

Jonathan Kirshner, *Hollywood's Last Golden Age: Politics, Society, and the Seventies Film in America*

The "70s film", which dominated the 1966-76 period, is defined by the author on pp. 21-22 and toward the bottom of p. 87. It portrays an America wracked by protest, war, urban decay, and pervasive injustice, among other things; particularly in the Watergate Affair authority and institutions are seen as often imperfect and worthy of our suspicion. The makers of the 70s films were reacting to these novel conditions, aspiring to create films that were works of art rather than mere popular entertainment.

The 70s films are more critical and analytical vis-à-vis US politics, culture and society than traditional Hollywood fare. They no longer steer away from controversial subjects and stick to "harmless" comedy, romance, adventure, patriotism, etc. These films might critique violence in US culture ('Bonnie and Clyde'), the superficial materialism of middle class society ('The Graduate'), hopelessness of the down-and-out in urban society ('Midnight Cowboy'), the secret power of the corporations ('The Parallax View'), the power of big business in the American West ('McCabe and Mrs. Miller'), betrayal and mendaciousness in the CIA ('Three Days of the Condor'), Nixon ('Shampoo'), ruthlessness and impunity of the capitalist elite ('Chinatown'), moral decay in New York ('Taxi Driver'), the illusion of trust ('The Friends of Eddie Coyle'), or the power of network television ('Network').

In contrast to the strictures of the Hays Code that sought to banish moral ambiguity from the movies, there is no clear right and wrong in the moral world of the 70s film; the movies are character- rather than plot-driven, there is often no path toward redemption, and "open" endings replace the traditional closure of Hollywood happy endings. The films of this style are more "realistic" and more pessimistic than the traditional Hollywood offerings; they also are critical of American pieties about patriotism, duty, the superiority of our political system, etc. Influenced by the French "New Wave", their film style is "often shaky, darker, filtered, or grainy" and sometimes with editing that breaks the rule of the classical Hollywood style, e.g., jump cuts inspired by the French film 'À bout de souffle (Breathless)'.

There of course remained plenty of the traditional escapist American fare ('Dirty Harry', 'The Sting', 'The Exorcist', 'The Poseidon Adventure'), but many of the most successful films of this period fall in this non-traditional category. BBS Productions made a deal, for example, with Columbia Pictures, to make six films with a budget ceiling of \$1 million and with no studio interference. This deal yielded some of the best Seventies films: 'Five Easy Pieces', 'The Last Picture Show' and 'The King of Marvin Gardens'.

These politically and socially engaged films were largely pushed aside by the rise of the pop culture blockbuster (e.g., 'Jaws' 1975 and 'Star Wars' 1977).

For your second essay, I will ask you to write about three of the films listed below, no more than one from a given chapter of the Kirshner book.

The point will be to define the 70s Film and to elucidate the differences of your three films from traditional Hollywood fare ('The Hollywood Style'). Your essay will necessarily include the picture your films paint of politics, culture, and society in 1970s America.

The paper is due **May 8**.

It is not necessary to read the entire book. I ask you to read the Prologue, Chapter 1, and the three chapters from which you have chosen your films.

'The Graduate' is off limits. Do not include it in your essay. (You may include 'McCabe and Mrs. Miller'.)

The essay should address the question; it should be 3-4 pages long (at least 750 words); it should be well-written and typewritten; it should include at least 8 (eight) citations from the Kirshner book taken from at least three different chapters.

While recognizing that different films reference different aspects of "70s" culture, you should make an effort to unify the essay into a coherent interpretation.

You may use the MLA format, the Chicago format, or any other that pleases you so long as it makes sense.

Include a Works Cited section, which lists the Kirshner book, any other printed or electronic source you used, and **the three films** that you viewed. By including the films you are certifying (testifying under oath) that you watched them.

For the sake of legibility, please double-space.

Your essay has two goals: to show your insight into the material treated; and to demonstrate to your instructor that you have seen the three films you chose and have read the book!

Films analyzed – by chapter

1. Before the Flood – i.e., Hollywood movies before 1966.
2. Talkin' 'Bout My Generation – transition to the new film; the influence of the French New Wave

John Boorman, 'Point Blank' 1967

*Arthur Penn, 'Bonnie and Clyde' 1967 – romantic outlaws against Establishment

*Mike Nichols, 'The Graduate' 1967 – foolish materialism of middle class America

3. 1968, Nixon, and the Inward Turn – a bleak assessment of America

Haskell Wexler, 'Medium Cool' 1969

*Bob Rafelson, 'Five Easy Pieces' 1970

Bob Rafelson, 'The King of Marvin Gardens' 1972

4. The Personal is Political

*Paul Mazursky, 'Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice' 1969 – sexual politics

*Mike Nichols, 'Carnal Knowledge' 1971 – sexual politics

Alan Pakula, 'Klute' 1971

5. Crumbling Cities and Revisionist History

*Robert Altman, 'McCabe and Mrs. Miller' 1971

Sam Peckinpah, 'The Wild Bunch' 1969

*John Schlesinger, 'Midnight Cowboy' 1969

*Martin Scorsese, 'Taxi Driver' 1976 – dysfunctional view of New York (America)

6. Privacy, Paranoia, Disillusion, and Betrayal (Nixon)

*Francis Ford Coppola, 'The Conversation' 1974 – privacy, Watergate

*Hal Ashby, 'The Last Detail' 1973 – America as corrupt and oppressive

*Sydney Pollack, 'Three Days of the Condor' 1975 – something rotten in the CIA

*Sydney Pollack, 'All the President's Men' 1976 – uncovering Watergate

Sydney Pollack, 'The Parallax View' 1974 – classic paranoid thriller

*Peter Yates, 'The Friends of Eddie Coyle' 1973 – who can a guy trust

7. White Knights in Existential Despair

Robert Altman, 'The Long Goodbye' 1973

*Roman Polanski, 'Chinatown' 1974 ("the perfect film")

*Arthur Penn, 'Night Moves' 1975 – existential depressiveness

8. Businessmen Drink My Wine

Robert Altman, 'Nashville' 1975 – America in Crisis

*Sidney Lumet, 'Network' 1976 – anxiety and paranoia in America

Hal Ashby, 'Shampoo' 1975

*Movies recommended by Craft

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