

Humanities Core Course, Spring 2016
Instructor: Tamara Beauchamp

Film Review and Interpretive Questions for *Full Metal Jacket* (1987)

Watch: 1:35-7:30

1. Actor R. Lee Ermey, who plays Gunnery Sergeant Harman, the Parris Island drill instructor, actually served as a U.S. Marine drill instructor during the Vietnam War and ad libbed much of his dialogue in the film. What sorts of insults does the drill instructor use to communicate with his troops? In your opinion, what **psychological function** does that form of speech serve?

Watch: 12:38-13:05

2. What symbolic valences do rifles assume over the course of this film? What do you make of **the feminization of the rifle in the initiation rites** of basic training? How does this scene relate to Professor Burke's assertion that basic training as "**a process that historically pitted hyper-masculinity against civilian femininity**"?

Watch: 28:25-30:12

3. Drawing from lecture, what is the definition of **deindividuation** and how can we see the process of deindividuation reflected in the rituals of basic training in the first half of the film? How does this relate to the forms of humiliation that are depicted? What is **liminality**, and why might basic training as depicted in the film be considered a liminal state?

4. According to Professor Burke, what is the purpose of the **scapegoat** in the culture of military training? How does Private Leonard Lawrence (Gomer Pyle) fit into this reading of the scapegoat?

Watch 1:03:10-1:05:40

5. Joker refers to the contrast between his peace symbol button and the phrase "Born to Kill" on his helmet as a "Jungian thing": the "duality of man." Psychologist C.G. Jung's philosophy was preoccupied with the oppositions that define human existence. He also made a distinction between **individual consciousness and the social community**, that is, the fact that a person must constantly mediate between the demands of his or her own self and the community or society of which he or she is a part. How might you understand the peace sign and "Born To Kill" to reflect this negotiation?

Watch: 1:06:30-1:10:20

6. Eightball describes his best friend, Animal Mother, thusly: "Now you might not believe it, but under fire Animal Mother is one of the finest human beings in the world. All he needs is somebody to throw hand grenades at him the rest of his life." What kind of features might make a soldier excellent on the battlefield, but damaged in everyday life? What kind of **binary between civilian life and wartime** is drawn in Eightball's observation?

Watch: 1:15:00 – 1:17:31

7. In film studies, we refer to certain filmmakers as *auteurs*, a French term that designates a certain set of technical features, thematic concerns, or signature look characteristic of a given director. There are several technical features in this film that are characteristic of Stanley Kubrick's work as an *auteur*, including the **long take** and the **deep focus** shot. This is particularly evident in a scene in which the soldiers are being filmed (a scene that also draws attention to the "madness" of the film itself. What, in your opinion, is the effect of these technical features in this particular context? How does this scene relate to prior Vietnam War films (i.e., *Apocalypse Now* of 1979) and the conventions of action or adventure films more generally?

Watch: 1:19:50-1:25:30

8. In your opinion, what is the purpose of Joker and Rafterman's role as reporters for the *Stars and Stripes* publication? What version of events is that publication interested in reporting? What is the narrative function of the **interview montage**?

9. What is the role of **women** in this film? How do the Marines speak about and interact with women, and what role do you think that this plays in establishing group solidarity?

Watch: 1:44:15-1:53:00

10. How do the other soldiers understand Joker's act of killing? How do you think the audience is to understand this act?

11. What do you make of Kubrick's **use of pop music**—often in jarring or incongruous ways—on the soundtrack? In your opinion, how does popular culture (i.e., Joker's impressions of **John Wayne**, **repeated motif of Mickey Mouse**, etc.) relate to the diegetic world of the film?