Film 187 SYLLABUS: Advanced Topics in Television Studies

Tuesday and Thursday, 2-3:45pm (Earth and Marine B214)

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Office hours: Tuesdays 4-6pm (Communications 105)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
In the era of media convergence, geeks and fans have been transformed from a stigmatized subculture into a mainstream power demographic, catered to and courted by the media industry. Yet, as President Obama can signify “nerdiness” and “coolness” simultaneously, comic book movies reign at the box office, and fanboy auteurs are overseeing the expansion of their televisual empires, fangirls have become culturally marginalized. Since the first wave of fan studies in the early 1990s, scholars have focused on the textual production of fangirls and their frequently feminist counter-readings of mass media texts. Can we view this new cultural preoccupation with the fanboy as a move towards gender equality in fan studies? Conversely, could we view the apparent gender bias of convergence culture as reinforcing a fallaciously gendered digital divide?

Among the questions this course will pose for discussion: Has the mainstreaming of geek culture in any way tempered the mass media’s pathologization of fans? What are the etymological and cultural issues with using the terms “geek,” “nerd,” and “fan” interchangeably? Is new media fulfilling its implicit promise to decentralize creative power and textual authority, or are developments such as transmedia storytelling and ancillary content limiting fannish interpretation and co-opting fan labor? What is the shifting industrial function of fan spaces such as Comic-Con? How do fanboys and fangirls differ in their interactions with the text and their production of their own fan works? To what degree are fangirls complicit in the professionalization of fanboys and the commercialization of fan practices? And finally, how might we expand this debate beyond gender divides to think about how geek culture is racialized?

REQUIRED READINGS:
Readings are listed below on the course schedule; assigned articles are to be read before the class date under which they are listed. All readings are required and can be found either in the course reader [CR], which can be purchased at The Bay Tree Bookstore, through the library’s online journal archive [L], or online [O]. Additional links to online articles or recommended reading may be sent via email. For journal articles marked [L], go to http://library.ucsc.edu/find/online-journals and find the PDF of that article using the publication information provided in the syllabus.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
Tuesday class will be comprised of a lecture and discussion of the readings and select clips. Consequently, you need to complete all of your readings for the week by class on Tuesday. Thursday class sessions will typically be reserved for screenings and further discussion. Attendance is required at both sessions every week, even if you’re familiar with the screenings.

Your weekly attendance and active participation is central to the class’ success and to your success in the class, as is your thoughtful engagement with the course readings. Documented medical or family emergencies will be excused, and you have one “free pass” for when you need a personal day. All other absences will negatively impact your attendance and participation grade. Ample time will be allotted to discuss your response to the readings and their correlation to the course screenings, and you’re encouraged to email me with any additional material you come across that you think might be relevant to the class (blog posts, videos, articles, etc.). In short, this is a class about the politics of participatory culture, so your participation is vital!

In addition to a midterm exam composed of short identifications and essay questions, you will be responsible for conceptualizing and writing a term paper on a research topic of your choice. You will submit your proposed final paper topic in week 7 in the form of a short paragraph describing your project and how it relates to the themes of the class. More details on this assignment will be distributed in the coming weeks.

You will also be responsible for completing three reading responses over the course of the class. You are free to select which three weeks you choose, but I would strongly encourage you to start early and not wait until the last three weeks of the term. Each response is due in class on the Tuesday the readings are due, and must include: (1) a brief summary of the argument and key points for at least one of the assigned articles for the week; (2) your own critical engagement with the article; and (3) a thoughtful discussion question for the class, based on one or more of the articles. Each reading response should be 2-3 pgs, typed and double-spaced, with citations, and should put the readings in conversation with each other and/or to the central themes of the course.

All assignments must be handed in on time, and turning in assignments late will be detrimental to your grade. All assignments must be completed to pass the course. Exceptions will be made and extensions will be given only for medical or family emergencies (provided you can offer documentation).

Grading breakdown:  
Attendance/Participation = 20%  
Reading Responses = 25%  
Midterm = 25%  
Final Paper = 30%

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:
If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please get an Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit it to me in person outside of class (e.g., office hours) within the first two weeks of the quarter. Contact DRC at 459-2089 (voice), 459-4806 (TTY), or http://drc.ucsc.edu for more information on the requirements and/or process.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:
Plagiarism in any form will be reported to the appropriate provost’s office, will result in failure of the course, and could lead to dismissal from the university. If you have any questions or doubts about how to properly cite a source, don’t hesitate to contact me.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 • Geeks, Dorks, and Nerds: Fandom as Pathology
Tuesday 1/4 and Thursday 1/6
Read:  - Joli Jensen, “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization” [CR]
       - Francesca Coppa, “A Brief History of Media Fandom” [CR]
Screen: Clips from Trekkies (Roger Nygard, 1997)
The Conan O’Brien Show (“Triumph the Insult Comic Dog vs. Star Wars Fans”)

Week 2 • Fans’ Textual Poaching and Production: From Slash to Wincest
Tuesday 1/11 and Thursday 1/13
Read:  - Henry Jenkins, “Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing As Textual Poaching” [CR]
       - Catherine Tosenberger, "The epic love story of Sam and Dean: Supernatural, queer readings, and the romance of incestuous fan fiction.” [O]
Screen: Supernatural, “The Monster At the End of This Book” (Mike Rohl, 2009, 42 min.)
       Supernatural, “The Real Ghostbusters” (James L. Conway, 2009, 42 min.)
       A selection of slash vids

Week 3 • (Hyper)white and Nerdy: Steve Urkel in Context
Tuesday 1/18 and Thursday 1/20
Screen: “White and Nerdy” music video (Weird Al Yankovic, 2006, 3 min.)
       “Jocks Plan Nerdocaust” (College Humor, 3 min.)
       Clips from Family Matters (“Dr. Urkel and Mr. Cool,” 1993)
       Revenge of the Nerds (Jeff Kanew, 1984, 90 min.)

Week 4 • The Revenge of the Fanboy
Tuesday 1/25 and Thursday 1/27
- Heather Hendershot, “On Stan Lee, Leonard Nimoy, and Coitus…Or, the fleeting pleasures of televisual nerdom” [O]
- Popular press on the revenge of the fanboy: “The Geek Shall Inherit the Earth” (Time Magazine), “Scott Brown Rallies America’s Nerds to Embrace Their Rise to Power” (Wired Magazine), etc. [O] Note: Links will be sent via email

Screen: Episodes of Chuck and The Big Bang Theory
Us (lim, 2007, 4 min.)

Week 5 • The Rise of the Fanboy Auteur
Tuesday 2/1 and Thursday 2/3
- Jonathan Grey, “Digital Auras and Authors” [CR]
Screen: Battlestar Galactica: The Resistance webisodes
Battlestar Galactica with podcast commentary

Week 6 • Commander and Geek: Obama as the First Fanboy President & Midterm
Tuesday 2/8 and Thursday 2/10 (MIDTERM)
Read: - Henry Jenkins, “From Participatory Culture to Participatory Democracy (I and II)” [O]
  http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/from_participatatory_culture_t.html
  http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/from_participatatory_culture_t_1.html
- Whitney Phillips, “‘Why so Socialist?’: Unmasking the Joker” [O]
  http://www.henryjenkins.org/2009/08/unmasking_the_joker.html
Screen: John Hodgman’s Radio & TV Correspondents Dinner speech (2009, 14 min)

Week 7 • Fandom’s Gift Economy
Tuesday 2/15 and Thursday 2/17
Read: - Lewis Hyde, selections from The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property [CR]
- Henry Jenkins, “If It Doesn’t Spread, It’s Dead” parts III (“The Gift Economy and Commodity Culture”) and IV (“Thinking Through the Gift Economy”) [O]
  http://henryjenkins.org/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p_2.html
  http://henryjenkins.org/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p_3.html
- Suzanne Scott, “Repackaging Fan Culture: The Regifting Economy of Ancillary Content Models” [O]
Screen: Galaxy Quest (Dean Parisot, 1999, 102 min.)
Due: Term paper topics (via email by 2/15)
**Week 8 • The Politics of Professionalization**
Tuesday 2/22 and Thursday 2/24

**Read:**
- Henry Jenkins, “Transforming Fan Culture Into User-Generated Content: The Case of FanLib” [O]
  
- Rebecca Tushnet, “Copyright Law, Fan Practices, and the Rights of the Author” [CR]

**Guest:** Julie Levin Russo

**Screen:** *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, “Superstar”* (David Grossman, 2000, 42 min)

**Wizard Rock music videos**

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**Week 9 • Comic Fanboys Save the Box Office/Twilight Fangirls “Ruin” Comic-Con**
Tuesday 3/1 and Thursday 3/3

**Read:**
- Melissa Click, “‘Rabid,’ ‘Obsessed,’ and ‘Frenzied’: Understanding Twilight Fangirls and the Gendered Politics of Fandom” [O]
  
- Popular press on the “Twilight Ruined Comic-Con” movement [O]
  
  
  (Note: Thoroughly explore the links and comments)

**Screen:** *Twilight* parodies

  *South Park,* “The Ungroundable” (Trey Parker and Matt Stone, 2008, 30 min.)

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**Week 10 • Convergence Culture, Fandom, and the Incorporation Paradigm**
Tuesday 3/8 and Thursday 3/10

**Read:**
- Dick Hebdige, selections from *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* [CR]
  
  [http://www.library.brighton.ac.uk/.../select.../subculture-meaning.html](http://www.library.brighton.ac.uk/.../select.../subculture-meaning.html)
- Matt Hills, “Negative Fan Stereotypes (“Get a Life!”) and Positive Fan Injunctions (“Everyone’s Got To Be a Fan of Something!”): Returning To Hegemony Theory in Fan Studies” [CR]

**Screen:** *Kick-Ass* (Matthew Vaughn, 2010, 117 min.)

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**Week 11 • Term papers due**
Tuesday, 3/15 at 2pm