

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

Autumn 2019

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

Sect. 110: Online

Location: LPC Student Center 330

### **Instructor Information**

Jef Burnham

Pronouns: he/him/his

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

Office Hours: M & Th 11:20am-12:50pm (2250 N. Sheffield, Room 332)

Remote Office Hours: W 9am-12pm (via Zoom)

\*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 the cult film may be understood. In studying the cult film, students will explore the cultural and political transgressiveness of films screened; 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 Text**

All readings will be provided via D2L in .Doc or PDF formats.

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

### **Assignments**

Annotated Bibliography & Reading Questions	15 points (1 points per annotation; 0.5 per question)
<i>Samurai Cop</i> Paper	10 points
Theatrical Cult Screening Reflection	20 points
Final Paper/Video Essay	25 points
<u>Attendance/Participation</u>	<u>30 points</u>
TOTAL:	100 points possible

### **Annotated Bibliography/Reading Questions**

Students will maintain an annotated bibliography of all course readings. Each week students will turn in an annotated bibliography entry for each reading (i.e. if you are assigned 2 readings in a given week, you will devise an annotation for both). An annotated bibliography should both describe and evaluate the source. Each annotation should be between 100-150 words and follow the reading's citation (see the course bibliography at the end of the syllabus).

In addition, each annotation must be accompanied by a discussion question. These questions will serve as the basis for our in-class discussions and must be open-ended questions geared toward stimulating conversation. Therefore, go beyond considerations of definition (i.e. avoid "What does \_\_\_\_ mean?") and avoid "yes" or "no" questions to critically engage with the concepts presented in each reading. You weekly annotation(s) and reading question(s) must be submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission Folder **by 9:00am every Monday beginning Week 2.**

### **Theatrical Cult Screening Reflection**

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 an essay reflecting on the audience's engagement with the film and the experience of watching the film with that audience, drawing on scholarship on cult film to evaluate these experiences. 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.

You are expected to include a minimum of 3 citations in your essay, only 2 of which may be Mathijs and Sexton's "Cult Reception Contexts." Cite your references in a consistent, standard format—I recommend Chicago Style or MLA. The essay must be 2-3 pages long (citations and header information do not count toward this page count) and be complete with intro, thesis statement and conclusion. It is to be typed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, and uploaded to the appropriate D2L Submission Folder in PDF format *any time* between Week 1 and **Noon on 11/11, but no later than 7 days after you attend the event.**

### ***Samurai Cop* Paper**

For this assignment, you will write a paper exploring the relationship of *Samurai Cop* (1991), screened Week 3, to the concepts related in the first 3 weeks' readings. You are expected to extensively draw on the readings from the first three weeks, specifically Mathijs & Mendik

(“Editorial Introduction: What is Cult Film?”) and MacDowell & Zborowski, and to cite your references in a consistent, standardized format—I recommend Chicago Style or MLA.

The paper must be 2-3 pages in length (citations and header information do not count toward this page count) and appear in standardized essay format with a thesis statement. It is to be typed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced, and uploaded to the appropriate D2L Submission Folder in PDF format **by Noon on 10/7**.

### **Final Paper/Video Essay**

The final project will illuminate the elements of each student’s chosen film that make it a cult text, drawing on the film’s production and reception, as well as exploring the its cultural relevance and potential impact. Papers must explore a definition of cult film that would allow the chosen film to be categorized as cult. Students must also seek out evidence of the film’s cult status online, documenting or engaging with fans of the text where possible. Papers must be 4-6 pages long and meet the requirements laid out in the assignment sheet and draw on a minimum of 4 sources from reputable (i.e. well-researched, non-Wikipedia) sources *in addition to* any websites referenced to establish that the film has a cult following.

For *extra credit*, students may opt to present their findings in the form of a video essay, examining a cult film in the public domain and utilizing, at minimum, clips from the film and voice over commentary. The video must be a minimum of 5 minutes long and the aural essay component should adhere to standard essay format with an introduction, thesis statement, body and conclusion. Along with your video, you must turn in the script for your video essay along with a bibliography of your resources meeting the above criteria.

#### Final Paper/Video Essay Due Dates:

1. Proposals must be uploaded to D2L **by Noon on 10/21**.
2. Essays or videos/scripts, and all associated annotated bibliographies must be uploaded to D2L **by 4:45pm on 11/25**.

### ***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 up to 7-10 days for the return of graded materials.

### **Course Policies**

#### **Class Format**

Each meeting will consist of a discussion of the previous week’s film and a lecture to contextualize topics related to the current week’s screenplay and film for use in your Reflection Papers. 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 below. *No technology is allowed during the screenings.* Notes on films should be taken on paper.

[**DISCLAIMER:** *Films screened WILL include graphic language, violence, & sex.*]

### **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 [COLTube](#), or links to the assigned videos will be provided.

### *Students in the 290-110 online section:*

You are required to view the 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 [COLTube](#), (2) via a link to the film as legally found elsewhere online, or (3) it will otherwise be available on Netflix.

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

Each week's class consists of a combination of lectures, screenings, and class discussions and/or group exercises. 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, or showing up 15 minutes late or more for a class. All absences will result in a deduction of 3 points 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 discussion for the week in question, but note that this does not excuse your absence.

(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 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** beginning Week 2. 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.

**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, as computers crash.

**Technology Statement:**

Laptops/tablets may be used during lectures/discussions **ONLY** to take notes.\* Also, texting, etc. on your cell phone is not allowed, as it is distracting to your fellow students as well as the instructor. You are asked to keep yours on vibrate and may 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.** Use of technology during screenings 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 continued use of technology in class.*

**Changes to Syllabus**

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L and sent via email.

**Online Course Evaluations**

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. For additional information, please see <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/Pages/online-teaching-evaluations.aspx>

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/academic-integrity/Pages/default.aspx>.

**If the instructor finds a student has violated the Academic Integrity Policy/plagiarized their work, the student will fail the course, receiving an automatic F grade.** (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.

### **Academic Policies**

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>

### **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 <http://www.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 seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) enabling them to access accommodations and support services to assist with their success. There are two office locations:

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

Students who register with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact Dr. Gregory Moorhead, Director of the Center, privately to discuss how he may assist in facilitating the accommodations to be used in a course. This is best done early in the term. The conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

Please see <https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/csd.aspx> for Services and Contact Information.

## Course Schedule

### **Week 1 (9/16): Introductions**

**Assign:** Annotated Bibliographies & Reading Questions  
Theatrical Cult Screening Reflection

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

### **Week 2 (9/23): 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:** *Samurai Cop* Paper

### **Week 3 (9/30): 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)

**Week 4 (10/7): Blaxploitation**

Readings Due:

Lawrence, "Introduction"/"Conclusion" from *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s*Outside Screening Due: *Super Fly* (Gordon Parks Jr., 1972)**SCREENING:** *Blacula* (William Crain, 1972)**Assign:** Final Paper/Video Essay**Assignment Due by Noon on 10/7:** *Samurai Cop* Paper**Week 5 (10/14): Gender and Sexuality**

Reading Due:

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

Outside Screening Due: "The *Rocky Horror* Treatment" Documentary (1981) [on D2L]**SCREENING:** *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975)**Week 6 (10/21): 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)**Assignment Due by Noon on 10/21:** Final Paper/Video Essay Proposal**Week 7 (10/28): 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)



### **Week 8 (11/4): Doris Wishman and Sexploitation**

Reading Due:

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

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

### **Week 9 (11/11): 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' "The Abominable Dr. Phibes & Cinematic Influence | Film Analysis"](#)

[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 11/11:** Theatrical Cult Screening Reflection

[NOTE: *This is the final date these papers will be accepted. However, they must be submitted within 7 days of you attending the screening per assignment guidelines.*]

### **Week 10 (11/18): Christian Scare Films**

Guest Speaker: TBD

**SCREENING:** 1) *M 10.28* (Bruce Neubauer, 1999)

2) "Without Reservation" (Fred Carpenter, 1988);

OR clips from [Pagan Invasion](#), "Halloween: Trick or Treat" (1991)

**Final Paper/Video Essay:** Due Monday, November 25 at 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.