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# Culture and the Critical Eye

# Fall '08

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**This course** will examine the relationship between music, art, film through the lens of critics, focusing on how we establish criteria for evaluating creative works and how the political and cultural environment influences the artist and the critic. Students will write essays in response to works of contemporary visual art, music and film. Readings will include essays and reviews by Clement Greenberg, Pablo Picasso, James Baldwin, Malcolm Gladwell, Lester Bangs, Umberto Eco and John Berger.

**Students** will develop their academic writing skills through an investigation of various rhetorical techniques, through a variety of critical readings and through writing and revising their own essays on works of music, visual art and film. Students should come prepared to discuss the readings each class and engage in discussions with respectful enthusiasm.

Responses are due on the day listed. No late responses accepted. First drafts due for in-class workshop by group; final drafts due one week from first draft workshop date. All responses must be typed and double-spaced.	
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SEQUENCE ONE: VISUAL ART AND THE CRITICAL EYE	
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Sept. 2	INTRODUCTIONS
Sept. 4	Read "The Faith of Graffiti" by Norman Mailer. Write a short response in which you summarize his argument, define the guidelines of public art and suggest how local government might better support it.
Sept. 9	Read "Two Centuries of American Painting" by Octavio Paz, "Manhattan" by John Berger, "The Art of Romaine Bearden" by Ralph Ellison, and "Hopper: The Loneliness Factor" by Mark Strand. Also read: The Introduction in <i>They Say/I Say</i> . Response: Write a response on the relationship between environment and creativity.
Sept. 16	Read "Picasso: Hand to Hand Combat with Painting" by Octavio Paz and an excerpt from "Leonardo da Vinci: A Psychosexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence" by Sigmund Freud. Also read chapters one and two of <i>They Say/I Say</i> . Write a response describing the criteria by which the two others evaluate their subjects and evaluate an artist of your choice using your own set of criteria. Bring in an image of a particular work to discuss.
Sept. 18	Read an excerpt on the nude subject from <i>Ways of Seeing</i> by John Berger, an excerpt from <i>The Obstacle Race</i> by Germaine Greer, "Women, Art and Power" by Linda Nochlin and a poster by The Guerilla girls. Also read chapters three and four of <i>They Say/I Say</i> . Write a response on the representations of gender in art, using the "three ways to respond".
Sept. 23	Read "Painting and Time" by John Berger, an excerpt from "My Life" by Oskar Kokoschka, George Grosz on Dadaism, Renee Magritte on Surrealism, Kasimir Malevich on Supremacism, Filippo Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto "Vortex" by Gaudier-Brzeska, and "Does Money Manipulate Art" by the Art Workers Coalition Read

	chapter five in <i>They Say/I Say</i> . Write a two-page manifesto arguing what the role of art in contemporary society should be, being sure to include what “they say”.
Sept. 25	Read “The Shadow Act” by Hilton Als. Write a response addressing whether the cultural or class background of an artist might affect viewer and institutional expectations of them.
First paper assignment: Your first draft will be ungraded, but should be a substantial attempt to write an essay. Keeping in mind the techniques we’ve learned for “entering a conversation,” write an essay on the relationship between art and popular culture using two artists as examples, and quoting from at least two critics. Feel free to experiment in your first draft, but remember that your final draft should have a clear and concise thesis.	
Oct. 2	Group One first draft due (16 copies).
Oct. 7	Group One, continued. Group Two first draft due (16 copies).
Oct. 14	Group Three first draft due. Group Two, continued.
Oct. 16	Group Four first draft due. Group Three, continued.
SEQUENCE TWO: FILM AND THE CRITICAL EYE	
Oct. 21	Read “The Last Taboo: The Dumbing Down of American Movies” by Phillip Lopate and chapter six and seven in <i>They Say/I Say</i> . Write a response explaining why the content of films matters, focusing on a particular audience (parents, educators, health advocates).
Oct. 23	Read “The Battleship Potemkin” by Brigit Beumers, “La Haine” by Jill Forbes and “A History of Violence” by Kent Jones. Watch one of the three films and write a response refuting the particular critic’s main arguments, using quotes from the text and evidence from the film.
Oct. 28	Read an excerpt from “The Devil Finds Work” by James Baldwin, “Talk Now, Pay Later” by Bell Hooks and chapters eight and nine in <i>They Say/I Say</i> . Write a response describing how both authors use voice to contextualize and promote their arguments.
Oct. 30	Read “Ernest Hemingway— Cinematic Structure in Fiction and Problems with Adaptation” by Edward Murray, and “Two Forms of Adaptation: Housekeeping and Naked Lunch” by Jonathan Rosenbaum.

Paper #2: Adaptations. Choose a film that that has been adapted from a novel that you are familiar with. Write an essay that integrates opinions on both the film and the novel, using the two essays on adaptation as references establish a set of criteria through which an adaptation might be evaluated.	
Nov. 4	Group One first draft due (16 copies).
Nov. 6	Group One, continued. Group Two first draft due (16 copies).

Nov. 11	Group Three first draft due. Group Two, continued.
Nov. 13	Group Four, continued & leftover papers.
SEQUENCE 3: MUSIC AND THE CRITICAL EYE	
Nov. 18	Read “How We Listen” by Aaron Copeland, an excerpt from “Interpreting Popular Music” by David Brackett and “The Clash” by Lester Bangs and chapter ten in <i>They Say/I Say</i> . Write a short criticism of a musician or band using Stefani’s five levels of competence. If possible, try and incorporate metacommentary into your critique.
Nov. 25	Read “‘U got the look’: Film and television, music video and MTV” by Roy Shuker and “Scoring a Black Nation: Music, Film and Identity in the Age of Hip-Hop” by Ramsey P Guthrie, Jr.
Nov. 27	Thanksgiving.
Nov. 29	Read “Representations of New York City in Latin Music” by Peter Manuel. Write a response describing how migration has influenced a particular music genre.
Dec. 2	Read “Blacking Japanese: experiencing otherness from afar” by Shuhei Hosokawa and “Raving, not drowning: authenticity, pleasure and politics in the electronic music scene” by Rupa Huq. Response: Write your own definition of “cultural authenticity” and explain how music communicates culture across national boundaries.
Dec. 4	Read “Disco Inferno” by Moustafa Bayoumi and watch “So Predictable” a short speech by Malcolm Gladwell. Choose either piece and write a counter-argument in which you responds specifically to quotes from the piece.
Paper #3: Analytical Essay. Write an essay in which you develop an argument describing the relationship between the larger political or cultural context of a particular time period and two works from different genres (ex: a song and a film) that were produced during that era. Comment on how critics viewed the works during that time period and explain how the critical perspectives on the works have changed over time. Consider how the shifting cultural and political context may have affected the critical view. Be sure to include quotes from a range of critical sources, and include primary text sources when possible. Your essay should reflect the techniques gleaned from <i>They Say/I Say</i> and be written in MLA format.	
Dec. 9	Group One first draft due (16 copies).
Dec. 11	Group One, continued. Group Two first draft due (16 copies).
Dec. 16	Group Three first draft due. Group Two, continued.
Dec. 18	Group Four, continued & leftover papers.

## Required Books

*They Say / I Say* (by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, W.W. Norton)

*The Bedford Handbook* (Diane Hacker, Bedford Martin's)

## Packets

Packets should be purchased between the first and the second class meeting from Village Copier, 13<sup>th</sup> Street between Fifth and University.

## Grading

**Major Papers (50%)** are graded mainly on improvement (from first to last draft and from the beginning to the end of the semester). **Participation (15%)** is graded on general attitude – including attendance and in-class work. **Smaller Papers (20%)** include homework and in-class writing. **Presentations (15%)** will involve leading one class discussion (providing background and helping class interpret the reading).

## Attendance Policy

Three unexcused absences will result in a failing grade

Excessive lateness will negatively affect your class participation grade. Although the class is held in the early morning please be considerate of the instructor, your fellow students and yourselves by arriving on time for each class.

**Plagiarism** is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or “outsourcing” of written assignments for a course.

## Disabilities

In keeping with the University's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student requesting accommodations must first meet with Student Disability Services. Jason Luchs or a designee from that office will meet with students requesting accommodations and related services, and if appropriate, provide an Academic Adjustment Notice for the student to provide to his or her instructors. The instructor is required to review the letter with the student and discuss the accommodations, provided the student brings the letter to the attention of the instructor. This letter is necessary in order for classroom accommodations to be provided. Student Disability Services is located at 79 Fifth Avenue - 5th Floor. The phone number is (212) 229-5626. Students and faculty are expected to review the Student Disability Services webpage. The webpage can be found at <http://www.newschool.edu/studentaffairs/disability/> and the office is available to answer any questions or concerns.