**COM 329, Contemporary Film**

**The Cult Film**

1. Two “popular” books originally set the agenda for the recognition and study of cult films:


2. Original definition of cult film:

   A cult film is one that has acquired a highly devoted but relatively small group of fans. These devotees enthusiastically champion films that are not generally acknowledged as worthy, that usually involve atypical heroes, plots, dialogue, etc. Cult fans believe they are among the few who have discovered something in certain films that the average moviegoer and critic have missed (elitism? “subcultural capital”?). Cult viewers will watch a film repeatedly, seeking it out wherever it may play.

3. Additional characteristics

   A cult film may inspire fan clubs, conventions, fan web sites, YouTube homages.

   A cult film may also include audience participation (e.g., *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 1975; *Sing-Along Sound of Music*, ongoing nationally, also released on video in 2007)—however, audience participation is *not* required for a film to be deemed “cult.”

   With home viewing (Later Period), there may be home parties, with line memorization and role playing.

4. The Early Period (pre-1980)

   Repeat/consistent showings in art houses, on college campuses

   e.g.:

   *Freaks* (1932)
   *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959)
   *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)
   *King of Hearts* (1966)
   *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)
   *Harold and Maude* (1971)
   *Pink Flamingos* (1972)
5. The Later Period (1980s to present; the home video era)

Repeat viewing at home

e.g.:

*Eraserhead* (1977)
*The Evil Dead* (1981)
*Brazil* (1985)
*Blue Velvet* (1986)
*Pretty in Pink* (1986)
*Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (1986)
*The Big Lebowski* (1998)
*Donnie Darko* (2001)

See also:


