

This seminar is dedicated to the essay as one of the key genres in the histories of U.S. literature and philosophy and their mutual investment in matters of aesthetic form and social reform. In our discussions of groundbreaking theoretical explorations of the essay by Michel de Montaigne, Theodor W. Adorno and others, and in close readings of essays by such pivotal figures as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Joan Didion, Susan Sontag, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and David Foster Wallace, we will a) investigate the changing forms and functions of the essay as a literary and social practice, b) contextualize and historicize the different uses and affordances of the essay as a versatile cultural and political tool in order to c) explore modes of essayistic composition in non-literary media such as film and digital visual culture (by American and international artists). In addition to our discussion of the material, students will be tasked to engage in essayistic projects of their own (more information to follow in the first session).

The reading material will be provided on AGORA.

Requirements: Regular attendance and participation in in-class discussion; Prüfungsleistung: Essay Project (more information to follow in the first session).