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Bio Royale: Foucault's Bio-Politics in *Battle Royale*¹

The film *Battle Royale* visualizes a world in which the modern bio-political structures enforced by the government to maintain bio-power, such as schools, have failed to contain the modern subject.² In order to combat this, the new control and bio-power relies on both life and death, shifting the present balance away from strictly life. The film, for all of its gratuitous violence also contains gratuitous romances. This is due to the fact that both are essential means of exercising power.³ In order to escape this new structure of control, the subject must find a way to self-govern both areas of life and death, romance and killing, and turn them against the controlling power.⁴

Foucault's traditional concept of bio-power, which fails in the opening scenes and backstory to *Battle Royale*, involved political control of entire populations through governing life.⁵ He explains that "With regard to discipline, this development was embodied in institutions such as the army and the schools . . . As for population controls, one notes the emergence of demography, the evaluation of the relationship between resources and inhabitants"

¹ My title (while attempting to be a bit witty with a pun on the movie's title with "battle" and "bio") gives the reader an idea of the film I will be talking about and the context through which I will be analyzing it.

² Here I introduce the film I will be using and some of the theoretical concepts I will use. Stating the name of a film very early on is key if your paper is focused on analysis of that film. If you don't understand some of the key terms here like "bio-political structures," don't worry, that's not what's important for you as a writer. What *is* important is the idea of mentioning *your* key terms as you begin to work towards your thesis in the introduction.

³ In this sentence and the one before it, I make an observation about the film and utilize theory to explain why the film content is the way it is.

⁴ This is my thesis, which should be placed at the end of your first paragraph after you've introduced (important: *introduce* only, everything can be explained more later) the film evidence and theory leading to it.

⁵ I use this topic sentence to explain what the following paragraph will be about. I will be explaining Foucault's concept of "bio-power" in depth.

(XXX).⁶ The government is able to control the development of bodies through discipline in schools and the outcome of this discipline can be analyzed at the level of the population through statistics.⁷ . . . In the introduction of *Battle Royale*, the viewer is informed that children are no longer attending schools and unemployment is skyrocketing.⁸ . . . In order to continue promising the security of the population as a whole and maintain the discipline necessary to do so, the government changes its policies with the BR Act.⁹

The creation of the BR Act marks the movement of this fictional world away from bio-power over life or traditional power over death and into a realm between the two, utilizing life and death.¹⁰ The game set up in which the students must kill each other is structured almost as any other institution aimed at anatomo-politics, with the only difference being the significant role of death. . . . The game is succeeding where school has failed, the new bio-politics of this world necessitated death as a disciplinary motivator and benefit to the larger population.¹¹

However, in the end there is still hope for the modern individuals hoping to escape subjugation, even under a regime using both death and life against them.¹² In discussing

⁶ I use a quote to show integration of the theory studied in class into my discussion of the film. I do not begin the sentence with the quote but rather lead into it, signaling that these words are not my own.

⁷ Explanation and analysis of quotes is key. A quote shouldn't just be dropped in so you can say you were referencing class material; it should be integrated into the essay. Take some time to explain a quotation and use it towards your argument.

⁸ After explaining the concept of "bio-power," I start to bring up relevant moments from *Battle Royale* to show that the theory and film are related.

⁹ In this essay, some plot explanation is necessary because the professor may not be familiar with a film I got to choose on my own. Plot explanation would not be as necessary in an essay on a film watched within the class, in which case you and your professor both know what you're talking about. This concluding sentence of the paragraph also leads into my introductory sentence for my next paragraph.

¹⁰ I build off the points made in my last paragraph and again signal with a topic sentence where I will be going with my argument next. I use this paragraph mainly to discuss the plot of the film in brief and with focus on what is necessary to understand my points.

¹¹ My concluding sentence for this paragraph ties back to my central ideas of "bio-politics" and death, making clear the relevance of what I've been saying.

¹² After an in-depth explanation of the theoretical framework I am using and the necessary aspects of the film's plot, I begin the real argument aspect of my thesis. I explained bio-political control and life and death, and now I

Foucault's concept of resistance, Brent L. Pickett explains that this concept "was developed in three distinct stages, beginning with a focus on difference in the 1960s, passing through an emphasis on revolutionary agitation in the 1970s, and finally developing into a broader notion of diffuse, localized resistance of power" (XXX). These stages can be summed up in the different attempts by students in *Battle Royale* to oppose the government, which is represented by their former teacher Kitano who is in charge of the game¹³. . . . In the end of the film, they each turn the powers of life and death which had been used to develop them back against the one who had done the developing in each case, Kitano. . . . They do not succeed in destroying the game itself, which might never be possible, but they themselves are able to be freed from it.

Foucault's bio-power was proposed as the current evolution of government power away from death and the individual and towards life and the population.¹⁴ In *Battle Royale*, the next evolution of government power is envisioned as one which uses both death and life as a means of control, the individual and the population are key. Where bio-politics and anatomo-politics failed in this fictional world, the new government power embodied by the BR Act, which forces children to kill each other, succeeds. Students' lives, in the form of interpersonal relationships and the good of the whole, as well as their deaths are capable of manipulation by those in power. None of the previous methods of rebellion succeed, from suicide to revolution. The only way the

make the argument for potential freedom from control. All of these concepts were summarized in my thesis and the goal is to be constantly referring back to that argument and keeping the reader following along.

¹³ Again I use a quote as evidence for theoretical application. The quote and my explanation of the quote allow the reader to understand a concept which I then apply to scenes and characters from the film. The strongest argument comes from tying film and theory together. Using theory shows you know what you're talking about from an academic background and you aren't just making something up while using film evidence can lead to a concrete understanding of the theoretical concepts.

¹⁴ For my conclusion, I begin broadly summarizing the ideas I presented throughout my paper chronologically.

new power can be overcome is through harnessing those same powers over life and death and self-governing them, turning them against the oppressive government.¹⁵

¹⁵ I finish my essay by restating my argument in order to leave my reader with what I wanted them to take from my essay.