

Special Topics: Cult Film, Englit 1480
Spring Semester 07-2
T 6-9:50
Lawn 207
CRN: 20062

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What constitutes the criteria by which a film is identified as cult? As a starting point, we can identify that the essential element (among many perhaps) is the audience. A cult movie is not made; a film only becomes cult through the consumption patterns of an audience. Frequently, films regarded as economic failures have been reclaimed by niche audiences, who then make the film their own. The perfect example of such a phenomena is *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, but it is only one example of many. Has the nature of cult viewership shifted in response to technological innovation: at first vcrs, then dvds and now the internet? Does a cult designation lose some of its special status now that unavailable films or banned films are increasingly accessible due to internet commerce (international shopping, ebay, bootlegs, downloads). Or, will cult endure as cult fandom functions as a sign of membership in some designated imagined community? The films generally identified as such are frequently termed as subversive or transgressive, but in some cases the cult fandom that surrounds the film is indicative of a different "use" by the audience, especially in terms of educational films such as *Reefer Madness*.

This course will consider a variety of American and foreign films that are popularly and critically identified as "cult" films. Within the larger analysis of the films, we will investigate the history of cult film, in particular its connections with exploitation cinema and the midnight movie phenomena. We will think about how and why films are defined as cult, as well as the politics behind such a definition. Because cult film is often discussed as an oppositional cinema or an underground cinema, we will consider how the films operate in relation to the mainstream and the avant garde. In the course, we will view various types of films within a larger interrogation of the defining features of this loosely constituted genre, as well as the films of numerous "cult" identified directors, including Tod Browning, David Lynch, John Waters, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Dario Argento.

Required Books

Hoberman, J. and Rosenbaum, Jonathan. *Midnight Movies*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983.

Jancovich, Mark, et al (Ed). *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*. Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2003.

Supplemental Readings on CourseWeb/ Blackboard

Grading

Journal Responses	15
Class Participation/ Attendance	15
Midterm	30
Final	40

Your final grade will be calculated from the 100 possible points, using the 90-80-70-60 scale. You will be notified if you are in danger of failing.

Attendance: You are expected to arrive on time for all classes and remain for the entire class period – attendance will be taken. You are responsible for viewing all the required films, reading each assignment, and being prepared for the discussion. If you miss a significant portion of a

class, you will be considered absent. While each absence *will* negatively affect your attendance/participation grade, if you miss 2 classes, you will receive *no credit* for class attendance/participation. Active participation in class discussion is encouraged as well as required. Please note: as much of the subject matter of the class (and the questions for the exams) will take place in lecture and discussion, missing classes will greatly affect your ability to keep up with the course.

Note: Watching films in a classroom requires different ways of seeing: pay close attention to *how* events unfold and *why* things are important. Take notes as you watch the film. An excellent resource for information on any given film is www.imdb.com; I suggest you stop there before or after you view an assigned film. You can find reviews, character names, cast, production information, etc. all films are available at the Hillman Library Media Center if you would like to view the film more than once.

Academic Integrity and Reasonably Correct Prose All work must be your own, or should be suitably referenced. Additionally, you must proofread and correct all grammatical errors in your written work before you hand it in. All work must be typed in standard 12 point font and double spaced.

Plagiarism Department policy
Plagiarism by a student is:

- when a student presents as his/her own, for academic evaluation, the ideas, representations, or works of another person or persons without customary and proper acknowledgement of sources.
- when a student submits work of another person in a manner which represents the work to be his/her own.
- when a student knowingly permits his/her work to be submitted by another person without the instructor's authorization. ("Student Obligations and Adjudication," University Policy 02-03-03).

If you draw on or quote from the works of others, you must formally acknowledge that you are doing so. If you are quoting someone else, indicate this by using appropriate quotation marks, and giving the reference for your material (yes, this includes the internet). You should turn in written assignments that are of your own composition, not the work of others. If you plagiarize, you will fail.

Journal Responses The journal responses are essentially a one page response to the film and readings. I use the term journal in order to indicate that these are not "official" writing assignments, but a place to explore ideas and work through concepts. Initially, I am requiring that you turn in a hard copy, though later in the semester we may switch to a digital dropbox on the CourseWeb. These journal responses will aid you in the longer papers due at midterm and finals.

Exams You will have a midterm and final that may include a short in-class portion and take-home portion.

Quizzes Make sure you do the reading because there may be some pop quizzes.

The 'R' Rating Most of the films that we view this semester are rated 'R' and contain what may be considered objectionable violence, language, and sexuality. If you foresee an objection to viewing any of the scheduled films, then I encourage you to see me immediately for alternate arrangements. We will use this "objectionable" material as a platform to discuss the 'R' ratings, the changing rules of acceptability in the American film industry and culture, and why films that transgress the norms of mainstream film practices are often claimed by audiences as cult objects.

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

Schedule of Assignments

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| 1/9 | Introduction, selections from Sontag, "Notes on Camp" (full article available on CourseWeb) |
| 1/16 | <i>Freaks</i> (Browning, 1932) V-2151, 64 min
Reading: Chapter 9 <i>MM</i> , |
| 1/23 | <i>Rocky Horror Picture Show</i> (Sharman, 1975) DVD-225 98 min
Reading: Chapter 1 <i>MM</i> , Chapter 7 <i>MM</i> |
| 1/30 | <i>Martin</i> (Romero, 1977) V-476 97 min
Reading: Chapter 5 <i>MM</i> , J.P. Telotte "Beyond All Reason: The Nature of Cult" on CourseWeb |
| 2/6 | <i>Blue Velvet</i> , (Lynch, 1986) DVD-709 120 min
Excerpts <i>Eraserhead</i> , (Lynch, 1977) DVD 4042 108 min
<i>Twin Peaks</i> (Lynch, 1990) DVD-485
Reading: Chapter 8 <i>MM</i> , Allison Graham "Journey to the Center of the Fifties: The Cult of Banality" on CourseWeb |
| 2/13 | <i>Pink Flamingos: An Exercise in Poor Taste</i> (Waters, 1972) DVD-482 108 min
Reading: Chapter 2 <i>MM</i> , Chapter 6 <i>MM</i> |
| 2/20 | <i>Santa Sangre</i> (Jodorowsky, 1989) V-85 123 min
Reading: Chapter 4 <i>MM</i> , Joanne Hollows "The Masculinity of Cult" (Chapter 3 <i>DC</i>) |
| 2/27 | <i>Phenomena</i> (Argento, 1995) 110 min
Reading: Peter Hutchings "The Argento Effect" (Chapter 8 <i>DC</i>)
MIDTERM ESSAY DUE |
| 3/6 | Spring Break |
| 3/13 | <i>Dead Alive</i> (Jackson, 1992) DVD 2335 97 min
Reading: Harmony H. Wu "Trading in Horror, Cult and Matricide:" |

Peter Jackson's Phenomenal Bad Taste and New Zealand fantasies
of Inter/National cinematic Success" (Chapter 6 in *DC*)

- 3/20 *Shivers* (Cronenberg, 1975) DVD- 62 87 min
Reading: Ernest Mathijs "The Making of a Cult Reputation:
Topicality and Controversy in the Critical Reception of *Shivers*"
(Chapter 7 in *DC*)
- 3/27 *The Wickerman* (Hardy, 1973) DVD- 444 88 min
Reading: Barry K. Grant "Science Fiction Double Feature:
Ideology in the Cult Film" on CourseWeb
- 4/3 *Superfly* (Parks, 1972) DVD-2125 93 min,
excerpt *Badassss Cinema V-8177*
Reading: TBA on CourseWeb
- 4/10 *Repo Man* (Cox, 1984) DVD 3234 92 min
Reading: David Lavery "Gnosticism and the Cult Film" on
CourseWeb, Chapter 10 *MM*
- 4/17 *Showgirls* (Verhoeven, 1995) DVD 171 131 min
Reading: Jacinda Read "The Cult of Masculinity: From Fan-boys to
Academic Bad-Boys" (Chapter 4 *DC*)
Final Essay Due