Film Studies 212-005: Intermediate Topics in Film Studies

Introduction to Horror Films

General Information:
MW 6:00-7:50
Curtin 104

Instructor: Adam Ochonicky
Office: Curtin 483
Office Hours:
Office Phone: 414-229-5959
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Required Texts:

A course packet is available at Clark Graphics (2915 N. Oakland, 414-962-4633).

The Phillips text may be purchased at People’s Books (2122 E. Locust St., 414-962-0575).

Course Description:
Horror films often have been considered as being among the lowest and most exploitative of cinematic genres. Despite such criticisms, the horror genre is more complex than it initially may seem to be; lurking beneath the bloody surface are unique insights and commentaries on the various contexts in which such films were produced. Critics from a variety of fields have recognized that horror films provide a complicated but popular forum in which social tensions may be interrogated. This course will serve as an introduction to major films within the genre, from the 1920s to works released in recent years. Through weekly screenings and critical readings, students will consider how the horror genre has served as a barometer of sorts for cultural anxieties at particular historic moments. Additionally, students will focus on the numerous aesthetic choices and filmmaking techniques that are evident throughout our course films in order to reveal both continuity and growth within the genre.

Course Requirements and Grades:
Final Grades for the course will be determined using the following scale:
- Participation 30%
- Weekly Responses 30%
- Midterm 20%
- Final Paper 20%

Participation (30%):
Your participation grade will be assessed according to your attentiveness and involvement in class discussions, as well as your attendance. Aside from screenings, much of our class time will be spent analyzing the films and assigned readings; as such, it is important that all students come...
prepared to contribute and share their thoughtful perspectives. Being unprepared for our discussions (for instance, by not completing the readings or habitually missing screenings) will result in a substantial reduction of the participation grade. It is expected that students will be respectful and considerate of each other during class discussions. Students also need to be attentive during screenings; you should be taking notes while viewing the course films.

Because we have a limited amount of class time to screen and discuss our films, regular and prompt attendance is extremely important. **More than five absences will result in a failing grade for the course, regardless of the explanation for missing class.** There will be no distinction between an “excused” or “unexcused” absence, so class should not be skipped except for an emergency or illness. In addition, if you arrive more than ten minutes late or leave early without my permission, you will receive a full absence. If you miss a screening, you will need to make arrangements to watch that week’s film on your own time.

Finally, the participation grade may be reduced and/or I may give you an “absence” for any of the following reasons:
- Use of cell phones (including texting) or personal music devices during class
- Sleeping during class
- Having your laptop open during a screening
- Excessive talking (i.e. having private conversations throughout class)

**Weekly Responses (30%):**
Each week, you are required to submit a **typed response to the readings and screening** that is approximately **one full page and single-spaced.** Be sure to use the standard 12-point Times New Roman font with one-inch margins, as well as MLA citations for material that you include from the readings. The purpose of these weekly responses is twofold; you are to demonstrate that you have completed the readings by identifying and discussing at least two ideas that you feel are significant, and then you are to apply those concepts to that week’s film.

This assignment should be composed as an essay, but there is not a strict format that you need to follow (for example, you do not need to write an introduction or some sort of “thesis” statement for your response). You should cite specific passages and include quotations from the readings in order to support your understanding of the ideas that you discuss, and you need to include detailed descriptions of particular scenes from the films that you reference.

With your responses, you should work to develop connections between the readings and films, and to consider recurring themes and issues in our screenings from week to week. The point is not merely to summarize the films and readings, but to uncover significant and meaningful elements in our course texts that may not be immediately apparent to a less critical viewer/reader. You also may write about issues in the readings and films that you find challenging or confusing in some way. Within the requirements listed above, you are free to develop a unique approach to your responses and to address aspects of our texts that most interest you. Additionally, these responses will provide you with material to share during our discussions.

All responses are due at the beginning of class, and **no late work will be accepted.**
**Midterm (20%):**
The midterm exam will be a set of take-home short essay questions. Additional information will be provided about the format later in the semester.

**Final Project (20%):**
Your final project will be similar to the midterm, although you also will be analyzing a film that was not screened in class. Precise requirements will be distributed in the second half of the semester.

**Course Schedule:**

All of the assigned readings for a particular week should be completed before the accompanying screening every Monday, as our course texts are intended to provide various historic and/or critical contexts for each film.

**“Early Influences/German Expressionism”**

Week 1
Required Readings: David Skal – *Monster Show* excerpt (pages 37-48)
S.S. Prawer – *Caligari’s Children* excerpt (pages 169-180)
M 09/06 Labor Day – no class
W 09/08 Course Introduction
screening: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (dir. Robert Wiene, 1920, 71 minutes)

Week 2
Required Readings: Kendall Phillips – “Introduction” (pages 1-10)
James Ursini – “Introduction” (pages 3-5)
Paul Wells – *The Horror Genre* excerpt (pages 7-11, 15-16)
Roger Ebert – *Nosferatu* review (pages 1-2)
David Skal – *Monster Show* excerpt (pages 48-61)
M 09/13 screening: *Nosferatu* (dir. F.W. Murnau, 1922, 94 minutes)
W 09/15 weekly response due

Week 3
Required Readings: David Skal – *Monster Show* Chapter One (pages 25-35)
Kendall Phillips – Chapter One (pages 11-33)
Martin Norden and Madeleine Cahill – “Violence, Women, and Disability” (pages 151-157, 159-164)
M 09/20 screening: *Dracula* (dir. Tod Browning, 1931, 75 minutes) and *Freaks* (dir. Tod Browning, 1932, 64 minutes)
W 09/22 weekly response due
Week 4
Required Readings: Rick Worland – *The Horror Film* Chapter 6 (pages 157-175)
David Skal – *Monster Show* excerpt (pages 128-139)
M 09/27 screening: *Frankenstein* (dir. James Whale, 1931, 71 minutes)
W 09/29 weekly response due

“Social Turmoil and Disintegration”

Week 5
Required Readings: Kendall Phillips – Chapter Three (pages 61-80)
Linda Williams – “Discipline and Fun” excerpt (pages 362-372)
M 10/04 screening: *Psycho* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960, 109 minutes)
W 10/06 weekly response due

Week 6
Required Readings: R.H.W. Dillard – *Night of the Living Dead* chapter (pages 14-29)
Kendall Phillips – Chapter Four (pages 81-100)
M 10/11 screening: *Night of the Living Dead* (dir. George A. Romero, 1968, 96 minutes)
W 10/13 weekly response due

Week 7
Required Readings: Virginia Wright Wexman – “The Trauma of Infancy” (pages 30-43)
Kevin Heffernan – *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold* chapter (pages 180-201)
W 10/20 weekly response due

Week 8
Required Readings: Tanya Krzywinska – “Demon Daddies” (pages 247-248, 253-257)
Michael Arnzen – “There Is Only One” (pages 99-116)
W 10/27 weekly response due

“Slashers, Teenagers, Splatter”

Week 9
Required Readings: Kendall Phillips – Chapter Five (pages 101-122)
Rick Worland – *The Horror Film* Chapter 9 (208-226)
M 11/01 screening: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (dir. Tobe Hooper, 1974, 83 minutes)
W 11/03 weekly response due

Week 10
Required Readings: Kendall Phillips – Chapter Six (pages 123-143)
Carol Clover - “Her Body, Himself” excerpts (pages 21-47, 61-64)
W 11/10 weekly response due
Week 11
Required Readings: Mario Falsetto – Stanley Kubrick excerpts (pages 70-71, 122-130, 159-167)
Jarrell Wright – “Reconsidering Fidelity and Considering Genre” (140-148)
M 11/15 screening: The Shining (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1980, 144 minutes)
W 11/17 weekly response due

Week 12
M 11/22 screening: The Evil Dead (dir. Sam Raimi, 1981, 85 minutes) or Dead Alive (Braindead) (dir. Peter Jackson, 1992, 104 minutes)
W 11/24 no classes – Thanksgiving holiday

“Recent Trends in Horror”

Week 13
Eric White – “Case Study: Nakata Hideo’s Ringu and Ringu 2”(pages 38-46)
W 12/01 weekly response due

Week 14
Required Reading: Chuck Tryon – “Video from the Void” (pages 40-51)
M 12/06 screening: The Blair Witch Project (dirs. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999, 81 minutes)
W 12/08 weekly response due

Week 15
Required Reading: Jurgen Felix and Marcus Stiglegger – “Austrian psycho killers and home invaders” (pages 175, 178-182)
Scott Tobias – Funny Games review
Roger Ebert – Funny Games review (pages 1-2)
Steven Hyden – “A funny response to Funny Games” (pages 1-2)
M 12/13 screening: Funny Games (dir. Michael Haneke, 2007, 111 minutes)
W 12/15 possible class meeting

M 12/20 Final Project is due in my mailbox (on the fourth floor of Curtin Hall) by 5pm.

Note: Many of the screenings contain graphic depictions of violence and/or sexuality; some students may find this content to be disturbing. If you anticipate any problems with our course films (or if any issues arise during the semester), please contact me.