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American Studies Department

Art History 100 TTH 6:00 to 9:45 pm  
Email: [cultfilm.americanstudies@gmail.com](mailto:cultfilm.americanstudies@gmail.com)  
Summer Session 2006

**Cult Films in American Culture  
American Studies 01:050:300 E6  
Rutgers--The State University**

**Contact Information:**

American Studies Office  
Room 024 RAB, Douglass  
Phone 732.932.1630

**Required Reading**

Joseph M. Boggs

The Art of Watching Films  
(Sixth Edition, 2004)

Joseph Conrad

The Heart of Darkness  
(Dover Classic Edition)

**Course Requirements**

Normally, when this class meets in the evening we will see at least one feature-length film along with one or more chapters of the serial. Serial chapters are shown once and only once. If you miss one, then you may have missed it forever. The responsibility for seeing these films is yours and yours alone. Seeing a film is not like reading a book. A book can be picked up and set down whenever you like. These short film segments must be seen when they are shown.

However, all of the feature films will be placed on reserve in the Media Room (basement level) of the Cook-Douglass Library in video format. Since the quality of your written work will crucially depend upon first-hand knowledge of each film, we encourage you to view each major film twice--once in class and later at the library. In addition, use of videotapes or DVD's on your own is encouraged (insofar as the films are available in these formats). You should always try to see a film twice, since you pick up many subtleties the second time.

"Zombies are the real lower class citizens of  
the monster world, and that's why I like them."

-- George A. Romero

## **Attendance and Participation**

Students are expected to attend all scheduled course meetings, to come on time starting on the very first day, and to stay in class through the lecture, the break, and the screening of the feature film. Since every day in summer school represents about one week's work in regular sessions, regular and punctual attendance is mandatory. You are allowed one excused absence to be used for illness, business, tragedy, or even pleasure. There are no other excused absences for any reason. If you miss twice, your attendance grade will be lowered one letter grade (in other words, the best grade you would get would be a B), three times another letter grade or C, four times a D, five times an F, six or more times are grounds for failure of this course. So please try to attend class regularly.

Note that every new copy of *The Art of Watching Films* comes with a free copy of a CD-ROM. This text-specific CD will help clarify and reinforce specific concepts addressed in the text with the use of film clips (one per chapter), a corresponding commentary for each film, and a quiz for you to take to test your understanding of the material. With the quiz function, you should test your mastery of the concepts addressed in the CD. You should take the separate quiz (10 questions) for each chapter. Answers can be immediately checked and the results should be emailed to us upon the completion of each quiz at [cultfilm.americanstudies@gmail.com](mailto:cultfilm.americanstudies@gmail.com). You should email us the results of each quiz by midnight of the day before that reading assignment falls due. For example, you should be emailing me the results of the quizzes for Chapters One and Two by midnight of the day before our second class meeting. No lame excuses, please. Just do the work. Late homework submissions will not be accepted.

## **Exams and Grades**

Attendance and Participation	20%
Midterm Exam (objective only)	30%
Final Exam (objective plus essays)	50%

Your course grade will be determined by your performance on the midterm and final examinations. The midterm covers the first three weeks of the course. The final is cumulative and covers all six weeks of the course. Both examinations will test recall of the films (through dialogue identification) and concepts in the textbook (especially terminology). Pay particular attention to the terms that are explained in the glossary, pages G-1 to G-8 in the back of the book. In addition to a number of objective (multiple choice) questions, the final will also give you a chance to write two essays to demonstrate your skill at handling ideas.

Attendance at both the midterm and final examinations is mandatory and required. This obligation must have top priority if you expect to receive credit for the course. Be sure to arrange your work schedule and your personal schedule accordingly. If you do not take the exams, you will not get credit for the course. The exams will be given at the scheduled time only. There are no alternate dates or make-ups of any kind whatsoever. You may not phone in sick. You may be excused only for illness that requires hospitalization or a documented death in your immediate family. Unless there is a drastic emergency of this nature that can be

substantiated and documented, we expect you to attend and take the exam on schedule.

In the belief that proper crib preparation is indistinguishable from studying, we have institutionalized and legalized the crib sheet for the final exam in this course. You are allowed to use a legal crib sheet. Our purpose is to reduce exam anxiety and to encourage good study habits. The rules are as follows:

@ Both sides of a single 8 1/2" X 11" piece of paper may be used. That's the same size as the pages of this syllabus.

@ Cribs must be written by hand--not typed--and signed.

@ The crib sheet is to be turned in with the exam.

### **Course Approach**

A survey of out-of-the mainstream films which characteristically feature atypical heroes and heroines, offbeat dialogue, and highly original story lines. Films such as The Rocky Horror Picture Show were underrated or neglected at the time of their release. Cult films also include some mainstream films like Apocalypse Now that have attracted a devoted audience of repeat viewers whose attendance becomes a communal event. Warning: some films may contain nudity, sexual situations, violence, profanity, substance abuse, and disturbing images. For definitions of cult films, see the following website: [www.jahsonic.com/CultMovies.html](http://www.jahsonic.com/CultMovies.html)

### **Special Invitation**

This course is on the selected list for the Summer Session Audit Program. It is open on a space available basis to noncredit, auditing students for reduced tuition of \$95. Rutgers Alumni and RU-ALL members may take advantage of summer audit tuition of \$65. Please have your class admission card available for presentation.

### **Optional Term Paper**

This optional extra-credit term paper will be due in class during the next-to-the-last week as indicated in our calendar of assignments. Since the assignment is entirely optional, there will be no need for extensions. If you do not have the paper, you will not be penalized in any way. Writing this paper can only help your final grade and cannot harm you at all.

Papers will be evaluated on their merit--extra credit is not given merely because papers were completed. Papers must be generated on the computer or typewritten. Use Times New Roman in 12-point type with one-inch margins all around. No cover sheet please. Simply type your name, the course name, the instructor's name, and the date, each item on its own line, single-spaced, in the upper right hand corner of page 1. Double space down to the paper's title. Double space thereafter. Follow either the MLA (Modern Language Association) or Chicago Manual of Style guidelines for the manuscript, citations, and works cited (bibliography). Grading will be based on content, organization, development, style, and correctness. Carefully proofread for spelling, typography, punctuation, and grammar.

Successful papers will earn bonus points to be applied to the score on the final exam, after the regular grades are computed. "A" papers get 9 points; "B" papers get 7 points; and "C" papers get 5 points. When bonus points are applied to the final exam, it can make a difference of an entire letter grade. Remember, it is up to you. No one has to do the assignment. However, those who carry it out should find the experience rewarding.

We are looking for a 1750 word paper (about 7 typewritten pages) that meets the criteria below. Papers are due at the start of class on Thursday July 27. Late papers will not be accepted. Papers will be graded and returned to you at the final exam, one week later, on Thursday August 3

**Subject.** Your paper will be about a film other than the ones we have already seen. You will view this outside of class. These are widely available as they are mostly “classic” cult films. We have prepared a list of cult films that have been well regarded, even critically acclaimed. You may choose any one of the following films:

*Dr. Strangelove* (1964)  
*Blow-Up* (1966)  
*Easy Rider* (1969)  
*A Clockwork Orange* (1971)  
*Pink Flamingoes* (1972)  
*Eraserhead* (1978)  
*Baghdad Café* (1988)

**First paragraph.** The first paragraph should contain a brief summary of the film’s narrative or story (about 100-150 words). Tell us what happens in the film. This should be in your own words. Do not repeat descriptions from other sources.

**Main Body.** The main body of your paper (1450 words, about 5 to 6 typewritten pages) should analyze the use of mise-en-scene or cinematography. Choose only one of these elements for analysis. Do not mix them up!

If you analyze **mise-en-scene** (drawing upon the terms and concepts from Chapter 4 Visual Design): Discuss how settings, costumes, make-up, lighting, movement, acting, and use of space affect our perceptions of the film’s narrative, characters, and/or meanings. Be sure to define or explain the terms you use and give specific examples from individual scenes in the film.

If you analyze **cinematography** (drawing upon the terms and concepts from Chapter 5 Cinematography): Discuss how framing and camera movement as well as other choices by the cinematographer affect our perceptions of the film’s narrative, characters, and/or meanings. Be sure to define or explain the terms you use.

**Conclusion.** Your final paragraph (up to 200 words) should discuss some of the kinds of meanings conveyed by the film and offer some conclusions about how mise-en-scene or cinematography conveys or affects those meanings.

**Format.** Papers should be word-processed, double spaced, in Times New Roman, 12-point font, and have one-inch margins. Your name, and the name of the film you are analyzing should be placed in the upper right-hand corner of your first page. Be sure to place page numbers on each page. Please staple all pages together. Please do not use folders or binders, since they are too bulky.

**Sources and Plagiarism.** The paper should reflect your own analysis of the film in your own words. I do not expect you to use any outside sources. If you do use any sources for words or ideas, you must give them full credit in footnotes or endnotes. 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 without acknowledging your source, you will commit plagiarism. The penalties for plagiarism in this course are as follows: a zero on any plagiarized writing, which may result in failure of the course and a report to the dean.

### **The Republic Serial**

In the 1930s major film exhibitors discovered that one way to build audience loyalty was to show episodic serials. These short one-reel films were shown in weekly installments. Often the installment would end with the hero in a difficult situation. Typically, the outcome would not be resolved until the following week. The idea was to build anticipation so that the audience would return week after week to follow the hero's fate. By the late 1940s and early 1950s this style of filmmaking had been perfected.

To re-create the atmosphere of a 1950s-style theater, we will be showing periodic installments of "Radar Men from the Moon," originally released in black and white in 1952. In the story the Earth is rocked by a series of mysterious atomic explosions. The U.S. Government enlists the help of scientist and inventor Commando Cody, who traces the origin of the explosions to a group of terrorists on the moon. Soon, Cody and his crew fly to the moon in their experimental rocket ship where they confront Radick, the moon's evil ruler, who is bent on conquering Earth with the help of his powerful atomic weapons.

### **Classroom Etiquette**

For your own benefit you should try to arrive on time for each class. If you are unavoidably late, please enter by the rear door so as not to disrupt everyone else's viewing. Again for your own benefit you should stay for the complete screening of each film. If you must leave early, speak to us about the situation beforehand, and leave by the rear entrance. Please turn off all cell phones and pagers and put them away during class. Our classroom is rather small, and we shall need almost every seat. Therefore, we ask that you take only a single seat. Please be considerate of your fellow students and do not use adjacent seats to spread out your belongings.

## Advising

I will do my best to keep an eye on you and to call you out if I think you look like you need help, but there are a lot of you and just one of me. It is therefore really up to you to come to me if you need help--on anything. I come to class early not just to take attendance but also to be available to talk. I have brief office hours during the break, but we can set up appointments then for longer meetings at mutually convenient times. . If you have course conflicts, I can arrange alternate meeting times, just ask. And don't be shy.

Advising is part of my job! I am happy to help you with course materials, paper and exam preparation, with planning your future, internships, picking a graduate school, and with navigating the Rutgers bureaucracy. Perhaps, most important, I'm a fairly good listener if you need someone safe to talk to, and I can help you find help if you need it.

## Cult Movies Checklist

- Cult film is in the eye of the beholder.
- Cult films are never mainstream movies.
- Cult films attract obsessive fans.
- Cult films may not gain such status until some time after their release
- A film that attracts too large an audience cannot be a cult film.
- Certain genres are more likely to be regarded as cult films.
- The most likely genres are science fiction and horror.
- Cult films often contain subversive elements such as transvestitism.

"Even a man who is pure in heart,  
and says his prayers by night,  
may become a wolf when the wolf bane blooms  
and the autumn moon is bright."  
--old German saga

"But one besotted viewer does not a cult make;  
it takes at least two to swap allusions and in-jokes."  
--Paul Simpson

## **Class Schedule**

Tuesday 27 June

### **THE CULT FILM DEFINED**

Distribution of Syllabus  
"Radar Men From the Moon"--Episode 1  
Course procedures explained.  
Course concepts presented.  
"The Wolf Man" (1941) 70 minutes  
Directed by George Waggnner

Thursday 29 June

### **THE ORIGINAL CULT FILM**

"Radar Men From the Moon" 2, 3  
"Casablanca" (1942) 102 minutes  
Directed by Michael Curtiz  
Read "The Art of Watching Films"  
Ch 1 "Film Analysis"  
Ch 2 "Thematic Elements"

Tuesday 4 July

### **NATIONAL HOLIDAY**

No Class Tonight

Thursday 6 July

### **THE CULT STAR**

"Radar Men From the Moon" 4,5  
"Night of the Iguana" (1964) 118 minutes  
Directed by John Huston  
Read "The Art of Watching Films"  
Ch 3 "Fictional and Dramatic Elements"  
Ch 4 "Visual Design"

Tuesday 11 July

### **CULT FILM GENRE: HORROR**

"Radar Men From the Moon" 6  
"Night of the Living Dead" (1968) 96 minutes  
Directed by George A. Romero  
Read "The Art of Watching Films"  
Ch 5 "Cinematography"  
Ch 6 "Editing and Special Visual Effects"

Thursday 13 July

### **THE MIDNIGHT MOVIE**

"Radar Men From the Moon" 7  
"Rocky Horror Picture Show" (1975) 100 min  
Directed by Jim Sharman  
See Notes on "Camp" by Susan Sontag at website:  
<http://pages.zoom.co.uk/everidge/Sontag.html>  
Read "The Art of Watching Films"  
Ch 7 "Color"  
Ch 8 "Sound Effects and Dialogue"

Tuesday 18 July

**EXPLOITATION FILMMAKING**

"Radar Men From the Moon" 8  
Read "The Art of Watching Films"  
Ch 9 "The Musical Score"  
Ch 10 "Acting"

**Midterm Examination** In Class.

"The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" (1974) 83 min  
Directed by Tobe Hooper  
See this film on your own. Not shown in class.

Thursday 20 July

**CULT FILM GENRE: SCIENCE FICTION**

"Radar Men From the Moon" 9  
"Planet of the Apes" (1968) 112 minutes  
Directed by Franklin A. Schaffner  
Read "The Art of Watching Films"  
Ch 11 "The Director's Style"

Tuesday 25 July

**CULT FILM RETROSPECTIVE**

"Radar Men From the Moon" 10  
"Ed Wood" (1994) 127 minutes  
Directed by Tim Burton  
Read "The Art of Watching Films"  
Ch 12 "Analysis of the Whole Film"  
Ch 13 "Adaptations"  
Sample Essay Questions Distributed.

Thursday 27 July

**THE CULT DIRECTOR**

*Optional Term Paper Due Today!*  
"Radar Men From the Moon" 11  
"Heart of Darkness" (1991) 96 minutes  
Documentary footage by Eleanor Coppola  
Directed by Fax Bahr w/ Geo. Hickenlooper  
Ch 14 "Genre Films, Remakes, & Sequels"  
Ch 16 "Censorship and Other Forces"  
"Glossary," pages G-1 thru G-8  
Read Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"

Tuesday 1 August

**THE CULT DIRECTOR'S MASTERPIECE**

"Radar Men From the Moon" 12  
"Apocalypse Now" (1979) 153 minutes  
Directed by Francis Ford Coppola  
Read "The Art of Watching Films"  
Course Evaluations Distributed

Thursday 3 August

## **FINAL EXAMINATION**

Blue books are supplied  
Bring soft lead #2 pencils for objective  
Bring ballpoint pen for essays  
Every other seat seating  
**NO MAKEUPS; NO EXCEPTIONS**

"When it comes to midnight movies,  
you've already got an empty theater  
and all you need is a projector  
and a few good people  
and good word of mouth."  
--Ben Barenholtz

### **Summer Advisory**

It is characteristic of summer school work that it is very intense. Unfortunately, this intense work is being carried out at the very time that many others are enjoying baseball, lazy afternoons, and weekends at the shore. However, you should bear in mind that you and you alone are responsible for keeping up with the assigned work in this course. When the semester ends with the final examination, work for this course is complete.

Therefore, please be advised that once the course has ended, there will be absolutely, positively no further opportunities for "make up" exams or "extra credit" work to improve your grade. Such after-the-fact activities are manifestly unfair to everyone else in the class who has done the work all along. The time to work on this course is now, not after the class is over.

"Every kind who owns a pair of blue jeans  
thinks he's gonna find the spirit of  
his generation in a midnight movie house.  
Forget it: it's all crummy kink, banal camp, bad sex.  
Jesus, why am I complaining?  
For me, it's a terrific cash flow."  
--Anonymous film distributor