

**21L.435 Violence and Contemporary Representation**  
**Questions for Paper # 2**

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**NOTES:**

A. The period of texts for this paper is the material from weeks eight through ten (White Masculinity; Girls/Women/Psychic Assault; Sex/Desire/Fragmentation).

B. If you haven't already, do read the packet I've given you on Scholarly Writing. Everything you need to know about how to write a great paper and do well in this class is in there! Be sure you have a thesis in your paper; be sure you have a strong conclusion that presses on the stakes of that thesis. Proofread your papers; polish your work.

C. Papers should be 4-5 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font, Times or Times New Roman.

D. I am not only willing to talk to you about your papers as you work on them, I really enjoy doing it and I think it's very helpful to not write your papers in solitude. So: feel free to come to my office hours or make an appointment to talk.

You can also always email me your thesis for some feedback—I can help focus it, or pose some questions to it (which you may want to consider in your conclusion), or let you know it sounds good as is. If you have any questions about my feedback on your first paper, please just ask.

\* *You do not need to answer every sub-question (nor could you in a focused 4-5 page paper).* These are broad topics to give you a lot of flexibility in how to approach your paper. The numerous sub-questions are there to get you thinking about the material from several angles; you will use them to develop a narrow, specific thesis.

**1. Splicing and the Cut.** Pick one or two of the following: *Fight Club* (the novel); *Fight Club* (the film); *Frisk*. Consider and make an argument about the figure of splicing or the cut—you should articulate your sense of what that figure is, means, or does—in relation to your chosen text(s).

Splicing involves conjoining the disparate, so it's a figure of unity and difference at once. You can be literal or metaphorical here; this can be an aesthetic problem, a bodily problem, a structural problem, and so forth—just be clear about how you're writing of the figure. Splicing might be a material gesture, one linked to media like photography or the editing in cinema (Tyler's nighttime repasts); it might be a violent gesture, linked to interruption, intermittency, or fragmentation (as in Cooper). At minimum, it involves conjoining the separate, which means it's a figure that troubles the relation between unity and dehiscence. You may want to speculate in your conclusion on how splicing affects or

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relates to *critical* approaches to your chosen text(s); do we have to read or approach the splice in a specific critical manner; what splices into criticism, or, by contrast, does criticism conjoin or suture over such rends?

**2. Men and Women and Rape.** Pick one or two of the following: *Frisk*; *A ma soeur*; *Audition*. Consider and make an argument about the figure of rape in relation to your chosen text(s)—you should articulate your sense of what that figure is, means, or does, because you may want to take rape as a broad figure of forced insertion/penetration, as a scene of unspecified sexual assault, or as a more literal figuration. But several of these texts pose the question, “What *is* rape, actually?”, so the figure is quite complex and you should articulate how you’re defining/figuring it.

Consider not only how your text(s) represent or depict rape (visually, formally, narratively, linguistically) but also how the (con)text for those scene(s) suggests a reading of rape. Do these films self-analyze or articulate a critique of how they represent (or deploy, or use, or theorize) rape? Does rape stand for a logic of something else (seduction; desire; familial love) taken to its extreme? Is rape the “worst” form of violence in your chosen text(s); does it have a kind of violent specificity, or is it “just another form of assault”? I strongly recommend considering in your conclusion: What are the critical implications of diegetic/narrative contestations over rape? (In other words, what are the critical implications of “rape” being a contested site *within* a text?)

**3. Time and Deferral.** Compare (and contrast, and complexify) the relation between deferral and duration in *Audition* and *A ma soeur*. Both films have very interesting narrative structures, and one could argue (many have argued) that both defer or put off the scene(s) of their most infamous violence. Do you agree? Disagree? Want to quibble? Do we have to define violence in a certain way to see it as deferred?

No matter how you negotiate the above questions, in your essay you should make an argument about how the temporal form of each film relates to violence, and you should articulate an explicit, theorized relationship between the “early” parts of each film, and the “later” or “final” parts. Do you agree that violence is deferred to the end, or do you see strains/traces of it earlier in the work? What is the spectatorial effect or consequence of the formal logic for which you are arguing? How does this understanding change on (re)viewing the texts (something you should absolutely do for this paper). Can you speculate on the broader relationship between deferral, duration and violence? How would the films have been different with a different formal relationship to time and narrative?

**4. Words, words, words.** Consider the role of talking, language, negotiation, persuasion, confession (and so forth) in one or two of the following: *Fight Club* (the

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novel); *Frisk*; *A ma soeur*. Articulate how you take language here: as tone or sound, as bodily speech, as narrative, as a form of too-much- or not-enough-ness, as rhetoric (persuasion), as confession or revelation, as full or as empty, as truth (for deception, see question #5, below).

Make an argument about the form, function and role of words, language, oral dictates, speaking (and the speakable/unspeakable), rhetoric (however you focus this topic) in relation to your chosen text(s). What kinds or pluralities of language-forms and -functions do you read in your text(s). How does language appear: as too-much, as not-enough; as meaning, as failures of or gaps in meaning; as seduction/persuasion; as logic or as emotion; as grotesque and empty or as exciting or bland? Every essay should make a connection between language and violence: is language the vehicle for violence (its medium; how it is transmitted)—and, if so, what are the consequences of that for readers or spectators? Is language the cause of violence; is language the consequence of violence? Does language promote or amplify violence or mitigate or calm it? Consider the implications for your own form of criticism on your chosen text(s), which is itself another production of more words, words, words...

**5. Lies, lies, lies.** Choose two of the following: *Fight Club* (the novel); *Fight Club* (the film); *Frisk*; *Audition*; *A ma soeur*. Analyze and make an argument about the figure of the lie, betrayal, bent truth, partial truths, revelations of previous deception—and articulate how you're approaching this figure—in relation to your chosen text(s). Who (is lied to; this is not always obvious); how, where, when and in what way does it take place in your chosen text(s)? Definitely consider whether (and if so, how; if not, what then) the *reader* or spectator is told the truth or told forms of lying. Is every lie always a betrayal? Can a lie also every reveal a truth? Are some lies worse (or more violent, or more linked to violence) than others?

You may want to consider: What is the temporality of the lie: does it matter when it's revealed to have been a lie? What do you make of your text if it troubles the neat binary between truth and lie: where is that distinction made impossible to determine? How do different texts lie: i.e. a novel versus a film? I strongly recommend considering in your conclusion the critical upshot of your argument about how your texts navigate this terrain; specifically: What is the consequence of how your texts grapple with figurations of the lie for a critical reading of violence in your chosen text(s)?

**6. The child.** Working with *Frisk* or *A ma soeur* (or both), consider and make an argument about violence and the child. What is the signifier "child" to your text? How does that get permuted or modified over the course of the novel or film (does the "child" come to be or represent new/different things, or is that status solidified, essentialized over the course of the text)? Is the child a figure of guilt or innocence (and whose guilt or innocence)? Is the child a form of time (new time; future time; corruptible time;

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irrecoverable time)? Is the child a figure in a family, in other words a relational figure, or is the child its own independent thing?

Consider how the child relates to violence (agent of, cause of, provoker of, victim of, witness to, field for thinking about...)? We'll stipulate that violence against a child is a particularly powerful, strong cultural taboo: how do your texts deploy that, formally, in relation to the reader/spectator? Is violence against or with or in relation to the child meant to conjure negative affects: shock, disgust, horror, terror, revulsion, anxiety, etc., or more positive/recuperative forms: empathy, pathos, affection, love, tenderness?

**7. The Trace/the Scar/the Mark** — Choose two of the following: *Fight Club* (the novel); *Fight Club* (the film); *Frisk*; *Audition*. Analyze and make an argument about the figure of the trace, the scar, the (birth)mark—and articulate how you're approaching or limiting or defining this figure—in relation to your chosen text(s). What is the relationship of the trace or scar or mark to time, to history, to meaning (or non-meaning), to writing/inscription, to legibility (or illegibility)? What is its relation to love, erotics, intimacy, closeness? How is it made in each work (i.e. how does it come into being)? And, above all, what is the relation of the trace, scar, or mark to violence: is it something that makes violence comprehensible or marks it as incomprehensible?

You may want to consider: Is it something that enables violence to circulate among or for forming communities (is the scar seductive; does it recruit figures to violence) or, rather, is it something that posits separation and difference? Are these marks giving us a theory of the body? As a form of truth? Or as deceptive? Is the photograph a kind of scar or mark? Or are specific media forms within your texts scarred or marked, as though they too were a body? What is the consequence of how your texts grapple with figurations of the trace/scar/mark for a critical reading of your chosen text(s)' theories of violence (as destruction or creation? As undoing or as additive? As ugly or as beautiful? —You can take this in many directions...)

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