

Key Trends in American Film: Final Paper Fall 2014

Task: Please respond to **one** of the following prompts, using one film to develop and to support your argument.

1. Jonathon I. Oake and others damned Hollywood's Gen-X films as attempts to ridicule and discredit a contemporary youth subculture. However, the faltering youth market of the late 1980s and early 1990s indicates that it was actually in Hollywood's interests to reach out to Gen-X, by suggesting that "mainstream" media like Hollywood films still had a part to play in the lives of this media-literate yet alienated audience segment. With these points in mind, consider the extent to which a Gen-X film approaches Gen-Xers as subject matter and a target audience.

2. It is often suggested that institutional conservatism leads Hollywood to offer blinded endorsements of the nuclear family. However, the work of both Allen and Kramer complicates this notion, by suggesting that commercial motivations have led Hollywood to release films which picture the postmodern family as site of crisis which Hollywood itself can help mend. With this point in mind, consider how a post-1990 family film of your choosing positions itself as a form of family therapy for those on and in front of the screen.

3. The work of Douglas Kellner gives us the impression that the American film industry was unilaterally critical of the United States government's responses to the events of September 11 2001. However, some filmmakers in the US clearly sought to rationalize, justify, and endorse developments that Kellner and other Left-liberals might have described as the erosion of democracy and civil liberties, "illegal" invasions overseas, state corruption, and the expansion of a state-military-industrial complex. Use an example of post-9/11 cinema to explain how that film thematizes, and takes positions on, some of the key discourses of the Bush-Cheney years.

NB: For these prompts, I would like students to use films other than those screened in class or assigned as home screenings. If in doubt about your choice, email me for confirmation of its usefulness.

Length: 2000 words (inc. references to literature; there is no need to reference films)

Submission: Send essays in PDF or word format to richard_nowell@hotmail.com

Value: 60% of Final Grade

Deadline: 12:00 Noon (CET) **Friday 19 December 2014** [Note this date is later than advertized in the syllabus, because the course started later than initially scheduled.]

Penalties for Late Submission of Work

On the day following the due date – 5 marks out of 100 deducted

On the 2nd day following the due to date – 10 marks out of 100 deducted

On the 3rd day following the due date – 15 marks out of 100 deducted

On the 4th day following the due date – 20 marks out of 100 deducted

After the 4th day following the due date – all marks deducted

Exceptional Circumstances

Penalties will be waved on medical and compassionate grounds (e.g. familial bereavement) only. Evidence will be required to support such claims. Please do not enquire about the waving of penalties on other grounds in the event that refusal may offend.

Grading/Evaluation: Grades from 1-4 will be awarded based on the following criteria:

	Argumentation/Understanding	Sources/Evidence	Communication
1 [70<] 1.5 [64-69.9]	Insightful, vigorous, and demonstrating considerable depth of understanding and a significant amount of original thought; addressing question directly through a wholly coherent synthesis of ideas; demonstrating a degree of mastery over subject; demonstrating a deep and thorough understanding of key concepts.	A wide range of sources consulted; sources employed with significant discrimination and sound judgment; thorough assessment of evidence; use of a broad range of examples.	Near-Faultless typography and layout; near-flawless turns of phrase and expression; sophisticated and precise vocabulary; clear structure; exemplary citation and bibliography.
2 [58– 63.9] 2.5	Perceptive and insightful; some evidence of original thought; for the most part addressing question directly; mainly coherent synthesis of ideas; thorough and	A fairly wide range of sources consulted; solid assessment of evidence; sophisticated use of a fairly broad range of examples.	Very Solid typography and layout; few errors in grammar; mainly sophisticated turns of phrase and

[52–57.9]	somewhat critical understanding of key concepts.		expression; mostly clear structure; strong citation and bibliography.
3 [46 -51.9] 3.5 [40– 45.9]	Solid understanding addressed, for the most part, to the question; good synthesis of ideas; reasonably solid understanding of key concepts; evidence of gaps in knowledge and some minor misunderstandings of key concepts.	Several sources consulted; evidence of some assessment of evidence; use of mostly workable examples.	Good typography and layout; comprehensible and largely error-free grammar, turns of phrase, and expression; reasonable clearly structured; some attempt to provide citation and bibliography.
4 (Fail) [<40]	Barely if it all addressed to question; no real synthesis of ideas; mainly descriptive rather than analytical; weak and patchy understanding of key concepts; significant gaps in knowledge and misunderstanding of key concepts.	Restricted range of sources consulted; superficial understanding of evidence; limited range of examples, many of which are inappropriate.	Poor typography and layout; numerous errors of grammar; limited vocabulary; ambiguous or inaccurate turns of phrase; weak or missing citations and bibliography.

General Advice

Superior quality essays deliver insightful analysis in the form of a clearly written, well crafted, and neatly structured piece of writing. Some scholars grasp intuitively from an early age the mechanics of strong essay writing; they are few and far between. Instead, it is often helpful to recognize that following certain protocol, and that following certain “tricks of the trade”, can help to elevate scholarly work. The following advice may therefore prove helpful.

Introduction

The opening paragraph of your essay should perhaps directly state the following points:

What is generally assumed and how/why such positions have emerged.

How your essay will develop, expand, or nuance such positions.

What you are going to argue.

What general areas/examples your essay will cover in support of that argument.

How, more broadly speaking, your essay might offer transferable ideas.

In following these steps, you are essentially sign-posting your essay. Consequently, the relevancy, importance, nature, and clarity of the information that follows will be maximized.

Main Body of the Essay

It might help to organize the main body of your essay thematically – i.e. into those general areas/examples your essay will be covering in support of its argument. Given the short length of this essay, 2–4 sections would seem a sensible number.

Within each section, try to ensure that each paragraph is argument driven by:

Working in a top-down manner; i.e. by first delivering statements and offering examples as support thereafter.

Beginning each paragraph with a declaration that encapsulates the content of the entire paragraph.

Then offer key examples in support of the statement (do not over-exemplify, chose the most powerful examples, perhaps highlighting why they are so important)

In doing so, you ensure that your argument is prominent and that your line of argumentation is easy to follow. It also ensures that the significance of your examples is apparent to the reader. This strategy therefore ensures that your essay showcases your high-impact analysis rather than becoming overwhelmed by the necessity to offer descriptive examples. In short it should provide a way of preventing your essay from becoming overly description – the product of an essay reading like a chain of examples without any real argument.

Conclusion

The concluding paragraph of the essay should perhaps be comprised of two parts:

The first should reflect upon what you set out to do and how you achieved it. Think back to points 1-4 of the introduction as a guide.

The second part should elucidate point 5 of the introduction by gesturing if possible to the implications of your argument; what new questions it opens for consideration; what it might tell us about parallel, earlier, or subsequent developments.

Writing Style

Aim for clarity and precision over entertainment-value and elegance. You are writing informative and persuasive scholarship; not entertaining commercial prose. Try to keep your

writing style simple. Read the paper aloud to yourself to see if it makes sense – you wrote it, so if you cannot understand it, what chance has anybody else of doing so. Use a spell check!