Course Description

While cultures often like to see themselves reflected in the arts, groundbreaking art often results in controversy due to the aesthetic and ethical challenges to the status quo. The twentieth century produced several notable cases that remain highly controversial. In literature, Nabokov’s Lolita was censored and faced charges of obscenity and pedophilia. In photography, Robert Mapplethorpe challenged the role of the visual arts as innocent representation by taking photos that some regard as pornographic. In film, Leni Riefenstahl blurred the lines between aesthetics, politics, and ethics by directing for Hitler. Some key questions of the course include: What is the relationship between ethics and aesthetics? When, if ever, do ethical and aesthetic values clash? What is the relationship between form and content? Is art inherently political or is there such a thing as aesthetic autonomy?

Course Objectives/Learning Goals

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.

An introduction to library research is also part of the course. Students participate in a mandatory orientation to NYU’s Bobst Library, including its on-site and online resources. Research exercises related to the readings, such as research into the authors’ backgrounds and sources, as well as research into critical response, can help students deepen their approaches to the readings and to their own essays. Classroom discussions encompass how to find and develop a line of thought and shape a thematic or analytical spine for the essay, and how to find, present and analyze evidence. The class also invites students to do basic work on how to formulate research questions, choose and evaluate sources, quote and paraphrase, cite sources, and assemble a bibliography.
Course Requirements:

Three Short (2 page) Writing Assignments 15%
Two Essays (4-5 pages each) 25%
Active Class and Online Participation 30%
Literary Critical Essay (Essay 3; 7-8 pages) 30%

Required Readings

Course CD-ROM (containing most assigned readings)

* A Further Explanation of Requirements *

Writing Assignments (15%)

Three writing assignments will be assigned. Each assignment should be approximately 2.5 - 3 pages in length (double-spaced, 12 pt. font) and posted to the appropriate forum on our NYU Classes page by noon on its due date. These writing assignments will be the focus of in-class workshops and will also connect to the essay topics. You may choose two writing assignments to rewrite for higher grades provided that you meet with the instructor to discuss them first; rewrites must be submitted via email by 11pm, Thursday, December 18.

Essays (25%)

Two essays are required. These essays are to be 4-5 pages in length, 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 essay 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. You may rewrite ONE of the two essays for a higher grade provided that you meet with the instructor to discuss the rewrite; this rewrite must be submitted via email by 11pm, Thursday, December 18.

Active In Class and Online Forum Participation (30%)

Active, diligent participation in class (and online!) is absolutely necessary. The course depends on open, flowing discussion. Ideally, you should 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, but if you are excessively absent (i.e. more than twice) this semester, your course grade will suffer and, in extreme cases, you may even fail the course. If illness or other urgent matters require you to be absent more than four times, please speak to your advisor and to me immediately. (Please note that a grade of “Incomplete” can only be negotiated in advance and only in extraordinary situations related to health and family emergencies). 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 the instructor) 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.

Literary-Critical Essay (30%)

The culminating project of the course is the (7-8 page) literary critical essay. This essay will involve close, critical analysis of Nabokov’s Lolita and will require that students use the novel and secondary sources to develop an argument about the larger philosophical controversy concerning the relationship between fiction and morality. Although a general assignment will be provided, students will develop their own approach and argument.

Academic Honesty

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

WARNING!

THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES (INCLUDING LAPTOPS, READERS, CELL Phones, ETC.) IS NOT PERMITTED IN OUR CLASSROOM. PLEASE POWER DOWN AND PUT AWAY ALL ELECTRONICS BEFORE CLASS BEGINS!

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS RULE WILL RESULT IN A SIGNIFICANT GRADE REDUCTION AND CAN RESULT IN COURSE FAILURE. PLEASE TAKE THIS VERY, VERY SERIOUSLY.
Part I
Film: Leni Riefenstahl and Pier Paolo Pasolini

9/2 Course Introduction. Art and Ethics: The Long Debate

9/4 Gaut, “The Ethical Criticism of Art” (Reading 1)

9/9 Gaut “The Ethical Criticism of Art” (continued);
Screening and Discussion: The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl
Writing Assignment 1 Due

9/11 Devereaux, “Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl’s Triumph of the Will” (Reading 2)

9/16 Film Screening and Discussion: Pasolini’s Salo or the Hundred Days of Sodom

9/18 Film Screening and Discussion: Pasolini’s Salo or the Hundred Days of Sodom

9/23 Workshop: Essay 1 – Draft Due (Bring 2 Hard Copies to Class)

9/25 Workshop: Essay 1 – Draft Due (Bring 2 Hard Copies to Class)
Essay 1 Final Draft due via Email 11pm, Sunday, 9/28

Part II
Photography: Robert Mapplethorpe

9/30 Kieran, “Pornographic Art” (Reading 3)

10/2 Levinson, “Erotic Art and Pornographic Pictures” (Reading 4)

10/7 Danto, Playing with the Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe (Reading 5)

10/9 Danto, Playing with the Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe (cont.)

10/14 No Class. Fall Break.

10/16 Screening and Discussion: Robert Mapplethorpe (BBC Documentary)
Writing Assignment 2 Due

10/21 Workshop: Essay 2 – Draft Due (Bring 2 Hard Copies to Class)

10/23 Workshop: Essay 2 – Draft Due (Bring 2 Hard Copies to Class)
Essay 2 Final Draft due via Email 11pm, Sunday, 10/26
Part III
Forgeries in Painting: Han van Meegren


10/30  Screening and Discussion: Fake or Fortune: Han van Meegren

Part IV
Public Art: Richard Serra and Maya Lin

11/4  Screening: Maya Lin, Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision
Reading: Griswold and Griswold, “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Mall: Philosophical Thoughts on Political Iconography”
Writing Assignment 3 Due

11/6  Guest Speaker: Mary Ting, Artist, discussing Maya Lin and Richard Serra
Reading: Serra, “Art and Censorship”

Part V
Fiction: Vladimir Nabokov

11/11  Walton, “Morals and Fiction and Fictional Morality” (Reading 7)
Tanner, “Morals and Fiction and Fictional Morality: A Response” (Reading 7 cont.)

11/13  Lolita

11/18  Lolita; Tamir-Ghez, “The Art of Persuasion in Nabokov’s Lolita” (Reading 8)

11/20  Lolita; Frosch, “Parody and Authenticity in Lolita” (Reading 9)

11/25  Bobst Library Workshop

11/27  No Class.

12/2  Lolita

12/4  Workshop: Essay 3 – Draft Due (Bring 2 Hard Copies to Class)

12/9  Workshop: Essay 3 – Draft Due (Bring 2 Hard Copies to Class)

12/11  Workshop: Essay 3 – Draft Due (Bring 2 Hard Copies to Class)

Essay 3 and Optional Revisions Due via Email 11pm, Thursday, December 18