CMST 3013: Topics in Film

Focus: The “Primordial World” Horror Film

Department of Communication Studies

Spring 2017

MWF 1:30-2:20 (Coates 137 HopKins Black Box)

Lab Wednesday 6-8:50 pm (Coates 151)

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Office Hours: M & W 2:30-3:30

Course Description: This course explores the “primordial world” horror film—its themes, stories, and monsters. We cover a range of films: from classic horror to cult classics to the mainstream films of today. We consider a variety of ways films have been analyzed and theorized, from contextualizing the films in history, to considering the films as works of art, to tracing the ways race and/or gender get imagined/represented in certain films, to highlighting the general themes that dominate this subgenre. Because this is a communication studies course, we will pay special attention to the way(s) that the films, as aesthetic acts, communicate particular cultural obsessions, fears, and anxieties in particular historical moments. We will engage all of these issues through reading and discussion and group performance work which results in both live and filmed performance. The course is worth 4 credit hours; it includes a lab for film screenings every Wednesday night from 6-8:50 p.m.

Objectives: By the end of this course, you should:

1. Be able to read a film and what it is trying to communicate more closely.

2. Have specific knowledge about the development of and historical trends in this particular horror subgenre.

3. Be familiar with several important and/or ground-breaking “primordial world” horror films.

4. Be knowledgeable of several approaches to analyzing/theorizing film.

5. Further develop skills in oral and written communication and live and filmed performance.

You are required to read Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* over the course of the semester. You may purchase a copy of the book, or you may find the book online. For example, a pdf version exists at darwin-online.org.uk/converted/pdf/1861\_OriginNY\_F382.pdf

In addition, the thirteen films screened on Wednesday evenings serve as texts.

Assignments

Film Screening Points 130 points

Film Discussion Points 220 points

Film Recommendation Paper 100 points

Group Performance #1 100 points

Group Performance #2 100 points

Sweding Assignment 100 points

Reading Quizzes 120 points

Particiption/Attendance 130 points

Total 1,000 points

Grading:

980-1,000 A+

921-979 A

900-920 A-

880-899 B+

821-879 B

800-820 B-

780-799 C+

721-779 C

700-720 C-

680-699 D+

621-679 D

600-620 D-

0-599 F

Description of Assignments:

Film Screening Points: This course includes a screening lab on Wednesday evenings. While you may be able to find many of these films online, you should attend the screenings with your classmates. One of the joys of watching film is experiencing it with others who may or may not share your opinions/responses/reactions. In addition, the screenings force you to watch the films from beginning to end without hitting the pause button to text, prepare food, or go to the restroom. The screenings encourage careful attention; they are more akin to seeing the films in a theater. Screening attendance is worth 10 points per screening. You will not receive full credit if you arrive late or leave early. You may bring a friend from outside the class. Just don’t be disruptive. And just like in the theater, turn cell phones OFF!

Film Discussion Points: There are 13 film discussions during this course. They are worth 20 points each and cover the film(s) shown in the previous lab. At the end of the semester, we drop the lowest 2 (this includes those you may have missed and/or skipped) and add the rest for an overall possible 220 points. We will discuss the films and how they relate to the class. Shea will take attendance. You will receive 17 points JUST for being present. But those who contribute to the discussion in meaningful ways will receive 20 points. Of course, those absent will receive zero points. These discussions are fairly straightforward. Just pay attention to the films shown and relate them to the topics in the course!

Film Recommendation Paper: On March 17th, turn in a well-written “primordial world” horror film recommendation that relates your recommended film to a/the topic(s) covered in class. Basically, Dr. Shaffer, you should see \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because it relates to this class in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ways. This three-page paper should have a title, be typed and double-spaced in a reasonable and professional font, stapled, have an introduction, body, and conclusion. It should be clear, convincing, and grounded in concrete examples. Feel free to talk to me as you work on this. This paper is worth 100 points.

Group Performances #1 and #2: We will break into groups several times this semester to work on short group performances that illustrate/explore/critique a concept that emerges either in the films or the readings. Some of these experiences will not be graded, but two of them with result in a grade. Each is worth 100 points.

Sweding Assignment: Toward the end of the semester, you will work with a small group to “swede” one of the films we have screened. “Sweding” is a term that describes remaking the film with limited resources. I will provide an outline on sweding later in the semester. This is a fun and challenging project; it is worth 100 points.

Reading Quizzes: Each week you are responsible for reading a chapter of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. There will be a short quiz at the beginning of class. Each quiz is worth 10 points. There are 14 chapters plus an introduction which equals 15 quizzes. We will drop the bottom three grades. The total is worth 120 points.

Attendance: Attendance is absolutely necessary. This is a participatory course. Attendance at each class meeting outside of screenings and film discussions is worth 5 points. Of course, the film discussions are mandatory for a good grade in the class. The total is worth 130 points.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week 1 Jan. 11 Introduction to course

 LAB Freaks -- 1932

 Jan. 13 Film Discussion #1 (Reading Quiz on OS Introduction)

Week 2 Jan. 16 MLK DAY– NO CLASS

 Jan. 18 (Reading Quiz on OS 1)

 LAB King Kong -- 1933

 Jan. 20 Film Discussion #2

Week 3 Jan. 23 (Reading Quiz on OS 2)

 Jan. 25 Lecture

 LAB The Creature from the Black Lagoon -- 1954

 Jan. 27 Film Discussion #3

Week 4 Jan. 30 (Reading Quiz on OS 3)

 Feb. 1 Lecture

 LAB Little Shop of Horrors -- 1960

 Feb. 3 Film Discussion #4

Week 5 Feb. 6 (Reading Quiz on OS 4)

 Feb. 8 Lecture

 LAB The Birds -- 1963

Feb. 10 Film Discussion #5

Week 6 Feb. 13 (Reading Quiz on OS 5)

 Feb. 15 Lecture

 LAB Jaws -- 1975

 Feb. 17 NO CLASS (Patti Pace Performance Festival)

Week 7 Feb. 20 Film Discussion #6 (Reading Quiz on OS 6)

 Feb. 22 Lecture

 LAB The Fly -- 1986

 Feb. 24 Film Discussion #7

Week 8 Feb. 27 MARDI GRAS – NO CLASS

 Mar. 1 MARDI GRAS – NO CLASS

 LAB Arachnophobia -- 1990

Mar. 3 Film Discussion #8 (Reading Quiz on OS 7)

Week 9 Mar. 6 (Reading Quiz on OS 8)

 Mar. 8 Lecture

 LAB Jurassic Park -- 1993

 Mar. 10 Film Discussion #9

Week 10 Mar. 13 (Reading Quiz on OS 9)

 Mar. 15 Lecture

 LAB The Descent -- 2005

 Mar. 17 Film Discussion #10 (Paper Due)

Week 11 Mar. 20 (Reading Quiz on OS 10)

 Mar. 22 Lecture

 LAB The Ruins -- 2008

 Mar. 24 Film Discussion #11

Week 12 Mar. 27 (Reading Quiz on OS 11)

 Mar. 29 Lecture

LAB Splinter -- 2008

 Mar. 31 Film Discussion #12

Week 13 Apr. 3 (Reading Quiz on OS 12)

 Apr. 5 Lecture

 LAB Godzilla -- 2014

 Apr. 7 Film Discussion #13

Week 14 SPRING BREAK

Week 15 Apr. 17 (Reading Quiz on OS 13)

Apr. 19 Sweding

 LAB Sweding

 Apr. 21 Sweding

Week 16 Apr. 24 (Reading Quiz on OS 14) Screen Sweded Films

 Apr. 26 & 28 Screenings and Course Conclusion

**\*\*\*Course Policies:**

**1) Upon arrival to class, please turn off all electronic devices. If a cell phone or other device interrupts the class, I will ask you to leave the class for that day. Shea will do the same during labs; 2) You may invite friends to attend the labs with you unless they are disruptive. At that point, they will be asked to leave; 3) Please be respectful of the other students during class and the labs; 4) Please see me before or after class or during my office hours if you have any issues you would like to discuss; 5) I reserve the right to add to the course policies over the course of the semester if the need arises.**

**Shea and I look forward to a great semester and to sharing our love of film and performance with you.**

**The Americans With Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a coordinator in the Office for Disability Services (112 Johnston Hall) so that such accommodations may be arranged. After you receive your accommodation letter, please meet with me to discuss the provisions as soon as possible.**