

Eng Lit 2481
Spring 2003
Lowenstein, A.

LIT 2481

**DAVID CRONENBERG:
GENRE/ART/NATION**

ENGLIT 2481 (CRN 38840), Spring 2003, Thursdays 1-5pm, CL 444
Dr. Adam Lowenstein

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Course Description. When David Cronenberg won a Cannes Special Jury Prize for *Crash* (1996), his twelfth feature film, his reputation as one of the world's foremost film directors should have been consolidated. But subsequent censorship of *Crash* left the film, like the director himself, subject to fierce critical divisiveness rather than canonization. This graduate seminar uses Cronenberg's controversial *oeuvre* (equal parts visceral horror and philosophical meditation) as a test case for crucial questions in film studies, cultural studies, and contemporary critical theory. How do we distinguish "genre" from "art"? How do we define (or resist defining) a nation and/or a national cinema between the poles of genre and art? Is the author killed or resurrected by working within or between genre and art categories? How does Cronenberg's identity as a Canadian director locate his work between critical models of US imperialism and non-Hollywood national cinema? What does it mean to represent "the body" in Cronenberg's films? Given the central importance of "realism" to designations of both genre cinema and art cinema, this seminar's theoretical texts will devote considerable attention to that term, particularly through the writings of the Frankfurt School philosopher Siegfried Kracauer. In the latter stages of the seminar, Kracauer's theories of film will be supplemented by an investigation of his theories of history in an attempt to both unify and complicate relations between those terms that Cronenberg's unique career resists and depends upon: genre, art, and nation.

Course Requirements. 1. Active, vocal, engaged class participation. 2. A journal with weekly entries focusing on reactions to each unit's readings, including questions to raise in class. These journals should be brought to each class, but kept separate from your class notes. They must be typed, as they may be collected periodically or distributed among seminar members. 3. An oral presentation designed to share your independent research findings with the other members of the seminar. 4. A short midterm paper (7-10 pages). 5. A final research paper (15-20 pages) that applies the seminar issues to original areas of scholarly inquiry. Please note that all due dates are FIRM; extensions will not be granted.

Course Texts (available at the University of Pittsburgh Book Center and on Hillman reserve):
The two-letter abbreviations following each title provide a key to their appearances in the seminar schedule:

- Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999) [FG]
- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, sixth edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001)
- Christopher E. Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Michael Grant, ed., *The Modern Fantastic: The Films of David Cronenberg* (Westport: Praeger, 2000) [MF]

- Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) [VB]
- Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, ed., *Cinema and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000) [CN]
- Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (1969; Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1995) [HL]
- Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) [TF]
- Chris Rodley, ed., *Cronenberg on Cronenberg* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997)
- Alan Williams, ed., *Film and Nationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002) [FN]
- Xeroxed articles on reserve in the Crow Room [X]

Seminar Schedule

WEEK 1, JAN. 9 – DEFINING “GENRE” AND “ART”

Screening: *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966, Sweden) 81m; *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968, USA) 96m

WEEK 2, JAN. 16 – DEFINING THE NATION

Screening: *Goin' Down the Road* (Don Shebib, 1970, Canada) 90m; *Crimes of the Future* (David Cronenberg, 1970, Canada) 65m

Reading: David Bordwell, “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” [X]; Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, “Art Cinema” [X]; Rick Altman, “What’s At Stake in the History of Literary Genre Theory?” and “What is Generally Understood by the Notion of Film Genre?” [FG]; Margaret Atwood, selections from *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* [X]; Robert Fothergill, “Coward, Bully or Clown: The Dream-Life of a Younger Brother” [X]; Piers Handling, “A Canadian Cronenberg” [X]; Stephen Crofts, “Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s” [FN]

WEEK 3, JAN. 23 – AN (UN)ETHICAL CINEMA OF THE BODY

Screening: *Shivers* (David Cronenberg, 1975, Canada) 87m

Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography” [X]; Robin Wood, “Cronenberg: A Dissenting View” [X]; Murray Smith, “A(moral) Monstrosity” [MF]; Elizabeth Grosz, “Introduction” [VB]

WEEK 4, JAN. 30 – GRAFTING BODY AND NATION

Screening: *Rabid* (David Cronenberg, 1976, Canada) 91m

Reading: Miriam Bratu Hansen, “Introduction” [TF]; Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema” [FN]; Andrew Higson, “The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema” [CN]; Andrew Parker, “Grafting David Cronenberg: Monstrosity, AIDS Media, National/Sexual Difference” [X]

WEEK 5, FEB. 6 – THE “REALITY” OF MONSTROSITY: MIND VS. BODY

Screening: *The Brood* (David Cronenberg, 1979, Canada) 91m

Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” “Basic Concepts,” and “The Establishment of Physical Existence” [TF]; Elizabeth Grosz, “Refiguring Bodies” [VB]

WEEK 6, FEB. 13 – THE EXPLODING HEAD: “THINKING” THROUGH CRONENBERG

Screening: *Scanners* (David Cronenberg, 1980, Canada) 103m
Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, "History and Fantasy" [TF]; Elizabeth Grosz, "Psychoanalysis and Psychological Topographies" and "Neurophysiology and Corporeal Mappings" [VB]; Ian Jarvie, "National Cinema: A Theoretical Assessment" [CN]; Susan Hayward, "Framing National Cinemas" [CN]; Rick Altman, "What Can Genres Teach Us About Nations?" [FG]

WEEK 7, FEB. 20 – BETWEEN TORONTO AND PITTSBURGH: LOCATING "THE NEW FLESH" AND THE MEDIATED SPECTATOR

Screening: *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983, Canada) 87m
Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, "The Spectator" and "Film in Our Time" [TF]; Elizabeth Grosz, "Lived Bodies: Phenomenology and the Flesh" [VB]; Tom O'Regan, "Australian Cinema as a National Cinema" [FN]

WEEK 8, FEB. 27 – REMEMBERING TO FORGET: THE EMERGENCE OF HISTORY

Screening: *The Dead Zone* (David Cronenberg, 1983, USA) 100m
Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, "Introduction" and "Nature" [HL]; Elizabeth Grosz, "Nietzsche and the Choreography of Knowledge" [VB]
MIDTERM PAPER DUE

WEEK 9, MAR. 6 – ***SPRING BREAK***

WEEK 10, MAR. 13 – A CINEMA OF THE SPECTACLE?

Screening: *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, 1986, USA) 100m
Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, "The Historical Approach" and "Present Interest" [HL]; Elizabeth Grosz, "The Body as Inscriptive Surface" and "Intensities and Flows"; Jonathan Crane, "A Body Apart: Cronenberg and Genre" [MF]

WEEK 11, MAR. 20 – SEPARATING SIAMESE TWINS: SEX AND HISTORICAL STRUCTURE

Screening: *Dead Ringers* (David Cronenberg, 1988, Canada) 115m
Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, "The Historian's Journey" and "The Structure of the Historical Universe" [HL]; Elizabeth Grosz, "Sexed Bodies" [VB]

WEEK 12, MAR. 27 – NARRATING THE SELF, NARRATING HISTORY

Screening: *Naked Lunch* (David Cronenberg, 1991, Canada-Great Britain) 115m
Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, "Ahaseurus, or the Riddle of Time" and "General History and the Aesthetic Approach" [HL]; Barbara Creed, "The Naked Crunch: Cronenberg's Homoerotic Bodies" [MF]

WEEK 13, APR. 3 – PERFORMANCE AND THE ILLUSION OF HISTORICAL "REALITY"

Screening: *M. Butterfly* (David Cronenberg, 1993, USA) 101m
Reading: Siegfried Kracauer, "The Anteroom" [HL]; Michael Grant, "Cronenberg and the Poetics of Time" [MF]

WEEK 14, APR. 10 – LOCATING THE SPECTATOR IN A CINEMA BEYOND PSYCHOLOGY

Screening: *Crash* (David Cronenberg, 1996, Canada) 100m

Reading: Martin Barker, Jane Arthurs, and Ramaswami Harindranath, "One Big Controversy, Several Large Research Tasks" [X]; Parveen Adams, "Death Drive" [MF]; Rick Altman, "What Role Do Genres Play in the Viewing Process?" [FG]

WEEK 15, APR. 17 – CRONENBERG ON CRONENBERG: GENRE/ART/NATION

Screening: *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999, Canada-Great Britain) 97m

Reading: Xavier Mendik, "Logic, Creativity, and (Critical) Misinterpretations: An Interview with David Cronenberg" [MF]

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE