HORROR AND PUBLIC CULTURE

Communication 397AM

Class Meetings:
Room:

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Say what you will, the diabolical gives food for thought.
-Emmanuel Levinas

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar focuses on the concept of horror in contemporary public culture in the United States. Fundamentally, the purpose of this class is to reflect on the nature of evil and human responsibility in the face of it. Topics for discussion include the rhetorical use of horror, the narrative creation of monstrosities, the responses to fear of the Other, the relationship between horror and terror, and the aesthetics of disturbing performances. The course will also include considerations of such concepts as radical evil, moral panic, dread, the uncanny, abjection, alterity, the numinous, haunting, violence, contagion, and blasphemy. Several weeks will be devoted to popular icons of monstrosity (such as the vampire, the ghost, and the slasher) in order to examine the ethical and political ramifications of these metaphors lurking in contemporary culture. Examples will be drawn from several horror genres, including film, television, literature, theater, and music.

Students will engage a number of perspectives on horror and public culture, including Marxist, psychoanalytic, feminist, and bio-political interpretations. This will include primary readings from philosophers and social and literary theorists including Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Mikhail Bakhtin, Kenneth Burke, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Mary Douglas, Sigmund Freud, René Girard, Søren Kierkegaard, Julia Kristeva, Friedrich Nietzsche, Paul Ricouer, and Michel Serres. They will also encounter readings from contemporary cultural scholars such as Nina Auerbach, Noël Carroll, Carol Clover, Joan Copjec, Barbara Creed, Cynthia Freeland, Judith Halberstam, Edward Ingebretsen, and Linda Williams.

INTEGRATIVE EXPERIENCE

This course serves as an Integrative Experience for Communication undergraduates. According to the General Education Council:

"The Integrative Experience (IE) requirement at UMass Amherst addresses the challenges associated with educational fragmentation. Positioned in the upper-division, the IE provides students with a structured opportunity to look back on their early college learning experiences, reflect upon and make connections between those earlier experiences and the more advanced work in their major, and use their integrated learning to prepare for the demands of the world beyond the University."

COMM 397AM fulfills these requirements in several ways. First, the course takes an integrative approach with respect to content matter, building upon a range of areas in the Communication Department (such as rhetorical studies, film studies, performance studies, media studies, and cultural studies) as well in the sciences, social sciences, arts, literature, and history. Second, the portfolio assignment requires application of perspectives and methods learned in Gen Ed courses, including an artistic pitch (drawing from AT and AL experiences), a scientific commentary (drawing from BS and PS), an historical analysis (drawing from HS), and a cultural analysis (drawing from SB). Third, weekly responses at the course Moodle allow for critical and ethical reflection upon the course material, along with opportunities for practice in online communication and information literacy. Fourth, class
discussions and an interpretative final analysis (in the form of a paper or lecture given by the student) provide practice in oral communication and collaboration.

For further information on the IE, please consult the Gen Ed website: http://www.umass.edu/gened/teachingAdvising/integrativeExperience/ie.html

**COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This course has several learning objectives. First, it aims to introduce students to the study of the more problematic aspects of human society as incorporated in rhetorical displays of horror; by doing so, this course intends to call students to examine and respond to serious ethical and political concerns that undergird contemporary society in the United States. Second, it aims to introduce students to scholars who have dedicated much of their work to interpret and to address these pressing issues. Third, in the spirit of General Education and the IE requirement, it aims to create an opportunity for students to practice an integrative approach to education by providing a wide-range of material drawn from the arts and sciences, and by asking students to demonstrate knowledge through individual and collaborative efforts of artistic and analytical nature.

**ASSIGNED READINGS**

For the convenience of the student, all readings will be available free at the class Moodle, available at moodle.umass.edu. For specific required readings, please see the Schedule of Classes and Readings. Further Readings are posted in many cases for students who wish to expand their knowledge beyond the initial readings, and include citations of additional material mentioned in class lectures.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

There are several assignments for this class; further information on each will be provided in handouts:

- **Weekly Responses To Questions.** Students will respond to questions in the online Moodle site in the Weekly Questions forum. Students are asked to post a single response of their own or reply to two other students' responses weekly. The questions will ask students to draw from the readings, reflect upon personal experience, and engage their peers. In most cases, the questions will investigate ethical issues surrounding the week's topic, in the hopes of fostering conversation and critical thinking. 25 points total.

- **Portfolio.** Throughout the semester, students will compose a portfolio designed to integrate course material, previous General Education experiences, and other knowledge and skills gained through the Communication major. The portfolio is due at the end of the semester, with an initial draft due at the midterm that must include the horror pitch. The portfolio will consist of the following elements: (1) a detailed pitch of a horror text they would create under ideal conditions, drawing upon their experiences with artistic texts such as films or novels; (2) an historical analysis of the imagery of the artistic text or of relevant phenomena; (3) a commentary on the scientific issues addressed or raised by the artistic text; (4) an analysis of the social context or cultural interpretations of the imagery of the text; (5) a reflection upon the ethical and political issues raised by the text. 50 points total.

- **Presentation.** Students will present a paper (@5-8 pages) or deliver a lecture (@20 minutes) or design an online or multimedia presentation (of comparable work investment to an essay or lecture) on a topic of their choice. Students may create panels of related ideas to present as if at a conference, or record their lectures previously. The aim of this project is to draw upon scholarly perspectives learned in class (such as psychoanalysis, feminism, critical rhetoric, etc.). Students may also work closely with peers to examine their performances, or may select other texts (such as a television series or film) for analysis, with prior approval. 25 points total.
Grading

Grades will be assessed on the quality of the content and analysis, the thoughtfulness and degree of participation involved, the quality of the writing, and overall innovativeness. I welcome students to consult with me on any step of the writing process. The final grade will be determined by a total out of 100 points:

A: 94-100 points  
A-: 90-93 points  
B+: 87-89 points
B: 83-86 points  
B-: 80-82 points  
C+: 77-79 points
C: 73-76 points  
C-: 70-72 points  
D+: 67-69 points
D: 64-66 points  
F: 0-64 points

Academic Dishonesty

Students are expected to adhere fully to the Code of Student Conduct regarding Academic Honesty. The Code and a link to the Academy Honesty policy may be found at: http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/code_conduct/

Unexcused Attendance Policy

There are no unexcused absences allowed. Students who are unexcused for a class will have their final grade reduced by one letter (for example, an A would become an A-). Excused absences (for religious observances, field trips, athletics, health, and related circumstances) are, of course, not subject to this policy. Please consult this website for information: http://www.umass.edu/registrar/gen_info/class_absence.htm

Other General Policies

Students with Disabilities. I will happily accommodate students’ learning needs. Students with documented learning disabilities should provide documentation at the start of the semester. Please consult this website for further information: http://www.umass.edu/disability/current.html

Internships. I will happily sponsor any internship you arrange for credit at any point during the year. Please just contact me via email and I will send a list of my very simple expectations. Also, please be aware that professors are paid to host internships during the Winter and Summer sessions but not the Spring and Fall semesters. I mention this in the spirit of full disclosure.

Office Hours. Please try to schedule a meeting with me in advance. If you just show up, there is a good chance the time will already be booked with other people.

Schedule of Classes and Readings

Week 1

Horror, Public Culture, and the Unknown

Required Readings:
- H. P. Lovecraft. Excerpt from Supernatural Horror in Literature.
- Laura Helmuth. Fear and Trembling in the Amygdala.

Further Readings:
- Alphonso Lingis. To Die with Others.
- Jonathan Strauss. After Death.
- Kersten Ackerl, Michaela Atzmueller, and Karl Grammer. The Scent of Fear.
• Lorey Takahashi, Brandy Nakashima, Hyechong Hong, and Kendra Watanabe. The Smell of Danger: A Behavioral and Neural Analysis of Predator Odor-Induced Fear.

The Nature of Horror

Required Readings:
• Noël Carroll. Why Horror?
• Noël Carroll. The Nature of Horror.

Further Readings:
• Matt Hills. Philosophies of Horror: Cognition ... and Affect.
• Mary Beth Oliver and Meghan Sanders. The Appeal of Horror and Suspense.
• Joanna Cantor. "I'll Never Have a Clown in My House": Why Movie Horror Lives On.

Week 2

Dread, Desire, and Fear

Required Readings:
• Søren Kierkegaard. Selections from The Concept of Anxiety and Fear and Trembling.

Further Readings:
• Barry Glassner. Selections from The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things
• Joanna Bourke. Selections from Fear: A Cultural History.
• Frank Füredi. Selections from The Politics of Fear and The Culture of Fear Revisited.

The Death of God

Required Readings:
• Friedrich Nietzsche. Selections from The Anti-Christ, Thus Spake Zarathustra, and The Gay Science.

Further Readings:
• Georges Bataille. Selections from Visions of Excess.

Week 3

The Uncanny

Required Readings:
• Sigmund Freud. Selections from The Uncanny.

Further Readings:
• Hélène Cixous. Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's Das Unheimliche.
• Barbara Creed. Film, Horror, and the Primal Uncanny.
• Nicholas Royle. Selections from The Uncanny: An Introduction.

Pollution and Contagion

Required Readings:
• Mary Douglas. Selections from Purity and Danger.

Further Readings:
• Daryl Jones. Narratives of Pestilence and Invasion.
• Priscilla Wald. Selections from Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative.
• Bill Albertini. Contagion and the Necessary Accident.
• S. Rachman. Fear of Contamination.
Week 4
Abjection and Alterity

Required Readings:
- Barbara Creed. Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection.

Further Readings:
- Barbara Creed. Kristeva, Femininity, Abjection.

The Banality of Evil and the Problem of Terrorism

Required Readings:
- Edward Ingebretsen. The Semiotics of Terror.

Further Readings:
- Joseph Tuman. Selections from *Communicating Terror: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Terrorism.*
- Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai. Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terror and the Production of Docile Patriots.
- David Altheide. Terrorism and the Politics of Fear.
- Edward Ingebretsen. Monsters and the Haunting of Civic Memory.

Week 5
Radical Evil and Moral Panic

Required Readings:
- Marcus Singer. The Concept of Evil.

Further Readings:
- Marty Norden. Introduction to *The Changing Face of Evil in Film and Television.*
- Calvin Schrag. Otherness and the Problem of Evil.

The Concept of the Monstrous

Required Readings:
- Jeffrey Cohen. Monster Culture (Seven Theses).
- Edward Ingebretsen. Thinking about Monsters.

Further Readings:
- Donna Haraway. The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others.
- Jacques Derrida. Passages--from Traumatism to Promise.

Week 6
Theories of the Gaze

Required Readings:
- Linda Williams. When the Woman Looks.

Further Readings:
- Barbara Creed. The Medusa's Gaze.
- Barbara Creed. Film and the Uncanny Gaze.
Slashers and Serial Killers I: "Psychotic" Gender

**Required Readings:**
- Carol Clover. Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film.
- Claire Sisco King. Un-Queering Horror: *Hellbent* and the Policing of the 'Gay Slasher.'

**Further Readings:**
- Judith Halberstam. Bodies that Splatter: Queers and Chain Saws.
- Kathleen Rowe Karlyn. *Scream*, Popular Culture, and Feminism's Third Wave: "I'm Not My Mother."
- Liahna Babener. Patriarchal Politics in *Fatal Attraction*.
- Cynthia Freeland. Feminist Slashers?
- Elizabeth Young. The Silence of the Lambs and the Flaying of Feminist Theory.
- Linda Williams. Learning to Scream.

**Week 7**

Slashers and Serial Killers II: Wound Culture and Capitalism

**Required Readings:**
- Cynthia Freeland. The Slasher's Blood Lust.
- Richard Tithecott. Selections from *Of Men and Monsters: Jeffrey Dahmer and the Construction of the Serial Killer*.

**Further Readings:**
- Mikel Koven. The Slasher Film as Folkloristic Social Script.
- Mark Selzer. Selections from *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*.
- Denis Duclos. Selections from *The Werewolf Complex: America's Fascination with Violence*.

Vampires I: Power and the Numinous

**Required Readings:**
- Nina Auerbach. Selections from *Our Vampires, Ourselves*.
- Beth McDonald. Selections from *The Vampire as Numinous Experience*.

**Further Readings:**
- Milly Williamson. The Vampire and the Self: The Dilemmas of the Dead and the Realm of the Possible.

**Week 8**

Vampires II: Parasites and the Feast

**Required Readings:**
- Michel Serres. Selections from *The Parasite*.

**Further Readings:**
- Laurence Rickles. Selections from *The Vampire Lectures*.

Vampires III: Eros and Thanatos

**Required Readings:**
- Barbara Creed. Men as Menstrual Mother: Dracula and His Uncanny Brides.

**Further Readings:**
- Anna Powell. Selections from *Psychoanalysis and Sovereignty in Popular Vampire Fictions*.
- Fionna Peters. Looking into the Mirror: Vampires, the Symbolic, and *The Thing*. 
• Joan Copjec. Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety.
• Sue Ellen Case. Tracking the Vampire.
• Elizabeth Singorotti. Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in "Carmilla" and Dracula.

Week 9
Pushers, Consciousness, and the Gaze
Required Readings:
• Andrew Schopp. The Practice and Politics of "Freeing the Look": Jonathan Demme's The Silence of the Lambs.

Further Readings:
• Kevin Heffernan. The Hypnosis Horror Films of the 1950s: Genre Texts and Industrial Contexts.

Zombies I: Labor and Ideology
Required Readings:
• Paul Ricouer. Recapitulation of the Symbolism of Evil in the Concept of the Servile Will.

Further Readings:
• Paul Waldman. The Left and the Living Dead.
• Mzilikazi Kone, Zombies, Haiti, and (Sex) Workers: On Relating to Modernity/Coloniality and Subalterity.
• Wade Davis. Selections from The Serpent and the Rainbow and Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie.

Week 10
Zombies II: Consumption and Interpellation
Required Readings:
• Kyle Bishop. The Sub-Subaltern Monster: Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie.
• Kyle Bishop. Dead Man Still Walking: Explaining the Zombie Renaissance.

Further Readings:
• Joshua Gunn and Shaun Treat. Zombie Trouble: A Propaedeutic on Ideological Subjectification and the Unconscious.
• Christof Koch and Francis Crick. The Zombie Within.

Ghosts and Spectres: Haunting and the Work of Mourning
Required Readings:
• Jacques Derrida. Selections from Spectres of Marx.

Further Readings:
• Joshua Gunn. Refitting Fantasy: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, and Talking to the Dead.
• Joshua Gunn. Haunting and the Spectral Voices of Nine-Eleven.
• Sonja Kufuinec. [Walking through a] Ghost Town: Cultural Hauntologie in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Mostar: A Performance Review.
• Peter Buse and Andrew Stott. A Future for Haunting.

Week 11
Werewolves I: Animality, Transformation, and Becoming-Other
Required Readings:
• Sigmund Freud. From the History of an Infantile Neurosis [The 'Wolfman'].
• Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. One or Many Wolves?
Further Readings:
- Eric White. "Once They Were Men, Now They're Landcrabs": Monstrous Becomings in Evolutionist Cinema.

Werewolves II: Sovereignty and Violence
Required Readings:
- Barbara Creed. Fear of Fur: Bestiality and the Uncanny Skin Monster.

Further Readings:
- Jacques Derrida. Selections from The Animal That Therefore I Am and The Beast and the Sovereign.
- April Miller. "The Hair that Wasn't There Before": Demystifying Monstrosity and Menstruation in Ginger Snaps and Ginger Snaps Unleashed.
- Anna Powell. Selections from Deleuze and Horror Film.

Week 12
The Devil and the Scapegoat
Required Readings:
- René Girard. Selections from I See Satan Fall Like Lightning and The Scapegoat.

Further Readings:
- Joshua Gunn. The Rhetoric of Exorcism.
- Jacqueline Fulmer. "Men Ain't All"--A Reworking of Masculinity in Tales from the Hood.

The Devil, the Alien, and Possession
Required Readings:
- Barbara Creed. Woman as Possessed Monster: The Exorcist.
- Barbara Creed. Horror and the Archaic Mother: Alien.

Further Readings:
- Tanya Krzywinska. Demon Daddies: Gender, Ecstasy, and Terror in the Possession Film.
- Carol Lee Fry. Season of the Witch.

Week 13
Golems: Technology and Playing God
Required Readings:
- Daniel Cabrera. The Soul of the Golem.
- Cynthia Freeland. Dr. Frankenstein's Progeny.

Further Readings:
- Mikel Koven. Some Thoughts on the Golem, The X-Files, and the Jewish Horror Movie.
• Slavoj Žižek. Fear Thy Neighbor As Thyself!
• Daniel Cottom. Frankenstein and the Monster of Representation.
• Janice Rushing and Thomas Frentz. The Frankenstein Myth in Contemporary Cinema.

Leviathans I: Nature and the Abyss

Required Readings:
• Tzvetan Todorov. Selections from *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*.
• Cynthia Freeland. Nature Evil in the Horror Film: Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*.

Further Readings:
• Jonathan Lemkin. Archetypal Landscapes and *Jaws*.
• Cynthia Marie Erb. Selections from *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in a World Culture*.
• Slavoj Žižek. The Hitchcockian Blot.
• Thomas Frentz and Janice Rushing. A Case Study of *Jaws*.

Week 14

Leviathans II: Protest and Blasphemy

Required Readings:
• Edward Ingebretsen. In the Shape of the Dark: Robert Frost and H. P. Lovecraft.
• William Tsutsui. Selections from *Godzilla on My Mind*.

Further Readings:
• Mark Anderson. Mobilizing *Gojira*: Mourning Modernity as Monstronsity.
• Massimo Berruti. Excerpts from H.P. Lovecraft and the Anatomy of the Nothingness: The Cthulhu Mythos.
• Nancy Anisfield. Godzilla/Gojiro: Evolution of the Nuclear Monster.

Horror, Humor, and Transgression

Required Readings:
• Mikhail Bakhtin. Selections from *Rabelais and His World*.

Further Readings:
• Noël Carroll. Horror and Humor.
• Simon Dentith. Bakhtin's Carnival.