

# CMST 7923: Seminar in Performance and Culture

## Performing Horror

Tuesday and Thursday 12:00-1:30

HBB (Coates 137)

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3:00

or by appointment

This syllabus provides basic information on the course.  
More information will be provided in class.

Performing Horror is a graduate seminar in the Department of Communication Studies. It is a Performance Studies course and includes the practice of performance. That is, students are required to create three performances over the semester.

Content: This seminar focuses on careful and critical engagement with texts using horror films and horror fiction as the object of study.

Assignments: Students will create three performances: (1) a 3-5 minute performance of horror fiction (anything from Stoker's Dracula to contemporary young adult horror) using methods from oral interpretation [texts are MEMORIZED]; (2) a critical performance of a horror film drawing from one of Caillois' four types of games: agôn (competition on an artificially leveled playing field), alea (games of chance), mimicry (role-playing, or make pretend), and Ilinx (disorientating oneself, thrill-seeking and risk taking); (3) a conceptual performance of horror. Students will also do presentations and write a final paper.

Texts: The reading in the course will draw from foundational horror scholarship like Carol Clover's Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film and contemporary work from **communication** scholars such as Kendall Phillips and Bernadette Calafell. You will also be assigned essays throughout the semester.

## Film Assignments/Cluster Discussions/Cluster Reports

You are assigned 43 films this semester (2-3 a week). Consider them required texts. You can find every one of them online—most on either YouTube, Amazon Prime, or iTunes ranging from \$0-3.99. At this price range, at max, you would spend \$171.57 total (the price of a few books). However, if you share the expense between a few in the class and screen together, you will achieve a few things: the film expense will be cheaper, you will grow closer to your classmates, and you will learn from others reactions/insights. So my advice is: plan to screen these films with a small group when you can. We will spend approximately 30 minutes of time discussing each cluster.

The clusters are a way to compare and contrast films. They are not discrete. That is, many films could be screened under multiple cluster categories. However, by assigning 2-3 a week, we can isolate/discuss certain monsters, directors, themes, time periods, or aesthetic approaches. Clusters allow us to engage both breadth and depth when discussing horror.

Please screen the cluster by the end of the week in which they are assigned. Each week, one of you will begin our discussion with a cluster report. The cluster report should be thoughtful and well-written (you will hand me a hard copy) 1,000 word response to the films.

1. German Expressionism: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and *Nosferatu* (1922)
2. Gothic Literature/Classic Horror: *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932)
3. Early Cult Classics: *Freaks* (1932), *White Zombie* (1932), and *King Kong* (1933)
4. 40s and 50s: *Cat People* (1942), *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), and *The Blob* (1958)
5. Ed Gein: *Psycho* (1960), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *Silence of the Lambs* (1991)
6. Stalker/Slasher: *Halloween* (1978), *Alien* (1979), and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984)
7. Alexander Aja: *Haute Tension* (2003), *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), and *Piranha 3D* (2010)

8. Haunting: The Shining (1980), Poltergeist (1982), The Others (2001)
9. Mother/Child: The Exorcist (1975), Carrie (1976), The Babadook (2014)
10. Primordial World: Jaws (1975), Jurassic Park (1993), The Descent (2005)
11. Romero's and Raimi's Zombies: Night of the Living Dead (1968), Dawn of the Dead (1978) and Evil Dead (1981)
12. Contemporary Zombies: 28 Days Later (2002), Dawn of the Dead (2004), and Shaun of the Dead (2004)
13. Body Horror: Eraserhead (1977), The Thing (1981), and The Fly (1986)
14. Conspiracies: Rosemary's Baby (1968), Stepford Wives (1975), and Get Out (2017)
15. Metahorror: Scream (1996) and The Cabin in the Woods (2012)

Assignments:

- Performance 1 (100 points)
- Performance 2 (100 points)
- Performance 3 (100 points)
- Class Discussion (300 points)
- Cluster Report (100 points)
- Partnered Book Report (100 points)
- Final Paper (200 points)

Class Total (1,000 points)

- A+ 970-1000
- A 930-969
- A- 900-929
- B+ 870-899
- B 830-869
- B- 800-829

If your work dips below this over the course of the semester, please make an appointment with me.