

Course: CHMN-277 Disneygothic
Meeting: BB4G, Wednesday 4:00 P.M. - 7:00 P.M.
Office Hours: Room E115, Wednesdays, 12:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.
Professor: Nick Barner
Contact: nbarner@calarts.edu

Disneygothic: The Attraction and Popularization of Modern Horror

“Disneyland, supposedly imaginary, maintains the illusion that America is real even though it is already given over to the unreal. So, too, with Gothic: it preserves the illusion of darkness, death, and sexuality in a world given over to the omnipresence of virtual light and life on screens.”

~ Fred Botting, *The Limits of Horror*



Course Description:

Taking inspiration from Fred Botting’s notion of “the Disneygothic”, this course will examine the transformations of Horror and Gothicism as they’ve saturated American markets, defined identities, and remixed transgressive, and at times status-quo, politics. Through screenings, presentations, discussions, readings, and visiting lecturers, Disneygothic will approach the histories of Horror film, literature, and art, both as mass-market phenomena and niche subcultural material. We will question what, besides simply fear, draws us to Horror. Students will compare the Horror of today with precedents such as: Poe’s *House of Usher*, Lang’s *Metropolis*, Benjamin Christensen’s *Häxan*, Carter’s feminist fairy tales, and Jewell Gomez’ Afrofuturist vampires. We’ll review CalArts Horror history from Tim Burton’s rise to our very own labyrinth of The Main Building. We’ll discuss Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and its media legacy, Shirley Jackson’s parallel practice of horror and comedy, and the seeds of today’s Black Horror since Blacula’s fight for studio funding right up to the last half-decade with Jordan Peele’s game-changing endeavors in the form. We’ll focus on how and why Horror is different today. What is finally out in the open, and what remains repressed? How did the transgressions of clandestine woman authors shape this genre, and how can Horror tell non-extractive stories about race? Is Horror still used as a hegemonic and colonial resource? What changes when Horror migrates from fan-scene to the mainstream?

Disneygothic can be thought of as a survey featuring projects in writing, art, and community engagement. We will critically address the proliferation Horror ploys, such as theme park rides, theater gimmicks, tie-in merchandise, endless sequels, reality TV, True Crime podcasts, Final Girl Mania, Prestige Television, and the genericizing of holidays and marginalized faiths. Students will maintain a *Disneygothic Archive* of contemporary Horror tropes, media, or art (scary or not) from day-to-day life, on which we'll base weekly discussions. The course is structured to be especially accessible to all *métiers*; we will approach film, music, fashion, architecture, writing, and more, to be determined by student interest. Disneygothic is explicitly *not* a course about the grizzliest or most extreme Horror, but it will include some depictions of violence.



Assignments:

The Disneygothic Archive — *Continuous through Semester. Grade: 20%.*

As a student in Disneygothic, you will have the opportunity to shape the course through weekly roundtable discussions. At the beginning of each meeting, you'll be invited to offer an observation about a piece of Horror media, or a Gothic aspect of real life. Not everyone has to say something every week, but these will be simple notes on anything watched, read, attended, listened to, or noticed on the street (or internet) that you want to discuss. It can relate directly to class, or it can represent a larger sea change in the state of Horror today. We'll enter these into our Disneygothic Archive, an online database that all of us can access and edit. We'll tag the entries with themes from the course. Someone might bring up an episode of *Wednesday*, and we might tag it: *pre-sold franchise, alienation, formal gothic fashion, anti-JK Rowling, child monsters, television nostalgia, normies vs outcasts, Edgar Allan Poe*, or whatever the group introduces or pulls from past readings, lectures, and discussions. Our Disneygothic Archive will feed back into the course, integrating into the discussions, and determining exactly which media we continue to learn from and with. Everyone will be expected to contribute at least two entries, but there is no upper limit.

This assignment satisfies Critical Studies Learning Goals 1. Engage in class discussions and communicate ideas, demonstrating course preparation; and 3. Respond to a range of critical approaches and demonstrate an introductory understanding of how they may relate to métier practice.

Horror Manifesto — Due: Week 5. 750-2000 Words. Double Spaced. MLA citation. Grade: 30%.

This is a short paper about your critical opinion of Horror in art. Why do *you* seek out Horror and Gothicism? Who do you identify with in Horror films? Is it different in books? Do you use Horror tropes or aesthetics in your own artistic practice? Are there certain types of Horror media you prefer to avoid? What are some ethical considerations about inspiring fear and depicting violence? What self-care techniques do you use to protect your wellbeing while still appreciating Horror? Do you feel involved in a Horror *scene* or a Horror *community*, and how does your specific angle of Horror relate to “Popular Horror”? Is *your* type of Horror becoming more mainstream or more niche? Has it always been on the margins? Do you like it that way? Where do you see horror going in general? Where do you think Horror *should* go in the future?

This assignment satisfies Critical Studies Learning Goals 2. Frame key events, movements and ideas in a range of subject areas in historical, contemporary and globally diverse contexts; and 5. write critically/creatively in clearly communicated texts honed for an intended audience.

Interview With a Vampire — Due: Week 9. Grade: 30%.

The second assignment will be to conduct a brief interview with someone you know, or someone you seek out in the Horror community. The interview should address how they relate to the genre, why they like it, or why they don't. You can hand in this assignment in any format you want. It can be audio or video, a transcript, or you can artistically integrate the interview into any medium you usually work in. You can also write a response to the interview process if you'd rather keep the content confidential. You can interview each other if you want to, but I'd encourage taking this opportunity to expand the community of our class out into the wide world of CalArts and beyond.

We can include our interviews in the Disneygothic Archive, and as you'll see in the next assignment, there will be an opportunity to share them in class, but both of those outcomes are optional. Completing the interview is required.

This assignment satisfies Critical Studies Learning Goal 2. Frame key events, movements and ideas in a range of subject areas in historical, contemporary and globally diverse contexts.

Final Presentation — Due: Weeks 12 & 13. Grade: 20%.

We have two classes at the end of the semester 100% dedicated to your final presentations. The guidelines for these projects are intentionally loose. They can be an extension of any of the other assignments. The presentation can be a multi-media or performative riff on your Manifesto paper, they can be a project that grows out of the interview, or they could be something you pick out of the Disneygothic Archive. The presentations can also be completely new, and it's fine if they're

part of your primary artistic practice. The requirements are that presentations should be 5-15 minutes long so we can host an impromptu group reflection after each one. They should relate in some way to the course, respond to the material we covered, and you should also add something new to the discussion. You can collaborate with each other (or with students outside of this class), but collaborative presentations should take up about as much time as an equivalent number of individual presentations.

This assignment satisfies Critical Studies Learning Goals: 1. Engage in class discussions and communicate ideas, demonstrating course preparation; and 3. Respond to a range of critical approaches and demonstrate and introductory understanding of how they may relate to métier practice.

Assignment Breakdown:

- Disneygothic Archive — Due: Continuous. Grade: 20%.
- Horror Manifesto — Due: Week 5. Grade: 30%.
- Interview: Due — Week 9. Grade: 30%.
- Final Presentation — Due: Weeks 12 & 13. Grade: 20%.



Course Goals:

Ultimately, this course is all about what kind of Horror fans we want to be. It's about recognizing the various effects of the genre in different contexts, then asking questions that tend not to get asked in Horror circles. To even think of those questions, we'll need to let go of our entrenched assumptions, and we'll foster this mindset together through our shared viewing experiences and reading discussions.

Theories of Horror abound. *Catharsis, control over the unknown, the lure of the formulaic, the manifestation of taboo...* the list goes on and on. The reality is that our lived experiences as viewers, and as *fans*, cannot be reduced to a single unified theory of Horror. Our class will serve as an opportunity for each of us to develop an informed relationship to genre communities and fan scenes. We'll have opportunities to share personal stories, and to build off one another's insights.

Critical Studies Learning Objectives:

- A literacy in critical, feminist, queer, and anti-racist theory applicable to Horror film, art, and literature.
- Community-oriented discussion skills, and the ability to constructively probe complex topics, even about our own beloved Horror influences.
- A knowledge of Horror history, back to the late 18th century, the ability to historicize past Horror periods, and the critical capacity to analyze our Horror moment as a part of that ongoing history, all with an appropriately suspicious eye turned towards how that history was written.
- An introduction to the politics, aesthetics, and economics of “high” and “low” art.
- A robust vocabulary of useful terms for grappling with both popular and avant-garde artworks, including kitsch, camp, canonization, cultural capital, *subcultural* capital, appropriation, othering, xenophilia, transgression, taste, and much more, some of which will be determined by the material, and some by student-input. Horror is often scary, but it's a lot of other things too, and we will name as many of them as we can!
- We will work towards a widely interdisciplinary practice of expressing our thoughts about art and genre. It matters who Horror is by, and who Horror is for. Likewise, it matters who our writing and art is for, and *who we are* in relation to our subjects. You will have the flexibility to explore these crucial elements of genre in your written work and in student-led discussions.



IT'S ALIVE!!!! ...the syllabus, that is.

Discussion and student interest is sure to reshuffle and amend this outline. Each week topics are alluded to as in-flux inspirations, subject to evolution or even disappearance. Some are genre loadstones that we should probably not avoid, while others are just possible examples of relevant topics. Plus, Horror is still happening, and the newest offerings will inform what we chose to examine.

In light of that disclaimer, please see one possible schedule here:

Our Potential Agenda

"We live in Gothic times."

~ Angela Carter, 1974

Week 1, September 13th — Scream Parks and Vampire Restaurants



Gothic Architecture and Horror Architecture. The Castle of Otranto and the House of Usher. Haunted Disney. Subterranean Disney. Sensationalized history through film, literature, and public space.

Presentation: Poe's influence on Disney. All the Magic Castles (Cinderella's, Sleeping Beauty's, The Beauty & the Beast's, the Magician's Castle), The Tower of Terror, The Tower of London, Vlad Castle's fine dining experience. Knott's Scary

Farm.

Clips from: Todd Hughes and P. David Ebersole's *Mansfield 66/67*, and *Hell House* (2002, documentary).

For Next Week: Please sign up for both the Archive presentation timeslot and the Final Presentation timeslot on these sheets: [Archive](#), [Final Presentation](#)

Optional: Julia Yepes' [*The Secret History of Jayne Mansfield's Bizarre Connection to the Church of Satan in Interview Magazine.*](#)

Week 2, September 20th — Superfan

Phantoms of the cineplex, home-video to home theater. Unleashing Percepto: William Castle's gimmick-core aesthetic. Coffin Joe on John Stewart.

Roundtable discussion. Update Archive.

Presentation: International Horror pervasion, scary publicity, expanded horror universes, the evolution of Disney's American Fantasy Gothic.

Read for next week: David Church, *Queer Ethics and The Urban Ruin-Porn Landscape*.



Week 3, September 27th — A Beautiful Day in The Neighborhood

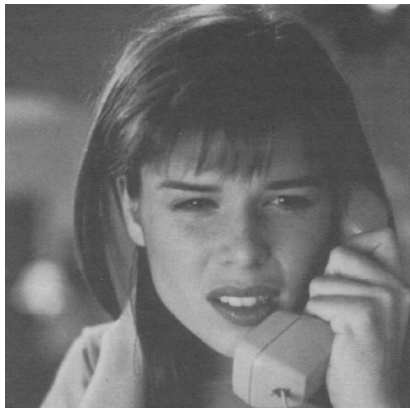
What is Post-Horror, My Nightmare, Your Nightmare, Moods, Vibes, Soundtracks, and Instagram Ruins for Pennies on the Dollar.

William Castle's Percepto Chair

Roundtable discussion. Update Archive.

Presentation:

Read for next week: Tananarive Due, *On Horror and the Creations that Shape Us*; INTERVIEW DUE NEXT WEEK



Neve Campbell in Scream (1996)

Week 4, October 4th — Playing Telephone

Teen Screams on loop forever. Other presold franchises. The Dark Knight/Joker. N.O.P.E. and Universal Studios' JUPITER'S CLAIM exhibit.

Roundtable discussion. Update Archive.

Presentation: *Sam Regal in Library!* Then: British Invasions in segregated America. Disney's *Coco* crusade. Halloween too. The Tuskegee Study, Night Doctors, the Rosicrucian history struck from the *Get Out* script. Gothic castles, Gothic housing projects, Gothic educational institutions.

Read for Next Week: *I Should Be Offended by Queer Villains, But I Cannot Help but Love Them*, Carmen Maria Machado (extract from *In The Dream House*); HORROR MANIFESTO DUE NEXT WEEK.

Week 5, October 11th — Who's That in the Mirror?

Culturally coopted freakouts and marketing taboo lifestyles. Rocky Horror, Doppelgangers.

No Roundtable.

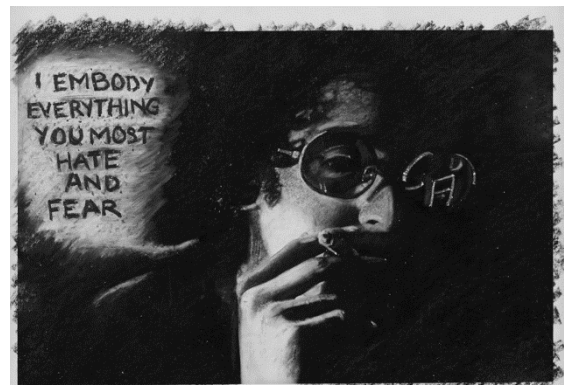
HORROR MANIFESTO DUE TODAY

Watch in class: *Single White Female* (1992), Barbet Schroeder.

Presentation: Adrian Piper's *Mythic Being*, Lorna Simpson's *Corridor*, Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Roberta Breitmore Archive*.

Watch for next week: *Titane* (2021), Julia Ducournau

Read for next week: Sian Ngai, *The Color of Value: Stan Douglas' Suspiria* (excerpt from *Theory of the Gimmick*)



Adrian Piper's Mythic Being

Week 6, October 18th — The Telltale Hierarchy

Bootleg filmzines, subcultural capital. Grand Guignol and Antonin Artaud. Dark Shadows. Supersaturation and Argento.

Roundtable Discussion. Update Archive.

Presentation: Stephen Graham Jones on the Slasher formula. Narratively identifying across genders. History of the Byronic Hero: how bad is Batman, really? High dives, adrenaline junkies, roller coaster marvels, and the horizon of expanded Horror cinema (*Stranger Things, Live!*).

Watch in Class: Stan Douglas' *Suspiria*, 2003; Tim Burton's *Hansel and Gretel*, 1983; Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley's *Family Tyranny*, 1987

Read for next week: Elvia Wilk, *Ask Before You Bite*

Week 7, October 25th — Frights of the Feed



The Backrooms Creepypasta

Blair Witch, ARGs, r/horror, Analog Horror. Big Social, online gaslighting. vampire LARPs, Sleeping beauty, consent in fantasy.

Roundtable Discussion. Update Archive.

Presentation: Backrooms and liminal anti-spaces. Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. The impact of online forums in publishing, film criticism, art institutions, and politics. "Elevator Pitch Horror" and "Laptop Horror". Pixar's deathless aesthetic in *Paranorman*. Hypermediation.

Read for next week: Lisa Kroger and Melanie R. Anderson on Anne Radcliffe (excerpt from *Monster She Wrote*)

Week 8, November 8th — Jane Austen Laughs at Death

Women working 9 to 5 (as 9th century Gothic novelists). Northanger Abbey. Radcliffian Rebellion. Heathcliff: Bronte's big bad bachelor.

Roundtable Discussion. Update Archive.

Presentation: Ann Radcliffe to Ann Rice. Criminalized woman against chivalrous heroes. Horror's stint as 19th Century Romance. Southern Gothic. Sleeping Beauty.

Read for next week: TBD



Northanger Abbey

Week 9, November 15th — The Crowd Goes Wild

Orwell's Uncanny Aliens, grey goo, Mars Attacks, Viral Zombies. Three Beauties & three Beasts. Picking sides in Night of the Living Dead.

INTERVIEW DUE TODAY

Presentation: Magic Kingdom's *ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter*. *Men in Black*. They live. *Sturdivant's House of Horrors* at Musée D'Art Moderne De Paris.

Watch in class: *Danger Word* (2013, short), Tananarive Due & Luciana Fischer

Read for Next Week: Nia Edwards-Behi, *A Response to Post-Horror*

Week 10: November 22nd — No Class, Indigenous People's Day.



Week 11, November 29th — The Great Fantastogoth Backlash // Student Presentations Begin

Elevated/Post Horror. The privilege of the sublime.

Quick discussion. *Student Presentations.*

Presentation: Post French Revolution transgression in Gothicism. Post 911 reactionary violence in Horror films (like Eli Roth's). Then, the conservative backswings: Lord Byron & Ari Aster.

Read for Next Week: Eugene Thacker, *On Demonology*, and *Whether it is a Respectable Field of Study* (excerpt)

Week 12, December 6th — Student Presentations

Quick Discussion of Reading and Archive. *Student Presentations continue!*

Week 13, December 13th — Student Presentations

Quick Discussion of Reading and Archive. *Student Presentations continue!*

Attendance Policy

A student will be assigned a No Credit (NC) grade for Critical Studies courses after missing in excess of three classes without a reasonable excuse, unless the student withdraws from the course by the 10th week of the semester, as per the grading policy (see below).

Grading Policy

Standard Grading Options

- High Pass (HP): Passing with Excellence
- Pass (P): Passing with Quality
- Low Pass (LP): Passing
- No Credit (NC): Work did not meet the criteria for credit.

Other Grading Options

Incomplete (I):

A temporary Incomplete grade may be given to a student who has maintained satisfactory attendance and completed passing work throughout most of a course, but as a result of extenuating circumstances is unable to complete the course requirements by the end of the semester. Incomplete grades are not assigned for Summer, Interim, Practicum, or Winter Session courses.

Incomplete grades are assigned through submission of an Incomplete Contract to the Registrar's Office. The Incomplete Contract is an explicit agreement between student and faculty of the work remaining to be completed, and the date by which the work must be submitted for final review. The contract must also be approved by the school or program responsible for the course.

Incomplete grades assigned for fall semester courses must be resolved no later than the end of the following spring semester. Incomplete grades assigned for spring courses must be resolved no later than the end of the following fall semester. Earlier deadlines for completion may be set at the discretion of the faculty and must be specified on the Incomplete Contract. Incomplete grades not replaced by final LP, P, or HP grades by the stated deadline will revert to NC (No Credit) grades on the transcript.

No Grade Recorded (NG):

Placeholder grade entered by the Registrar's Office at the close of the grading period which indicates that no grade has yet been assigned by the faculty of record. "NG" grades not changed to a final evaluation by the end of the following semester will convert to "NC" on the transcript.

Withdrawn (W):

Grade assigned by the Registrar to indicate withdrawal from a course after the end of the add/drop period. Students may withdraw from a course without academic penalty through the 10th week of the semester. The course remains on the student's record with a "W"

grade. "W" grades have no impact on semester or cumulative grading calculations, and do not count toward a student's residency or full-time status.

Grade Appeals

When a student wishes to appeal a grade: the student must first appeal to the instructor who assigned the grade in question. Where there is no satisfactory remedy through appeal to the instructor, the student may file written appeal to the dean of the school in which the course is offered. The decision of the dean is final.

“NC” grades may not be changed to a grade except by means of a petition to the dean of the School involved. Such changes must be initiated by the instructor of the class or, in the instructor’s absence, the dean of the school offering the course and submitted to the Registrar. Such a petition must include a written explanation from the instructor of the class explaining the reasons for changing the grade and a signature of support from the dean of the school offering the course. Petitions for the change of an NC grade must be submitted during the student’s term of residency at the Institute and are considered only under exceptional, extenuating circumstances.

Auditing

Auditing a class is an arrangement made between the student and the instructor. No official record will be kept and no credit will be given.

GPA Equivalencies

On the official academic transcript, CalArts calculates student progress by indicated attempted units and the completed units, but does not use a Grade Point Average (GPA) as part of its marking system. However, when a GPA is required for external purposes, the following formula may be used: HP=4.00, P=3.00, LP=2.00, NC=0.00.

Services for Students with Disabilities

CalArts will provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have registered with the Student Affairs office. Registration with the Office of Student Affairs is on a voluntary, self-identifying basis. Services are available only after a student has presented certified, current documentation of the disability from an appropriate medical or educational specialist, and this documentation has been reviewed and accepted as complete.

Plagiarism

Critical Studies endeavors to teach students the essential skills and basic ethics involved in any academic enquiry. To this end, we are committed to observing the policy on plagiarism set out in the CalArts Course Catalog. This stipulates that plagiarism is the use of ideas and/or quotations (from the internet, books, films, television, newspapers, articles, the work of other students, works of art, media, etc.) without proper credit to the author/artist. Critical Studies holds to the view that plagiarism constitutes intellectual theft and is a serious breach of acceptable conduct. It is also the policy of CalArts that students who misrepresent source material as their own original work and fail to credit it have committed plagiarism and are subject to disciplinary action. In the case of Critical

Studies, any student caught plagiarizing will immediately be given a 'no credit' for that class. The student will not be allowed to re-write the paper, and if there is further evidence of plagiarism, Critical Studies will recommend more severe disciplinary action, including suspension or dismissal.

If you have any questions regarding plagiarism or want direction on how to credit source material, ask the member of faculty and refer to reference guides on permanent reserve in the CalArts library. The CalArts reference librarians may be able to offer additional information as well.