

Please choose **ONE** of the following topics (either Topic A or Topic B) and respond in the **form of a well-organized and clearly argued essay**. Your response should be formatted according to the **academic criteria of the genre of the essay**. Summaries of texts and non-contextualized references to concepts/theoretical terms should be avoided. The exam is two and a half hours long (about thirty minutes to read both topics and two hours to write your essay).

Good Luck!

TOPIC 1

Read the excerpts cited below.

The first one is from a recent polemical article by Paul B. Preciado that appeared in one of the most influential monthly magazines of contemporary art in the US; Preciado is a writer and curator who gained recognition in the wake of the publication of *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmokopornographic era* (2008), an autobiographical and theoretical reflection on gender and sexuality, and is now regarded as one of the most prominent figures in the field of autotheory. The second excerpt is from Mina Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" written on or about the outbreak of World War I. British-born Mina Loy was one of the most unclassifiable modernist poets who navigated avant-garde circles across Europe and the U.S, and one of the most radical feminist voices in her own time.

In a short reflective essay, discuss the critique of a normative subject. In what way can or cannot Loy's text be read through Preciado? In your essay, you are welcome to integrate theoretical frameworks that you are familiar with and think are relevant, and another or other text(s), forms and media.

Text 1

ON THE VERGE, Paul B. Preciado on Revolution July/ August 2022

The fundamental problem we face is that the patriarchal-colonial capitalist regime has colonized the function of desire by assigning it monetary value, has captured it with a semiotics of violence, distorting it with modes of consumerist objectification and depressive submission. The key to patriarchal-colonial capitalism is not the production of economic profit but the creation of a subjectivity in which desires have been adapted to the processes of production of capital and the heterosexual and colonial reproduction of life. Violence operates by creating a normative subjectivity that takes possession of the body and of consciousness to the point that both agree to "identify with" the very process of extracting their own life. The first thing that power extracts, modifies, and destroys is our capacity to desire change. Until now, the entire patriarchal-colonial edifice of capitalism has rested on a hegemonic aesthetic that has limited the field of perception, cut off sensitivity, and captured desire.

Text 2

FROM Mina Loy, "Feminist Manifesto" (1914)

The feminist movement as at present instituted is
Inadequate

Women if you want to realize yourselves—you are on the
eve of a devastating psychological upheaval—all your pet illu-
sions must be unmasked—the lies of centuries have got to go—
are you prepared for the *Wrench*—? There is no half-
measure—NO scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap
of tradition, will bring about *Reform*, the only method is
Absolute Demolition

Cease to place your confidence in economic legislation, vice-
crusades & uniform education—you are glossing over
Reality.
Professional & commercial careers are opening up for you—
Is that all you want ?

And if you honestly desire to find your level without preju-
dice—be **Brave** & deny at the outset—that pa-
thetic clap-trap war cry **Woman is the
equal of man—**

for

She is **NOT!**

The man who lives a life in which his activities conform to a
social code which is protectorate of the feminine element—
is no longer *masculine*

The women who adapt themselves to a theoretical valuation of
their sex as a *relative impersonality*, are not yet

Feminine

Leave off looking to men to find out what you are *not* —seek
within yourselves to find out what you *are*

As conditions are at present constituted—you have the choice
between **Parasitism, & Prostitu-
tion—**or *Negation*

Men & women are enemies, with the enmity of the exploited
for the parasite, the parasite for the exploited—at present they
are at the mercy of the advantage that each can take of the
others sexual dependence—. The only point at which the
interests of the sexes merge—is the sexual embrace.

Topic 2

Please draw on the following excerpt to write a reflective **essay** on the figure of the stranger. Provide a close reading of the following excerpt and draw on any relevant literary, theoretical or other texts that engage the concept of the stranger and trouble the ethnocentric, nationalistic and racist aspects that are involved in the representation of Self and Other. Please refrain from simply summarizing the text(s) you will discuss in your essay and from making references to concepts/themes without contextualizing them in detail.

From **Toni Morrison**, “Being or Becoming the Stranger,” *The Origin of Others* (Harvard UP, 2017)

“The urgency of distinguishing between those who belong to the human race and those who are decidedly non-human is so powerful the spotlight turns away and shines not on the object of degradation but on its creator. Even assuming exaggeration by the slaves, the sensibility of slave owners is gothic. It’s as though they are shouting, “I am not a beast! I’m not a beast! I torture the helpless to prove I am not weak.” The danger of sympathizing with the stranger is the possibility of becoming a stranger. To lose one’s racialized rank is to lose one’s own valued and enshrined difference. [...]

Perhaps I can clarify this prevalent capacity to estrange others by explaining how I myself participated in the process and learned from it. I have published this account elsewhere, but I want to describe to you how vulnerable we are to distancing ourselves and forcing our own images onto strangers as well as becoming the stranger we may abhor.

I am in this river place—newly mine—walking in the yard when I see a woman sitting on the seawall at the edge of a neighbor’s garden. A homemade fishing pole arcs into the water some twenty feet from her hand. A feeling of welcome washes over me. I walk toward her, right up to the fence that separates my place from the neighbor’s, and notice with pleasure the clothes she wears: men’s shoes, a man’s hat, a well-worn colorless sweater over a long black dress. She is black. The woman turns her head and greets me with an easy smile and a “How you doing?” She tells me her name (Mother Something) and we talk for some time—fifteen minutes or so—about fish recipes and weather and children. When I ask her if she lives there she answers, no. She lives in a nearby village, but the owner of the house lets her come to this spot any time she wants to fish, and she comes every week, sometimes several days in a row when the perch or catfish are running and even if they aren’t because she likes eel, too, and they were always there. She is witty and full of the wisdom that older women always seem to have a lock on. When we part, it is with an understanding that she will be there the next day or very soon after and we will visit again. I imagine more conversations with her. I will invite her into my house for coffee, for tales, for laughter. She reminds me of someone, something. I imagine a friendship, casual, effortless, delightful.

She is not there the next day. She is not there the following days either. And I look for her every morning. The summer passes and I have not seen her at all. Finally I approach the neighbor to ask about her and am bewildered to learn that the neighbor does not know who or what I am talking about. [...]

I felt cheated, puzzled, but also amused, and I wonder off and on if I have dreamed her. In any case, I tell myself, it was an encounter of no value other than anecdotal. Still. Little by little, annoyance then bitterness takes the place of my original bewilderment. A certain view from my windows is now devoid of her, reminding me every morning of her deceit and my disappointment. What was she doing in that neighborhood anyway? She didn't drive, had to walk four miles if indeed she lived where she said she did. How could she be missed on the road in that hat, those awful shoes? I try to understand the intensity of my chagrin, and why I am missing a woman I spoke to for fifteen minutes. I get nowhere except for the stingy explanation that she had come into my space (next to it anyway— at the property line, at the edge, just at the fence where the most interesting things always happen), and had implied promises of female comradery, of opportunities for me to be generous, of protection and protecting. Now she is gone, taking with her my good opinion of myself, which, of course, is unforgivable. And isn't that the kind of thing that we fear strangers will do? Disturb. Betray. Prove they are not like us? That is why it is so hard to know what to do with them.

The resources available to us for benign access to each other, for vaulting the mere blue air that separates us, are few but powerful: language, image, and experience, which may involve both, one, or neither of the first two. Language (saying, listening, reading) can encourage, even mandate, surrender, the breach of distances among us, whether they are continental or on the same pillow, whether they are distances of culture or the distinctions and indistinctions of age or gender, whether they are the consequences of social invention or biology. Image increasingly rules the realm of shaping, sometimes becoming, often contaminating, knowledge. Provoking language or eclipsing it, an image can determine not only what we know and feel but also what we believe is worth knowing about what we feel.

These two godlings, language and image, feed and form experience. My instant embrace of an outrageously dressed fisherwoman was due in part to an image on which my representation of her was based. I immediately sentimentalized and appropriated her. Fantasized her as my personal shaman. I owned her or wanted to (and I suspect she glimpsed it). I had forgotten the power of embedded images and stylish language to seduce, reveal, control. Forgot too their capacity to help us pursue the human project—which is to remain human and to block the dehumanization and estrangement of others.