EMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL: MIRROR NEURONS & THE APPEAL OF HORROR

Thursday, January 16, 2014
3:15 pm
Education Center, Room 118

The ability of at least some of us to take pleasure in watching monsters and horror films is something of a paradox. Why do we enjoy depictions of beings and actions that we would find repugnant if faced with them in real life? Dr. Shaw will address this issue in regards to his favorite human monster of film and TV, Hannibal Lecter. It will focus on several factors that allow those of us who love him to enjoy his depictions on the big and small screens.

These factors include the extensive use of close ups (which trigger our mirror neurons to cause us to feel empathy with the character), his exquisite aesthetic and culinary taste, his genius for evil deeds (done to unsympathetic victims), and his romantic acquaintances (Clarice Starling and Lady Murasaki). Most significant, however, is what Dr. Shaw characterizes as Lecter’s Will to Power, drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche's existential theory of value. Lecter is one of the most powerful characters in the history of the moving image, for he is in complete control of every situation and individual.

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Reception to follow at 14 Glebe Street