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OUTSTANDING SCHOLARSHIP EXEMPLAR



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Scholarship 2021 Media Studies

Time allowed: Three hours
Total score: 24

ANSWER BOOKLET

Check that the National Student Number (NSN) on your admission slip is the same as the number at the top of this page.

Answer all THREE questions from Question Booklet 93303Q, and write your answers in this booklet.

Begin your answer to Question One on page 3, your answer to Question Two on page 11, and your answer to Question Three on page 19.

If you need more room for any answer, use the extra space provided at the back of this booklet.

Check that this booklet has pages 2–28 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

YOU MUST HAND THIS BOOKLET TO THE SUPERVISOR AT THE END OF THE EXAMINATION.

QUESTION ONE

Quotation number:

“Human beings share the same common problems. A film [or media text] can only be understood if it depicts these properly.” Akira Kurosawa

PLANNING

The slasher genre's success, especially in the golden era, comes from the depiction of the common problems faced by the american society of the time.

- Economic Downfall + Latch key kids
- Return of conservatism
- Aids epidemic

The films, despite B-quality, rose to such popularity because audeinces understood and recognised the common porblems they were facing within the films, reflected real, tangible fears of the society at the time.

Begin your answer to Question One here:

Media's power lies in offering a reflection of every-day common human problems, and the development of genres have become a vital tool in articulating changing societal fears and values. The success of the Slasher sub-genre, particularly in its golden era throughout the 1980s, came from its ability to depict the common place societal problems of America at the time, allowing the films to become sociological phenomena because they portrayed fears that its audience understood. Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 Psycho, generally regarded as the first Slasher, marks the experimental era of the genre and established many of the tropes that persisted throughout the genre's life time. John Carpenter's Halloween (1974) and Wes Craven's Nightmare on Elm Street (1984) are prime examples of the Classical era of the Slasher, where the genre's blueprint was consolidated, and the film's ultimately reflected the common problems of American society. The development of the genre truly demonstrate that a film "can only be understood if it depicts" the common problems of humanity properly.

Psycho, produced 1960 was revolutionary, and marked the experimental era of the Slasher genre, establishing many of the tropes of the genre. However, its success came from the fact that it depicted the social and political problems of common Americans in a powerful way. The 1960's are known for the societal shift from the conservatism of the 1950s to a more liberal society. When Psycho was produced, America was in a political turmoil as the tension between liberalism and conservatism was strengthening, and these problems are reflected in the film. Of the tropes established by Hitchcock's masterpiece is the first/final girl convention, as coined by Slasher critic Carol Clover. Marion Crane serves as the film's first girl, shown engaging in sexual activities out of wedlock in the opening scenes. Marion serves as the opposite of the 1950s American women, defying the gender standards at the time. Clover comments that "Marion is first and foremost a sexual transgressor" and is punished for her transgressions when she is brutally murdered by Michael Bates in the infamous shower scene. Lila Crane plays Marion's antithesis, serving as the ideal American woman, portrayed as virtuous and virginal. She is rewarded for her compliance to societal standards by surviving the film, becoming its final girl, ultimately reinforcing the conservative gender expectations of a country emerging from the 50s. However, Psycho clearly depicts its audience's demand for liberalism, especially through the film's direct violation of the Hays Code. The Hays Code was a set of rules that governed moral standards in the film industry from 1934 to 1968. The nudity and violence within Psycho's shower scene was a direct violation of

the code, subverted through a series of fast cuts. Psycho marked the beginning of the end for the Hays Code, and depicted society's desire for liberalism within the media. The film also established the phallic weapon trope that later became a staple of the genre. Michael Bates knife is the quintessential phallic weapon, and its repeated penetrating motion coupled with the Marion's nudity inherently sexualises her murder. Clover comments that "sex and violence are not concomitants, but alternatives, one a prelude and a substitute for the other." The 1960s experienced the 2nd wave of feminism, and the phallic weapon trope is a clear example of the patriarchy's attempt to reassert themselves through the media. The blurring between conservatism and liberalism with the film reflects the political turmoil of America at the time, highlighting the common problem's Americans were facing as they tried to navigate the new social climate. The film not only revolutionised the media industry, but became a sociological success due to its audiences ability to understand and relate to the issues presented, truly showcasing that a film can only be understood if it is able to depict the common place problems of its audience.

The Classical era of the Slasher began in 1978 and permeated throughout the 80s as the Slasher formula was solidified and the films became highly successful aspects of popular culture. When re watching these works from a 21st century perspective, their success seems outlandish when compared to their B-quality and sometimes laughable dramatics. However, the genres success throughout this time came from its ability to depict the common problem of American society in a recognisable and understandable way, allowing their audiences to see their real, tangible fears reflected in the media they were consuming. The 1970s housed many important historical events that contributed to the genres ability to portray society's problems. The Vietnam war followed by the Watergate scandal of 1972 left a general distrust in the government fostering throughout the country. The economical downfall and stagflation of 1976 that followed further fuelled this distrust, and left the younger generation feeling abandoned and deserted. By the time Carpenter's Halloween was produced in 1978, the liberalism of the 60s had begun to be blamed for the country's problems, and the return to conservatism had begun. We see these fears and problems, specifically the government distrust and abandonment, reflected in the tropes that emerged within the genre, such as the lack of authority figures. In Halloween, Laurie and her friends are left to their own devices to defeat the killer terrorising their small, suburban town, with the police only stepping in to help in the final five minutes. Slasher critic Soloris Petridis notes that "the older generation does nothing to help the teenagers" reflecting the feelings of

abandonment and economical problems that faced the younger generation at the time. These feelings of helplessness and distrust in authority were further reinforced by factors such as Latch Key kids. Due to the large problems of rising divorce rates and increases in working mothers, Latch Key kids were children of generation X that were often left home alone after school. This created a large problem, with US History expert William J Palmer describing the generation that "went through their all important formative years as one of the least nurtured, least parented generations in US history." The economic and societal problems that were emerging throughout the 70s are clearly reflected within the Slasher films that were produced throughout the classical era. This is why the genre became so successful, because it was able to depict the common human problems of its audience, reflecting their real, tangible fears in a way that allowed the films to be truly understood.

The Reagan era aligns almost perfectly with the Golden era of the Slasher. President Reagan was elected in 1981 and became an influential voice in new conservatism, and the country began to shift back to its conservative roots. Palmer describes the 80s, in their social histories, as the sequel to the 50s, a decade which he has coined, "the fifties II." With this, came the return of conservative gender expectations and family values, with critics Henry Benshoff and Sean Griffin describing the Reagan campaign as "an anti-gay, anti-feminist programme designed to keep the straight, white male in charge of the nuclear family and at the top of the socio-cultural hierarchy." The societal problems created by the returning conservatism are clearly depicted through the first/final girl trope that persisted in the Slasher. Craven's Nightmare on Elm's Street, produced 1984, was highly successful and is a prime example of the genre's ability to depict the changing problems of its audience.

Promiscuous Tina is clearly identified as the film's first girl, being murdered in the opening scene after having sex with her boyfriend. Virginal and virtuous Nancy is the only youth that survives the film, proving Clover's observations that "any teenager who smokes, has sex or does drugs has to die" within these films. However, it is not the sexual act itself that is condemned, but the female experience of it, with Clover concluding, "the horror film thus expressed female desire only to show how monstrous it is." The classical film's of the genre clearly assert the returning conservatism of America throughout the 80s, depicting problem's faced by the younger generation regarding gender and sexuality expectations. The AIDs epidemic of the 80s became society's biggest fear, and greatest problem. The disease was no longer confined to one group, but was able to infect anyone. This further contributes to the fears of unsafe sex and sexuality depicted in the Slasher, and created

the fear of what is around the corner that the Slasher personified through its defining jump scares. It is the interplay between the Reagan Era and the AIDS epidemic that, as articulated by Petridis, "provides the basis for the punishment of the sexual act in the Slasher". The human problems within 1980s American are depicted in such a way that the Slasher films were able to properly reflect society's fears, morphing the films into a sociological event that is hard to understand from a 21st century perspective. However, as said by Akira Kurosawa, the films were able to be truly understood due to their ability to reflect the common fears and problems all human beings shared at the time.

The Slasher genre's success throughout the Golden Period came from its ability to depict the common human problem of the time, providing a prime example of the circular nature of media; society influences media and in return, media influences society. Psycho reflected the political turmoil of the 1960s, while Halloween and Nightmare on Elm Street depicted the economic, social and medical problems of 1980 American society. The genre was able to reflect the changing social and political problems and fears of its audience, allowing the films to be truly understood and appreciated, offering a cathartic release for a terrified and turbulent American society. "Human beings share the same common problems." and the Slasher sub-genre truly depicts them in a powerful way, highlighting the ability of genre as a tool for the articulation of history.

QUESTION TWO

Quotation number:

"Streaming isn't a format: it's a business model."

PLANNING

- convenience and accessibility of streaming is a consumers dream, as realised by Netflix, streaming wars just to keep up.
- exclusive media, fundamentally changed Hollywood and resulted in a NEED for streaming service just to be able to compete
- Subscription based model vs add based model
digital age has resulted in a decrease in tv adds etc, subscription services are the way to go, relate to local media etc

Begin your answer to Question Two here:

"Once a generation, Hollywood experiences a seismic shift. It is happening again." (Brooke Barnes) From Netflix, to Disney +, to Neon, streaming has taken the world by storm, turning the media ecosystem as we know it on its head. However, what began as an innovative entertainment format has morphed into an essential business model for media companies. The traditional models of linear cable television and DVD rentals have crumbled under the convenience and accessibility provided by streaming platforms, transforming Hollywood, and the business models of media giants. In a rapidly changing industry, streaming has become more than a format, but an essential business model required for survival in an exclusive landscape.

Streaming began as an innovative consumer's dream, pioneered by Reid Hastings and Ted Sarandos when Netflix released their streaming platform in 2007. In the beginning, Netflix and Hollywood had a mutually beneficial relationship. Netflix was able to buy sub-par content that wasn't performing to standard on cable television, and provide it a new audience. A prime example of this can be seen in the show, Breaking Bad's, shocking comeback. In the season 4 finale, the show had 2 million viewers, however after just two years on Netflix, the series finale attracted over 10 million. Netflix had pre-made content for their subscribers to watch, and production companies such as AMC were attracting new audiences for their content. It was a win-win. That is, until the convenience and accessibility provided by streaming resulted in consumers opting to not return to the television. Why would they when streaming allowed them to watch what they want, when they want, whenever they want? Netflix was able to use an acquired gallery of media to change viewer habits, leaving out the middle man of cable television. Streaming fundamentally has changed media consumption habits, giving birth to the binge watching culture that has become synonymous with the platform. Instead of having to wait a week for the next episode to air, consumers are now able to watch an entire season in one sitting. In 2018, over 360,000 people viewed the entire Season 2 of Stranger Things on Netflix the day it was released, over 9 hours of viewing time. What began as an innovative platform fundamentally changed viewer habits, and by 2010, Netflix had over 2 million subscribers.

The success of Netflix between 2007 and 2010 began to leave media giants such as Warner Bros and Disney threatened, and thus began the streaming wars. The fundamental adaptations in media consumption began to leave tradition forms of broadcasting behind as people turned away from their televisions, in a phenomena being dubbed as Cord

Cutting. In 2021, 27% of American households claimed to plan on cancelling cable subscriptions, with the numbers foretasted only to rise over the next five years. Cord cutting is for a single reason only, quite frankly, cable television cannot compete with the accessibility and convenience offered by streaming platforms. However, it is the decline in television advertisements that drove the final nail into the coffin for media companies such as Disney and Warner Bros. Wall street economist expert, Todd Junglar, explains that "we believe television advertisement is undeniably on the secular decline" as companies turn towards digital marketing instead. Companies love digital marketing on platforms such as Facebook and Google as it "grants the ability to specifically target advertisements to the desired audience" (John Kiplin, TVNZ advertisement manager). In fact, in 2018, 50% of US companies decreased spending on television advertisement, and 60% increased spending on digital options. The decreasing eyeballs on cable television stolen by the convenience of Netflix, coupled with the increased difficulty for add funded models, resulted in media giants finally caving. The only way to compete with Netflix was to maintain the public brands, shift focus from cable, and create streaming platforms that could compete with Netflix. Instead of a secondary platform for media consumption, streaming became an economic necessity for media giants, personifying Mullagan's words that, "streaming isn't a format: it's a business model" and a necessity for survival in our new media ecosystem.

The streaming wars began in earnest in 2019 when Disney + was released, followed by Hulu, Amazon Prime and AMC MAX. The direct competition of media giants has resulted in platforms needing their own exclusive galleries of content to drive subscription models. Thus came the exclusive approach to media. Netflix, again head of its time, predicted this need for exclusive content, and released their first original programming in 2013 with House of Cards. The show was a bigger success than Hastings and Sarandos could have ever imagined, and was nominated for two Emmy's and a Golden Globe. Netflix's other original program released at the same time, Orange is the New Black, was surprisingly equally as successful. Orange is the New Black was able to fill a whole in the market, telling real and diverse stories of women to an audience that hadn't been catered for. This spurred the influx in diverse content created, a much needed leap for Hollywood. Not only are the stories Netflix is telling about diverse and under-represented groups, but are being directed, written, produced and acted in by a record number of female, Hispanic and black professionals. Netflix now spends over \$15 billion a year on original programming, changing the streaming platform into a highly successful business model. The exclusive approach to media has

forced streaming and broadcasting companies into producers, solidifying the economic investment required by companies that makes streaming no longer merely a format, but a necessary business model.

This exclusive approach to media has also created a media boom. With every platform wanting original and exclusive content, more televisions and films are being created than ever before. In 2018 alone, Netflix produced more than 370 movies and television shows, more than the entire industry created in 2005. This media boom is further driven by the rapid consumption of media that streaming provides through binge watching cultures, and raising a question regarding the quality of media being produced. However, instead of an influx in lower quality content as expected, it appears that the competition of the streaming wars has resulted in a focus on premium programming. Instead of the low budget dramas previously created by AMC and Media Works for cable television such as *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*, streaming platforms are beginning to make real and complex stories. The new format of streaming allows consumers to watch episodes one after another rather than weeks apart, resulting in more complex and meaningful stories being told within television series. Examples such as Netflix's feature series *The Queen's Gambit* and Disney's *Maladorian* are series "that have taken on a film like quality" (Ted Sarandos, Netflix CEO), blurring the lines between film and television. The "dissolving of the barrier between film and television" (Brook Barnes) has been further accelerated by the business necessity that streaming platforms have become. Both Disney and Warner Bros now exclusively release new films to their streaming platforms simultaneously to their release to cinema. Not only does this drive subscription incentives, but also raises questions regarding the place of cinema in the future. Will new films now exclusively be released to streaming platforms to drive subscriptions and economical success, and what place does this leave for cinema in our new media ecosystem? Binge watching behaviours created by streaming have already morphed the social family movie night into long-into-the-night reclusive affairs. Will the economical and business necessities of this new format also destroy the cinematic experience? Factors such as Covid have not only skewed data, but have accelerated consumer behaviours, leaving it likely that there may be a world fast approaching where cinema outings are a thing of the past.

Streaming's ability to offer convenience and accessibility that traditional models simply cannot compete with have morphed it from an innovative platform to a necessary business model. The fundamental changes in consumer behaviour through binge watching, coupled with wandering eyeballs and declining ad revenue have forced media giants to join the

streaming wars. An exclusive approach to media, and the consequent media boom have further incentivised economic benefits of streaming formats, and raised questions to the future of cinema and the media landscape as we know it. The economic benefits of streaming are endless, and in a rapidly changing media landscape, the platform has become more than a format, but a powerful business model that has allowed underdogs such as Netflix to dominate Hollywood. However, it raises the question, when media becomes centred around money, are we losing the human stories that we once fell in love with?

QUESTION THREE

Quotation number:

"The only safe thing is to take a chance." Mike Nichols

PLANNING

Chances taken make film interesting:

- Outlandish narrative
- Strings background music
- Ambitious use of angles, lighting and colour palette

Begin your answer to Question Three here:

Film's power lies in the telling of unique stories through the often magical eyes of a director. However, if the stories told are predictable and mundane, the visceral and powerful world that lies within film is lost. Thus, in the words of Mike Nichols, "The only safe thing is to take a chance" when creating powerful and meaningful film. In the creation of my short film, "Come Hang with Me", a murder mystery set in a prestigious boarding school, the process was one chance taken after another. While much inspiration was drawn from the classics of the genre, it was the taking of chance that allowed me to create a film that was more than a carbon copy. Hence, the only way to safely insure a powerful, unique film is created is through taking a chance.

Murder mysteries are first and foremost a narrative. They must contain a sprinkle of Easter eggs, morally grey characters and most importantly, a twist ending. The audience that engages in a murder mystery is expecting twist and turns and, ultimately, to be shocked, and the director must deliver. The creation of the narrative of my short film was arguably the most difficult part. In order to create a truly engaging mystery, I had to take a few chances. Instead of the simple story line I longed for, I decided to go for a more complex, Cluedo inspired narrative. Three students are under investigation for the death of a class mate, with the fundamental twist ending provided by the true killer being the matron. The chance taken with this narrative ensured that the film would be original and more than a parroted copy, something fundamental in catering to an audience. My teen audience did not want to watch a carbon copy of *Knives Out*, but an original story, after all that's why we engage with films. However, this chance brought with it the risk of a larger cast, a more complex story line to tell within the relatively short 12 minute time frame and the possibility of plot holes.

I took much inspiration for my film from Rian Johnson's masterful, *Knives Out*, a classic whodunit murder mystery. The film utilised the flash back convention in order to tell its complex story in a coherent and easy to follow way. This is a convention seen throughout the murder mystery genre with films such as *Clue* and *The Usual Suspects* utilising it to much success. Thus, I decided to adopt the convention to tell the more complex and vibrant narrative that I took a chance on. The film progressed between interviews with the detective and each suspect's flash back, accompanied by voice overs, allowing for the creation of multiple time-lines within the film. The chance taken with the complex narrative however allowed for me to utilise the Chekhov's gun technique. An important aspect of a murder mystery is the audience's ability to feel as

though they are solving the mystery alongside the detective, keeping engagement and satisfying inner sleuth in the audience. Hence, the Checkov's gun technique, coupled with extreme close up shots, allowed me to draw attention to clues within each narrative, signifying their importance to the case and manipulating the audience to understand the links within the mystery. It also allowed me to create red herrings in the same way, creating inconsistencies within the stories that added to the shock of my twist endings. These shots were later reused in the realisation scene, placing them clues in the forefront of the audience's mind, and allowing them to feel as though they reach an epiphany at the same time as the detective. I took a large chance with the reusing of these shots as it depended greatly on my ability to stick to my very detailed shot list. However, the chance paid off as the Checkov's gun technique, coupled by the rapid cross cutting synchronised with the dramatic and fast paced soundtrack, created a stand out scene in the film. Thus, it was only through taking a chance that I could safely create an engaging and original film.

Knive's Out's success as a murder mystery film largely stems from its control of tension, sustained mood and fast pace. This is primarily done through its unique, all-strings soundtrack composed by Nathan Johnson. Johnson remarks that the soundtrack, "the musicians digging into the strings, almost like the stabbing of a knife", and is crucial in the creation of the dangerous mood and centres the film around the original murderous intent. I decided to take large chance and chose a soundtrack entirely of string-quartet pieces as well. The risk associated here is the lyrics of backtracks can often add and accentuate the feelings of the musical pieces. However, I found the lack of words within my pieces to be an asset, truly proving that in order to safely create a great film comes through the taking of risks. The wordless pieces allowed for me to subconsciously manipulate audience mood without distracting from the vibrant script my complex narrative required. I did this through contrasting pieces between interview and flashback scenes. The interview scenes featured slow and low pieces, that coupled with the low key lighting of the scenes, created a sinister and dangerous mood. An important aspect of my narrative to achieve the shock of my twist ending was the apparent guilt of each suspect. The use of string-quartet music to create the sinister mood was highly effective in doing this as it manipulated the audience to subconsciously see each character as dangerous. I attempted to further reinforce this guilt through the use of high angle shots in the interview scenes which placed the suspects in positions of inferiority, offering the suggestion that they had committed the deed. I found this particularly effective for my teenage audience who related the

feelings of inferiority to authority figures such as the detectives to times they too had wronged or been guilty, almost like being sent to the principles office. This helped to create a link to real life shared experiences, consolidating the apparent guilt of each character. I also attempted to use the dutch angle shots in these scenes where the camera is slightly tilted, a convention of the thriller genre, which coupled with the chance taken to use word-less music, create a sense of psychological unease surrounding each character, further adding to the sinister and uneasy atmosphere created. I think this was highly effective in creating the perceived guilt surrounding each character that I desired, and added greatly to the shock of my twist ending.

The flash back scenes featured more staccato, fast paced pieces. This contrast in music allowed for the building and reducing of tension, which further accentuated the unease felt by the audience. The fundamental sharp sounds of strings truly made the chance taken on the unique soundtrack pay off. The faster pieces allowed for synchronisation with the fast cutting technique I used. The fast cutting, combined with a variation of camera angles, created a 'jumpy' effect as the audience watched the suspects, further accentuating feelings of guilt and maintaining the unease I wanted to create. It also allowed for effective pace control which was important in keeping my audience engaged. Teenagers and young adults lead busy lives, and often prefer to engage with films that are faster paced such as super hero and sci-fi genres. Hence, the fast pace of my film was vital for the audience engagement and satisfaction.

Although I took a large chance in choosing an unusual soundtrack for my film, it allowed for my to effectively tell crucial parts in my story in a way a mainstream soundtrack wouldn't allowed me to. Thus exemplifying Mike Nichol's words that "the only safe thing is to take a chance."

However, the chance taken to create a complex story line with a larger cast did have some difficulties. Due to scheduling issues, I was unable to assemble all 6 members of my cast for the final scene. Quick improvisation resulted in the detective speaking to the camera for much of the scene. This had a pleasantly surprising effect in which the audience felt like the killer, linking back to some of the key themes of the film regarding the unknown evil. However, I neglected to change the pronouns of the script, resulting in the entire scene feeling weird and incomplete. This greatly impacted the flow of the scene and its pace, resulting in the scene losing the fast pace required, and ruining the final climatic moment of the film. The ending of my film which in theory was the perfect twist to satisfy my audience's inner detective was sadly derailed by the risk taken of having a larger cast. However, the chance take to have a more complex story line and hence larger cast did overall

make my film more original and engaging then it would of been. It was purely a discipline and organisation fault that sadly let down the ending of the film, leading me to conclude that, despite it not paying off in this case, taking a chance is truly the only safe way to create a powerful and original film.

It is only through the taking of a chance that a director is able to create a truly original and moving film. IN my own film, the chances taken for a purely string-quartet soundtrack coupled with an ambitious montage scene paid off, creating stand out moments of the film. The chance taken to have a larger cast presented issues ultimately derailed the ending of the film, but gambles do not come without risk. That risk is something directors must accept if they want to create truly beautiful stories of human experience, for "the only safe thing is to take a chance."

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Outstanding Scholarship Exemplar 2021

Subject	Media Studies	Standard	93303	Total Score	15
Q	Score	Annotation			
1 (2)	6	<p>The candidate demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a convincing knowledge of the Slasher genre and the inferences drawn from the close reading of a range of media texts • a detailed knowledge of the way Slasher films highlight human problems in US society • knowledge of a diverse range of film texts • a coherent and well-structured argument that addresses the quote • some insightful analysis • an ability to draw a well-supported and thoughtful conclusion. 			
2 (4)	7	<p>The candidate demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comprehensive knowledge of the topic that addresses the quote with current and historic material, including a clear understanding of the video/film streaming industry – and future trends and implications on the media landscape • a critical analysis and insight on the industry and its development with a clear overarching view of the topic. 			
3 (1)	7	<p>The candidate demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an extensive & detailed knowledge gained from their own production experience making a short film, including a well-developed argument that addresses the quote • a critical evaluation of the 'chances' that were taken and the resulting ramifications in the production process • references to other film directors and their work to support their response. 			