Spring 2019 Freshman Seminar

**ARTFUL LIVES**  
Thursdays 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

“Life isn’t about finding yourself. It’s about creating yourself.” ~George Bernard Shaw

“All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up” ~Pablo Picasso

“The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible.” ~Allan Kaprow

“The art of life is not controlling what happens to us, but using what happens to us.” ~Gloria Steinem

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 diaries, graphic memoirs, auto ethnographies, films, performances and theater works that innovatively and directly draw upon life. We will consider autobiographical as well as biographical projects as we ask: 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? 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. Artists under consideration may include: Jamaica Kincaid, Maggie Nelson, Alison Bechdel, Cynthia Hopkins, Reverend Billy, Coco Fusco, Kara Walker, Agnes Varda, Lucy Grealy, Ana Mendieta, Anna Deavere Smith, and Spalding Gray.

### Required Texts & Materials:

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.

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.

- *Educated: A Memoir* by Tara Westover
- *The Laramie Project* by Moisés. Kaufman; Leigh Fondakowski; Greg Pierotti; Andy Paris; Stephen Belber; Tectonic Theater Project.
- *Fun home: a family tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel
- *You got older* by Clare Barron
- *Fires in the Mirror* by Anna Deavere Smith

Please also have a notebook and pen/pencil for in-class writing devoted to this class; bring this with you everyday.

Please also plan on at least one or two class outings to a relevant exhibit, screening, event or performance. I’ll provide advance notice. These will be in addition to periodic class visits with artists, makers and scholars.

### Attendance & Preparedness:

Because much of the learning in our course occurs through active discussion, in-class writing, 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 also plan to schedule at least 2 individual meetings with me.

### Office Hours:
There will be two formalized opportunities for you to schedule an individual 1-1 meeting with me to discuss your projects. Please feel free to email me anytime 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 + exercise # + section time will suffice). Consult: https://style.mla.org/

Assignments will be posted to our NYU Classes site. If you have problems accessing NYU Classes, please let me know. It is essential to read and 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.

You will be asked to upload some assignments to NYU Classes and to print out 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; so please bring 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. We will draw directly upon e-readings periodically and will largely endeavor to remain focused on the opportunity to engage in a live, embodied classroom exchange with one another. A laptop or tablet (rather than an iPhone) is highly recommended for our in-class work with those texts and others.

**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. Some of these are listed on the syllabus and subsequent assignments will be posted to NYU Classes. It is necessary to complete these on time. You are encouraged to keep regular track of your insights and questions. Save all of the writing that you do for this class.

2) **Discussion Facilitator:** You will sign-up to prepare and bring in -3- 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.

3) **Writing Projects:** In addition to our routine informal writing, there will be two graded writing projects and one final graded presentation and write-up. These will invite you to play with various modes of composition, including text. Each will also entail a research component. The final project will offer you an occasion to present. Detailed descriptions, objectives, and expectations for each assignment will be provided to you. For now, please note these major deadlines:

- Writing Project #1 Due 2/27
- Writing Project #2 Due 4/10
- Writing Project #3 Presentations 5/9; Written Piece Due 5/13.
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 attendance & participation (10%), essay/project #1 (25%), essay/project #2 (30%) and a final project (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.)](http://goo.gl/u1E0iy)
- [Academic Resource Center](http://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/)

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. Find out more at [http://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/counseling-services.html](http://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/counseling-services.html)

Academic Integrity:
This university is “a community of scholars who value free and open inquiry” ([CAS Academic Integrity](https://cas.nyu.edu)). 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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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/Viewing/Listening Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/31</td>
<td>Introductions + Selfies</td>
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| 2    | 2/7  | Life-Writing in the Digital Age | Turkle, “Growing Up Tethered” pp. 171-186  
Hayes, “Human 2.0?” in Leader pp. 233-256  
Jamison, “Confessional Writing is not Self-Indulgent”  
Lopate, “The State of Nonfiction Today” pp. 3-16 |
| 3    | 2/14 | Journals, Diaries & Letters | “In order to be creative you have to know how to prepare to be creative” ~ Twyla Tharp  
Daum, “Introduction” The Unspeakable pp. 3-6  
Manguso, Ongoingness: The End of a Diary (104 pp)  
Lopate, “On Writer’s Journals” pp. 100-106 |
| 4    | 2/21 | Memoir | Westover, Educated: A Memoir – select chapters |
| 5    | 2/28 | Memoir & Autobiography | Bechdel, Fun Home (232 pp/ mainly illustration)  
Hampl, “Memory & Imagination” (11 pp) |
| 6    | 3/7  | Autobiographical Performance I | Screen: John Leguizamo, Freak  
Chee, How to Write an Autobiographical Novel (select essays)  
In-class screenings: Spalding Gray |
| 7    | 3/14 | Autobiographical Performance II | Clare Barron, You got older  
Cynthia Hopkins, The Truth: A Tragedy |

**Spring Break**  
March 18th – 24th

| 8    | 3/28 | Autobiographical Film | Sadie Benning: suspended animation, Jennifer Lange and Solveig Nelson (selections)  
Screen: Tarnation by Jonathan Caouette |
| 9    | 4/4  | Self-Portraiture & Photography | View works by: Cindy Sherman; Ana Mendieta  
Adrian Piper; Kara Walker; Francesca Woodman;  
Research + Read: substantive scholarly article on one  
In-class screening: The Agony and the Ecstasy of Francesca Woodman |
| 10   | 4/11 | Music | Listen: Magnetic Fields 50 Song Memoir  
Screen: The Punk Singer  
Visit Bobst Archives: The Kathleen Hanna Papers |
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>4/18</td>
<td>Verbatim Theater</td>
<td>Anna Deavere Smith, <em>Fires in the Mirror</em> (134 pp)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/25</td>
<td>Performing Selves + Others</td>
<td><em>The Laramie Project</em> (88 pp)</td>
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<td>5/2</td>
<td>Comedians, Alter-Egos &amp; Personas</td>
<td>Screen works by: Carmelita Tropicana; Reverend Billy; Childish Gambino/ Donald Glover; Aziz Ansari Research + Read: one substantive academic article</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>Presentations + Celebration!</td>
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