

Major Assignment 1 Sequence: The Lens Essay

Due: rough draft: 2/9 at 9am on LATTE

Final Length: 6-7pgs

final draft: 3/2 at 9am on LATTE

Final Format: MLA format; 12pt Times New Roman; double-spaced; one-inch margins

Overview

In this unit, we will begin a semester-long discussion about how to read texts closely and apply the knowledge you obtain from them to other texts. For your first Major Assignment, you will use one or more of the concepts you encounter in William James's "Attention" or Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility" to help you analyze and make an argument about the representational practices of Matt Spicer's *Ingrid Goes West*.

This does not simply mean that you will identify James's or Benjamin's concepts as they appear in *Ingrid Goes West*. Rather, you will make an argument about the way Spicer's film extends, complicates, or challenges the theories of attention and distraction laid out by James and Benjamin. In other words, you will synthesize the ideas of James and Benjamin with your own interpretation of *Ingrid Goes West* in order to construct an argument that you could not have made through close reading alone.

Directions

- Carefully read and annotate James and Benjamin. Watch and take notes on *Ingrid Goes West*.
- Using the skills and techniques we've practiced in class, closely read the film. Make sure your analysis touches on one of the thematic issues addressed by James and/or Benjamin.
- Choose one of the theoretical texts to place in conversation with the film. Identify conceptual matches and mismatches between your chosen text and the film (i.e. both moments in the film that are easily explained by your chosen text and moments that complicate or challenge that ideas laid out in your text).
- Generate an analytical thesis that explains some of these matches and mismatches (i.e. your thesis should address both). You might, for example, answer such open-ended questions as the following:
 - For James, you might ask: How does the film complicate James's notions of voluntary and involuntary attention? How does the film depict the relationship between attention and the will?
 - For Benjamin, you might ask: How does the film complicate Benjamin's theory of modern distraction? How does the film depict the relationship between technology, alienation, and attention?
 - For both, you might ask: Are Ingrid's actions driven more by attention or distraction? Does the film depict distraction and/or social media as a good or a bad thing? What people, activities, and technologies are portrayed as legitimate objects of attention, and which are portrayed as distractions (and why)? What role does the film suggest money plays in the designation of something as a distraction?

- Gather and analyze evidence to support your thesis. Organize this evidence and analysis in a logical way (i.e. moving from the familiar or obvious to the unfamiliar or less obvious). Make sure that, as you bring your theoretical text into conversation with the film, you're grappling with James or Benjamin's central ideas rather than taking isolated passages out of context to support your ideas. Remember: even when you disagree with an author, you must explain why you disagree, and that requires you to fully understand the author's position.
- Craft an engaging introduction that makes your motive clear. Ask of your thesis, "So what? Why should someone care? What's unexpected here? How is this interesting?" until you can respond with a satisfying answer. This answer will lead you to your motive. Underline your motive in all drafts of this paper so that it can be quickly identified.
- Draft the body of your essay. Craft a conclusion that elaborates on your motive and explains the stakes of your argument.
- Document your sources in MLA format, which requires you to include both in-text citations and a works cited page.
- Gather feedback on your essay. Revise and proofread your work.

Critical Skills

This assignment requires you to practice several writerly skills and techniques that will be invaluable to you during your time at Brandeis. These skills and techniques include:

- Actively reading and strategically summarizing complex theoretical texts (e.g. "Attention" and "The Work of Art")
- Closely reading creative texts (e.g. *Ingrid Goes West*)
- Using the knowledge you obtain from one text to illuminate another text (i.e. using a source as a lens)
- Thinking critically about both the strengths and limitations of theoretical texts

Criteria for Evaluation

1. *Thesis and Motive*—Is the essay's central claim complex, insightful, and unexpected? Does the thesis respond to a real question, tension, or problem? Is it stated clearly at the outset? Does it evolve over the course of the essay? Does the introduction have a clear motive that outlines the stakes of the argument and demonstrates a meaningful context for the author's claims?
2. *Evidence and Analysis*—Does the essay incorporate concrete evidence? Does this evidence both support and complicate the essay's central argument? Are the nuances of this evidence insightfully explored? Does the essay draw explicit connections between its evidence and its claims? Is the essay's argument complex enough to require detailed, thought-provoking analysis?
3. *Structure*—Is the essay organized in a logical and engaging way? Does it move from the simple, familiar, and obvious to the complex, unfamiliar, and less obvious? Do its ideas develop over the course of its argument, growing more complicated as new evidence and analysis is introduced?
4. *Style*—Is the essay's language clear and concise (yet sufficiently sophisticated)? Does the essay demonstrate sentence variety and appropriate vocabulary? Does it exhibit an awareness of audience? Does it make good use of transitions, attributive tags, and citations? Are there minimal usage errors? Is the essay easy and pleasurable to read?

5. *Revision*—Has the final draft of the essay undergone significant, substantive revision? Has it fundamentally transformed its claims, ideas, and/or use of evidence instead of simply addressing cosmetic concerns? Is the final draft of the essay noticeably stronger than the rough draft? Has the final draft been proofread?

Pre-Draft 1: Close Reading

Due: 1/26 at 9am on LATTE

Length: 1pg

Format: MLA format; 12pt Times New Roman; double-spaced; one-inch margins

Overview

To “closely read” something essentially just means to analyze it; this can be done to any kind of text (whether written, visual, or oral). For virtually all of the essays you write at Brandeis—regardless of class or discipline—you will closely read your evidence in order to support your argument or thesis.

For your first Major Assignment, you will build your argument around close readings of both *Ingrid Goes West* and one of our assigned theoretical texts (i.e. “Attention” or “The Work of Art”). To that end, your first pre-draft assignment asks you to closely read a single scene from *Ingrid Goes West* that relates to one of our class’s thematic concerns.

Directions

- Choose a scene from *Ingrid Goes West* that deals with one of our class’s thematic concerns. Watch and rewatch it. Take notes.
- Choose one or more filmic elements (such as camera work, editing, mise en scène, score, dialogue, etc.) to analyze. Ask yourself how these elements contribute to the overall meaning or effect of the scene. What are the implicit and explicit meanings of the words used by the characters? What tone of voice do the characters use? How is music used to set the atmosphere? How does the scene’s lighting influence your interpretation of it? How are camera angles used to emphasize or de-emphasize particular people or objects?
- Write one to three paragraphs walking your reader through this analysis. Your close reading does not need to be driven by a thesis, but it does need to adhere to the conventions of good academic writing (i.e. it should include topic and concluding sentences, transitions, proper grammar and syntax, etc.). Incorporate and cite at least one direct quote.
- Proofread your work.

Criteria for Evaluation

All pre-draft assignments are evaluated for thoughtful, thorough, and accurate completion.

Pre-Draft 2: Understanding a Lens

Due: 1/31 at 9am on LATTE (also bring to class) **Length:** two complete reverse outlines

Format: MLA format; 12pt Times New Roman; double-spaced; one-inch margins

Overview

One method that helps to elucidate complex texts such as “Attention” and “The Work of Art” is reverse outlining. To do this, you create an outline that maps a text’s ideas out using the format below. A reverse outline forces you to boil a text down to its constituent ideas, decide for yourself which ideas are the most important, and arrange those ideas in an organized hierarchy.

Once you have actively read and annotated both essays, produce one reverse outline for James and one for Benjamin. Using the format below, define each concept and answer each question *in your own words* (i.e. do not simply copy and past quotes from the theoretical texts). Cite the page number(s) on which you find your evidence.

Format

James

I. Introduction

- A. What problem or gap in scholarship does James claim to address (i.e. what’s his motive)?
- B. Define “attention.”
- C. Define “distraction.”

II. The Varieties of Attention

- A. Define the following terms:
 1. sensorial attention
 - i. Who is most susceptible to passive immediate sensorial attention?
 2. intellectual attention
 3. immediate attention
 4. derived attention
- B. Which of the above kinds of attention are voluntary? Which are involuntary? How long can voluntary attention be sustained?
- C. How is genius related to attention (and to what kind of attention is it most intimately linked)?

Benjamin

I. Art History

- A. Why, according to Benjamin, are photography and lithography (i.e. modern printing) significant in the history of art?
- B. Define “aura.”
 - i. What effect does technological reproduction have on the aura of an artwork?
 - ii. What “two [historical] circumstances” contribute to this effect?

II. Film History

- A. How is the job of a film actor different from that of a stage actor?
- B. What relationship does the film actor have to the masses?
- C. What has the age of technological reproducibility done to expertise (e.g. how does it affect the relationship between author/reader, actor/audience, etc.)?

III. Distraction

- A. When it comes to engaging with a work of art, how do “art lovers” differ from “the masses”?
 - i. Explain the difference between “distraction” and “absorption.”
 - ii. Explain the role of “habit” in perception.
- B. What do you think Benjamin means when he writes that fascism grants “expression to the masses—but on no account grant[s] them rights”?

Criteria for Evaluation

All pre-draft assignments are evaluated for thoughtful, thorough, and accurate completion.

Pre-Draft 3: Mini Lens-Based Analysis

Due: 2/2 at 9am on LATTE

Length: four paragraphs

Format: MLA format; 12pt Times New Roman; double-spaced; one-inch margins

Overview

This assignment asks you to use both James and Benjamin to analyze a scene from *Ingrid Goes West*. It thus offers a microcosm of the lens essay, and you should be able to use one of the close readings you perform for this pre-draft in your final essay.

Directions

- Choose two scenes from *Ingrid Goes West*: one that speaks to the theoretical issues addressed by James and one that speaks to the issues addressed by Benjamin.
- Using the ideas of James, craft a very brief (i.e. two-paragraph) argument about the role of attention in your first scene. Be sure to root all of your analysis in concrete filmic details and to cite at least one piece of dialogue in your analysis.
- Using the ideas of Benjamin, craft a very brief (i.e. two-paragraph) argument about the role of distraction in your second scene. Be sure to root all of your analysis in concrete filmic details and to cite at least one piece of dialogue in your analysis.
- Proofread your work.

Criteria for Evaluation

All pre-draft assignments are evaluated for thoughtful, thorough, and accurate completion.

Pre-Draft 4: Outline

Due: 2/7 at 9am on LATTE

Length: as long as necessary

Format: MLA format; 12pt Times New Roman; double-spaced; one-inch margins

Overview

A comprehensive outline is the best way to ensure that your paper has a logical structure and contains only evidence that is relevant to your argument. This assignment asks you complete such an outline.

In your final essay (as well as in your outline), each paragraph should have a separate claim that supports your thesis; it should also contain evidence (i.e. concrete filmic details) and analysis. In a well-structured essay, the argument develops as the paper unfolds; this means that your paragraphs should not be interchangeable. Keep in mind that logically organized essays typically proceed from the simple, familiar, and obvious to the complex, unfamiliar, and less obvious. Your outline should roughly follow the format below.

Format

I. Introduction

- A. Hook
- B. Motive
- C. Thesis

II. Body Paragraph

- A. Purpose of paragraph
- B. Evidence
- C. Analysis

[Repeat body paragraphs as needed]

III. Conclusion

- A. Brief summary of argument
- B. "So What?"

Criteria for Evaluation

All pre-draft assignments are evaluated for thoughtful, thorough, and accurate completion.

Rough Draft with Cover Letter

Due: 2/9 at 9am on LATTE

Length: 3/4-1pg single-spaced (cover letter)
6-7pgs double-spaced (rough draft)

Format: MLA format; 12pt Times New Roman; one-inch margins

Overview and Directions

For this assignment, you will do two things. First, you will write a rough draft of your lens essay; this draft does not need to be polished, but it does need to be complete. Second, you will write a cover letter—addressed to your readers—in which you answer the following questions and present any other concerns that you have about your draft:

- What do you see as your thesis or main idea? How does this thesis engage both *Ingrid Goes West* and one of the assigned theoretical texts?
- Select your motivating idea from the worksheet distributed in class and report it in your letter. What is your motive? Underline it in your rough draft.
- How well do you feel you have represented and engaged with your chosen theoretical text?
- How well do you feel you have performed a close reading of *Ingrid Goes West*?
- What are the biggest problems you're having at this point in the writing process? What have you accomplished most successfully?
- What's the number one thing in your essay—thesis, structure, use of evidence, persuasiveness, style, etc.—that you'd like your reader(s) to focus their comments on?
- When you revise, what's the primary thing you intend to focus on? Why? How do you intend to tackle this issue?

Please upload your draft and cover letter to LATTE as a single .doc(x) file; send them to your peers as a single Google Doc.

Criteria for Evaluation

All draft assignments are evaluated for thoughtful, thorough, and accurate completion.

Peer Review

Due: 2/14 at 9am on LATTE

Length: 3/4-1pg (cover letter)

Format: MLA format; 12pt Times New Roman; *single-spaced*; one-inch margins

Overview and Directions

Your goal during peer review is to offer constructive comments that will help your peers revise (literally “see again”) their work from a fresh perspective. The most helpful peer review comments thus focus on substantive concerns (e.g. thesis, clarity, structure, evidence, analysis, etc.) rather than cosmetic ones (e.g. typos, formatting errors, awkward phrases, localized usage errors, etc.). For this assignment, you will read your peer’s essay twice, generating different kinds of feedback on each readthrough.

On your first readthrough:

- Draw a line under awkwardly expressed sentences and phrases whose meanings are unclear.
- Write marginal notes to the writer about anything that puzzles you, explaining why.
- Label the topic of each paragraph; if you cannot determine the topic, put a question mark in the margin.

After you have completed your first readthrough, read the essay a second time, then compose a letter to your peer that includes the following:

- A salutation (i.e. their name) and a signature (i.e. your name).
- A brief summary (in your own words) of your peer’s central argument.
- At least one strength of the essay.
- Any aspects of the essay that confused you or made you feel lost.
- A response to the issues and questions raised in your peer’s cover letter.
- A prioritized to-do list of 2-3 things that will most improve the essay in revision. Be sure to be as specific as possible about what needs revising and why; you might even make some concrete suggestions. Make sure to prioritize substantive things (such as thesis, motive, evidence, and analysis) over grammatical and syntactical issues.

Please share your letters with your peers and submit them to LATTE; use your peers’ Google Docs to leave them marginal notes.

Criteria for Evaluation

Peer review is evaluated for thoughtful, thorough, and accurate completion.

Final Draft with Cover Letter

Due: 3/2 at 9am on LATTE

Length: 1pg single-spaced (cover letter)
6-7pgs double-spaced (final draft)

Format: MLA format; 12pt Times New Roman; one-inch margins

Overview and Directions

Each time you submit the final draft of a Major Assignment in this course, you'll also submit a.) the feedback you received from your peers during peer review and b.) a one-page, single-spaced cover letter. For this assignment, then, you'll do two things. First, you'll use your peers' feedback to revise and polish your rough draft. Second, you'll compose this Major Assignment's required cover letter. In your letter, be sure to answer the following questions:

- What is your thesis? How has it changed from draft to revision?
- What other changes have you made? Why?
- What are you most pleased about in this revision?
- What would you work on if you had the chance to keep revising?
- What were the most challenging parts of the drafting and revision processes? How did you approach these challenges?
- Choose two "Elements of the Academic Essay" (c.f. Gordon Harvey) that appear in your essay—one that you think works well, and one that feels less successful—and explain why you think each element is successful or unsuccessful.

Be sure to keep the "Criteria for Evaluation" for Major Assignment 1—available both at the beginning of this document and below—in front of you as you revise your essay and draft your cover letter!

Criteria for Evaluation

1. *Thesis and Motive*—Is the essay's central claim complex, insightful, and unexpected? Does the thesis respond to a real question, tension, or problem? Is it stated clearly at the outset? Does it evolve over the course of the essay? Does the introduction have a clear motive that outlines the stakes of the argument and demonstrates a meaningful context for the author's claims?
2. *Evidence and Analysis*—Does the essay incorporate concrete evidence? Does this evidence both support and complicate the essay's central argument? Are the nuances of this evidence insightfully explored? Does the essay draw explicit connections between its evidence and its claims? Is the essay's argument complex enough to require detailed, thought-provoking analysis?
3. *Structure*—Is the essay organized in a logical and engaging way? Does it move from the simple, familiar, and obvious to the complex, unfamiliar, and less obvious? Do its ideas develop over the course of its argument, growing more complicated as new evidence and analysis is introduced?
4. *Style*—Is the essay's language clear and concise (yet sufficiently sophisticated)? Does the essay demonstrate sentence variety and appropriate vocabulary? Does it exhibit an awareness of audience? Does it make good use of transitions, attributive tags, and citations? Are there minimal usage errors? Is the essay easy and pleasurable to read?

5. *Revision*—Has the final draft of the essay undergone significant, substantive revision? Has it fundamentally transformed its claims, ideas, and/or use of evidence instead of simply addressing cosmetic concerns? Is the final draft of the essay noticeably stronger than the rough draft? Has the final draft been proofread?