

## Jesse James Stommel

Sample Handouts and Lecture Notes

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### CREATIVE NON-FICTION PEER REVIEW

#### Instructions:

**Step 1 (10 min):** Start by reading through each draft, making notes for the writer as you do. Feel free to read through relatively quickly, as you would do if you had just discovered the essay in a magazine. Don't feel like you have to be an editor at this point. In workshop, it can be really helpful to give a writer your immediate reactions to a piece as a *reader*, how the piece makes you feel, what it makes you think about, etc.

**Step 2 (10 min per essay):** Discuss each essay, focusing on the following sorts of questions. The author of the essay should try to remain as silent as possible during this part.

1. Talk about at least a few strengths of the essay.
2. Talk about a few things that could be improved.
3. What is the writer's essay *about*? While you don't necessarily need a thesis in a creative non-fiction essay, you should still be able to answer this question.
4. Do the first couple of sentences get you interested? Do they make you want to keep reading? If not, is there a sentence in the paper that you think would work *better* as a first sentence?

**Step 3 (5 min per essay):** Now, the author of the piece should ask questions of the readers. As a writer, what are you still concerned about? What is or isn't working for you? What sorts of suggestions do you still need? If you are worried whether a certain point is clear or not, get feedback.

### LITERARY ANALYSIS PEER REVIEW

**Step 1 (10 min):** Start by reading through each of the drafts, making notes for the writer as you do. Feel free to read through relatively quickly, as you would do if you had just discovered the essay in a magazine. In workshop, it can be really helpful to give a writer your immediate reactions to a piece as a *reader*.

**Step 2 (5 min per essay):** Discuss each essay, focusing on the following sorts of questions. The author of the essay should try to remain as silent as possible during this part.

1. Talk about at least a few strengths of the essay.
2. Talk about a few things that could be improved.
3. What is the writer's essay *about*? Is there one sentence you can identify as their thesis. If not, can you locate their central claims in a few sentences.
4. Do the first couple of sentences get you interested? Do they make you want to keep reading? If not, is there a sentence in the paper that you think would work *better* as a first sentence?
5. Look at the structure of individual paragraphs. Does the writer offer a good balance of examples, analysis and reflection? Does the writer handle one more deftly than the others? Etc.

**Step 3 (5 min per essay):** Now, the author of the piece should ask questions of the readers. As a writer, what are you still concerned about? What is or isn't working for you? What sorts of suggestions do you still need? If you are worried whether a certain point is clear or not, get feedback.

## QUEER THEORY NOTES

Hamlet: “O, that this too too solid [sullied / sallied] flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!”

**ESSENTIALISM:** Refers to the view that women are essentially--that is, naturally--different from men. Most essentialist critics believe that no amount of enculturation could alter female/male nature, female/male difference. In this view the categories of man and woman are determined entirely by biology.

**SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM:** Refers to the view that most of the differences between men and women are characteristics not of the male and female sex (i.e. nature) but, rather, of the masculine and feminine genders (i.e. nurture). In this view, the categories of man and woman are determined and reinforced by culture.

**QUEER THEORY:** A contemporary approach to literature and culture that assumes sexual identities are fluid, not fixed, and that critiques gender and sexuality as they are commonly conceived in Western culture. Queer theorists maintain that gender is a social construct--that is, masculinity and femininity are patterns of behavior rather than natural or innate. Queer theorists further contend that sexuality, like gender, is socially constructed, arguing that the binary opposition heterosexual/homosexual is as much a product of culture and its institutions.

**SEXUAL IDENTITY:** In “What’s Queer?,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick summarizes the many elements “condensed in the notion of sexual identity, something that the commonsense of our time presents as a unitary category”: biological sex, gender assignment, preponderance of masculine or feminine traits, biological sex of preferred partner, gender assignment of preferred partner, masculinity or femininity of preferred partner, self-perception as gay or straight, self-perception of preferred partner, procreative choice, preferred sexual acts, most eroticized sexual organs, sexual fantasies, main locus of emotional bonds, enjoyment of power in sexual relations, the people from whom you learn about your gender and sex, and your community of cultural and political identification. The sheer length of Sedgwick’s list reveals the difficulty (or even absurdity) of considering sexual identity to be a “unitary category.”

**THE WORD “QUEER”:** Sedgwick writes, “A word so fraught as ‘queer’ is--fraught with so many social and personal histories of exclusion, violence, defiance, excitement--never can only denote; nor even can it only connote; a part of its experimental force as a speech act is the way it dramatizes locutionary position itself.” She says later that it is a word expressed best when it is “attached to the first person.” However, this might seem suspect, since the first person implies a singular unified subjectivity, something that the notion of “queer” would seem to resist. In short, “queer” is a contested word, a word with baggage, a word that resists our attempts to fix it with a definition, a word that is not only subjective but calls into question the very notion of subjectivity.

**QUEER:** In spite of its semantic instability, Sedgwick does attempt a possible definition for “queer,” writing that it “*can*” (my emphasis) refer to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.” Thus, the word becomes a marker for an inability to singularly define sex, gender, or sexuality. However, it could be (and has been) used more generally to describe anything that resists monolithic signification (i.e. stuff that resists our attempts to make sense of it).

**QUEER THEORY REDUX:** In “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about *X*?,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner write, “It is not useful to consider queer theory a thing, especially one dignified by capital letters . . . Queer theory is not the theory *of* anything in particular, and has no precise bibliographic shape” (343-344). It is a not-altogether-subtle irony, then, that each of the terms on this handout are written in all-caps. The form employed in this account of “queer” is at odds with the basic tenets of queer theory. This is a feature of the work of many queer theorists, who struggle within a very prescriptive academic discourse (using jargon sometimes to the point of gibberish) to define a term that resists their efforts at every turn.

**QUEER, v.:** Nouns describe fixed and immutable things, whereas verbs imply movement and action. It is decidedly more useful to think of “queer” as a verb than as a noun; it makes less sense to think about what “queer” *is* and more sense to think about what “queer” *does*. The same could be said of “queer theory.” Queer theory tells a story about the world we inhabit--a story about our evolving physicality (or the erosion of it). Thus, Berlant and Warner favor the phrase “queer commentary” and wonder repeatedly about what queer theory “tells us.”

## QUEER THEORY NOTES, cont.

**GENDERFUCK:** In “Genderfuck: the Law of the Dildo,” June L. Reich writes that **genderfuck** “‘deconstructs’ the psychoanalytic concept of difference without subscribing to any heterosexist or anatomical truths about the relations of sex to gender . . . [it] structures meaning in a symbol-performance matrix that crosses through sex and gender and destabilizes the boundaries of our recognition of sex, gender, and sexual practice” (255). While there is something exciting about Reich’s work and its attempt to take the notion of the queer to an extreme, much of her language is impenetrable, making the possibility of engaging in (or reading) genderfuck seem inaccessible. Certainly, there is a tongue-in-cheek quality to Reich’s work, i.e. she brings ridiculously complicated language to a ridiculously complicated subject. However, I would argue that sex, gender, and sexuality are complicated subjects but not impenetrable ones. Our bodies (and the stories we tell about them) are immediate to us, accessible to us, attached to us, in a literal way. While theories of genderfuck and the queer ought to avoid over-simplification, they should still engage us in an immediate way and at the level of the body. My brain wrestles with Reich’s definition of genderfuck, but she doesn’t make me feel anything. My brain reels, but my body doesn’t.

**SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STORIES QUEER THEORY TELLS:**

1. What does queer theory tell us about sexual identity? About male, female, transsexual, gay, straight, bi, etc.?
2. What does queer theory tell us about genderfuck?
3. What does queer theory tell us about language? About signifiers and signifieds?
4. What does queer theory tell us about politics? About activism?
5. What does queer theory tell us about war? About violence? About torture?
6. What does queer theory tell us about the human species? Is the queer a species?
6. What does queer theory tell us about the self or about ourselves?

**JUDITH BUTLER AND PERFORMATIVITY:** One of Butler’s first and most important claims in her work is that **gender is not an essential category**. She works (and works and works) to demonstrate the ways that gender and sexuality are fundamentally “incoherent.” And it isn’t just that Butler *perceives* gender and sexuality as “incoherent,” she wants them “incoherent”—almost to the point of revelry.

In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” she writes, “Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.” By **acts**, Butler alludes not to the free actions of an agent but to performance (i.e. the stage actor who acts/performs a role). She writes, “One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body . . . It is, however, clearly unfortunate grammar to claim that there is a ‘we’ or an ‘I’ that does its body, as if a disembodied agency preceded and directed an embodied exterior.” The agent is created in the process of performing itself—one’s possibilities for embodiment are not “antecedent to the process of embodying itself.”

She continues her discussion of **agency**, “The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.” So, our gender is something we perform, but the script is already written (by culture). In *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, Annamarie Jagose writes, “Butler reiterates the fact that gender, being performative, is not like clothing, and therefore cannot be put on or off at will . . . Performativity is not something a subject *does*, but a process through which that subject is *constituted*” (87).

In “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Butler writes, “Drag is not an imitation or a copy of some prior and true gender; according to [Esther] Newton, drag enacts the very structure of impersonation by which any gender is assumed. Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of expropriation or appropriation that assumes that gender is the rightful property of sex, that “masculine” belongs to “male” and “feminine” belongs to “female.” There is no “proper” gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex’s cultural property. Where that notion of the “proper” operates, it is always and only improperly installed as the effect of a compulsory system. Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation” (1519).

## DECONSTRUCTION NOTES

**STRUCTURALISM:** A theory of society whose proponents attempted to show systematically, even scientifically, that all elements of human culture, including literature, may be understood as part of a system of SIGNS. Structuralism also argues that meaning exists primarily in the form or language of a discourse rather than in the content or subject.

**SIGN:** In STRUCTURALISM, the basic unit of signification composed of the *signifier* (which carries meaning) and the *signified* (which is the concept or thing signified). In written language, for example, the word “tree” is the signifier, the idea of the tree (or the tree itself) is the signified; the whole sign is comprised of both elements.

**POSTSTRUCTURALISM:** Intellectual movement arising from and contesting STRUCTURALISM. Poststructuralism departs from structuralism primarily in denying that social systems have static, underlying structures that determine their meaning, and concentrates instead on the fragmented, multifaceted, contradictory nature of things. Frequently, but inaccurately, seen as synonymous with POSTMODERNISM, poststructuralism can nevertheless be viewed as a variety of the postmodern attitude.

**DECONSTRUCTION:** A POSTSTRUCTURALIST approach to criticism primarily identified with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Deconstructing something means, literally, “taking it apart”—on the one hand, drawing out all its threads to identify its multitude of meanings, and, on the other, undoing the “constructs” of ideology or convention that have imposed meaning on it. The process of deconstruction inevitably, and intentionally, exposes inconsistencies and contradictions. This is often achieved through the systematic dismantling (or bursting) of BINARY OPPOSITIONS.

**BINARY OPPOSITIONS:** Two concepts or terms in opposition to one another, where one is always privileged over the other. According to STRUCTURALISM, our society is held together by binary oppositions. For example: man/woman, light/dark, heterosexual/homosexual, right/left, etc.—note that in Western culture, the first term is usually privileged over the second. DECONSTRUCTION wants to erase the boundaries between oppositions, thus showing that the values and order implied by the opposition are also not rigid. QUEER THEORY is one example of deconstruction, in its dismantling of the binary man/woman by drawing attention to the arbitrary (and performed) nature of those categories. By deconstructing the binary man/woman, queer theory also deconstructs the Western system of values that would have man privileged over woman.

**PLAY:** Derrida’s word for what happens as binary oppositions are dismantled: play is introduced into the system. Here, think kids on a playground, where the rules become inconsequential—one game is easily combined with another, new kids are introduced into the game at any moment, lots of screaming and wild nonsensical speech, all in the service of fun. Now, liken that to what happens to gender after queer theory gets its hands on the opposition man/woman.

**6 STEPS TO A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING (ex. Eliot’s “The Waste Land”):**

- 1) *First, consider a binary opposition in the text.* For example, fertility/sterility in “The Waste Land”.
- 2) *Then, decide which half of the binary is generally privileged.* Society seems to privilege fertility over sterility.
- 3) *Find moments in the text/film where the binary opposition seems to be firmly in place.* In the section “What the Thunder Said,” Eliot mourns the absence of water, a necessity for the land to be fertile. He observes sadly the “dry grass,” “mudcracked houses,” and “sterile thunder,” looking sadly out at a world with less “drips” than “drops.”
- 4) *Find moments in the text where the binary opposition is complicated (or dismantled).* In this same section, Eliot says that the “dry grass” is “singing,” suggesting that, no matter how dry, the grass is still lively. Also, at the opening of the poem he refers to “Lilacs out of the dead land,” suggesting that life rises up even out of the most seemingly sterile ground.
- 5) *Finally, decide what this dismantling does to the system of values at work in the novel (or in society).* The distinction between fertility and sterility, between life and death, is thrown into question. Eliot’s deconstruction of this binary forces us to look more carefully at our world. For example, after reading Eliot’s poem, we might question the liveliness of places like malls with their bright but sterile florescent glow. We are encouraged also to look for life and hope in unusual or unexpected places—to make meaning from what society might otherwise deem empty or meaningless.
- 6) *Begin again with a new binary opposition until the system of values at work in the novel (or in society) is completely dismantled and play is thoroughly unleashed.* In “The Waste Land” you could turn to the binaries rich/poor, culture/self, civilized/savage, the city/the wild, male/female, Water/Drowning, Sight/Blindness, etc.

## THE FANTASTIC, MARVELOUS, AND UNCANNY NOTES

**THE UNCANNY:** According to Freud's description, the uncanny derives its terror not from something externally alien or unknown but—on the contrary—from something strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it. In works that belong to this genre, events are related which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected. Many people experience the feeling of the uncanny in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies. Another example here might be a serial killer, whose pathology could be explained by science, but who nevertheless commits acts that are “extraordinary,” “shocking,” “disturbing,” etc. The idea of the uncanny might also be applied to seemingly supernatural stories in which the character is ultimately revealed to be mad or dreaming. With the uncanny, the horror generally comes from a feeling of “I'm not safe, because that could be me.”

**THE MARVELOUS:** In the marvelous tale, events take place that violate the reader's conception of natural laws. And so, the supernatural is accepted, and it is agreed that new laws of nature must be in place for the phenomena to occur. Society assumes certain things such as monsters do not exist, demons do not tell us to murder our family, dead bodies do not come back to life, ghosts are not real, etc. Science often attempts to explain these things: the monster is actually a genetically mutated animal, the man that killed his family is crazy, we dreamed the zombie attack, the ghosts are only in our imagination, etc. In the marvelous, these attempts fail, and we accept that there can be no rational explanation for the events. Instead, we must come up with new laws to explain the phenomena: in fact, we were wrong, ghosts, monsters, zombies, demons *do* exist. So, where **THE UNCANNY** relies on science and reason to explain away the supernatural, the marvelous accepts the supernatural as real. With the marvelous, the horror generally comes from a feeling of “I'm not safe, because my world is not as I thought it was.”

**SCIENCE FICTION:** Science fiction is often **MARVELOUS** in that a world is created with a new set of rules or natural laws. While science fiction can be speculative (i.e., it attempts to imagine a world that *could be* real in the future), the world generally doesn't conform to contemporary notions of what is possible and requires the reader to shift their assumptions about how things work.

**THE FANTASTIC:** According to Tzvetan Todorov's influential definition, the fantastic in literature is a mode of “hesitation” in which uncertainty is maintained in the reader as to whether the events are supernatural (**THE MARVELOUS**), or have some natural and realistic explanation (**THE UNCANNY**). And so, a fantastic text or film must oblige the reader/viewer to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Often, the characters in a fantastic text will experience a similar hesitation. The fantastic lasts only as long as this hesitation, a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from “reality” as it exists in the common opinion. When the reader or character makes a decision—when she opts for one solution or the other—she emerges from the fantastic. If she decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we enter the genre of **THE UNCANNY**. If, on the other hand, she decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of **THE MARVELOUS**.

The fantastic then is tentative—a liminal space (a threshold) between two possibilities, **THE MARVELOUS** and **THE UNCANNY**. It is often difficult to maintain the moment of the fantastic, because of our almost irresistible urge to explain or dismiss things we don't understand. The horror of the fantastic generally comes from a feeling of “I'm not safe, because I can't make sense of this—because I don't understand what I'm seeing.”

## **SPLATTER 03**

### **VOW OF SORORITY**

**I swear to submit to the following set of rules drawn up and confirmed by SPLATTER 03:**

Clover, “if some victims are men, the argument goes, most are women, and the women are brutalized in ways that come too close to real life for comfort” (77).

**1. And so, the film must not contain gratuitous victimization of female characters. The male to female death ratio must be one to one. Preferably, the film would contain little or no objectification. However, since horror films are all about to-be-looked-at-ness of one sort or another, if characters *are* objectified (for the purposes of eroticism or horror), an equal amount of screen time must be spent objectifying male and female characters.**

Linda Williams, “To dismiss [horror films] as bad excess whether of explicit sex, violence, or emotion, or as bad perversions, whether of masochism or sadism, is not to address their function as cultural problem-solving” (219).

**2. And so, the film must be conceived in relation to a particular cultural problem; and, in execution, the film must solve this problem. In many cases, *culture IS the problem*, so the metaphorical annihilation of the cultural culprit (i.e. sexism, heterosexism, etc.) is a perfectly acceptable solution.**

**3. Patriarchy is, perhaps, the most pervasive of these cultural problems, and so father-figures or stand-ins for the patriarchy must (a) be absent, (b) be rendered impotent or incompetent by the narrative, or (c) die grisly deaths.**

Clover, “let us for the moment accept the equation point of view = identification. We are linked, in this way, with the killer in the early part of the film ... Our closeness to him wanes as our closeness to the Final Girl waxes” (79).

**4. And so, the sole survivor of the film must fit the prototype of the “Final Girl.” Above all else, she must be biologically female.**

**5. And, POV must noticeably shift from Killer to Final girl as the narrative unfolds. Preferably, the Final girl would have more (and more dramatic) POV shots than the killer.**

**6. And, the film must appeal to *both* male and female viewers.**

Clover, “What filmmakers seem to know better than film critics is that gender is less a wall than a permeable membrane” (80).

**7. And so, the film must play with the concept of gender by having BOTH (a) an emphasis on cross-gender identification AND (b) at least two gender-ambiguous characters.**

Clover, “One is deeply reluctant to make progressive claims for a body of cinema as spectacularly nasty toward women as the slasher film is, but the fact is that the slasher does, in its own perverse way and for better or worse, constitute a visible adjustment in the terms of gender representation” (86).

**8. And so, the film must “constitute a visible adjustment in the terms of gender representation.”**

Benshoff, “Queer can be a narrative moment, or a performance or stance which negates the oppressive binarisms of the dominant hegemony ... both within culture at large, and within texts of horror and fantasy ... queerness disrupts narrative equilibrium and sets in motion a questioning of the status quo” (93).

**9. And so, the film must “disrupt narrative equilibrium and ... the status quo.”**

Benshoff, “For spectators of all types, the experience of watching a horror film or monster movies might be understood as similar to that of the Carnival as it has been theorized by Bakhtin, wherein the conventions of normality are ritualistically overturned within a prescribed period of time in order to celebrate the lure of the deviant” (97).

**10. And so, the film must also appeal to “queer” viewers, whose gender identity or sexuality is in opposition (in some way) to the status quo. The film must “celebrate the lure of the deviant.”**

**Furthermore, I swear as a director to refrain from personal flourishes! I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating “gore” if it is not in direct service to the “work” as a *whole*. My supreme goal is to force the horror out of my characters and settings—to liberate them from the “normal” or status quo. I swear to do so by all the means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations.**

**Thus I make my VOW OF SORORITY**  
**Boulder, Friday 20 June 2003**  
**On behalf of FILM 4004**

## **SPLATTER 03, cont.**

**In-class Group Activity:** The goal of this activity will be to come up with a pitch and storyboards for a b-movie horror film.

First read through my parodies of dogme 95 and the Communist Manifesto. You can choose to follow one or both of these sets of rules in coming up with your pitch. First, though, you should discuss which of these rules seem most important, which need some revision, and if there are any that you would throw out altogether (I don't think I've seen a dogme movie that *actually* follows all the dogme rules to the letter).

Then, write your pitch. Don't feel like you need to summarize the entire film in your pitch. Rather, imagine that you have only 1 minute or less to convince us that your film will revolutionize the b-movie genre. Describe the major players, key sequences, important shots, and (of course) the ending. Think a paragraph here. Also, use the supplies at hand to construct a couple storyboards for a key moment or two from the film. Think out of the box here about how a storyboard looks and is constructed (an unconventional film warrants unconventional storyboards). Feel free to work on these two parts simultaneously, i.e. you can divvy up the duties in your group so that some of you are working on the pitch while others are working on the storyboards.





## CINEMATIC EXCESS NOTES

**EXCESS:** Kristin Thompson defines excess as, “those aspects of the work which are not contained by its unifying forces” (513). Excess in cinema is everything in a film that is not required by the narrative (and yet it can *affect* the narrative). Often, these are elements outside the intentions of the director—accidents, mistakes, etc. (she gives the example of a plane that flies through the sky of a sword and sandals epic). However, stylistic techniques or quirks (that don’t serve to advance the narrative) are also considered excess (certain elaborate Hitchcockian camera movements, for example).

Thompson writes that, “excess is not only counternarrative; it is also counterunity,” so it serves to undermine the singular coherence of a work of art (by making things unclear, problematic, etc.). For her, there is something freeing in this: “The viewer is no longer constrained by the conventions of reading to find a meaning or theme within the work as the solution to a sort of puzzle which has a right answer. Instead, the work becomes a perceptual field of structures which the viewer is free to study at length, going beyond the strictly functional aspects” (523). Jeffrey Sconce offers something similar, “excess provides a freedom from constraint, an opportunity to approach a film with a fresh and slightly defamiliarized perspective” (551). So, viewers don’t have to put the pieces of a film together (like “a sort of puzzle”). They can do whatever they want with the pieces (throw them in the air, set them on fire, build a castle from them, etc.).

**PARACINEMA:** In short, b-movies. Jeffrey Sconce writes, “paracinema is less a distinct group of films than a particular reading protocol, a counter-aesthetic turned subcultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus” (535). “Para” means next to, just behind, other, so “paracinema” literally means the other cinema, cinema’s backside if will. For Sconce, paracinema is also a brand of “counter-cinema,” films that resist the dominant techniques and ideologies of conventional cinema.

**AUTODIDACT:** Thought I’d throw this one on here just for fun. Basically, a self-made, self-taught individual. Sconce writes “the autodidact is a figure alienated from the legitimate modes of acquisition. Estranged or excluded from legitimate modes of acquisition, autodidacts invest in alternative forms of cultural capital, those not fully recognized by the educational system and the cultural elite” (540). Sconce argues that the best b-movie filmmakers are often poor, uneducated, and alienated from legitimate culture. So, if you’ve got no money and you’re technically “inept” (his word), you’ve got a future in b-movies.

### Questions:

1.) What is a b-movie? What does the “b” in “b-movie” stand for? What characteristics do b-movies share? Try and come up with a working definition for b-movie. Is this a designation that we find necessary or useful? Is *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter* a b-movie?

2.) What’s the appeal of b-movies? Why do we watch them (or why don’t we)? Why do they make us laugh? Are they scary? If not, are they still part of the horror genre? Why or why not?

3.) What’s the relationship (according to Sconce or according to you) between paracinema and excess? (Sconce discusses this in the section on pp. 544-548). Do b-movies have more excess than so-called “legitimate” films? Does this change the way we view (or read) b-movies? Can we have the same sorts of conversations about b-movies that we have about other films?

4.) Sconce argues that b-movies represent a brand of “counter-cinema.” How do you see b-movies challenging dominant ideology? Think of some examples here. Think also about *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter*. Is this a political film? What are its politics? Are they easily discernable?