

New York University  
The Gallatin School of Individualized Study  
Fall 2009

Writing Seminar I: Artists' Lives, Artists' Works  
T/Th 3:30 – 4:45 PM, 194 Mercer, Room 202

Instructor: Yevgeniya Traps  
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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION: Artists' Lives, Artists' Works**

What is the relationship between art and life, between the luxury of creating and the necessity of surviving? In this writing seminar, we will explore the many ways artists' experiences and the circumstances of creation influence artists' work. How are artists shaped by the societies in which they live? How do family background, historical events, political movements, social disruptions, and celebrity influence our creations? How do artists, in turn, shape social attitudes and values? Focusing on how art and writing reveal the effects of race, gender, sexuality, and politics in the second half of the 20th century, we will consider a number of works in their contexts.

Using writing as a way of thinking critically, we will work, throughout the semester, on the process of crafting descriptive, analytical, narrative, and literary-critical essays.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

**All texts have been ordered at the NYU Bookstore (18 Washington Place).**

- James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Delta 2000)
- Anatole Broyard, *Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir* (Vintage 1997)
- Don DeLillo, *The Body Artist* (Scribner 2002)
- Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1990)
- Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer* (Vintage 1995)
- Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* (Pantheon 1986)
- Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaghterhouse-Five* (Delta 1999)
- David Foster Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (Back Bay Books 1998)
- Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (Harvest Books 1977)

**You will, on occasion, be asked to print out some additional materials posted on BlackBoard** (indicated as BB on the schedule).

## **COURSE POLICIES**

**It is essential that you attend class regularly, arrive promptly, and submit all work on time.** If you suspect you might need an extension, please let me know well ahead of time so that we can make arrangements. If you need to miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out about missed work and all assignments; I strongly advise you to exchange contact information with at least one classmate, who will be able to fill you in on anything you might have missed. **Please keep in mind that more than three unexcused absences will have an adverse effect on your grade; so will persistent lateness.**

**All assignments must be typed and printed. I will not accept work over e-mail.**

**You will be responsible for weekly reading responses, commenting briefly but thoughtfully on each assigned reading.** Ideally, the responses will serve to generate ideas, as an opportunity to reflect on the reading you will be doing and to prepare for more formal writing assignments.

**You will also be responsible for four essays in the course of the semester.** We will discuss the particulars of this assignment in the course of the semester. Because we will be approaching writing as a process, you will be expected to bring in drafts of work in progress for in-class workshops. **Participation in workshops will be part of your final grade.**

**Participation—both in class discussion and in smaller group work—is an important part of your course grade.** Please come to class prepared to ask questions, to comment, to fully engage. **You must bring the assigned readings to each class meeting.**

**We will typically devote some portion of our meeting time to in-class writing.**

**REMEMBER: Any and all work you hand in this semester must be your own.** Whenever you use someone else's words or ideas, you must cite them properly. Failure to indicate your reliance on outside sources will be perceived as plagiarism, resulting in a failing grade, without a chance to make up the assignment. **Be aware too that you are expected to be working with your own ideas, in your own words; over-reliance on the ideas of others will affect your grade adversely.**

**Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns.**

## SCHEDULE

The following will be our tentative reading schedule for the semester. The schedule is subject to change—with sufficient notice—depending on the pace we establish.

Tuesday, September 8:	INTRO Diagnostic
Thursday, September 10:	WHO IS AN ARTIST? WHAT IS ART? Nathanael West, “The Impostor” Martin Amis, “Career Move”
Tuesday, September 15:	Didion: “On Keeping a Notebook” and “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” RESPONSE
Thursday, September 17:	Didion: “Notes From a Native Daughter,” and “Goodbye to All That” Baldwin: “Notes of a Native Son”
Tuesday, September 22:	Baldwin: “A Question of Identity,” “Equal in Paris,” and “Stranger in the Village” RESPONSE
Thursday, September 24:	<i>Kafka Was the Rage</i>
Tuesday, September 29:	<i>Kafka Was the Rage</i> RESPONSE
Thursday, October 1:	First Essay Due: WORKSHOP
Tuesday, October 6:	Orlan’s Carnal Art (BB) Sylvia Plath, “Daddy,” “Lesbos,” and “Edge” (BB) Anne Sexton, “All My Pretty Ones,” “The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator,” and “Her Kind” (BB) RESPONSE
Thursday, October 8:	<i>The Body Artist</i>
Tuesday, October 13:	<i>The Body Artist</i> RESPONSE
Thursday, October 15:	<i>The Body Artist</i>
Tuesday, October 20:	Second Essay Due: WORKSHOP
Thursday, October 22:	<i>The Philosophy of Andy Warhol</i>

Tuesday, October 27:	<i>The Philosophy of Andy Warhol</i> Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp” (BB) RESPONSE
Thursday, October 29:	CONCEPTUALISM (BB)
Tuesday, November 3:	<i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> RESPONSE
Thursday, November 5:	<i>Maus</i>
Tuesday, November 10:	<i>Maus</i> RESPONSE
Thursday, November 12:	<i>Maus</i>
Tuesday, November 17:	Third Essay Due: WORKSHOP
Thursday, November 19:	<i>The Ghost Writer</i>
Tuesday, November 24:	<i>The Ghost Writer</i> RESPONSE
Thursday, November 26:	<i>The Ghost Writer</i>
Tuesday, December 1:	Foster Wallace: “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction” and “Getting Away From Already Being Pretty Much Away From It All”
Thursday, December 3:	Foster Wallace: “Greatly Exaggerated” and “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again”
Tuesday, December 8:	CONCLUSIONS
Thursday, December 10:	Fourth Essay Due: WORKSHOP
Tuesday, December 15:	LAST CLASS