

THE MULTI-TRACK MIND

A Progression of Assignments Culminating in a Video Essay

Week One: CHOOSE YOUR CONTROVERSY

Select the social issue / controversy you would like to explore in this unit. Make a list of films, plays, and works of art associated with your issue. You will need to have at least 5 full-length works (plays, films, specific episodes of a television series, one documentary) on this list. Be sure that a full-length documentary (or 2 short documentaries) and at least 4-5 films/plays/television shows have been made on this topic—and that you have access to them.

Come to class with a list of all relevant and available artworks that deal with this topic. Include this list as the first page of your **Viewing Journal for Unit 2 (an ongoing Google doc)**.

Your Viewing Journal will document all of your notes related to the choices made by your chosen artists regarding the representation of your social issue. Include time codes and page numbers in your Viewing Journal to facilitate an easier video editing process. In addition, create a Google folder where you will upload clips and images that you may consider using on your video track.

Week Two: FICTIONS & NON-FICTIONS

Now pick **(1) a full-length documentary AND (2) at least TWO feature films/TV series/plays that engage with your social issue**. *If you can't find a full-length doc, feel free to watch multiple short docs (minimum length: 30 minutes each) or TV specials (an episode of Vice, for example).* Remember: Your final Viewing Journal must contain at least 5 full-length works.

Examples for Climate Change: *An Inconvenient Truth* (documentary), *Don't Look Up* (feature film), *Snowpiercer* (feature film), *The Day After Tomorrow* (feature film), *Flow* (animated film), *Earthquakes in London* (play)

In **your Viewing Journal (min 1 page single-spaced notes per work)**, explore how these works approach the controversy through a variety of different lenses. What choices stand out to you about the various approaches to this controversy? What gets left out as you cross over from the world of documentary to fiction? What are the strengths and limitations of the documentary form? How does your chosen fictional work deal with this controversy in unique and surprising (or stale and predictable) ways? Take notes about pivotal scenes from each selection in your analysis. **(Bullet points are fine.)**

Week Three: THE PITCH

Now record a **video pitch** (a 2-3 minute video of yourself talking to the camera about your social issue) to our **NYU Stream Channel**.

You will want to jot down a few talking points before you record, but this shouldn't be scripted (keep it as informal as you like). Help us to understand the problem you are grappling with (and

why it matters to you): Why have you decided to explore this controversy? What do many people still not understand about this issue? What would surprise your peers?

Narrow the focus of your controversy so that you can directly address the ways that Hollywood and artistic communities (theater, dance, visual art, music, performance art) are fueling or helping to solve this problem. As you talk, try to push past any obvious claims that we would all agree with; give us something new to think about, inspired by the work you have already done in your Viewing Journal (the documentary and two feature films you have seen).

What questions remain for you concerning the ways artists can engage with this social issue? What do you still not fully understand? What are you hoping to figure out by watching and reading several more works of art over the next month?

Watch your classmates' videos and write comments on 3 of them on our Stream channel. Give constructive feedback in your comments (offer suggestions about plays, music, film, tv, dance, and visual art that engages with their controversy; ask questions that might highlight some blind spots; express any concerns that you have).

Week Four: THE YOUTUBE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Start researching your own controversy (and its relationship to the Arts) on Twitter/X, TikTok, blogs, and in the popular press. You're interested in public opinion: what are people saying about it? What are the trends? How do perspectives on this issue vary? Try to be as specific as possible in defining your controversy; *Race* would be too broad (*police brutality and race* is better). Make a list of questions you are thinking about at the top of your document.

Then turn to YouTube and find as many pertinent videos as possible related to your discussion: documentary shorts, TED talks, music videos, etc. Aim for a mixture of artistic and documentary-based responses to your controversy. Try to have:

- at least one TED talk (or a lengthy, well-regarded presentation that resembles a TED talk).
- At least one music video or performance (sketch comedy)
- A mixture of well-known and more esoteric artistic responses to this issue (conceptual artists, visual artists, performance artists)

Select the 10 MOST USEFUL YOUTUBE VIDEOS from your search and create an Annotated Bibliography.

Below each citation, briefly describe the video and then explain how each one offers you a new perspective. If a video does not provide you any insight, it does not belong on your list. Write one hefty paragraph of original thinking for each video. Do not merely describe the video; tell me what you think about it—and how it leads you to ask new questions about your controversy (and its relationship to the art world).

Length: Approximately 1/3 of a page per entry, single-spaced.

List the Citation for the video using Proper MLA format:

Author's Name or Poster's Username. "Title of Image or Video." Media Type Text. Name of Website. Name of Website's Publisher, date of posting. Medium. Date retrieved. Link.

Week Five: THE ANNOTATED JOURNAL ARTICLE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Do some further reading about your controversy from a variety of new perspectives (and disciplines) and select **FIVE** of the most useful essays you find from JSTOR, EBSCO, Project Muse, Google Scholar, *The Economist*, *New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*, or other established periodicals. These selections should be lengthy ESSAYS, as opposed to brief news articles or blog posts. Make sure that some of these essays directly address the ways artists have represented your issue.

Follow the same format as your YouTube Bibliography, this time with texts. List the proper MLA citation. Summarize the text in 1-2 sentences and then spend the bulk of your paragraph explaining its contribution to your evolving understanding of this controversy.

Length: **One substantial paragraph (approx. ½ of a page, single-spaced) for each text.**

WEEKS 6-8: THE FINAL VIDEO ESSAY

"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

— F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Crack-Up" (1936)

This final video essay asks you to explore the ways artists can engage with a public controversy. You will need a **compelling central question**, clearly defined by the end of your beginning. Your argument will be a nuanced response to this question, as you delve deeper into the complicated issues and discourses related to your controversy. You will be creating a video essay that will be presented to the class (with your narration and chosen images from the art/film/documentary/plays you have studied).

While you have freedom to structure your video essay in a variety of ways, I recommend designating one *primary* artwork (a film or a play) as the anchor for your discussion (while using additional films, plays, documentaries, and visual art as secondary evidence). Demonstrating your ability to read these artworks for explicit and implicit meaning will be a crucial part of this assignment. Pay careful attention to each artwork's significance, intention, execution, and reception.

In addition to presenting the controversy's different sides and perspectives, you must ground your theory with analysis of *at least* **FIVE WORKS OF ART** (films, plays, visual art).

As you investigate this question in the middle of your video, you should reference *at least TWO TEXTS* from your Annotated Bibliography as *turning points*. These texts should transform the way you think about the intersection of art and your chosen issue in some way. You should feel comfortable articulating the complex idea from one of these texts and using it as a lens that enables you to further develop your argument.

Principles from our course to keep in mind as you draft this essay: inductive vs. deductive reasoning, recursive movement, turning points, the development of your matrix, consideration of a counterargument, effective representative moments, relationships between form + content, experimenting with complex sentence forms, resisting either/or thinking or overly broad/unsubstantiated claims, ethical and appropriate methods of citations, crafting satisfying beginnings and endings, and recognizing different modes of artistic engagement

LENGTH FOR FINAL ESSAY FILM: BETWEEN 6-7 MINUTES (no more than 8 minutes)

For Week 6: Research and incorporate work by a visual, conceptual, or performance artist. Put notes about 2 artists in your Viewing Journal (one paragraph each with visual links). Continue developing your central question and matrix.

- Write the beginning of your essay and outline all major turning points. Include your central question and matrix. Select your main artwork, status quo, destabilizing moment, problem, placement of other works on your Matrix, and your central question.
- Then: how you will develop your argument using the rest of your artwork and evidence.
- Also: Watch and take notes in your Viewing Journal about your 5th full-length work (play, film, tv show). Try to find a work that fills an empty quadrant on your matrix.

For Week 7: Keep working on your video essay script. Aim for a complete 4-page draft

For Week 8: Final draft of script for video essay due (around 3-4 pages, double-spaced). Record the vocal track for your video essay. Assemble the video track. **Maximum length: 8 minutes**