

**Albert G. Nigrin**

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**Cult Films in American Culture:**

**Instructor: Albert Nigrin**

**Course #: 01: 050: 301**

**Dates: 2006-07 Winter Session**

**Day/Time: 12/26/06-1/12/07 - 8:30 AM-12:00PM**

**Location: Scott Hall #135, CAC, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey**

**Course Description:** This lecture-discussion course focuses on the American “cult” film from its origins in the 1920s to its evolution in American culture. Close analyses of cult films will be paired with readings by J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, Sigmund Freud, and others. According to Freud, for example, social organization for the primordial horde came about as a result of the incest taboo and the law of exogamy. Several of the films to be screened depict scenes that violate this organization and break the taboo. This course will explore how and why these violations permeate cult films. In addition, many cult films are open ended metaphors for contemporary social anxieties. We will examine how these counter-culture films are a reaction to late ‘60s and ‘70s American society. Finally, this course will include in-depth analyses of the structure of celebrated American cult films (“mise-en-scene,” editing, narrative form, set design, sound, and special effects) including: *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Eraserhead*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *Cat People*, and others.

*Warning: some films may contain nudity, sexual situations, violence, profanity, substance abuse, and disturbing images.*

**Course Texts:**

-J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum. *Midnight Movies*. NY: Press, Da Capo Press, 1991.  
-Xerox Packet of Articles (including selections from Sigmund Freud. *Moses and Monotheism*. NY: Vintage Books, 1939; and others) is available from the instructor the first two weeks of class only. Cost: \$40 (cash or check made payable to the Rutgers Film Co-op/NJMAC) includes most of the reading materials and a lab fee for certain in-class film rentals.

**Suggested Texts:**

Francesco Aranda. *Luis Bunuel*. NY: Da Capo Press, 1976.  
Edmund G. Bansak. *Fearing The Dark: The Val Lewton Career*. McFarland and Co. Inc. Publishers, 1995.  
John Baxter. *The Cinema of Joseph Von Sternberg*. NY: Barnes & Noble Press, 1972.  
David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. NY: A. Knopf, 1995.  
John Brosnan. *The Horror People*. NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1977.  
Charles Champlin. *George Lucas and the Creative Impulse*. NY: Harry Abrams Pub.1992.  
Michel Chion. *David Lynch*. London: British Film Institute, 1995.  
Jo Leslie Collier. *From Wagner to Murnau*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988.  
Lotte Eisner. *The Haunted Screen*. Berkeley: University of California, 1977.  
Lotte Eisner. *Murnau*. Berkeley: University of California, 1973.  
Sigmund Freud. *On Creativity and the Unconscious*. NY: Harper & Row Pub., 1958. See essay “The Uncanny.”  
Sigmund Freud. *Totem and Taboo*. NY: W.W. Norton and Co, 1950.  
Peter Gidal. *Andy Warhol: Films and Paintings*. NY: Studio Vista, 1971.  
Alice L. Hutchinson. *Kenneth Anger*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004.  
John Ives. *John Waters*. NY: Thunder Mountain Press, 1992.

## **Nigrin - Cult Films in American Culture/page 2**

### **Suggested Texts continued:**

- Alejandro Jodorowsky. *El Topo: A Book of the Film*. NY: Douglas/Links, 1971.  
Steven Koch. *Stargazer: Andy Warhol's World and his Films*. NY: Praeger, 1993.  
Siegfried Kracauer. *From Caligari to Hitler*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.  
Bill Landis. *Anger*. NY: Harper Collins Pub., 1995.  
John McCarty. *The Fearmakers*. NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994.  
Sal Piro, *Creatures of the Night I: The Rocky Horror Experience*. Livonia, MI: Stabur Press, 1980.  
Sal Piro, *Creatures of the Night II: More of The Rocky Horror Experience*. Livonia, MI: Stabur Press, 1985.  
Dale Pollock. *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*. NY: Ballantine Books, 1983.  
Joel Siegel. *Val Lewton*. NY: Viking Press, 1973.  
David Skal. *Hollywood Gothic*. NY: WW Norton and Co., 1990.  
Tzvetan Todorov. *The Fantastic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.  
J.P. Telotte, ed. *The Cult Film Experience*. Austin: University of Texas, 1992.  
J.P. Telotte. *Dreams of Darkness: Fantasy and the Films of Val Lewton*. Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1985.

### **Course Requirements and Grading:**

Attendance is mandatory. Two exams [Short Answer/Essay Questions].

Class Participation: 20%

Attendance: 10%

Exam #1: 35%

Exam #2: 35%

### **Attendance and Absences:**

I will overlook one absence from class; thus, take your absences seriously. If you accumulate more than one absence, you should speak to me right away and let me know how you will make up the work you've missed. In addition, more than one absence will affect your attendance grade and I will be less flexible in considering your overall grade. The opposite also holds true: if your attendance and class participation are consistently strong, you may enhance your final grade.

### **Exams:**

You should take careful notes during class; both exams will be based directly on the material we cover and our class discussions. The first exam will cover the first half of the syllabus; likewise, the final exam will cover the second half of the syllabus.

### **Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism is a serious offense in this course and according to Rutgers University regulations. If you appropriate another person's ideas or words in any manner, whether by restatement or direct quotation, and without acknowledging your source, you will commit plagiarism. The penalties for plagiarism in this course are as follows: a "F" on any plagiarized writing, which may result in failure of the course and a report to the dean.

### **Class Meetings:**

- 12/26+27/05 Introduction  
Origins of the Cult Film  
*Nosferatu*, *Cat People*,  
*Nosferatu The Vampire* (excerpts), *Dracula* (excerpts)  
Read section in handout from Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*.

### **Nigrin - Cult Films in American Culture/page 3**

- 12/28+29/05 Surrealist Films  
*An Andalusian Dog/The Golden Age*  
Read J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum's *Midnight Movies*. pages 1-76. Read section in handout on Bunuel.
- 1/2+3/07 Stanley Kubrick's *2001, Planet of the Apes*  
Read section in handout on *2001*.
- 1/4/07 Exam #1
- 1/5+8/07 The Midnight Movie  
Alejandro Jodoworsky's *El Topo* (excerpts), George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*  
Read J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum's *Midnight Movies*. pages 77-135.
- 1/9/07 The Ultimate Cult Motion Picture Experience  
*Rocky Horror Picture Show*  
Read J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum's *Midnight Movies*. pages 136-213.
- 1/10/07 David Lynch's *Eraserhead*, Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*  
Read J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum's *Midnight Movies*. pages 214-330.
- 1/12/07 Exam #2