Research Paper Annotated Bibliography

Cooley, Aaron. “Reviving Reification: Education, Indoctrination, and Anxiety in The Graduate.” *Educational Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2009, pp. 358–376. *EBSCOhost*, Accessed 4 Nov. 2017.

This article closely investigates the world in which Ben Braddock reenters after graduating from college. Cooley specifically looks at Ben’s malaise and anxiety upon returning home and argues that it is chiefly brought on by his identification and rejection of the reification of his world. The article cites examples of the discrepancy between Ben and the world he finds himself in, like at the graduation party in the beginning of the film and at his birthday party with the scuba suit. Cooley looks closely, too, and Ben and Mrs. Robinson’s relationship, arguing that the consummation of the affair comes out of Ben’s frustration after having his manhood insulted rather than out of love or lust. Cooley says that “[Ben’s] search for meaning and his ensuing frustration resulted in him striking back at the embodiment of the reified world that he so desperately wanted to escape” (367): Mrs. Robinson, who is the most artificial character in the film. Cooley further critiques Ben’s character by pointedly exposing him as “weak, entitled, and spoiled” and hypocritical in his rejection of his parent’s world; in his denial of the artificial world, he constantly reaps the benefits from it, like being able to lounge in his pool, not having to work, and having a sports car to drive around California. This hypocrisy can be seen as a sign of Ben’s fundamental dependence on reificated society, and although he avoids this lifestyle throughout the film, he will ultimately revert back to it to receive the spoils once again.

Fairchild, B. H. “‘Plastics’: ‘The Graduate’ as Film and Novel.” *Studies in American Humor*, vol. 4, no. 3, ser. 2, 1985, pp. 133–141. *JSTOR*, Accessed 4 Nov. 2017.

In “Plastics”, Fairchild compares the satiric effect and target of *The Graduate* novel and film, and how the different medium treat the main character, Ben. Fairchild likens Ben to an “impassive, emotionless mechanism” (134) who is treated like an object at the beginning of the film in the airport (being carried on the people mover and then being compared to luggage) and as a pride piece at his welcome home party. “Plastics” identifies Ben’s main struggle as a struggle against his engrained programing of “bourgeois politeness and conformity” (134), which he drops into at the welcome home party and during his first evening with Mrs. Robinson. This politeness, the result of a “mechanical, conformist shell of himself and his social class” (135) holds true until Ben’s date with Elaine, when he becomes more sensitive and “real” when Elaine emotionally breaks down. In addition to looking at Ben’s bourgeois manners and the society that comes with them as his means of entrapment, Fairchild also investigates how the film version of the story differs from the novel version, and how visual elements work to support the story. He mentions specifically the diligently regulated color scheme (black and white in the areas in conformity and Ben’s red car as a means of escape), the use of the image of water trapping Ben as a metaphor for him drowning, and the framing of scenes to emphasize the lack of communication between characters.

Gitre, Edward J. K. "A Failure to Communicate: Benjamin Braddock and the Aims of Education." Hedgehog Review, vol. 12, no. 1, Spring2010, pp. 62-74. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hft&AN=509993421&site=ehost-live.

In his article, Gitre talks about the university rebellions in California, and how *The Graduate* was a timely representation of students. Gitre speaks of California’s Master Plan to educate more of the growing state population by enrolling more students in the universities and colleges that already existed (instead of establishing more). As a result, class sizes became excessive (some lectures having “well over a thousand” (66) in attendance), and education became about churning people out as products rather than inspiring the love of learning in people. As a result, the “Free Speech Movement” (FSM) emerged, and students spoke out about their mistreatment. This was seen as a counterrevolution as a reaction to the revolution which changed the education structure in the first place.

*The Graduate*, premiering contemporaneously to this movement, cinematically represented the struggle of students at the time. Students related specifically to the lack of communication between Ben’s generation and his parent’s generation and the use of water and glass to signify Ben’s entrapment in a society he doesn’t fit into.

Hayden, Tom. “Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society, 1962.” *History Is a Weapon*, [www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/porthuron.html](file:///Users/acheever/Desktop/www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/porthuron.html). Accessed 12 Nov. 2017.

The Port Huron Statement is a primary source example of the mindset of the youth culture of the time. It traces a decline in America through anxiety over the Cold War and disillusionment of American democracy with national enduring racial tension. The recognition of America in decline leads to a yearning for a better future. This essay also writes of “the emptiness of life” and the “vast distance between man and man”. Similarly to Gitre’s article and *The Graduate*, the Port Huron Statement recognized the societal “depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things”; in the Gitre article, this can be seen in the University’s mass-production of graduates without much consideration for the individual, and in *The Graduate*, the objectification of Ben occurs many times, from the opening credits, to the welcome-home party, to his 21st birthday party. Indeed, Hayden’s statement argues that the higher educational system and society as a whole produces apathy in its graduates and a rejection of the society the produced that indifference, a mentality which can clearly be seen in *The Graduate.*

Nystrom, Derek. *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men: Class in 1970s American Cinema*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

In his book, Nystrom looks at how the youth counter-culture is portrayed in films of the 1970s. Films like *The Graduate*, he argues, were targeted at “the younger members of (and aspirant to) the PMC” (26) yet this generation began to reject their own culture. This can be seen portrayed by Ben in *The Graduate*, even though his lack of communication with his parent’s generation is only due to “dilatory hesitation” (27). Nystrom points out a section of *The Graduation*, when Ben and Elaine are talking at the drive in, as specifically voicing the concerns of the counter-culture generation and their dissatisfaction both with their own class and their disfavor for the “more raucous, downwardly mobile form of youth culture”, embodied by the loud bohemians in the car next to them.

Roszak, Theodore. *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968.

In his book, *The Making of a Counter Culture,* Roszak identifies the technocracy (or PMC) as a social group that tries to apply notions of productivity, rationality, and streamlining to people. Everything which cannot be rationalized in this way, which includes emotions, is ignored or controlled rather than dealt with. The benefits of this mentality is that people are fed, housed, and healthy, but the question is whether or not people are happy. The youth rebellion, embodied by Ben in *The Graduate* is against their parents and thus the technocracy; they see the “plastic” world their parents live in and strive for genuine human connection and sometimes a reform of society in attempt to break out of the systematic, emotionless way their middle-class society works. All the same though, Roszak points out that even though the youth rebel against the society of their parents, their “attention is understandably riveted on sharing the glamorous good things of middle-class life. Cooley similarly sees this in *The Graduate* when he argues that Ben reaps the benefits of what his parents have provided him by being in the technocracy; he is more than housed and fed and is indeed pampered with a private swimming pool, a red sports car, and an expensive scuba suit for his birthday (although he doesn’t want it). Roszak concludes then that the youth counter culture, thus, can be considered a fad. The rejection of their own culture (which they enjoy the benefits of) “[provides] little that can be turned into a lifelong commitment…It will finish as a temporary style, continually sloughed off and left behind for the next wave of adolescents: a hopeful beginning that never becomes more than a beginning” (72).

Stevens, Kyle. *Mike Nichols: Sex, Language, and the Reinvention of Psychological Realism*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2015.

Stevens looks specifically at Nichols’ use of silence in his chapter “*The Graduate* and the Subversion of Silence”. Stevens references another scholar Cavell, who argues that the reason why the film was so popular and that Ben is so relatable is that *The Graduate* doesn’t offer much of Ben’s inner psychological thoughts and instead offers silence. In this silence, viewers are able to “‘fill in’ motivations and intentions” (96), and thus, personally invest themselves and see themselves reflected in Ben. Stevens also comments upon Ben’s use of silence as an avoidance tactic; for example, in the welcome-home party scene, “Ben is desperate to escape the determinist framework placed on his actions by the older generation who treat him so perfunctorily, and silence seems to be his only weapon” (98-99). Lastly, Stevens explores how Mrs. Robinson is similar to Ben’s parents, mostly his mother. In the scene where Mrs. Robinson nakedly traps Ben in Elaine’s room, letting him know that she’s available, she acts as his parents do, “demanding he listen without giving him a chance to speak” (100). Earlier on, when Stevens first touches upon the affair, he claims Ben “acquiesces to the sexual advances of Mrs. Robinson” (88) as one would imagine a child would do when a parent or respected adult asked one to do some chore. Further, Stevens questions Ben’s acquiescence, wonder whether it was “despite (or because of) the face that [Mrs. Robinson] looks like his mother” (88).

Whitehead, J. W. *Appraising The Graduate: The Mike Nichols Classic and Its Impact in Hollywood*. Jefferson, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011.

This book looks at how academic discourse of *The Graduate* was initially unmotivated, as the film wasn’t initially seen as a satire but as emblematic of Ben’s generation. Whitehead argues, counter to Fairchild, that the film is not only satirical about Ben’s parent’s generation, but also of Ben’s generation. This can be seen chiefly in the third part of the film in Ben’s pursuing Elaine at Berkeley. One can see the distorted lens through which Ben sees Elaine as his savior and can see firsthand how ridiculous Ben looks restlessly following her around campus. And although he “saves” her from her arranged marriage with Carl, his relationship with her was also arranged by his parents and Elaine’s father. This critical eye of Ben and Elaine carry to the penultimate shot of the film, adding a layer which the audience can interpret as cynical, rather than as celebratory. Thus, Whitehead suggests the film is not glorifying the counter-culture of the time, but instead bares its failure. Whitehead says “these self-styled revolutionaries, the Baby Boomers, yielded to the temptation of LBJ’s dread apparition of ‘soulless wealth’ instead of pursuing his dream of the ‘Great Society’ or the even more radical route of ‘dropping out’ and truly abetting a revolution” (8).