

Geography 217: Cities in the Modern World
Prof. Benjamin Forest and Mr. Chris Erl
Winter 2020

Cities in Culture

Reflections on depictions of the city in popular culture

Due dates:

Project introduced: January 29, 2020

Cultural work selected by: 11:30 PM on February 28, 2020

Final essay due by: 11:30 PM on April 14, 2020 – submitted via MyCourses

The assignment: Throughout this course, we have been considering how urban spaces are formed and experienced by those living in them. Such experiences can be the site and source of incredible inspiration; indeed, cities, towns, and urban areas feature prominently in popular culture. Think about your favourite movie, TV show, song or podcast, and consider how it depicts “the urban.”

Your assignment is to select one cultural work and analyze how it depicts the urban environment. Try to select something where components of the urban environment (neighbourhoods, shopping areas, universities, public transit systems, etc.) feature very prominently. You will consider the work and how it connects to the key themes we discuss in class. These include:

- Urban patterns/systems/design
- Urban land use and landscapes
- Transportation networks
- Suburbanization
- Freedom, alienation, and democracy
- Order, policing, and social control
- Labour and work in the city
- Urban identities (gender, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, Indigeneity, etc.)
- Migration
- Generational experiences
- Deviant behaviours
- Gentrification and urban capitalism

Your selected cultural work should include between **2 and 3** of these topics (for example, how *X* episode of *Y* television show considers transportation and suburbanization). Consider how the work depicts the urban, how it represents the issues present in urban spaces, how the characters are impacted by those issues, or how those issues present in urban life are their own storylines.

What you need to do:

1. Select a ‘cultural work’
2. Notify the instructors of your choice by 11:30 on February 28, 2020.
3. Study the work to see what themes are most prominent and **select 2**.
4. Select **3-5 sources** to discuss the themes (using course materials)
5. Write 5 pages connecting the cultural work to the themes in class following the template provided at the end of this outline
6. Get that grade

1. Select a 'cultural work'

Your first task is to select a cultural work. Pick 1 book, 1 episode, 1 song, 1 video, or 1 film. There are some things that will be easier to analyze and write a 5-page paper on than others. While it might be appealing from an effort perspective to select a 4 minute music video over a 450 page book, consider that you'll have to be writing an entire paper on this piece (not that you cannot use a music video, but do not select a short work because you think it'll be easier). When considering what to select, we suggest something from the following list:

- An episode of a television show
- A short or feature-length film
- A music video
- A song
- A book
- A poem
- A graphic novel
- A comic book

Unfortunately, microcontent like Vines are not permitted. Fortunately, neither are TikToks. If you're unsure as to whether your work will be considered acceptable, email Chris Erl (christopher.eryl@mail.mcgill.ca) for clarification.

2. Select your cultural work

Only one student can analyze each cultural work, so you will need to be strategic about what you choose. If, for example, a friend selects the first episode of the first season of *The Wire*, you should select a different episode. In the event that two students select the same work, priority will be given on a first-come, first-serve basis.

How does one select their cultural work? A "Forum" on the "Discussions" page on MyCourses will go live the day this essay will be explained (January 29, 2020). It will remain active until February 28, 2020. All you need to do is select "Start a New Thread" and post your student number, the name of (and, if available, the artist responsible for) your cultural work, what type of work it is, and a link where to find a copy (an Amazon link for a book is okay). There is a sample in the description of the forum using one of the examples shown on the first day. Note that you *cannot* use works presented in class, e.g. *Metropolis*.

Browse through the posts to see if your work has already been selected. If not, post away!

3. Study the work and select 2 themes

Read your book/poem/graphic novel/comic, listen to your song, watch your movie/TV show/video. Make notes about how the urban environment is portrayed and where the themes we've discussed in the class arise. It is a very good idea to jot down notes of timestamps or page numbers where a particularly notable example arises.

Remember the list of themes noted on the first page and isolate them in the cultural work you've selected. Do not just say "this song discusses the urban environment in a very cromulent way." You should say "this song discusses the suburban environment and the complicated relationship between queer communities and suburban spaces in X, Y, Z ways." If there are more themes than

two that you can identify, select the two most prominent or the two you feel most confident writing about.

4. *Select 3 to 5 sources that address the themes*

Use the course readings to discuss the themes present in the cultural work. Look through the journal articles and/or book chapters that speak to the broader theme and use your own reasoning and logic to draw connections. You are additionally allowed to use lectures (your notes, recordings, etc.), so long as they are relevant and properly cited.

You will use proper citations for your essay in *APA format*. This means your in-text citations will look like (Name, Year) or, for a real-world example (Erl, 2020).

Plagiarism violates university regulations. More general, folks work very hard on their analyses and spend a long time trying to get them published. They deserve recognition for the work they do, so cite them accordingly. It is also important to note: several world leaders, including Germany's Minister of Defence in 2011, had their entire careers ruined because it was discovered that they plagiarized in university.

The key to citing your essay properly is to look at a sentence and ask yourself "is this an original thought?" and "is this *not* common knowledge?" If it is clearly someone else's thought or is directly referencing a theory/cultural work/paper etc., it should be cited. If it is your own analysis, it does not need to be. Please do not cite every sentence, but also do not have only 1 citation for your entire paper. If you are not sure if you need to cite something, ask us!

5. *Write 5 pages connecting the cultural work to the themes you've identified*

Your essay should be 5 well-written pages of analysis. It should consist of an introduction, 2 to 3 paragraphs of analysis (you can divide it up and focus on each theme individually, on different aspects of the cultural work and how they relate to the themes, or in whatever way makes the most sense), and a conclusion. We would much rather get 4 well-written pages than a 5-page essay with 4 well-written pages and 1 poorly written page. If your essay is shorter than 4 pages or more than 6 pages, you will start to lose marks. Remember: *brevity is the soul of wit*. And wit is much appreciated. Your works cited **does not count** for your page count. This means you can have 5 pages and a works cited page.

6. Get that grade

	Failure	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Introduction Content (15)	-does not outline the essay in any coherent way OR has neglected to construct a thesis statement.	- does not clearly outline the essay - has a vague, unclear, or unrealistic thesis statement.	- unclear essay outline/thesis - uses too many clichés (e.g., “home is where the heart is.”)	- understandable essay outline - has an identifiable thesis statement.	- succinctly, eloquently outlines essay - avoids clichés , -identifiable thesis statement.
Introduction Form (5)	- is not identifiable or not present	- longer than 2 paragraphs/only a few sentences.	- 1 – 2 adequate paragraphs and/is longer or shorter.	- 1 – 2 well written or good paragraphs	- 1 – 2 well written paragraphs
Body Content (25)	- very poor analysis OR shot-for-shot retelling of the cultural work and little discussion of the themes	- poor or surface-level analysis of the cultural work and how it relates to the selected themes	- adequate analysis of the cultural work and how it relates to the selected themes	- good analysis and justifiable consideration of the cultural work and how it relates to the selected themes	- excellent analysis & thoughtful consideration of the work in relation to the selected themes
Body Form (5)	- way over/under the indicated limit and poor sentence/ paragraph structure	- way more/less than 3 – 4 pages - many run-on sentences/ paragraphs	- more or less than 3 – 4 pages - many run-on sentences/ paragraphs	- approx. 3 – 4 pages - some run-on sentences/ paragraphs	- approx. 3 – 4 pages - no run-on sentences/ paragraphs
Conclusion Content (15)	- a very unthoughtful intro replica	- a near-exact replica of the introduction	- a very close replica of the introduction	- a good summarization of the essay	- a unique and thoughtful reflection
Conclusion Form (5)	- cursory or non-existent	- far more than 3 paragraphs/1 or 2 sentences	- more than 3 paragraphs/ only a few sentences	- 1 – 2 good paragraphs	- 1 – 2 well written paragraphs
Citations and Sources (5)	- incorrect citations - > 3 sources	- citations with glaring errors - > 3 sources	- citations with some errors - 3 – 5 sources	- proper citations - 3 to 5 adequate sources	- proper citations - 3 to 5 relevant sources
General Content (15)	- an essay that is a retelling of a cultural work, no unique analysis, obviously shows no understanding of concepts	- an essay that provides a cursory consideration of a cultural work with weak ties to course concepts	- an essay that adequately considers the cultural work in connection to themes with some weak areas	- a good essay that analyzes the cultural work with a sufficient connection to course concepts	- overall thoughtful & well analyzed paper that wonderfully ties a critical analysis & themes together
General Form (10)	- Missing all items from the ‘excellent’ list	- Missing 4 - 5 items from the ‘excellent’ list	- Missing 2 - 3 items from the ‘excellent’ list	- Missing 1 item from the ‘excellent’ list	- Correct title block in upper right-hand corner of the first page - unique, strong, explanatory title - subheaders for each section - 12 point font - Times New Roman or Calibri - double spaced - page numbers
TOTAL (100)	<i>Below 50%</i>	<i>50 – 59%</i>	<i>60 – 69%</i>	<i>70 – 79%</i>	<i>80% +</i>

What's in a thesis?

It is important to construct a coherent thesis statement that clearly outlines what you are arguing in your essay. This does not need to be an earth-shattering insight; you simply need to explain how a cultural work expresses themes of the course. In formulating a thesis, ask yourself the following questions:

- *Which course themes am I trying to connect to this cultural work?*
- *Which specific aspects of those themes best relate to this work?*
- *Which instances in this work best speak to those themes?*
- *Is this something I will be able to support using academic literature/books?*
- *Does this make sense?*

A good thesis statement is easily identifiable and very clear. It will read something like this:

“Episode X of *This Show* clearly illustrates the complicated relationship between indigenous peoples and the urban environment, as well as highlighting the socio-economic problems in transportation planning. Character X’s interactions with Character Y while on public transit are a particularly salient case of these dynamics.”

A poor thesis statement is:

“In this essay, I will talk about migrant communities in the suburbs and gentrification. I will use Song Z by *Band Q* to do that.”

Submitting the Essay

The essay will be due at 11:30 PM on April 14, 2020. It should be uploaded to MyCourses through the ASSIGNMENTS tab at the top of the page. If you need guidance on this, please let us know and we’ll send you instructions. Do not wait until 11:00 PM on April 14 to ask for help. Failure for the document to upload is not a valid excuse for late submission.

The essay should be submitted in .docx (Microsoft Word) format. A PDF is also acceptable.

Your submission file should have this title:

Lastname-Firstname-StudentNumber

Ex: Call-Jenny-8675309

Example paper outline

Your Title Here: A Short, Pithy Description of Your Paper

Firstname Lastname

Student ID #

Geography 217

Professor Benjamin Forest and Mr. Chris Erl

Date

Introduction (1 – 2 paragraphs)

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas porttitor congue massa. Fusce posuere, magna sed, purus lectus malesuada libero, sit amet commodo magna eros quis urna (Clarke, 1992: p. 705). Mauris eget neque at sem venenatis eleifend. Ut nonummy. According to all known laws of aviation, there is no way a bee should be able to fly, (Benson, 2010: p. 1).

How this cultural work relates to theme one (~1-2 pages with subheading title)

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How this cultural work relates to theme two (~1-2 pages with subheading title)

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Conclusion (1 – 2 paragraphs)

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Works Cited

Benson, B. (2010) *The Entire Bee Movie Script*.

https://gist.githubusercontent.com/The5heepDev/a15539b297a7862af4f12ce07fee6bb7/raw/7164813a9b8d0a3b2dcffd5b80005f1967887475/entire_bee_movie_script

Clarke, I.F. (1992) "The city: heaven-on-earth or the hell-to-come?" *Futures* 24 (7): pp. 701-710.