

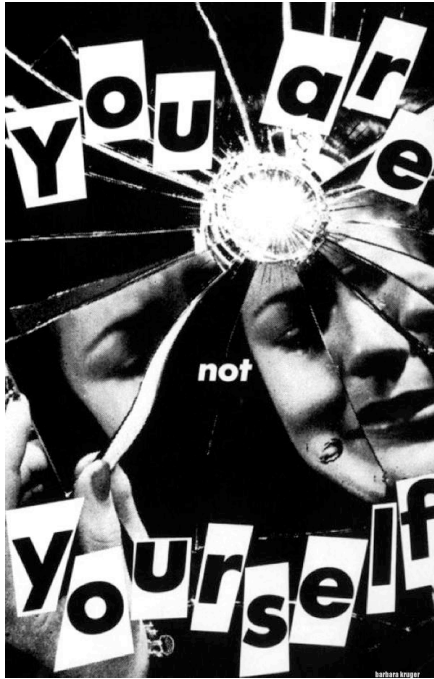
# The Naked Mirror Imagination Challenge Big Scary Essay®

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Elegant, eclectic and clever, not to mention an American original when it comes to writing, Gore Vidal reminds young writers that a peek into the fabulous history of the word *essay*, an etymological poke into the labyrinth of *essay's* past, yields another word you might not have expected to run across: *attempt*. You see most people think of an essay as a finished product--a dull, lifeless, inert textual body with a static introduction, an "ABCD" body, and a clear lets-tie-up-all-the-pieces conclusion. You will not write this kind of essay, opting instead to produce something that is less product and more process.

Allow the OED, the Oxford English Dictionary to show you the "guts," the DNA of the term "essay," with its Jeckyll/Hyde twin, "assay":



**essay, n.** SECOND EDITION 1989

Pronunciation Spellings Etymology Quotations Date chart

(eſeɪ) [a. OF. *essai*, *essay*; see [ASSAY](#) n. For several of the senses see also [SAY](#).  
In 18th c. the accent. was sometimes on the 2nd syll.]

**I.** The action or process of trying or testing.

‡**1.** A trial, testing, proof; experiment; = [ASSAY](#) n. 1, 3. *Obs.*

**c1600** [SHAKES.](#) *Sonn.* cx, Worse essays proved thee my best of love. **1605** [BACON](#) *Adv. Learn.* ii. vii. §7 Democritus..attributed the form thereof [of the 'frame of things'] able to maintain itself to infinite essaies or proofs of nature. **1631** [HEYLIN](#) *St. George* 247, I will make bold to venture on it, by way of tryall and essay. **1648** [Eikon Bas.](#) 26 It was the first overt Essay to be made, how patiently I could bear the loss of my kingdoms. **1660** [SHARROCK](#) *Vegetables* Ep. Ded., You were pleased to judge me able, and..to propose..that I should make an essay of that ability. **1704** [ADDISON](#) *Italy* (1733) 195 After having made Essays into it, as they do for Coal in England. **1745** [De Foe's Eng. Tradesman](#) I. xii. 98 He has made an essay by which he knows what he can, and cannot do. **1812** [J. HENRY](#) *Camp. agst. Quebec* 28 From the essays made, it seemed to me that, etc.

‡**b.** *spec.* The trial of metals; = [ASSAY](#) 6. *Obs.*

**1668** in *Phil. Trans.* III. 821 The Ore being ground..they divide it in several heaps, and then by lesser Essays, they find out how much silver is contained in every heap. **1731-6** in [BAILEY](#) (folio).

‡**2.** A trial specimen, a sample, an example; a rehearsal. Cf. [ASSAY](#) 17. *Obs.*

**1614** [SELDEN](#) *Titles Hon.* 22 An essay also of that age's vnhappy affectation of Greek patch. **1656** [BLOUNT](#) *Glossogr.*, *Essay*, a flourish or preamble. **1659** [HAMMOND](#) *On Ps.* cvi. 16-18 *Paraphr.* 532 Two terrible essays of God's wrath were here shewed. **1674** [CLARENDON](#) *Hist. Reb.* (1704) III. xv. 498 A small essay of my zeal for..your Majesty. **1684** [T. BURNET](#) *Th. Earth* II. 55 These are lesser essays or preludes to the general fire. **1734** tr. *Rollin's Anc. Hist.* (1827) VII. xvi. §9. 110 Gave an essay in this first action of what might be expected one day from his valour and bravery.

So, for the purposes of this writing/research challenge, I am asking, with no little nostalgia, for you to return to the origins of the essay. Your mandated task is to make a sincere *attempt* to produce a set of ordered reflections, a group of carefully arranged tasty words which respond in some way to the novels, films, short critical treatments and lectures you have worked through and will continue to work through in the coming weeks. The best essay is a "rehearsal" of a provocation--your attempt to grab a reader and change the way they think in the process.

Are you writing for your gang of two graduate teaching assistants and your professor? In a way, of course you are.

But in order to do well on this assignment, you must forget about this peculiar group of

literature-cinema fetishists!

The only people who count are the readers you write for: the audience for your paper.

Who are they? Well, they are a lot like you. They are impatient and easily bored. They like specific details; *they love direct, succinct quotes woven carefully into the fabric of an essay*. If you are going to write about an image, they want to see a xeroxed reproduction of that image properly captioned and carefully catalogued in your list of works cited. They hate misspellings and passive verbs. They like tangy language which is fresh and not filled with stupid clichés. Specifications: 5 to 8 pages tops; cleverly titled, double-spaced; 1-inch margins top and sides; carefully proofread; chock-full of active verbs; [MLA](#) or [University of Chicago](#)-style bibliographies/works cited; **and due Monday, November 24 at noon in class**. Late papers will not be accepted--keep this in mind as this imagination research challenge constitutes 33% of your final grade for the term. Early papers, in most cases, will be cherished lovingly--that is, you are encouraged to run your work by your GTAs in advance. All A-level critical speculations will integrate carefully selected direct quotations from the primary texts and will avoid ALL of [the quicksand-like bad habits noted here on your gradesheet](#). They will, additionally, include researched material from TWO (2) separate research resources found in LOVE LIBRARY stacks--YES, the "stacks." While you are welcome and even encouraged to make use of material from JSTOR or PROJECTMUSE located in the [ONLINE VERSION of LOVE LIBRARY](#), I also expect you to spend some time spelunking the stacks in search of published scholarly materials that either support your argument or, even more exciting, that you utterly disagree with. English Special Study 499 students ought to include at least 5 to 7 bibliographical resources.

One last bit of advice, do NOT plagiarize ANY material from the internet; unCITED material = PLAGIARISM; also, if you are going to "quote" a passage from an illustrated text, go to the bother of xeroxing the image and incorporating it INTO your essay.

Choose ONE of the following prompts...

1

*An exercise in re-definition, analysis, and/or deconstruction*

Redefine the term "Naked Mirror" using Oliver Mayer, Haruki Murakami, Orson Welles, and Man Ray as your allies.

2

*Wherein you surf the contours of dialectical intrigue*

I have argued in class that we might benefit constructively by seeking to complicate our notion of the dialectical relationship that obtains between literature and culture, between narration and nation. Do the works we will have read by late November support or dispute view? Use at least THREE works as you identify specific phenomena in culture that finds itself represented/critiqued/supplemented in and by literature.

3

*Sexual Fictions*

Define the relationship between sexuality and representation to be found in the work of Appignanesi/Zarate, Man Ray, Dan Clowes, and Charles Vidor--include xeroxed reproductions key scenes of these works to illustrate your paper.

4

*Damned Literary, Film, or Art Criticism*

Find a piece of published criticism on two or three of the works we have read this term in a scholarly journal published within the last 20 years that you TOTALLY disagree with. Incorporate a critique of this published scholarly study as you produce your own critically informed interpretation of one of the works we have read thus far this semester. Be sure to attach a xeroxed copy of the selected piece of dreadful analysis that you attack in your polished, posh essay!

5

### *Writer as Satirist*

Explore the nature of satire in the work of David Fincher, Dan Clowes, and Gustavo Arellano.

6

### *Tales of Seduction*

Contrast the concept of "seductive hallucination" found in the work of Junot Diaz, Haruki Murakami, Man Ray, and/or Daniel Clowes.

7

### *Desire and the Human Psyche*

Contrast the dissection of the human psyche to be found in the work of Charles Vidor, Orson Welles, and Marisela Norte.

8

### *Funny Guys*

Write a short essay on the dynamics of contemporary COMEDY. If you look close enough, you'll find humor in the works of Haruki Marukami, Daniel Clowes, Gustavo Arellano and/or Man Ray. Find some examples from some or all of these artists. Contrast their comedic strategies as you explore their work.

9

### *Psychoanalysis and Literature/Film*

Locate and read ONE of Sigmund Freud's case histories from the multi-volume selection of Freud's collected works edited by James Strachey: Some of his more famous case histories include the Wolf-Man, Little Hans, Dr. Schreber, Dora, and the Rat Man. Use one of these case histories as a key to open up unexplored phenomena from at least TWO of the works we have encountered in class this term.

10

### *Racism, Sexism, and the Psyche*

Using the works of Diaz, Norte, and Riley, discuss the effects of racism or sexism or both on the human psyche.

11

### *The Erotics of Power, the power of the Erotic*

Using one primary work written by Michel Foucault on power, sexuality, or punishment, analyze the dynamics of power and sex, sadism and masochism, in the work of Tomas Riley, Man Ray, Orson Welles, and/or Oscar Zarate

12

### *Desiring Desire*

Desire: to wish or long for, to crave, to lust, to covet, to hope, to want. We all desire something, someone, or some situation. But what constitutes desire? Using Tomas Riley, Oliver Mayer, Marisela Norte, and Michael Finster, explore the ways that the authors, films, or texts represent the complex issue of "desiring" and "wanting," be it love, individuality, sex, or a particular identity.

13

### *Alienation: Self in a Cage Alone*

"We are all lonesome animals. We spend all life trying to be less lonesome."-- John Steinbeck's words encapsulate two major themes of this course [and of human nature]: loneliness and alienation. Explore and analyze the presence of these themes within at least

THREE course texts. How is loneliness and alienation depicted by our writers and artists and how do their respective characters/subjects cope with these elements of human nature? Think about how other course themes, such as addictions and dreams, also play into this analysis. What direct connections can you make between loneliness and alienation, and addictions and dreams?

14

*Derrida, Foucault, et al and Literature/Cinema*

Find and read an essay by Carlos Fuentes, Jacques Derrida, Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Jane Gallop, Luce Irigaray, Michael Taussig, Henry Louis Gates, Stephen Heath or Gore Vidal that you suspect relates to one writer and one director we have read/screened this term. Apply the ideas you find in this essay as you comparatively discuss these two required texts from this semester's grab-bag of delicious literary/cinematic morsels. Do please ensure that the essay you select is a substantive piece over 10 pages in length and that you xerox and attach a copy of said selected essay to your essay when you turn it in!

15

*Roll Your Own*

Develop and refine your OWN independent thesis; you MUST run your WRITTEN, TYPED, ENTITLED proposal to me or your TA by classtime, NOVEMBER 10 in person or via E-mail in order to take advantage of this option. You are also welcome to run it by me in person during office hours or by appointment. If you are interested in combining or adapting any of the challenges listed above, do also PLEASE run this by us before this deadline.