TEXTUAL ANALYSIS EXERCISE

DUE ROUGH DRAFT (500-700 words) Sunday, September 6th, 11:59PM (Canvas)
FINAL DRAFT (500-700 words) Friday, September 11th, 11:59PM (Canvas)

TEXT

Tolentino, Jia. "Always be optimizing." *Trick mirror: Reflections on self-delusion*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2020.

INSTRUCTIONS

Once you have finished reading Tolentino's essay, carefully *re*read the passage reproduced on the next page. Take notes as you do so, asking yourself the following questions in particular: What question or problem is this passage exploring? What are its KEY TERMS? Its themes? Its examples? What broader implications might the ideas contained in the passage have for the text as a whole? Then, reread the passage *again*.

Once you have taken thorough notes on each passage, complete the following pre-writing steps, including the responses in your submitted rough draft:

1. List the FIVE most confusing words in the passage. Look up each word in your dictionary. Then, paraphrase what each means within the passage.
2. Underline (and copy) the most confusing sentence. Write six to ten observations about this sentence. For example: what are the KEY TERMS? Do any words have more than one meaning, or an additional implicit meaning? How do the words connect to each other (are they opposites, synonyms, etc.)? What are the transition words (if any)? Do they suggest a logical connection within the sentence or between sentences? What do the sentence structure or key words imply about Tolentino's tone?
3. Now, put your observations into the context of the passage as a whole: how do the first and last sentences relate to each other? How, in other words, do the ideas develop from the beginning of the passage to the end?

Once you have completed these steps, you are ready to begin writing. Using quotations from this passage and at least one other, **produce AT LEAST TWO substantive paragraphs of at least 250 words each in response to the following question: How has a "good life" built on individuation turned to be amoral and indefensible?**

As you write, work to ANALYZE the ideas you encountered, while avoiding SUMMARY.

- ANALYSIS explores and explains; it says something *new*. It requires that we consider implications, that we interpret the language and structure of a text. Analysis looks for patterns, dissects concepts, and explores (rather than merely presenting) evidence. It asks (and answers!) HOW and WHY questions.
- SUMMARY reports on what has already been said. It generally asks and answers WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and WHO questions. Summary adds nothing new to the conversation.

PASSAGE

Figuring out how to "get better" at being a woman is a ridiculous and often amoral project—a subset of the larger, equally ridiculous, equally amoral project of learning to get better at life under accelerated capitalism. In these pursuits, most pleasures end up being traps, and every public-facing demand escalates in perpetuity. Satisfaction remains, under the terms of the system, necessarily out of reach.
But the worse things get, the more a person is compelled to optimize. […]
In a later Awl piece, Buchanan described the chopped salad as "the perfect mid-day nutritional replenishment for the mid-level modern knowledge worker" with "neither the time nor the inclination to eat a lunch. […] On today's terms, what he's describing—a mechanically efficient salad-feeding session, conducted in such a way that one need not take a break from emails—is the good life. It means progress, individuation. It's what you do when you've gotten ahead a little bit, when you want to get ahead some more. The hamster-wheel aspect has been self-evident for a long time now. (In 1958, the economist John Kenneth Galbraith wrote, "It can no longer be assumed that welfare is greater at an all-around higher level of production than a lower one….The higher level of production has, merely, a higher level of want creation necessitating a higher level of want satisfaction.") But today, in an economy defined by precarity, more of what was merely stupid and adaptive has turned stupid and compulsory. Vulnerability, which is ever present, must be warded off at all costs.

FORMAT

You must proofread carefully.

Quotations should be carefully transcribed, punctuated, and attributed. For bibliographic conventions, use MLA style. Use 1.0-inch margins on all sides, double-spacing, and twelve-point Times New Roman font. Number all pages. Your submission should have your name, the date, and course information on the first page. Submit your work via Canvas in either .docx or .pdf format. Google docs and .pages files are not acceptable. Email submissions are not acceptable.

SUCCESSFUL TEXTUAL ANALYSIS EXERCISE CHECKLIST

Your Textual Analysis Exercise should…

- □ Consist of at least two substantive paragraphs, each of which begins with a topic sentence that sets out the project of that paragraph
- □ Identify at least one KEY TERM – a word or phrase that explores and explains HOW something works. KEY TERMS are NOT examples; they are ideas that help us think more carefully about examples
- □ Identify and quote AT LEAST TWO textual moments per paragraph that relate to your KEY TERM
- □ Analyze your quoted moments, explaining how they help us better understand your KEY TERM
- □ Conclude by discussing what your analysis teaches us about the passages and their complexities…
- □ …and by discussing how the passages you cite relate to, further, and/or complicate the author's overall argument

Your Textual Analysis Exercise should NOT…

- □ Summarize the passages (i.e., report what is said without adding anything new) at length
- □ Attempt to address EVERYTHING in a passage (or in the author's essay, for that matter!)
- □ Reference non-textual examples (i.e., relate something you find in the text to something *not* in it)
- □ Rely on factual quotations (i.e., quotations that merely report facts or examples; these will

feel like they could be said by anyone rather than only the author themself)