEEK 7, FEB. 17 – SHIFTING THE LENS: “NATIONAL” AUTHORSHIP AND THE SCIENCE FICTION GENRE

Screening: *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1982, Canada) 87m

Reading: Piers Handling, “A Canadian Cronenberg” [CP]; Scott Bukatman, “Who Programs You? The Science Fiction of the Spectacle” [CP]

MID-TERM ESSAY DUE

WEEK 8, FEB. 24 – DREAMING THE GENRE, IMAGINING THE AUTHOR

Screening: *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984, USA) 92m

Reading: Bruce F. Kawin, “Children of the Light” [FG]; Colin MacCabe, “The Revenge of the Author” [FA]

WEEK 9, MAR. 2 – NATIONAL CINEMA AND/AS GENRE CINEMA

Screening: *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, 1986, USA) 100m

Reading: Jim Leach, “North of Pittsburgh: Genre and National Cinema from a Canadian Perspective” [FG]; Barry Keith Grant, “Experience and Meaning in Genre Films” [FG]

WEEK 10, MAR. 9 – ***SPRING BREAK***

WEEK 11, MAR. 16 – FILM POLITICS REVISITED: THE MATTER OF IDEOLOGY

Screening: *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (Wes Craven, 1988, USA) 98m

Reading: Judith Hess Wright, “Genre Films and the Status Quo” [FG]; Barbara Klinger, “‘Cinema/Ideology/Criticism’ Revisited: The Progressive Genre” [FG]

WEEK 12, MAR. 23 – GENDER AND HORROR, “FORM” AND “CONTENT”

Screening: *Dead Ringers* (David Cronenberg, 1988, Canada) 115m

Reading: Helen Robbins, “‘More Human Than I Am Alone’: Womb Envy in *The Fly* and *Dead Ringers*” [CP]; Andrew Klevan, “The Mysterious Disappearance of Style: Some Critical Notes about the Writing on *Dead Ringers*” [CP]

WEEK 13, MAR. 30 - NEW NIGHTMARES: SELF-REFERENCE, "POSTMODERNISM," AND THE BUSINESS OF AUTHORSHIP

Screening: *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (Wes Craven, 1994, USA) 112m

Reading: Jeffrey Sconce, “Spectacles of Death: Identification, Reflexivity, and Contemporary Horror” [CP]; Timothy Corrigan, “The Commerce of Auteursm” [FA]

WEEK 14, APR. 6 – THE VIRTUAL AUTHOR IN A DIGITAL AGE: INNER SPACE, OUTER SPACE

Screening: *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999, Canada-Great Britain) 97m

Reading: Steve Keane, “From Hardware to Fleshware: Plugging into David Cronenberg’s *eXistenZ*” [CP]; Margaret Tarratt, “Monsters from the Id” [FG]

WEEK 15, APR. 13 - CONCLUSION: ART FILM, HORROR FILM, AND THE VANISHING POINT OF GENRE/AUTHORSHIP

Screening: *Spider* (David Cronenberg, 2002, Canada-Great Britain-France) 98m

Reading: Mikita Brottman and David Sterritt, "*Spider* Reveals a More Nuanced Cronenberg"

[CP]

FINAL ESSAY DUE

Feature Filmographies

David Cronenberg

Stereo (1969); *Crimes of the Future* (1970); *Shivers* (1975); *Rabid* (1977); *East Company* (1979); *The Brood* (1979); *Scanners* (1981); *Videodrome* (1983); *The Dead Zone* (1983); *The Fly* (1986); *Dead Ringers* (1988); *Naked Lunch* (1991); *M. Butterfly* (1993); *Crash* (1996); *eXistenZ* (1999); *Spider* (2002)

Wes Craven

Last House on the Left (1972); *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977); *Stranger in Our House/Summer of Fear* (TVM, 1978); *Deadly Blessing* (1981); *Swamp Thing* (1981); *The Hills Have Eyes Part II* (1984); *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984); *Invitation to Hell* (TVM, 1984); *Chiller* (TVM, 1985); *Deadly Friend* (1986); *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988); *Shocker* (1989); *Night Visions* (TVM, 1990); *The People Under the Stairs* (1991); *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1994); *Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995); *Scream* (1996); *Scream 2* (1998); *Music of the Heart* (1999); *Scream 3* (2000)