

Unit One Essay Assignment (E1)

Please read this whole assignment carefully.

Write an essay, about three to five pages long, comparing two specific images. One image is the photograph by Robert Frank, “New York City.” The other image is “The Forest (Klaus)” by Inez van Lamsweerde, available on the course website under Materials.

The nature of the comparison is up to you, and the strength of your essay will likely rest on whether you find an interesting claim to make about the juxtaposition of these two images. Whatever you choose to say, you should support your contentions with close examination of the images themselves, offering concise, descriptive language to capture the relevant aspects of the images. You may assume that your reader has seen the two images under discussion, but that she does not have them available while reading your essay.

While the Frank image is a *straight* photograph, the Lamsweerde image has been altered using a computer. In particular, Lamsweerde has replaced the subject's mouth and hands with those of a woman. You are not *required* to make use of this fact in your discussion of the images, but you are *invited* to do so, and you may also find it helpful to keep in mind the texts on digital imaging by Manovich and Mitchell that were discussed in class. This essay does not call for any additional research, but asks you to do original thinking in your writing. As part of this thinking, you may refer in your essay to the supporting materials that accompany the images on the web pages under Materials. (Please include bibliographic information properly formatted for any sources you do choose to use.)

It is not enough just to describe the images, nor just to detail their similarities and differences. The central claim of your essay must discover something about the conjunction of these two images that matters, something about these two images that is so interesting (to you and your reader) that it *needs* to be pursued in an essay. Again, finding such a worthy thesis is the most difficult aspect of essay writing, and deserves your own most critical attention.

Writing Process: One valuable strategy for writing — both in this assignment and in writing generally — is to begin your thoughts (not necessarily your essay) with your own “gut” reaction. How do these images make you feel? Is there something intriguing or disturbing or exciting about them? Try to figure out why or how the images have this effect on you. Be as specific as possible. Allow yourself to explore your feelings and the images in great detail, but remember to edit your writing so that each sentence advances your discussion and relates to your thesis. Similarly, hotspots in either image or both might provoke the most interesting responses from you; find some hotspots and write down your subsequent thoughts as part of your writing process.

Writing Skills: As this is the first essay assignment in 21W.784, it places some demands on you as a writer, demands that may feel unfamiliar. You probably already have some

idea how to read a text, but this assignment asks you to *read images*. You probably have done some interpretive work in previous assignments, but this assignment demands from you a *close reading*. You may have supported a thesis in an essay before, but this assignment asks you to make sure that your thesis is both *motivated and original*. And you are expected to come up with a motivated, original thesis having to do with not just one but two images (a *comparative* thesis) that do not obviously speak to each other. All of these aspects of the assignment are challenging and possibly unfamiliar, and you should reflect as you work on what parts of this essay you find most difficult to write and what in the assignment presents the greatest challenge.

As with other essays in this class, this assignment will be submitted for commentary, then revised and resubmitted. Do not regard the initial submission as preliminary. Other than the fact that this first draft will undergo a revision, there is nothing about it that should be draft-like. That is, both draft and revision should be completely edited for spelling, grammar, punctuation, flow, clarity, concision, citations, etc.

Along with your draft and your revision, please append a page with one or two paragraphs of self-critique, where you discuss what you think are the problems with your essay. What parts of your essay are unclear? What parts are boring? What parts are not sufficiently motivated? What should you have discussed that got left out? You may also comment on aspects of your essay that you are particularly pleased with or proud of. This sort of self-critique is an extremely valuable skill in essay writing, and it is well worth practicing whenever possible.

The draft of this essay is due in my office or in the inbox on my door at noon on Saturday, September 17. The revision will be due in class on Tuesday, September 27. For both draft and revision, please send me a copy of your essay by e-mail *as an attachment*, on the due date. Late draft submissions may receive no commentary, and late submitters may be ineligible for a conference. Late revisions may be penalized.

For the details of formatting and typography, please refer to the syllabus for this course (available on this website).