

Media and Cultural Studies

Film 236 Winter 2017

MID-TERM ESSAY

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Due **January 23** - a 250-word description of your essay theme / topic / point-of-view; including the film(s), and, reading source(s) cited, emailed to the instructor (berggold@queensu.ca) and copied to TA Sydney Hart (16sh40@queensu.ca) for approval.

Due **February 13** - your essay delivered to the Film Departments Administrative office. Only a paper copy will be accepted. The essay will be 2500 words approximately; double-spaced; formatted with one-inch margins all around; plus a separate page for Works Cited; with a minimum of five (5) sources; employing MLA citation format (not double-spaced); italicize titles of books, films, television series, journals, magazines; use quotations marks for articles and TV episodes. This assignment is 25% of your final grade.

Select a film, or two films, from the class screenings as a focus for your essay. Also, include at least one source based on the required course readings. You must present a critique of a film(s) in relationship to a contemporary issue that has political or cultural meaning. A film essay is not a film review describing plot and background to guide a viewer. Your essay will combine critical observation with scholarly research. Do not simply summarize the film's story line, but develop a point-of-view with a critical perspective on contemporary media and cultural issues.

Writing an Analytical Film Essay:

1. Choose a film.
2. Choose the subject matter for a film — a particular feature, theme or topic.
 - Formal analysis: — character, narrative structure, or, film style (camera, sound, edit).
 - Context: — Film to film, or, film to source (literary, or, news event).
 - Film to social issues, including history, society, or, cultural analysis.
3. Start with a short thesis in the introductory paragraph — an interpretation of your particular theme or topic.
4. Followed by a logical detailed analysis that demonstrates your point of view.
 - Your interpretation is not only a personal opinion, but also a judgment based on evidence.
5. List research source material in Works Cited on a separate page.

Sample essay topic description (250 words):

An essay analyzing the film *RiP!: A Remix Manifesto*, and *YouTube. Facebook and Instagram*, in the context of Walter Benjamin's article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

The spectacle of conflict and suffering dominate the television news, telethons, talk-shows, websites, newspapers and social media. How and why and to what effect do these images circulate? Why are we moved by such images? With these questions in mind, the essay will address the tensions, contradictions, and overlapping ways in which the different forms of media hail us as citizens or consumers or both.

Walter Benjamin's article, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," offers a way to understand how conflict and spectacle becomes beautiful in modernity and how the world explodes in 30 frames a second in video. Benjamin presents gains and losses that come with the "withering of the aura." With the withering of the aura comes the potential democratization of cultural authority and thus the expansion of citizenship; and the culture industry replaces the loss of authenticity with the production of a false aura—"the spell of personality"—for all celebrities, whether movie stars or musicians; presidents or revolutionaries. The culture industry replaces ritual/cult (i.e., community) value with exchange value through consumption.

Using Benjamin's thesis of "the aura" and its "withering" as a primary tool of analysis in comparison with social media and spectacles today; including, forms of value; aesthetics and politics; "false aura"; democratization of culture, the aesthetics of destruction, and so forth.

General instructions and suggestions:

- 1). This assignment is intended as a means by which you may gain a working knowledge of some of the basic theoretical approaches to analyzing mass media. "Working knowledge" means an engagement with the text(s) you are using; in other words, you are expected to do more than merely recite or rephrase the argument. If you use a citation to illustrate or support your point, be sure that you elaborate on that point, demonstrating how the argument or information cited applies to your specific example, question, etc.
- 2). If you are doing the essay option, be sure your introductory paragraph (or two, if warranted) includes a clear and concise thesis statement: What do you propose to argue? How will you go about it? With whom are you arguing and/or agreeing? And why? The body of the paper should consist of a series of paragraphs (each of which pivots upon a particular point) through which your thesis is argued. The conclusion should be both a summary and an assessment of the essay. What have you articulated? What do you think requires further/future analysis? What new questions have been raised? IF you are doing the project option, I want you to be GUIDED by these types of questions. Even if you make a montage with voice over, you are still making an argument of some kind.

3). Your essay must cite sources and use proper modes of citation (MLA style). It must be PROOF READ! Italicize titles of books, films, television series, journals, magazines; use quotations marks for articles and TV episodes.

4). Arguments are not personal opinions. Opinions may lead to an argument, but the two modes of articulation must not be confused. One of the best ways to test and challenge yourself is with the question: Why? If your answer is some variation of "Because I like / dislike / want / don't want / enjoy / feel, etc.", then start again. Opinions are more like beliefs that have not been analyzed. Arguments, on the other hand, emerge from the consideration of more than one side of an issue; they work through the reasons for the issue taking the shape, having the meaning, that it does; and they take a position on that issue and on the conditions which brought it about. Also, avoid generalizations and informal language: "society thinks / does..."; "people feel / do..."; "Ever since cinema was invented...", etc..

5). Academic integrity is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility (see www.academicintegrity.org). These values are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive. Adherence to the values expressed through academic integrity forms a foundation for the "freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas" essential to the intellectual life of the University. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the regulations concerning academic integrity and for ensuring that their assignments conform to the principles of academic integrity. Information on academic integrity is available in the Arts and Science Calendar (see Academic Regulation 1), and from the instructor of this course. Departures from academic integrity include plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification, and are antithetical to the development of an academic community at Queen's. Given the seriousness of these matters, actions that contravene the regulations on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning or the loss of grades on an assignment to the failure of a course to a requirement to withdraw from the university.

6). Finally, in French the word "*essayer*" means "to try." Consider this assignment an attempt to communicate the important work you have done reading and thinking about an issue. Challenge your reader and yourself to try your argument. At this stage in the term you may not find that you have tremendous confidence engaging with the texts. Remember that these theorists are also trying; they too are testing their arguments, their theoretical tools, on an ever-changing social and cultural history. Use your knowledge from other disciplines, classes, readings, etc.