



This is a graded discussion: 100 points possible

due Oct 30 at 1pm



## Week 5 Reading Response: Cult Devotion and the Midnight Movie

3 3

[Felicidad Cua Lim](#)

2 posts total: 1 post each on 2 of the required readings by Telotte and Kawin. Due 1 pm Wed, Oct. 30 (If possible, kindly submit your two posts together to make grading easier.) Late posts are accepted for up to 3 weeks after the initial deadline, but the later the post, the greater the deduction.

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7:07pm



Telotte

1. In Telotte's reading of cult, he describes the genre as breaking the norms and expectations a movie creates in both its genre and audience. He states specifically regarding the genre, "It crosses boundaries of time, custom, form, and-- many might add-- good taste" (6). This suggests that cult defies what mainstream audiences expect from a motion picture. He proceeds with explaining how cult films have a type of moviegoing experience with the midnight screening, and how a film such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* struggles with finding its audience. Cult then becomes a way to identify with a particular fanbase who is willing to see a film during a particular time, in this case midnight. This deviates from the normal way films are viewed and marketed as Telotte puts it, "feature films are generally targeted at and marketed for the broadest possible audience," (7). From this implication, cult is embraced by people with particular tastes and interests, who find themselves represented in these films, whereas they do not through more mainstream settings and films.

Kawin

2. Kawin defines camp in two ways, through how many times it is seen, and through the people

which are viewing the films. He refers to this viewing audience as 'deviant.' This suggestion of a person being a deviant ties into Telotte's reading, with the breaking of norms in regards to who is seeing these cult films and who they are targeted to. These fans of cult films are devoted to them because as Kawin explains, "the cult film should be recognized as an extreme spectator pleasure and as a site of audience power (21). The cult film gives the audience power, such as in our screening where the audience is basically part of the movie, shouting out lines, singing along, and even adding new dialogue to the film. Kawin continues in his definition, "The cult film creates a ritual space, and the repeated movie is the center of the service," suggesting the connection viewers have with these films in their repeated watching (230). In this essence, cult films have a ritualistic following and screening to them, in how they are seen, and in how devoted audiences are to them.

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10:32pm

### **Kawin Reading**

Bruce Kawin in "After Midnight," discusses midnight cult films in relation to the audience that watches them. He argues that cult films take notice of the "diverse audience" that exists and tries "catering to...minority and outsider tastes and perspectives" (22). I found this claim intriguing because it seems to extend the categories of films that could become cult to any that connect with minorities or any tastes that are often forgotten or not thought of. But I wonder if this is really possible or if it's over-generalizing. More so, how much of an audience would a film need to garner before it could officially be a cult film? A film may be made that caters to a minority audience but not enough of that audience may know about it, or it is inaccessible to them, and then it may never become cult. However, at the same time, I feel like I agree with him because of what he goes on to write. Kawin follows his claim by writing that cult films are "uniquely free of the mainstream" (22). With this logic then everything that doesn't fit into what is expressly popular at a given time and somehow avoids mainstream tendencies and choices, could also become a cult film. Thus, I found Kawin's claim interesting because it broadens the possibilities of what a cult film could be.

### **Telotte Reading**

J.P Telotte in “Beyond All Reason: The Nature of the Cult,” discusses the different categories of cult films, what each category offers, and what cult means to its audiences. Telotte claims that cult films are a form of cultural transgression, “crossing boundaries” and entering “taboo territory” (12, 16). In this way, Telotte claims that audiences acknowledge or learn about a “deep-felt and perhaps unacknowledged desire” (15). I found this claim interesting because it seems possible that it is suggesting that audiences, each time they watch a cult film, are participating in a form of social rebellion. By crossing social boundaries, they may be challenging the cultural norms and practices that are in place in mainstream society at that time. As a result of this, I question if cult films could then be considered a form protest or activism. However, since Telotte claims that it’s a way audiences acknowledge or discover a part of themselves, it also feels like cult films may be a form education—though unintentional. In this way, I found Telotte’s claim to be intriguing since it suggests different uses of camp.

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10:38pm

### Telotte

One of Telotte’s main arguments centers around the idea that the midnight movie cult experience, although countercultural by nature, is its own culture where others revel in their differences together. Telotte also noted that mass media and consumerism has steeped into the midnight movies, particularly with *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Although this does not take away from the film’s countercultural cult status, it is oddly integral to the film’s success. One of my favorite points that Telotte makes is in regards to midnight movie’s exhibition practices. The midnight movie, as opposed to its classical Hollywood cult counterpart, contains viewing practices that are not concurrent with “homogeneous” audience practices. “The typical venue for these films is the midnight showing, usually at suburban mall theaters rather than art or rerun houses” (Telotte 10). While it may seem counterintuitive to see a suburban mall theater as a site for counterculture, the fact that the art house is seen as an improper venue is an important distinction. For Telotte, “... the traditional art house... cannot quite sustain this context, since it bears a burden of intellectual pretension and acceptance, by virtue of being a home for recognized art, a sanctioned venue for difference” (Telotte 10). It may be no surprise that I agree with this statement, as I am critical (and

complicit) of the elite's role (or appropriation) of subcultural art. Per Telotte's definition, midnight movies cannot thrive in an elitist environment, as it takes away the spirit of the need to be different in a world that demands assimilation.

I also wanted to note that because this essay came out in 1991, Telotte perhaps did not anticipate *Rocky Horror*'s future forays into the mainstream such as its appearance (I am so sorry for bringing up this terrible show) in the show *Glee*. Telotte also took a jab at sequels being in vogue in Hollywood at that time, whereas now the remake is all the rage. *Rocky Horror* was recently remade (terribly) and was directed by Kenny Ortega, who also directed *High School Musical*. It is interesting how the mainstreaming of this film continues today, yet the midnight movie experience has practically disappeared.

### Kawin

While Telotte and Kawin seem to echo each other in each of their respective readings, I feel that Kawin's essay conveys a feeling of obsessive love— the type of obsessive love that we saw today through the devoted fans of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. While I do not agree with Kawin's idea that cult film definitions are definitive, I find his knowledge of cult films and his self awareness of these films are what make this essay interesting. Kawin at one point outs himself as a former film snob as he admits that he used to stand in line for films like *Red Desert* but his love of films has morphed into the obsession that keeps cult films in circulation. This idea of love and devotion stuck out to me. Not to purposely sound cheesy, but love comes in a wide variety of forms, from familial to obsessive. Kawin's sense of love for cult films seems like the type of love that is obsessive and refuses outside criticism. This was apparent when he slams what we have been discussing for the first 4 weeks of class: "It's an insult to call it camp" (Kawin 23), he says after listing many cult icons. He continues, "We don't go back to these films to say how silly they were; what we keep discovering is how terrific and even necessary they are to us. This deep appreciation is a serious province of value, almost a matter of devotion" (Kawin 23). By being insulted by camp, Kawin denies himself one of the reasons cult films are so pleasurable. He cites *Evil Dead II* as a cult film hallmark, yet it is its campy qualities (exaggerated gore and purposeful continuity errors) that make it so darn enjoyable. I am not saying that the two must intersect, but it is erroneous of Kawin to believe that camp must be divorced from "pure" cult films. The fact that he is insulted insults me.

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