

# Bringing out the CULT in American Popular CULTure



English 258.002  
CRN 82285 – Fall 2014  
MWF 2:30 pm – 3:20 pm  
317 Clark Hall

Michael Buso  
G19 Colson Hall  
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Office Hours:  
MW 11:00 am - Noon or by appt.

## Course Overview & Goals

Welcome to English 258, which fulfills the GEC requirements for Objective 7, American Culture. This section of English 258 is not a historical investigation of popular culture, nor is it an introduction to American culture generally. This section is focused on contemporary culture and assumes cursory knowledge of said culture; we will not be investigating the origins or history of American Popular Culture, though we may certainly reference this history as we consider how the past has influenced the present. Throughout this course, students will 1) study what is meant by the phrase “pop(ular) culture”; 2) be introduced to a series of critical methodologies to guide them through cultural texts; 3) enhance their understanding of American popular culture and the way that it shapes our perceptions and definitions of “American”; 4) practice critical thinking and writing about culture; and 5) begin to understand the role of genre in popular culture and its role in forming narratives.

## Required Texts

\*Please note that you do not have to purchase the movies and TV episodes. Most (if not all) of the TV episodes are available online (Netflix streaming is highly recommended, as most (if not all) of the movies & TV shows are currently streaming). Other sites offer streaming services where you can purchase or “rent” at a reduced cost. You are responsible for finding and watching all assigned viewings, as well as reading all assigned texts and bringing your book to class on days when readings are due.

## Required Primary Text:

\**The Cult Film Reader*, edited by Ernest Mathijs & Xavier Mendik – 2008.  
*available at the WVU Bookstore, local textbook stores, or online retailers (you can rent/buy, new/used), should be brought to every class when a reading is due from it*

## Required Secondary Readings:

\*Please note that these readings are required, not optional. Print file, read, and bring to class when that reading is due.

- \* “Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths” PDF (eCampus)
- \* John Storey’s “What is Popular Culture?” PDF (eCampus)
- \* Maitland McDonagh’s “What’s Inside the Cabin?” TXT (eCampus)
- \* “Can We Talk About ‘Cabin In the Woods’ Yet?” TXT (eCampus)

## Required Films Available for Viewing on Reserve at WVU’s Downtown Library:

- \* *Frozen* (the 2013 Disney film)
- \* *Rocky Horror Picture Show*

(<https://reserves.lib.wvu.edu>)

“I have no idea where this will lead us, but I have a definite feeling it will be a place both wonderful and strange.” ~Agent Cooper, *Twin Peaks*

## Course Policies & Procedures

**Attendance Policies:** I expect you to attend every class. This class is primarily discussion-based, and is one that encourages collaborative learning through critical discussion of the assigned readings. Because the course depends on your active participation for every class and your active involvement during every class meeting, regular and on-time attendance and active participation are critical to your success in this class. Please note: You are responsible for making up any work you may miss by failing to attend class, even if the absence is necessitated by illness or personal emergency. If you are absent (or even if you are just late to class), any quizzes missed cannot be made-up. Additionally, I do not accept late work (I will take them early though!). Scheduled tests may be made-up based only on specific medical concerns, on a case-by-case basis. If illness or personal emergency requires you to miss multiple class periods, I will probably advise you to drop the course and take it again in a semester when you can be present to do your best work. Multiple absences will necessarily limit your academic success in this class. Please keep track of your own attendance, and if you notice it is becoming a problem, please visit me during my office hours, or send me an email and we discuss it further.

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**Cheating/Plagiarism:** Students are expected to be familiar with the sections on Academic Honesty in the **University Student Conduct Code**, online at: <http://campuslife.wvu.edu/r/download/180235>. If you have any questions about when and how to document sources, or any other question that will help you avoid unintentional plagiarism, please come and talk to me. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offences. Clear cases will result in an F for the course and appropriate academic discipline. In all English courses, we expect students to submit their own *original* work. When you recycle your own past work or submit essentially the same paper in more than one class, you are self-plagiarizing. For instance, if you are repeating the class, you must talk to me about whether you may use a previous assignment as the basis for further revisions. If you are using a similar assignment from another class, permission must be obtained from me and the instructor of the other class. Permission is neither automatic nor guaranteed. Failure to disclose recycled or dual-submission work may result in an automatic F.

**Computers and Cell Phones:** Classroom activities require your full attention, so please keep your cell phones out of sight and refrain from texting in class. I should not see or hear your cell phone during class time. Since our work in class will primarily be using books and printed PDFs, computers (in the form of laptops, tablets, iPads, Kindles, Nooks, etc.) are not permitted unless you have the required documentation that they are a necessity or if you make special arrangement with me. If you are ever using technology in a way that is distracting or unrelated to the work of the class, you will be asked to put away the device. If you have to be asked more than once, you may be asked to leave. If there is an unusual circumstance where you must leave your phone on, please just speak to me privately *before* class.  
**Any use of electronic or web-linked devices during a quiz or test will result in failure of the course.**



**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a documented learning disability, a serious hearing or vision problem, or any other special need that might affect your performance and participation in class, please be sure to inform me. Also, please be aware of the support services available to you through the Office of Accessibility Services in Suite 250 at 1085 VanVoorhis Rd (beside Applebee's and across from the Mountaineer Station transportation center). The phone number is 304-293-6700, and email is [access2@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:access2@mail.wvu.edu). Access the website at <http://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>.

**Writing Center:** The WVU Writing Center is located in G02 Colson Hall and is a free resource for students where you can meet with a tutor to go over any assignment or just to get help brainstorming the best topic. Call 304-293-5788 to schedule an appointment or stop by to see if a tutor is available. For more information, check online at: [http://english.wvu.edu/centers\\_and\\_projects/wcenter](http://english.wvu.edu/centers_and_projects/wcenter).

## Assignment & Grading Overview

### **Two Comprehensive Tests (60% total)**

You have two tests in this course: a mid-semester test (30%) and one towards the end of the semester (30%). Each test may contain multiple choice questions, short answer questions, true/false questions, and an essay component. We will review in class for each major test. Your quizzes, any handouts, and class notes will also be valuable study sources for these tests.

### **Pop Culture Project (15%)**

Since pop culture, and in particular cult film & TV, inspires fandom to re-enact, perform, or otherwise re-invent the works they love, one component of your grade this semester will be a pop culture project that asks you to form small groups and stage brief reenactments, adaptations, or other creative forms of the films & TV shows we are watching this semester. You will be allowed to form your own groups of 2-4 people, select the text you want to work with, and perform a 5-10 min project (length of time varies depending on the number of members in your group). You might wish to create a YouTube video instead of doing something live in class. Text selection will be first come, first serve.

Once groups are formed, probably in the second week, you will sign up for performance dates. You will also, as a group, write a 2-3 page paper outlining your reasonings and choices in how and why you staged your performance. A more-detailed assignment prompt will be handed out during the second week of class.

### **Quizzes (15% total)**

Expect viewing/reading quizzes often. They are unscheduled and will generally occur at the start of class. The purpose of quizzes is two-fold. First, the quizzes ensure that you are watching/reading the required material. Secondly, the quizzes will help you gauge your viewing/reading practices. Are you watching/reading critically and closely? Your quiz grades will be averaged at the end of the semester and comprise 15% of your overall grade. Please note that there are



80's

90's

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80's

90's

00's

**Participation (10%)**

Participation is assessed based not only on attendance, but also on your investment in class activities and discussion and your ability to respect and work well with others. You are welcome to talk to me if you have questions about your progress in the class.

**Grade Breakdown:**

A+ à 100-98    B+ à 89-88    C+ à 79-78    D+ à 69-68    Fà <60  
 A à 97-94    B à 87-84    C à 77-74    D à 67-64  
 A - à 93-90    B - à 83-80    C - à 73-70    D - à 63-60

**\*Please Note\*:** The best way to be successful in this course is to do the viewings & readings, participate and attend class regularly, and to complete ALL of the course assignments. Failure to complete any of the course requirements will result in the failure of the course.

**Course Schedule**

What follows is the course schedule of readings and assignments. Please note that it is subject to change throughout the semester. In the event of a class cancellation (for any reason), please continue to follow the schedule unless otherwise indicated by me. When a television series is assigned, the season and episode is abbreviated; for example, 1.3 indicates that you should view season 1, episode 3. Generally I recommend that, when there are both readings and viewings due on the same day, you should do the viewings first, then the readings (they are still important, but they may possibly spoil some of that day’s viewings). The PDF/TXTs are available on our class eCampus page under the *Course Content* tab. The *Cult Film Reader* textbook is abbreviated on the syllabus as CFR, followed by the assigned page numbers.

**\*Viewings/Readings are due on the day they are listed on the schedule**

Date	Viewing Due	Reading Due	In-Class Work
<b>Introduction to Popular Culture, Cult Films, and Archetypes</b>			
Mon Aug 18			go over syllabus
Wed Aug 20		“Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths” PDF (eCampus)	
Fri Aug 22		John Storey’s “What is Popular Culture?” PDF (eCampus)	<i>*last day to add/drop with no grade</i>
Mon Aug 25	<i>Cabin in the Woods</i>	“What’s Inside the Cabin?” TXT (eCampus) & “Can We Talk About ‘Cabin In the Woods’ Yet?” TXT (eCampus)	
Wed Aug 27		CFR 1-11	
Fri Aug 29	<i>Clue</i>	CFR 15-21	
Mon Sept 1	<b>NO CLASS – Labor Day</b>		
<b>“Who killed Laura Palmer?”</b>			
Wed Sept 3	<i>Twin Peaks</i> 1.1, 1.2		
Fri Sept 5	<i>Twin Peaks</i> 1.3, 1.4		
Mon Sept 8	<i>Twin Peaks</i> 1.5, 1.6, 1.7		
Wed Sept 10	<i>Twin Peaks</i> 1.8, 2.1		
Fri Sept 12	<i>Twin Peaks</i> 2.1, 2.7, 2.9		
<b>From “Eskimo” to “Fetch”: Camp, Gender, Sexuality, &amp; Identity in Cult Films</b>			
Mon Sept 15	<i>The Birdcage</i>	CFR 41-52	
Wed Sept 17	<i>Soapdish</i>		

wea Sept 3 *Twin Peaks* 1.1, 1.2  
 Fri Sept 5 *Twin Peaks* 1.3, 1.4  
 Mon Sept 8 *Twin Peaks* 1.5, 1.6, 1.7  
 Wed Sept 10 *Twin Peaks* 1.8, 2.1  
 Fri Sept 12 *Twin Peaks* 2.1, 2.7, 2.9

**From “Eskimo” to “Fetch”: Camp, Gender, Sexuality, & Identity in Cult Films**

Mon Sept 15 *The Birdcage* CFR 41-52  
 Wed Sept 17 *Soapdish*  
 Fri Sept 19 *Paris is Burning*  
 Mon Sept 22 *Heathers* CFR 53-66  
 Wed Sept 24 *Clueless*  
 Fri Sept 26 *Mean Girls*  
 Mon Sept 29 *Frozen (2013)*  
 Wed Oct 1 *Scream* CFR 29-40  
 Fri Oct 3 *Valley of the Dolls (1967)*  
 Mon Oct 6 *Rocky Horror Picture Show* CFR 76-87  
 Wed Oct 8 CFR 392-402 test review  
 Fri Oct 10 **TEST ONE**  
 Mon Oct 13 **NO CLASS – Fall Holiday**

**A Brief Horror Interlude, for October’s Sake**

Wed Oct 15 *Children of the Corn (1984)* CFR 212-215  
 Fri Oct 17 *Fright Night (1985)*  
 Mon Oct 20 *Blair Witch Project* CFR 263-273

**“A Few Idiots Tried to Fight It”: Multiculturalism, Fan-demonium, & 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cult TV**

Wed Oct 22 *Firefly* 1.1, 1.2  
 \*1<sup>st</sup> episode is called “Serenity”, but is not  
 the same as the movie  
 Fri Oct 24 *Firefly* 1.3, 1.4  
 Mon Oct 27 *Firefly* 1.5, 1.6, 1.7 CFR 429-444  
 Wed Oct 29 *Firefly* 1.8, 1.9  
 Fri Oct 31 *Firefly* 1.10, 1.11  
 Mon Nov 3 *Firefly* 1.12, 1.13, 1.14  
 Wed Nov 5 *Serenity* \*the movie!  
 Fri Nov 7 **NO CLASS –  
 away at conference**

**“Why are you wearing that stupid bunny suit?”: the Crazy, Weird, & Bizarre in Cult Films**

Mon Nov 10 *Donnie Darko*  
 Wed Nov 12 *Death Race 2000 (1975)* CFR 386-391  
 Fri Nov 14 *Godzilla vs. Mothra (1964)*  
 Mon Nov 17 *Barbarella* CFR 445-455  
 Wed Nov 19 *Brother from Another Planet*  
 Fri Nov 21 *Heavy Metal*  
 Nov 24-28 **NO CLASS –  
 Thanksgiving Week**  
 Mon Dec 1 *Toxic Avenger*  
 Wed Dec 3 *Tromeo & Juliet* test review  
 Fri Dec 5 **TEST TWO**  
 (part one in-class)  
 Mon Dec 8 **TEST TWO**  
 (part two due in my office  
 2:30-3:20 pm)



