

# DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

## FILM 290-101/110 – Topics in Digital Cinema: Cult Films

Fall 2021

Sect. 101: Mo. 1:00pm - 4:15pm

Sect. 110: Online

Location: LPC Student Center 330

### Instructor Information

Jef Burnham

Pronouns: he/him

Email: [jburnha1@depaul.edu](mailto:jburnha1@depaul.edu)\*

Remote Office Hours: Friday 8:45AM-2:45PM  
(schedule a Zoom meeting through BlueStar)

\*If you do not receive a response from me within 24 hours, assume I did not get your email.

### Course Description

This class will provide students with historical and theoretical contexts according to which cult films may be understood. In studying the cult film, students will explore cult films' cultural and political transgressiveness; reception practices of cult audiences; the rise of the midnight movie; notions of "so bad it's good" movies and cinematic "filth"/paracinema; and the influence of cult films on modern, mainstream industrial practices.

### Required Readings

All required readings will be provided to you on D2L.

### Learning Objectives

Upon the successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify key historical movements influencing the development of cult film subcategories and production.
- Critically engage with films with regard to their form, production, and ideologies.
- Analyze films according to their generic conventions and counterculture ideologies.
- Demonstrate an understanding of and ability to reflect on cult audiences' reception practices in the past as well as in the Internet age.

### Grading Scale

A	93-100 %	C+	77-79%
A-	90-92 %	C	74-76 %
B+	87-89 %	C-	70-73 %
B	84-86 %	D+	67-69 %
B-	80-83 %	D	60-66 %

## Assignments

Papers 1-4 (15 points each)	60 points
Final Reflection Paper	20 points
<u>Attendance/Participation</u>	<u>30 points</u>
TOTAL:	110 points possible

### **Papers 1-4**

Throughout the quarter, students will submit four, 3-4 page analytical essays covering films screened in and outside of class as well as course readings. Students must evidence that they viewed the required films screened as well as read all assigned texts through each paper's assigned analysis of the relationships between specific films and readings. The assigned texts and analytical expectations of each paper will be provided to you on D2L.

### **Final Reflection Paper**

For this assignment, students will attend a screening of a cult film outside of class (a list of viable screenings will be provided) and write a 4-6 page essay reflecting on the audience's engagement with the film, the experience of watching the film with that audience, and, through outside research, either the film's life as a cult text outside of the screening or the broader fandom surrounding the film's genre/topics/etc. Students must draw on cult films scholarship to evaluate these experiences and the film's/genre's/etc. following.

Students comfortable attending screenings with a theatrical audience will have plenty of options, particularly in October. There will also be opportunities for those studying remotely or uncomfortable viewing a movie in a public space to attend a film virtual film screening with a live audience. Feel free to engage with those in the audience prior to and following the screening to gain more insight into the audience's relationship to said text.

### **Attendance/Participation [290-101 (in-class)]**

Attendance is mandatory and participation in all discussions and exercises is expected. I assess both the quality and quantity of participation in class to elevate collective learning. Students who are absent obviously cannot participate in class.

For the purposes of this class, an absence is defined as not attending class, sleeping in class, leaving prior to or during the screening, or showing up 15 minutes late or more for a class. All absences will result in a 3-point deduction from your overall Attendance/Participation grade; **if you are absent more than two times, you fail the course**. If you are absent, you may make up up to 2 points for participation by participating in the online section's discussion board DURING the week you miss—your absence will not be excused.

[NOTE: Excused absences may be obtained *from the Dean of Students Offices* under certain circumstances and given the proper documentation.]

### **Attendance [290-110 (online)]**

Online students are required to view the recordings of the on-campus discussions/lectures that take place each Monday. To ensure online students view the lectures, I will, throughout each session, provide online students with 1-3 *Lecture Keywords* that you must take note of. In order to prove that you have viewed the lecture, you will then enter these keywords into the appropriate Lecture Keyword Submission quiz (found on D2L under More>Quizzes) **by 11:59pm CT on the Saturday concluding the week the lecture was recorded**. Failure to submit lecture keywords by the assigned time for any lecture each week will result in a deduction of 1 point from your overall Attendance/Participation grade in the course.

### **Participation [290-110 (online)]:**

Online students are also required to participate in weekly discussions on the D2L Discussion Board forums. Substantial participation in these discussions is required prior to **11:59pm each Sunday**. Discussion topics will relate to assigned readings, assigned screenings, or any other topic the instructor deems worthy of conversation in these forums. Individual topics will be dictated in each week's discussion prompt. Failure to participate in the Discussions in a given week will result in a loss of 2 points from your overall Attendance/Participation grade in the course.

### Notes on the Evaluation of Student Work:

Detailed assignment sheets/grading rubrics according to which written assignments are assessed will be found on D2L under Content. In order to perform well on assignments, students must review and adhere to these guidelines. In general, written work will be evaluated according to the clarity of your writing, adherence to assignment guidelines, and basic mechanics (i.e. spelling, grammar, and punctuation). Please allow approximately 10 days for the return of written material.

## **Course Policies**

### **Class Format**

Each meeting will consist of a discussion of the previous week's film and assigned reading(s) and a lecture/discussion to contextualize topics related to the current week's film/topic. Following that, a film will be screened weekly. Attendance at screenings is mandatory for the 290-101 in-class section even if you have already seen the film, and failure to remain in class for screenings will affect your grade as detailed in the Attendance/Participation section above. *No technology is allowed during the screenings* (see the Technology Statement below for more details). Notes should be taken on paper.

**[TRIGGER WARNING:** *Cult films exist at the margins of cinema and often do not adhere to prevailing notions of what is politically correct/in good taste/etc. Often they are, by nature, extremely challenging, particularly for newcomers to non-mainstream cinema. As such, be aware that films screened WILL include graphic and potentially offensive language, as well as depictions of graphic violence, sex, assault, etc.*]

## Outside Screenings

In preparation for **SIX** lectures listed in the course schedule, you will be required to view an additional film or selected online videos *outside of class*. All outside screening films will be made available via course reserves and links to the assigned online videos will be provided.

### Students in the 290-110 online section

You are required to view the recorded discussion/lecture portions of the class, which will be available to you on D2L each Monday evening. You are also required to view the films watched in class and assigned to in-class students as outside screenings. Films will be made available to you (1) via course reserves, (2) via a link to the film as legally found elsewhere online, or (3) it will otherwise be available on Netflix.

## Technology Statement

Laptops/tablets may be used during lectures/discussions **ONLY** to take notes.\* Also, texting, etc. on your cell phone is not allowed—it is distracting to your fellow students and the instructor both. Keep your phone on vibrate and excuse yourself to the hallway if there is an emergency call you must take. If you are expecting such a call, please let the instructor know in advance.

**No technology use of any kind will be allowed during film or clip screenings.** Failure to adhere to this policy may result in you being asked to leave and being marked as absent.

*\*If I receive complaints about the distracting nature of your technology use or if you are not paying attention, I will no longer allow your use of that technology in class.*

## Late Work

Assignments must be completed and uploaded to D2L in PDF format by the date and time specified in the Class Schedule. **No late work will be accepted** unless instructor approval is granted prior to the due date/time. Printed submissions or submissions by email will not be accepted. I also suggest backing up work with a Cloud file storage service.

## Decorum and Civil Discourse

DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be socially responsible leaders. It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

## COVID-19 Health and Safety Precautions

Keeping our DePaul community safe is of utmost importance in the pandemic. Students, faculty and staff are expected to (1) wear a mask as required at all times while indoors on campus; (2) refrain from eating and drinking in classrooms; (3) keep current with their COVID-19 vaccinations or exemptions; (4) stay home if sick; (5) participate in any required COVID-19 testing; (6) complete the online Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus training; and (7) abide by the City of Chicago Emergency Travel Advisory. By doing these things, we are Taking Care of DePaul, Together. The recommendations may change as local, state, and federal guidelines evolve. **Students who do not abide by the mask requirement may be subject to the student conduct process and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office.** Students who have a medical reason for not complying with any requirements should register with DePaul's Center for Student with Disabilities (CSD).

## Academic Support Resources

<https://resources.depaul.edu/coronavirus/faqs/Pages/classes-academics-students.aspx>

## Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>. The university and school policy on plagiarism can be summarized as follows: Students in this course should be aware of the strong sanctions that can be imposed against someone guilty of plagiarism. If proven, a charge of plagiarism could result in an automatic F in the course and possible expulsion. (Note: Turnitin is used to check the originality of submissions on D2L.) Actions taken by the instructor in this regard do not preclude the university from taking further action, including dismissal from the university. The strongest of sanctions will be imposed on anyone who submits as his/her own work any assignment which has been prepared by someone else. If you have any questions or doubts about what plagiarism entails or how to properly acknowledge source materials be sure to consult the instructor.

## Withdrawal

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system (<http://campusconnect.depaul.edu>). Withdrawals processed via this system are effective the day on which they are made. Simply ceasing to attend, or notifying the instructor, or nonpayment of tuition, does not constitute an official withdrawal from class and will result in academic as well as financial penalty.

## Retroactive Withdrawal

This policy exists to assist students for whom extenuating circumstances prevented them from meeting the withdrawal deadline. During their college career students may be allowed one medical/personal administrative withdrawal and one college office administrative withdrawal, each for one or more courses in a single term. Repeated

requests will not be considered. Submitting an appeal for retroactive withdrawal does not guarantee approval. College office appeals for CDM students must be submitted online via MyCDM.

### **Incomplete Grades**

An incomplete grade is a special, temporary grade that may be assigned by an instructor when unforeseeable circumstances prevent a student from completing course requirements by the end of the term and when otherwise the student had a record of satisfactory progress in the course. All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval. Information about the Incomplete Grades policy can be found at [cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.aspx](http://cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.aspx)

### **Preferred Name & Gender Pronouns**

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the quarter so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. Please also note that students may choose to identify within the University community with a preferred first name that differs from their legal name and may also update their gender. The preferred first name will appear in University related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by University business or legal need. For more information and instructions on how to do so, please see the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy at [policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332](http://policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332)

### **Students with Disabilities**

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at:

- Loop Campus – Lewis Center #1420 – (312) 362-8002
- Lincoln Park Campus – Student Center #370 – (773) 325-1677

### **Online Course Evaluations**

Instructor and course evaluations provide valuable feedback that can improve teaching and learning. The greater the level of participation, the more useful the results. As students, you are in the unique position to view the instructor over time. Your comments about what works and what doesn't, can help faculty build on the elements of the course that are

strong and improve those that are weak. Isolated comments from students and instructors' peers may also be helpful, but evaluation results based on high response rates may be statistically reliable (believable). As you experience this course and material, think about how your learning is impacted. Your honest opinions about your experience in and commitment to the course and your learning may help improve some components of the course for the next group of students. Positive comments also show the department chairs and college deans the commitment of instructors to the university and teaching evaluation results are one component used in annual performance reviews (including salary raises and promotion/tenure). The evaluation of the instructor and course provides you an opportunity to make your voice heard on an important issue – the quality of teaching at DePaul. Don't miss this opportunity to provide feedback!

---

## Course Schedule

### Week 1 (9/13): Introductions

**Assign:** Final Reflection Paper

**SCREENING:** *Pink Flamingos* (John Waters, 1972)

### Week 2 (9/20): What is Cult Film?

Readings Due:

Mathijs & Mendik, "Editorial Introduction: What is Cult Film?" from *Cult Film Reader*

Mathijs & Sexton, "Cult Reception Contexts" from *Cult Cinema: An Introduction*

Outside Screening Due: *Harold and Maude* (Hal Ashby, 1971)

**SCREENING:** *A Bucket of Blood* (Roger Corman, 1959)

**Assign:** Paper 1 (Due by Noon on 9/27)

### Week 3 (9/27): The Aesthetics of "So Bad it's Good"

Readings Due:

MacDowell & Zborowski, "The Aesthetics of 'So Bad It's Good': Value, Intention, and *The Room*"

Outside Screening Due: *The Room* (Tommy Wiseau, 2003)

**SCREENING:** *Samurai Cop* (Amir Shervan, 1991)

**Assignment Due by Noon on 9/27:** Paper 1

### Week 4 (10/4): Blaxploitation

Readings Due:

Lawrence, "Introduction"/"Conclusion" from *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s*

**SCREENING:** *Blacula* (William Crain, 1972)

**Assign:** Paper 2 (Due by Noon on 10/11)

### Week 5 (10/11): Gender and Sexuality

Reading Due:

Kinkade & Katovich, "Toward a Sociology of Cult Films: Reading 'Rocky Horror'"

Outside Screening Due: "The Rocky Horror Treatment" Documentary (1981)

**SCREENING:** *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975)

**Assignment Due by Noon on 10/11:** Paper 2

### Week 6 (10/18): International Cult

Readings Due:

Sexton, "The Allure of Otherness: Transnational Cult Film Fandom and the Exoticist Assumption"

Outside Screening Due: *El Topo* (Alejandro Jodorowsky, 1970)

**SCREENING:** *One Cut of the Dead* (Shinichirou Ueda, 2017)

**Assign:** Paper 3 (Due by Noon on 10/25)

### Week 7 (10/25): The Cult of Horror

Readings Due:

O'Toole, "The Cult of Horror"

Martin, "What's Cult Got to Do with It?: In Defense of Cinephile Elitism"

**SCREENING:** *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, 1986)

**Assignment Due by Noon on 10/25:** Paper 3



### **Week 8 (11/1): Sexploitation & Doris Wishman**

Reading Due:

Modleski, "Women's Cinema as Counterphobic Cinema: Doris Wishman as the Last Auteur"

**SCREENING:** *Deadly Weapons* (Doris Wishman, 1974)

**Assign:** Paper 4 (Due by Noon on 11/8)

### **Week 9 (11/8): Producing Cult**

Readings Due:

Mathijs & Sexton, "Meta-Cult" from *Cult Cinema*

Outside Screenings Due:

[RedLetterMedia's Best of the Worst \(Episode 59\): Suburban Sasquatch](#)

[Film Joy's "Does The Matrix Hold Up? - Movies with Mikey"](#)

[Lindsay Ellis' "The Hobbit: A Long-Expected Autopsy"](#)

[Nyx Fears' "is Verotika the trash baby of the century?"](#)

[Rantasmø's "Frozen Needs More Gay"](#)

**SCREENING:** *Mystery Science Theater 3000: Space Mutiny* (episode: Jim Mallon, 1997/  
the film riffed: David Winters, 1988)

**Assignment Due by Noon on 11/8:** Paper 4

### **Week 10 (11/15): Cult Films & Religion**

Outside Screening Due:

*The Big Lebowski* (Ethan Coen & Joel Coen, 1998)

Guest Speaker: TBD

**SCREENING:** *M 10.28* (Bruce Neubauer, 1999)

### **FINAL REFLECTION DUE**

Monday, November 22, submitted to D2L by 4:45PM

### **Course Readings Bibliography**

(NOTE: in Chicago Style bibliography format)

Conrich, Ian. "Musical Performance and the Cult Film Experience." In *Film's Musical Moments*, eds. Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell, 115-131. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Kinkade, Patrick T., and Michael A. Katovich. "Toward a Sociology of Cult Films: Reading 'Rocky Horror'." *Sociological Quarterly*. 33.2 (1992): 191-209.

Lawrence, Novotny. *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Martin, Adrian. "What's Cult Got to Do with It?: In Defense of Cinephile Elitism." *Cinéaste* 34, no. 1 (2008): 39-42.

Mathijs, Ernest, and Jamie Sexton. *Cult Cinema: An Introduction*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Mathijs, Ernest, and Xavier Mendik. "Editorial Introduction: What is Cult Film?" In *The Cult Film Reader*, eds. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, 1-11. New York: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, 2008.

MacDowell, James, and James Zborowski. "The Aesthetics of 'So Bad It's Good': Value, Intention, and *The Room*." *Intensities* 6 (Autumn/Winter 2013). Accessed July 5, 2016.

Modleski, Tania. "Women's Cinema as Counterphobic Cinema: Doris Wishman as the Last Auteur." In *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Sconce, 47-70. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

O'Toole, Lawrence. "The Cult of Horror" In *The Cult Film Reader*, eds. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, 257-262. New York: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, 2008.

Sexton, Jamie. "The Allure of Otherness: Transnational Cult Film Fandom and the Exoticist Assumption." *Transnational Cinemas* 8, no. 1 (2017): 5-19.

Studlar, Gaylyn. "Midnight S/Excess: Cult Configurations of 'Femininity' and the Perverse." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 17.1 (1989): 2-14.