

New York University Gallatin School of Individualized Study
K10.0319 Writing Seminar I: Aesthetics on Trial
715 Broadway, Room 501
Fall 2009

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Office Hours:

Tuesday 4:30-6:30 (719, 726 Broadway)

Thursday 4:30-6:00 (416, 715 Broadway)

Friday 1200-300 (718, 726 Broadway)

While cultures often like to see themselves reflected in the arts, groundbreaking art is frequently accompanied by controversy. In literature, Vladimir Nabokov and the Marquis de Sade – among many others – were faced with charges of obscenity. In the visual arts, controversies surrounding “public art” have helped to determine what art can be and do from a social and political perspective. In photography, people like Robert Mapplethorpe have challenged the role of the visual arts as innocent representation. In film, Leni Riefenstahl blurred the lines between aesthetics, politics, and ethics by directing for Hitler. In addition, forgeries of Old Masters have gained renewed attention not simply as financial fraud but as philosophical inquiry into the very identity and value of art. Through critical writing we will investigate some such questions as: How do we define art? What is the relationship between ethics and aesthetics? What constitutes obscenity in the arts? Is art inherently political? In addition to weekly homework assignments, two shorter essays and a longer literary-critical paper are required.

The first-semester seminar aims to help each writer discover the powerful writer within herself/himself. Rather than attributing the success of excellent writing to a writer’s innate gift, this seminar concentrates on writing as a craft. The course explores the various stages of the writing process, including free writing, multiple drafting, revising, and polishing essays. Student writing is at the center of this course, and readings, centered on a theme, provide both models of excellence in writing and springboards for class discussion and debate.

Course Requirements:

Essays (3-5 pages each, each worth 15% of course grade)	30%
Literary Critical Essay (7-10 pages)	30%
3 Homework Assignments (2 pages each)	20%
Active Class and Online (Blackboard) Participation	20%

Required Course Materials:

Course Packet – for sale by instructor (\$40.00)

Books (soon to be available at NYU Bookstore):

- Marquis de Sade. *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*. Grove, 1994. ISBN 0802130127
- Lopez, Jonathan. *The Man Who Made Vermeers: Unvarnishing the Legend of Master Forger Han van Meegeren*. Mariner, 2009. ISBN 0547247842
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Annotated Lolita (Revised and Updated Edition)*. Vintage, 1991. ISBN 0679727299
- Nafisi, Azar. *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. Random House, 2008. ISBN 0812979303

A Further Explanation of Requirements...

Two Essays (30% total)

There are two shorter essays required for this course. These papers are to be 4-5 pages, typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides (follow MLA guidelines as documented in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th Ed.). Topics will be distributed well in advance of the paper due dates. After you begin to work on your paper, you will be asked to bring drafts with you to class in order to participate in writing workshops and peer review sessions (we will have two full-period workshops devoted to each essay). I will also be available to help throughout the entire writing process so do not hesitate to call on me. **You may rewrite ONE of the two essays for a higher grade; this rewrite must be submitted as a hard copy attached to the original draft by the last day of class – Wednesday, December 15.** Please note: late essays and/or essay rewrites will not be accepted under any circumstances.

The Longer (Literary Critical) Essay (30%)

The literary critical essay assignment will be distributed via email on November 29. The essay should be approximately 7-10 (double-spaced) pages in length and will go through at least two workshops before final submission via email by 11pm, Saturday, December 19. More information will be given later in the term.

Homework Assignments (20%)

There are three (3) homework assignments due on specified dates (see below). Homework assignments should be in five (5) paragraph form (or thereabouts) and no more than 2 pages (double-spaced, 12 pt. font) in length. You are required to post homework assignments (as Word attachments) to the appropriate forum of the Discussion Board on the course Blackboard site AND write a one paragraph commentary on a classmate's homework posting by midnight *the night before* coming to class on the date the assignment is due.

Active Class and Online (Blackboard) Discussion Board Participation (20%)

Active, diligent participation in class is absolutely necessary. The course depends on open, flowing discussion. Ideally, I'd like you to feel comfortable enough to speak out *whenever* an idea arises as if you are speaking to a group of friends or colleagues (which you are). Always come to class prepared, having *critically* read and taken notes on the reading material. Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class. Regular attendance and lively participation is absolutely necessary in this course. Missing a class or two is understandable (I have to miss a few myself). But if you are excessively absent (i.e. more than four times) this semester, your course grade will certainly suffer and, in extreme cases, you may even fail. If illness or other urgent matters require you to be absent more than four times, please speak to your advisor and to me *immediately*. Perpetual lateness is also basis for penalty. I will count every three times late as one absence (perpetually coming late to class is very disruptive to the group dynamic). In the event that you are absent, you should email a classmate (not me) in the class to find out exactly what you missed in order that you do not fall too far behind. However, I cannot stress how important it is to be on time, present, alert, and active in class – both for your sake and for that of your classmates.

Schedule of Discussion Topics, Readings, Assignments

Assignments below should be read/completed by the assigned date.

- 9/8 Course Introduction.
In-Class Exercise
- 9/10 Discussion of In-Class Exercise
- 9/15 Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art" (reader)
Devereaux, "Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*" (reader)
- 9/17 Gaut & Devereaux (continued)
- 9/22 **Homework 1 Due: Workshop & Discussion**
- 9/24 Film Screening and Discussion:
The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl
- 9/29 Readings on Pasolini's *Salo or the Hundred Days of Sodom* (handouts)
de Sade, *The 100 Days of Sodom*
Film Screening and Discussion
- 10/1 Film Screening and Discussion (continued)
- 10/6 **Homework 2 Due: Workshop & Discussion**
- 10/8 Danto, *Playing With The Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe* (reader)
- 10/13 Danto (continued)

- 10/15 Film Screening and Discussion: *Damned in the U.S.A.*
First Essay Topics Distributed
- 10/20 First Essay Workshop
- 10/22 First Essay Workshop
- (First Essay Due Via Email 11pm, Sunday 10/25)**
- 10/27 Transcript of a Hearing to Decide the Future of *Titled Arc* (reader)
Hilde Heine, "What is Public Art?" (reader)
- 10/29 Greg Horowitz, "Public Art/Public Space" (reader)
Michael Kelly, "Public Art Controversy" (reader)
- 11/3 Film Screening: *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision*
- 11/5 No Class.
- 11/10 **Homework 3 Due: Workshop and Discussion**
- 11/12 Alfred Lessing, "What is Wrong with a Forgery?" (reader)
Dennis Dutton, "Artistic Crimes" (handout)
Jonathan Lopez, *The Man Who Made Vermeers*
Second Essay Topics Distributed
- 11/17 Lessing, Dutton, Lopez (continued)
- 11/19 Second Essay Workshop
- 11/24 Second Essay Workshop
- (Second Essay Due Via Email 11pm, Sunday 11/29)**
- 11/26 No Class.
- 12/1 Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*
Nabokov, *Lolita*
- 12/3 Nafisi & Nabokov (continued)
- 12/8 Nafisi & Nabokov (continued)
- 12/10 Third Essay Workshop
- 12/15 Third Essay Workshop (**Optional Essay Rewrite Due**)