



## Killer Klowns from Outer Space (1988) 8.13.20

- ❖ We didn't watch it for the episode this week, but there's an [Arrow Video release of \*Killer Klowns from Outer Space\*](#) available in Region A. Obviously Arrow takes great care in releasing campy horror movies, and this release is no different.
- ❖ [Film Theory and Criticism \[7<sup>th</sup> Ed.\] edited by Leo Braudy & Marshall Cohen](#) --- A collection of vital film scholarship from around the world. This anthology tends to be a standard for film studies classrooms and, while it's far from perfect, it's guided lots of our research on the show. If you're uninterested in the whole book, no need to worry: you can still find many of the collected writings individually online. We used "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" by Rick Altman during the episode today, and we'll include relevant passages below.
  - **"A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" by Rick Altman**
    - "While there is anything but general agreement on the exact frontier separating semantic from syntactic views, we can as a whole distinguish between generic definitions that depend on a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, sets, and the like – thus stressing the semantic elements that make up the genre – and definitions that play up instead certain constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable placeholders – relationships that might be called the genre's fundamental syntax. The semantic approach thus stresses the genre's building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged" (556)
- ❖ [The Big Top on the Big Screen: Explorations of the Circus on Screen edited by Teresa Cutler-Broyles](#) --- Here's a neat book all about circuses in film. Barely touched most of this book yet, but its scope goes far beyond horror movies and clowns. We'll include some relevant passages from the one chapter discussing *Killer Klowns* below:
  - **"Spectrality and Spectatorship: Heterotopic Doubling in Cinematic Circuses" by Whitney S. May**
    - "Recognizing the returns on investment of marketing to children, Feld revised the entire circus atmosphere to appeal to youngsters. He modified the clown to be more approachable, dismissing the grotesque creatures from circus days previous, and popularizing the friendly faced iterations still at play today... In need of an immediate supply of this new, affable version of clown, Feld even founded his well-publicized Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College, which began churning out clowns 'Ringling Style' in 1968, and ran all the way through 1997...By attempting to decrease the distance between spectator and specter, the clown, once a figure loaded

with the preternatural, inscrutable energy of the circus, had been stripped of its meaning and relegated to a mass-produced commodity. In line with [Frederic] Jameson's lamentations, the clown had been reduced to a means for its own consumption. Warped by the circus industry into a relic of consumerism, the clown would re-emerge in a different medium as a nightmare of its former configuration"

- ❖ *Special Issue on Violent Clowns from Comedy Studies* --- Here's an entire special issue of the journal *Comedy Studies* dedicated to violent and horrifying clowns. You'll find multiple essays here that discuss *Killer Klowns* specifically, and an interview with Stephen Chiodo. Highly recommend this issue for anyone with a special interest in this film.