

Sexuality, Gender, and Politics in the Contemporary Horror Film

LCC 3256: Major Filmmakers / LCC 3252: Film and Television

Summer 2008

Instructor: L. Andrew Cooper
Office Location: Skiles 301 (in transition)
Office Hours: M/W 12-1pm and by appointment
Email: andrew.cooper@lcc.gatech.edu

Course Description

The Silence of the Lambs features two murderers, one who eats people and another who removes and wears people's skin. *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* features a family of murderers who eat people and remove and wear their skin. Imdb.com classifies the former film as "Crime/Thriller;" it won all the major Oscars for 1991. Imdb.com classifies the latter as "Comedy/Horror;" it is widely regarded as trash.

Many of history's greatest filmmakers have created horror films, but "horror" is nevertheless a brand that connotes distaste and perversion. This course will look past the stigmas of "horror" and examine why and how contemporary horror films provide critical means of understanding our deepest anxieties about our individual and cultural identities. Horror films routinely represent and reconfigure notions of sexuality and gender in ways that simultaneously reinforce and challenge social norms. They also provide a metaphorical language for confronting political realities that seem to defy articulation.

This course will help you to become a more critical viewer and versatile interpreter of film, which is arguably the dominant entertainment medium of the last century. By focusing on horror films, this course will increase your understanding of how a popular genre of film reflects on and creates social structures through aesthetics that challenge viewers on both visceral and intellectual levels. In other words, when this course is over, you should be able to explain to parents or anyone else about why horror films are worth serious study, in college and beyond.

Required Texts

You are required to view all films and read all texts mentioned in the "Schedule" section at the end of this document. All of the films are widely available to rent or buy. I will also screen most of the films outside of class. You are not required to purchase all of the films, but I **strongly recommend** that you purchase copies of the films you will use for major assignments. Copies of all films are available at the Engineer's Bookstore, 748 Marietta Street. Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho* is also available for purchase at Engineer's. Other readings are available via the library's **electronic reserves**.

The films:

The Silence of the Lambs (1991)
Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 (1986)
Halloween (1978)
A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)
Suspiria (1977)
Ringu (1998)
The Ring (2002)
American Psycho (2000)
Night of the Living Dead (1968)

Candyman (1992)
The Hills Have Eyes (1977)
Hills Have Eyes 2 (2007)
Hostel (2005)
Saw (2004)
In the Mouth of Madness (1995)
Cigarette Burns (2005, TV, *Masters of Horror*)
Audition (1999)
Imprint (2006, TV, *Masters of Horror*)

Course Policies

Grading

Each assignment has a point value. Assignments add up to a total of 1000 points. Convert point totals into percentages, and the letter grade equivalents are:

A = 90-100; **B** = 80-89; **C** = 70-79; **D** = 60-69; **F** = 0-59

Failure to complete an assignment will result in 0 points.

Attendance

If you must miss class, email me ahead of time. You have three “freebie” days, classes you may miss without any grade penalties. For other absences, you must have official documentation of an illness, injury, or legal obligation that keeps you from class. I will deduct 25 points from your grade for each non-freebie, undocumented absence. Three latenesses constitute an absence. After six absences, you may fail the course. *Even “excused,” documented absences could affect your participation grade if they occur too often.*

Note that although attendance at film screenings is optional, you should always come to class ready to discuss your knowledge of the films.

Punctual Work

Unless I approve a deadline extension, which is unlikely, I will not accept major assignments after the deadline. You are responsible for all information covered during every class meeting.

Academic Conduct

You are responsible for knowing and abiding by GT’s policy for academic integrity. Consult the Honor Code online at <http://www.honor.gatech.edu> or in the General Catalog. Work that violates the Honor Code will receive zero credit and may result in failure of the entire course. I will also report any serious misconduct to the Dean of Students. In addition to following the honor code, you must behave respectfully toward your professor and classmates. Details about respectful behavior appear in the “Assignments” section under “Participation” on this syllabus.

Disability Notice

If you need accommodations for a disability, please contact me at the beginning of the semester so that we can discuss them. You should also contact Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students (ADAPTS) within the first two weeks of the semester so that they can help us to develop reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor call (404) 894-2564 (voice) / (404) 894-1664 (voice/TDD) or visit 220 Student Services Building. For more information visit <http://www.adapts.gatech.edu>.

The Fine Print

I reserve the right to alter the policies and assignments on this syllabus. I will exercise this right rarely, but I will often provide more detailed information about assignments during class. This syllabus is your guide. Keep it. Know it. Love it.

Assignments

The assignments for this course include a film review, an academic essay, a poster, a group-based oral presentation, a final exam, and participation in class discussions and activities.

The Film Review (50 points, sign up for due date)

Sign up for a “review discussion” date during the first week of class. **By 12 midnight on the Wednesday before your discussion date**, post a review of one of that week’s films in T-Square’s Forums. Give the film a rating, **a number of stars between one and five**. Five stars suggests the film is one of the best **horror** films you have ever seen or would expect to see; one star suggests it is one of the worst. In the body of the review, persuade your audience (the entire class) that your evaluation is correct by **stating the criteria** by which you judge the film and **explaining how aspects of the film succeed or fail in meeting each criterion**. Your statement of criteria should directly or indirectly address the question, **“What makes a horror film good?”** Your explanation of the film’s success or failure should rely on **interpretation as well as your knowledge of horror’s conventions and history**. While “it’s scary” is a fine starting point, you should delve deeper to explain *why* it’s scary. Similarly, “it’s stupid” is a reasonable evaluation, but you should explain why it’s stupid (what makes a horror movie smart?). The review should be **500-750 words (2-3 double-spaced pages)**.

The Essay (300 points, due June 25)

Write an essay, **1750-2000 words (7 to 8 double-spaced pages)** in length, that examines a relationship between **two of the films, or one film and the novel**, we have discussed in class. **Explain a connection you see between the texts while considering one of the following questions:**

1. How and why do the texts use violence to reflect on gender?
2. How and why do the texts use the actions of killers and/or victims to challenge and/or reinforce normative sexuality?
3. How and why do the texts reflect on the conventions and/or history of the horror genre?
4. How and why do the texts use horrific events and imagery to critique historical circumstances and/or events?
5. How and why does a later text critique and/or revise aspects of an earlier text? (You might think about adaptations, but you might also think about the evolution of generic conventions.)

If you prefer to use a different question, you must write the question and get my approval for it at least one week before the essay is due. **Whatever question you choose, you must refer to at least one of the essays or book chapters we have discussed in class as you support your argument.**

The Poster (300 points due July 21-25, sign up for due date)

Create a poster that provides an **interpretation and close analysis of a scene (no more than five minutes long)** from one of the films we have discussed in class. Develop an argument based on the sounds, images, themes, and other elements that create meaning in the scene you choose. Your argument should have a central claim that it sets out to prove. The proof of this claim should appear as both samples of the scene’s meaningful elements and either written or oral interpretation of those elements. The poster should combine still **images from the film with typed analysis**. In addition to printing the poster, you should post an electronic version of it on T-Square’s Forums. You may choose to embed film and/or sound clips from the film in the electronic version of the poster. On your due date, give the class a brief (2-3 minutes) presentation. The class will then tour all the poster displays, chatting with each presenter about her or his ideas. At individuals’ requests, I will try to make computers available so that presenters can combine sound and/or video clips with their presentations and/or chats.

The Group-Based Oral Presentation (100 points, sign up for due date)

Give a 10-minute presentation about the filmmaker or writer assigned on your presentation's due date. Provide rigorous, documented information and suggestions about how the facts relate to the class. Post a list of "Works Cited" on T-Square (a minimum of three sources).

The Final Exam (100 points, July 28, 2:50-5:40pm)

The exam involves identifications, short-answer questions, and an essay.

Participation (150 points)

Participation in class discussions and activities is mandatory. Demonstrate your knowledge of the readings, and share your insights. Maintaining class decorum is part of participation: noisy cell phones, disrespectful behavior, and other intrusions lower productivity and, therefore, your grade. The participation grade also includes scores on any quizzes or assignments not detailed here.

Schedule of Topics, Films, Readings, and Assignments

See the films and read the materials noted BEFORE the date where they appear.

Date	Topic	Films and Readings	Assignments Due
Mon. May 12	Welcome		
Wed. May 14	Highbrow Horror?	<i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> (1991) Fuss, from <i>Identification Papers</i>	
Fri. May 16	Lowbrow Horror?	<i>Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2</i> (1986) Halberstam, from <i>Skin Shows</i>	
Mon. May 19	The Final Girl	<i>Halloween</i> (1978) Clover, from <i>Men, Women, and Chain Saws</i>	
Wed. May 21	The American Girl Fights Back	<i>A Nightmare on Elm Street</i> (1984) Edmundson, from <i>A Nightmare on Main Street</i>	
Fri. May 23	Film Reviews	Read reviews on T-Square.	Review Discussion 1
Mon. May 26	HOLIDAY	NO CLASS	Have fun. Be safe.
Wed. May 28	A Nightmare in Europe	<i>Suspiria</i> (1977) McDonagh, from <i>Broken Mirrors, Broken Minds</i>	Presentation 1: Dario Argento
Fri. May 30	Cultural Haunting	<i>Ringu</i> (1998) McRoy, Introduction; White, <i>Ringu</i> (both from <i>Japanese Horror Cinema</i>)	Presentation 2: Hideo Nakata
Mon. June 2	Adaptation 1 (or is it a remake?)	<i>The Ring</i> (2002) Stam, "Theory and Practice"	
Wed. June 4	Film Reviews	Read reviews on T-Square. Start reading <i>American Psycho</i> .	Review Discussion 2
Fri. June 6	Bad Boys	Read <i>American Psycho</i> .	Presentation 3: Bret Easton Ellis
Mon. June 9	Psycho Culture	Read <i>American Psycho</i> .	
Wed. June 11	This is not an exit	Finish <i>American Psycho</i> .	
Fri. June 13	Adaptation 2 Film Reviews	<i>American Psycho</i> (2000) Read reviews on T-Square.	Review Discussion 3
Mon. June 16	Vietnam and the Birth of Modern Horror	<i>Night of the Living Dead</i> (1968) Higashi, "A Horror Film about..."	Presentation 4: George Romero
Wed. June 18	American Heritage	<i>Candyman</i> (1992) Briefel and Ngai, "Urban Space, Fear,	

		and Entitlement”	
Fri. June 20	Film Reviews	Read reviews on T-Square	Review Discussion 4
Mon. June 23	The Cold War and the American Family	<i>The Hills Have Eyes</i> (1977)	Presentation 5: Wes Craven
Wed. June 25	Vietnam, the Sequel (aka Iraq)	<i>The Hills Have Eyes 2</i> (2007)	The Essay Is Due!!
Fri. June 27	Film Reviews	Read reviews on T-Square.	Review Discussion 5
Mon. June 30	An American Nightmare in Europe	<i>Hostel</i> (2005) Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure”	Presentation 6: Eli Roth
Wed. July 2	Strategic Torture	<i>Saw</i> (2004) Williams, “Film Bodies”	Presentation 7: James Wan
Fri. July 4	HOLIDAY	NO CLASS	Have fun. Be safe.
Mon. July 7	Fiction Becomes Reality	<i>In the Mouth of Madness</i> (1995)	Presentation 8: John Carpenter
Wed. July 9	Movies Kill / Poster Prep	<i>Cigarette Burns</i> (2005, from TV series <i>Masters of Horror</i>) [readings about posters TBD]	
Fri. July 11	Film Reviews	Read reviews on T-Square.	Review Discussion 6
Mon. July 14	Twisting Genre	<i>Audition</i> (1999) Hantke, from <i>Japanese Horror Cinema</i>	Presentation 9: Takashi Miike
Wed. July 16	Too Sick for American TV?	<i>Imprint</i> (2006, from TV series <i>Masters of Horror</i>)	
Fri. July 18	Film Reviews	Read reviews on T-Square.	Review Discussion 7
Mon. July 21	Poster Presentations		Posters 1
Wed. July 23	Poster Presentations		Posters 2
Fri. July 25	Poster Presentations		Posters 3
Mon. July 28	FINAL EXAM	Exam, 2:50pm-5:40pm	Be there. Bring pens.

Schedule of Film Screenings (attendance is optional)

The schedule will not enable screenings of *Halloween* (1978) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). These films are very, very easy to find: watch them on your own (if you dare) or with friends.

Date	Film
Mon. May 12	<i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> (1991)
Wed. May 14	<i>Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2</i> (1986)
Mon. May 19	<i>Suspiria</i> (1977)
Wed. May 21	<i>Ringu</i> (1998)
Wed. May 28	<i>The Ring</i> (2002)
Wed. June 4	<i>Night of the Living Dead</i> (1968)
Mon. June 9	<i>Candyman</i> (1992)
Wed. June 11	<i>American Psycho</i> (2000)
Wed. June 18	<i>The Hills Have Eyes</i> (1977)
Mon. June 23	<i>The Hills Have Eyes 2</i> (2007)
Wed. June 25	<i>Hostel</i> (2005)
Mon. June 30	<i>Saw</i> (2004)
Wed. July 2	<i>In the Mouth of Madness</i> (1995)
Mon. July 7	<i>Cigarette Burns</i> (2005)
Wed. July 9	<i>Audition</i> (1999)
Mon. July 14	<i>Imprint</i> (2006)

PLEASE READ, SIGN, AND RETURN THESE STATEMENTS TO DR. COOPER.

I affirm that I have read the entire syllabus and policy sheet for LCC 3256/LCC3252 and understand the information and the responsibilities specified.

print name

signature

date

DIRECTIONS: Read carefully and check all that apply.

I give my instructor, L. Andrew Cooper, permission to use copies of the work I do for this course, LCC 3256/LCC 3252:

- as examples in this and other courses
- as examples in presentations and in print and electronic publications

Please indicate how you want to be acknowledged:

- Please use my name both in the acknowledgements and with my actual document.
- Please use my name in the acknowledgements section but use an appropriate pseudonym with my actual document.
- Please use a pseudonym both in the acknowledgements and with my actual document.
- Please use my work, but do not acknowledge me in any way.

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- I do not want my work used as examples in any situations.

print name

signature

print permanent address

print campus address

date