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Student Seminar: Body Horror Across Media

Seminar Description & Tentative Bibliography

Seminar Description:

Since the beginnings of the COVID-19 crisis, sales of pandemic fiction have skyrocketed. Video on-demand rentals of Steven Soderbergh's *Contagion* have surged, and books like Emily St. John Mandel's novel *Station Eleven* have garnered unprecedented attention from the media. What are we to make of these texts? How do they configure bodily vulnerability, physical abnormality, monstrosity, and disease? "Body Horror Across Media," the fall 2020 student seminar led by Ryan Totaro '22, explores these questions through the lens of a horror subgenre known as "body horror." Also known as "biological" or "visceral horror," body horror depicts bodily mutations, deformity, decay, zombification, mutilation, disease, and parasitism in a fictional context, primarily on film. However, the body horror subgenre exists in many art forms - including, though not limited to, literature, the graphic novel, and music. What unites these disparate media is their unique capability to inspire visceral, physically embodied sensations of terror, abjection, and disgust. The seminar will approach the seminal texts of this genre through the lense of affect theory, particularly as it intersects with feminist and disability studies. We'll explore how the subgenre inspires visceral affective reactions in audiences, and debate whether distinct media of body horror produce an affect unique to their form. Accordingly, the course incorporates a variety of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences - everything from English, Psychology, and History, to Health, Film, and Visual Studies. If you're interested in the psychological phenomena underlying "ASMR horror," poststructuralist theories of abjection, or the historical origins of circus sideshows... this seminar might be for you!

Significant primary texts in the course will include Katsuhiro Otomo film *Akira*, José Saramago's novel *Blindness*, and Billie Eilish's album *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*, among others. The course's scholarship will draw on the literature of Julia Kristeva, Barbara Creed, and Xavier Aldana Reyes. A full tentative bibliography is listed below - I hope to hear from you soon, and wish you all are safe and healthy in quarantine!

Tentative Course Bibliography:

FILMS

Freaks (Tod Browning, 1932)
Eraserhead (David Lynch, 1977).
Akira (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988)
28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2002)

LITERATURE

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus (Mary Shelley, 1818).
“The Masque of the Red Death” (Edgar Allan Poe, 1842).
Blindness (José Saramago, 1999).

GRAPHIC NOVELS

Uzumaki: Spiral Into Horror, Vol. 1 (Junji Ito, 1998 - 2000).
Animal Man, Vol. 1: *The Hunt*. (Jeff Lemire et al., 2012).

ALBUMS

When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go? (Billie Eilish, 2019).

SCHOLARSHIP

Sideshow USA: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination (Rachel Adams, 2001)
Staring: How We Look (Rosemary Garland Thompson, 2009)
Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture (Rosemary Garland Thompson, 1996).
Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity (Edward Branigan, 1984).
Abject Terrors: Surveying the Modern and Postmodern Horror Film (Tony Magistrale, 2005).
Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture (Kendall R. Phillips, 2005).
The Horror Film (Stephen Prince, 2004).
Horror Film and Affect: Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership (Xavier Aldana Reyes, 2018).
The Horror Film: An Introduction (Rick Worland, 2007).
The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis (Barbara Creed, 1993).
Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (Julia Kristeva, 1980).
Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre (Robert Spadoni, 2007).

Limits of Horror: Technology, bodies, Gothic (Fred Botting, 2008).

Skin shows: Gothic horror and the technology of monsters (Judith Halberstam, 1995).

Gothic Realities: The Impact of Horror Fiction on Modern Culture (L.A. Cooper, 2010).

Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film (Xavier Aldana Reyes, 2014).

"Mutations and Metamorphoses: Body Horror is Biological Horror," in *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (R.A.L. Cruz, 2012).

"Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," in *Film Quarterly* (Linda Williams, 1991).

"Recreational Terror: Postmodern Elements of the Contemporary Horror Film," in *Journal of Film and Video* (Isabel Pinedo, 1996).