Spring 2020

ARTFUL LIVES
FYSEM-UA 713
Tuesdays 2:00-4:30

Prof. Jennifer Cayer
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Course Description:

“Creativity is not just for artists. It’s for businesspeople looking for a new way to close a sale; it’s for engineers trying to solve a problem; it’s for parents who want their children to see the world in more than one way” ~Twyla Tharp

How, and to what unique ends, have artists, performers, and writers crafted art from the materials of their lived experience? We will explore a variety of works across genres, including essays, diaries, letters, graphic memoirs, films, performances and theater works that innovatively and directly draw upon life. What does it mean to represent ourselves in art? And what aesthetic and ethical questions arise in the making of such works? For example, what is the relationship between memory and memoir, ‘truth’ and nonfiction? How might such works carry broader cultural, political and social significance? And what changing roles do social media play in our representations and comprehension of ourselves and selfhood? Along the way, we will experiment with making our own artful representations in multiple modalities from written language to playing with sonic, visual, and kinetic forms. In addition to this creative work, we will also practice critically representing, analyzing, and contextualizing the works under consideration. We will also have the opportunity this semester to meet with practicing, professional artists via class visits and excursions.

Learning Objectives:

- To closely analyze and interpret works across genres to discern various meanings and implications
- To practice designing and responding to generative questions, both for discussion and research
- To research using library databases and tools in order to find and assess substantive supplemental materials
- To write clearly, concisely, and reflectively about sources as well as works of art across genres
- To practice presentation and public speaking skills
- To play with creative composition across genres

You do not need to be an artist, but as the course unfolds, I’ll encourage you to play and practice with representing yourselves in writing and other art forms. I’ll also ask that you seek to discern areas of your own intellectual curiosity within the wide range of works and subjects we encounter. These habits of mind — of receptivity, risk-taking, creative experimentation, finding, discerning, and following-up on our curiosities — are central to achieving our broader goals and specific learning objectives.

Required Texts, Materials & Events:

Readings:

Many of our required readings will be available as pdf’s or links on our NYU Classes course site. All materials must be printed and brought to class for our discussions (unless I suggest otherwise). I recommend taking notes in the margins and on the page as you read so that you have a record of your individual engagement prior to our class discussion. It is essential to read and to write all of the assigned course material in advance of our class meetings so that you can fully engage in discussions and in-class exercises. Bring all relevant reading and written materials to class.

The following are required texts and are available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore. Same goes here: plan to have your own copy that you can use at home, mark up, and bring to class. (*Hold off on buying all books at once as things may change – we may read excerpts or opt for different works as our conversation progresses. I’ll keep you posted and give you ample lead time to buy/order).

- Educated: A Memoir by Tara Westover
- The Laramie Project Tectonic Theater Project
- Fun Home: a family tragicomic by Alison Bechdel
- Passing for Human: A Graphic Memoir by Liana Finck
- Fires in the Mirror by Anna Deavere Smith

Journal/ Notebook:
Designate a journal or notebook to keep track of evolving thoughts, insights, observations and ideas that come to you both outside and inside class. Bring this notebook as well as a pen/pencil to class every day.

**Screenings:**

Some of our required course materials will be films/videos to screen in advance of class. I will set aside screening times in the library as well as put video materials on reserve at The Avery Fisher Center located on the 7th floor of Bobst Library. Some, if not many, of these materials may also be available to rent or stream for free via services like Netflix, HBO, Amazon Prime, etc. As these options tend to change, it is your responsibility to plan in advance and either 1) attend a scheduled screening 2) screen the library reserve copy on your own time at Bobst or 3) find and stream on your own prior to our class discussion.

**Events & Excursions:**

Together, we will see the Broadway show Heidi Schreck's *What the Constitution Means to Me* on Wednesday April 17th @ 7:00 PM at The Hayes Theater (240 West 44th Street). Mark your calendars and plan to be there by 6:45 – this is a required excursion; but let me know ASAP if you have a course-related or other major conflict.

Also, please plan to attend two other relevant exhibits, screenings, events or performances. I'll provide advance notice of options, and let us know what you come across that connects to our course.

**Attendance & Preparedness:**

Because much of the learning in our course occurs through active discussion, in-class writing, workshops, and conversation rather than through lectures, it is essential that you attend class, come prepared and participate. Punctual attendance is mandatory. Be on time. Absences or habitual lateness will result in lowered grades, even though you may have completed the required assignments. It is necessary to explain the reason for an absence prior to, or at the time it occurs. Religious observance and documented illness or family emergency are grounds for an absence to be excused; however, you are still responsible for the homework and should consult with a classmate for what has been missed.

Please note that a blank note attesting to a general Health Center visit on or around our class time does not necessarily mean your absence will be excused. Because we meet only once per week, missing two class meetings will make it challenging to successfully complete the course.

**Communication & Office Hours:**

I will routinely post important class materials as well as assignments to our NYU Classes site. You can find the site through home.nyu.edu (→Academics tab → NYU Classes).

It is essential that you check into our site regularly. I will also e-mail you with pertinent course updates; be sure you regularly check your NYU account so that you receive my communications.

Please also plan to schedule at least 1-2 individual meetings with me. There will be two formalized opportunities for you to schedule an individual 1-1 meeting with me. But, please feel free to email me anytime to ask a question, check-in or to schedule a meeting apart from these occasions.

**Formatting and Submission Procedures for Written Work:**

Please submit all written work in MLA style and formatting. The basics are double-spaced, a standard 12-point font, 1” margins, page numbers, and a simple heading (your name + brief title and the date will suffice). Consult: https://style.mla.org/

You will be asked to upload some assignments to NYU Classes and to print others for class; please be sure to read and follow the instructions for each given assignment. Just ask if you have any questions.

Any late homework, drafts, projects, or essays need to be discussed with me in advance and routine lateness will negatively affect your ability to succeed in the course.

**Classroom Environment, Respect & Civil Discourse:**

Together we must make our classroom a place where the free exchange of ideas can occur in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Participation entails attentive and active engagement with your own, and your classmates’ spoken and written ideas. This means adopting a willingness to listen to, and weigh perspectives other than your own, adopt and convey perspectives sensitively, and consider their possible effects on others. When choosing writing/project topics,
remember you must be willing to share your work with the rest of the class. If you are troubled by something that comes up in class, please feel free to say so, and/or reach out to me privately in person or via e-mail. Such moments of discomfort will often pose occasions for our most meaningful learning.

Computers & Phones in the Classroom:
We will selectively use laptops or tablets in class; I’ll let you know when we will need them. But, unless I stipulate otherwise, please turn those devices off/have them stowed away at the outset of class--no laptops, iPads, iPhones, smart phones, or other communication devices on the table. Please be sure to silence your phones and put them away upon entering the classroom. Let’s endeavor to remain focused on the opportunity to engage in a live, embodied classroom exchange with one another.

Assignments:
1) Course Reading & Routine Writing: It is important to read/screen all of the assigned course material in advance of our weekly meetings so that you can fully engage in discussions and in-class writing. Other short writing prompts and drafts are assigned to facilitate discussion and feed into your larger projects. These assignments will be posted to NYU Classes. It is necessary to complete these on-time. You are also encouraged to keep regular track of your insights and questions in a writer’s journal. Save all of the writing that you do for this class.

2) Discussion Facilitator: You will sign-up to prepare and bring in -2- well-formulated and provocative discussion questions specifically designed to push and deepen our conversation about that day’s topic and materials. You may opt to research and select a related image, song, film clip, etc. only if it is relevant and helps us to dig deeper/see something anew in its connection to course materials. You may also opt to research a scholarly article or reference materials that will help us to further contextualize the materials for that day.

3) Writing Projects: In addition to our routine informal writing, there will be two graded writing projects and one final graded presentation and written piece. Detailed descriptions, objectives, and expectations for each assignment will be provided to you. Please note these major draft and final deadlines:
   - Writing Project #1 Draft due 2/14, Final due 2/21 – 4-pages
   - Writing Project #2 Draft due 3/7, Final due 3/14 – 6-pages
   - Writing Project #3 Proposal Due 4/4 – 1-2 pages (ungraded; final project proposal)
   - Writing Project #4 Draft due 4/25; Presentations 5/9; Written Piece due 5/13. 8-pages

Please note: Unexcused late papers/projects will not receive credit and late submissions will not receive feedback. Please discuss any anticipated delays with me well in advance of the due date.

Grading:
Course evaluation will be based on participation/discussion facilitation (10%) informal writing (10%), Project #1 (20%), Project #2 (25%) and Project #4 (35%).

The brief descriptions below provide a general sense of grading standards; plusses and minuses are shades of difference. Detailed prompts and objectives will be provided for each assignment:

A-range work is both ambitious and successful. It develops an interesting problem and idea with grace and confidence. It handles its sources not only ethically but with skill and elegance.

B-range work is one that is ambitious but only partly successful, or one that achieves modest aims well. Its problem and idea lack larger significance, or it does not consistently provide the evidence and analysis that support its insights.

C-range work has significant problems articulating and developing its idea and argument. It may not be motivated by an intellectual or creative problem; it may exhibit problems in its use of sources. Its structure might be tidy but repetitive (lack progression) or might be disorganized and difficult to follow.

D-range work typically does not engage concepts or sources, and may largely fail to address the expectations of the assignment.

A failing work is usually less than half the assigned length and does not address the expectations of the assignment to
any significant degree.

Additional Campus Resources:

- The New York University Writing Center [https://nyu.mywconline.com]
- Writing Affiliates [http://goo.gl/QP6wha]
- The Moses Center for Students with Disabilities [http://goo.gl/7CAcva]
- Residential International Student Engagement (R.I.S.E.) [https://goo.gl/u1E0iy]
- Academic Resource Center [https://goo.gl/4OetVO]
- NYU Libraries [http://library.nyu.edu]
- Resources for Commuter and Off-Campus Students [https://goo.gl/ij50NS]
- The Wellness Exchange [http://goo.gl/hZ9tg3]
- MLA Style Center [https://style.mla.org/]

Disability Disclosure Statement:
Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

A Note on Wellness:
College life can be stressful and overwhelming. I encourage you to reach out if you need help. The NYU Wellness Exchange offers free, confidential counseling services. You can reach them 24/7 at the hotline 212-443-9999 or during walk in hours at 726 Broadway, 344.

Academic Integrity:
This university is “a community of scholars who value free and open inquiry” (CAS Academic Integrity). In this class, we work with ideas and language. It is deeply important to keep track of which of those you have developed (in dialogue with classmates, sources, professors, friends, and so on) and which of those have come to you from others (classmates, sources, professors, friends, the internet, and so on). To put it succinctly—and to, once again, quote the CAS statement on Academic Integrity: “Academic honesty means that the work you submit—in whatever form—is original.”

This means that you may not submit work written (even in part) by someone else as though it was written by you; and it also means that you may not submit work written for this course in another course (unless you receive permission from both that professor and from me) to do so.
# Class Meeting Schedule:

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/ Screening/ Writing for Class</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/31</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
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| 2    | 2/7   | Memory & Imagination         | Scan over: Leader, “Introduction” pp. 1-6  
Read closely: Hampl, “Memory & Imagination” (11 pp)  
Screen: Stories We Tell (Sarah Polley) *you may opt to screen on Weds. 2/6 starting at either 5 pm or 7 pm in the Immersion Room @ The Avery Fisher Center in Bobst, 7th floor – fyi no food/ drink – water is ok)  
Begin: Westover, Educated: A Memoir (aim to finish most of Part One p. 1-150)  
To do: Finish your Creative Autobiography |
| 3    | 2/14  | Journals, Diaries & Letters  | Read:  
Daum, “Introduction” The Unspeakable pp. 3-6  
Lopate, “On Writer’s Journals” pp. 100-106  
Sontag, Reborn Journals and Notebooks pp. 1-13  
Coates “Letter to My Son” + Gabi Starr on Letters  
Continue to read: Westover, Educated: A Memoir Part Two p. 153-251  
Write: First Draft of Object Essay - bring a hard copy to class |
| 4    | 2/21  | Memoir                       | Read:  
Westover, Educated: A Memoir (finish Part Three p. 255-329 for discussion)  
Write: Revision of Object Essay due |
| 5    | 2/28  | Essays & Auto-Fiction        | Read: Lopate "Research and Personal Writing"  
Jamison "Introduction" to Best American Essays 2017  
Chee "Girl" + "How to Write an Autobiographical Novel"  
Carson "The Glass Essay"  
(total 100 pp) |
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| 6    | 3/7  | Performance & Film | **Screen:** *Moonlight* dir. Barry Jenkins and story by Tarell Alvin McCraney  
*Read:* "Connoisseur of Grief" on Tarell Alvin McCraney  
+  
**Screen:** *Tarnation* by Jonathan Caouette  
*Write:* Bring a hard copy draft (5 or so pages) of Essay #2 to Class |
| 7    | 3/14 | Theatre | **Spiderwoman Theater Muriel Miguel Class Visit**  
**Read:** Spiderwoman Theater “Winnetou’s Snake Oil Show from Wigwam City” pp. 269-287  
**Peruse:** Spiderwoman Theater  
Website: https://www.spiderwomantheater.org/  
*Write:* Essay 2 Revision Due |

**Spring Break**  
March 18th – 24th

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| 8    | 3/28 | Graphic Memoir & Comics | **Read:** Bechdel, *Fun Home* (232 pp)  
**Screen:** *Persepolis*  
**Scan:** McCloud *Understanding Comics* (up to page 161) -AND- Matt Madden’s 99 Ways to Tell a Story excerpts |
| 9    | 4/4  | Music & Dance | **Visit to Bobst Archives: The Kathleen Hanna Papers + Library Workshop**  
**Screen:** *The Punk Singer*  
**Read:** Mimi Thi Nguyen, “Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival” pp. 173-196  
**To do:** Bring 1-2 Page Proposal for Final Project |
| 10   | 4/11 | Comedy, Alter-Egos & Personas | **Screen:** Hannah Gadsby: *Nanette* (Netflix)  
**Read:** “Reverend Billy: Preaching, Protest, and Postindustrial Flanerie” by Jill Lane p. 60-84 |
| 11   | 4/18 | Theater & Performance Art | **Required Excursion:** Weds. 4/17 - 7 PM - See Heidi Schreck’s *What the Constitution Means to Me* on Broadway  
**See:** Heidi Schreck’s *What the Constitution Means to Me*  
+  
**Screen:** John Leguizamo, *Freak*  
| 12   | 4/25 | Performing Selves & Others | **Screen:** Anna Deavere Smith’s *Notes from the Field* (2017) on HBO or to rent for 3.99 on Amazon (approx. 80 mins)  
**Read:** Anna Deavere Smith’s “Introduction” to *Fires* |
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<td>5/2</td>
<td>Life as Art / Art as Life + Life-Writing in the Digital Age</td>
<td>Read: Kaprow, “The Real Experiment” &amp; “Art Which Can’t Be Art” pp. 201-222</td>
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<td>Read: Hayes, “Human 2.0?” in Leader pp. 233-256</td>
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<td>Draft + Revise: a rich, substantive paragraph or two in which you represent multiple sources in order to substantiate a meaningful and specific context through which to view/ situate your own or your artist's work. Copy this work directly into this assignment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>Life as Art / Art as Life</td>
<td>Presentations + Celebration!</td>
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in the Mirror xxiii-xli + An Interview with Carol Martin “Anna Deavere Smith: The Word Becomes You”

**Recommended Reading:** “Citing Identity, Sighting Identification: The Mirror Stages of Anna Deavere Smith” by Ann Pellegrini

**To Do for Final Project:** Continue Research; Refine Contexts + An Annotated Bibliography