New York University
Spring Semester 2021
First Year Seminar credit hours
course number, room,
Mondays, 12:30-3:00

Professor Martha Rust
martha.rust@nyu.edu
244 Greene St. rm. 707
212-998-8809
Office hours:

What is Memory? Multidisciplinary Perspectives

Thanks to the written records that serve as our cultural memory, we know that memory has been a topic of inquiry at least since those records began sometime in the third millennium BCE. In subsequent millennia, human memory has served both to produce civilization and to record its history (history itself being a component of civilization). Along the way, philosophers, poets, playwrights, memoirists, musicians, theologians, psychologists, sociologists, neuroscientists, and literary scholars from Homer, Plato and Augustine to John Locke, David Hume, and Sigmund Freud to Pierre Nora, Vladimir Nabokov, and NYU’s own memory scientists have sought to answer the question “What is memory?” Together their quests have raised such sub-questions as How is memory embodied? How do we remember? What is the connection between memory and the self, and between memory and story-telling? and between memory and ethical reasoning? What is the connection between memory and emotion, and between memory and the senses? How and why do we forget? What events--personal or cultural--are best forgotten and how do we go about forgetting them? This course is designed to address these questions and more as we progress through five units: Life Memories, Theories of Mind, The Science of Memory, The Art of Memory, and Collective Memory and the Politics of Forgetting. Reading, watching, and listening assignments will facilitate an exploration of the full spectrum of western thinking about memory, from its beginnings to the emerging academic discipline of Memory Studies. One of the tenets of that field is that memory is “a form of work, working through, labor, or action.”¹ I hope that in addition to learning a great deal about memory and forgetting as academic topics, you will come away from our course having gained new insights into the workings of your own memories and having developed a personal practice of memory that will serve your growth as individuals long after your memories of the course itself have dimmed.

Required books
Elizabeth Farnsworth, A Train through Time: A Life Real and Imagined
Alison Bechdel, Fun Home

Course requirements (and weight in grade)
- Completion of six Memory Lab assignments 30%
- Regular turn at discussion leading (to be done in pairs) 10%

• Regular turn at sending out a “memory quotation of the day” 2%
• Completion of bi-weekly passage notes on reading 18%
• Completion of in-class team workshops 10%
• Completion of personal field trip 5%
• Completion of final project (pending approval of prospectus and standing with respect to all other course requirements) 20%
• Attendance and class participation (including attendance of field trip and) 5%

Grading scheme: Your grade for this course will be determined according to an approach sometimes referred to as Specifications Grading. Depending on the assignment, grading will be either Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) or on a scale from 0-4 on the Sample Scale (more information on this to come).

To summarize:
• Basic course performance (resulting in a grade of C) includes attending class (and the field trip), leading class discussion when it's your turn, contributing to in-class group work and to the work of your team for the final topography assignment, and in general participating in class in a way that contributes to the learning community. It also includes completing all passage notes and topography assignments.

• Earning a grade in the B range means meeting the stated standards specified for the passage notes, the topography assignments, and the short paper with Ss or a minimum average of 3 on Sample's scale, depending on the type of assignment. You may resubmit an assignment if it falls below the standard. I will indicate when an assignment will be graded S/U or on the Sample scale.

• To try for a grade in the A range you must write a final paper in addition to satisfying the requirements for getting a B. To write a final paper, you must first have your prospectus of it approved.

Course Policies

Attendance: This course will depend heavily on in-class activities, discussion, collaborative work and participation, and students who miss a significant amount of class will have difficulty meeting the goals of the course. I therefore expect that students will make it their intention to attend every single class session and to arrive punctually.

Religious observance and documented illness or family emergency are grounds for absences to be excused. However, if you should miss more than 40% of class meetings—no matter what the reason—you cannot pass the course and must withdraw, or receive an F.

If you are absent without excuse for more than one week, I will reach out to your CAS advisor. If you are absent without excuse for more than 20% of class meetings, your grade is at risk of being lowered a full letter grade (e.g., from a B+ to a C+).
In case of all absences, you should communicate with the instructor as soon as possible. Ask a classmate for notes of missed classes, and then go to the instructor's office hours with any questions.

**Assignment deadlines**

*Passage notes:* Since class discussion leaders will make use of these notes, it is crucial that they be turned in on time. Notes will be graded on an S/U basis with late notes earning a U.

*All other assignments:* For the sake of your keeping up in the class, strive to turn all assignments in on time. That said, deadlines for multiple classes can certainly pile up and conflict with each other! In the interest of helping you juggle those deadlines responsibly, you may request a two-day grace period on any assignment (other than the passage notes). If you haven’t been able to complete the assignment by the end of the grace period, you must make an appointment with me so that we can go over what you’ve done so far and get you on track to finish.

**Devices:** We’ll sometimes be making in-class use of the internet, in which cases you’ll need to have your laptop or tablet with you. Otherwise, please keep your laptop stowed, and always bring the assigned reading to class.

**Disabilities:** Academic accommodations and support are available to any student with a disability. Students with disabilities should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/students-with-disabilities.html; mosescsd@nyu.edu; 726 Broadway, 3rd Floor; tel. 212.998.4980), which can arrange for things like extra time for exams. The instructor must also be notified at the beginning of semester for special accommodations regarding assessment and assignments.

**Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Cheating (adapted from the website of the College of Arts & Science, https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html):**

Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).
Reading/Watching/Listening Schedule

**Week 1** (First day of class) *Introduction and Introductions*
In class activities and experiments
  - Share early memories
  - Memorize a list of words
  - Write a Time Capsule

**Week 2**: Autobiographical memory, development of memory in children

  Memory Lab 1: An Anecdote, due Friday

**Week 3**: The book and writing as memory
Elizabeth Farnsworth, *A Train through Time: A Life Real and Imagined* [160 pages - small format book, lots of photos]

**Week 4**: Recalling the past, memory and emotion, memory and the senses
*Inside Out*, film
Jason Kelly’s review of *Hindsight*. [1 page]
Corkin, *Permanent Present Tense*, pp. 1-17 (chapter 1)

  Memory Lab 2: “Proustian Moments,” due Friday
**Week 5:** Metaphors of memory, theories of mind

Plato, from *Phaedrus* and *Theatetus* [3 pages]

Sigmund Freud, “A Note Upon the “The Mystic Writing Pad.”” [6 pages]

Douwe Draaisma, “Memoria: Memory as Writing,” pp. 24-38 (from *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*)

Corkin, *Permanent Present Tense*, pp. 19-50 (chapters 2-3)

*Memory Lab 3: Analysis of a metaphor of memory, due Friday*

**Week 6:** Neural networks, the brain, and neuroscience

Visit LeDoux or other NYU neuroscience lab working on memory

Corkin, *Permanent Present Tense*, pp. 51-114 (chapters 4-7)

*Memory Lab 4: Reflection on Henry Molaison and the science of memory, due Friday*

**Week 7:** Memory’s foibles: False memories, forgetting, and not forgetting

Corkin, *Permanent Present Tense* pp. 151-179 (chapter 8)

Radiolab S03, episode 4, “Memory and Forgetting” [1 hour]

Elizabeth Loftus, “How Reliable is Your Memory?” [TED talk, 17 minutes]


**Week 8** The art of memory, memory palaces, memorization

Francis Yates, from *The Art of Memory*, pp. 110-120

Draaisma, “Memoria: Memory as Writing,” pp. 38-46

Joshua Foer, *Memory Champion Teaches You How to Memorize Anything* [5 minutes]

Quintilian, from *Institutes of Oratory* [7 pages]

Cicero, from *On the Ideal Orator* [2 pages]
Cicero, from *Ad Herennium* [5 pages]

Corkin, *Permanent Present Tense*, pp. 181-199 (chapter 9)

*Memory Lab 5: Your own art of memory, due Friday*

**Week 9:** *Memory in Theater and Graphic Memoir*

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

*Fun Home* in production [excerpt of play, 3 minutes]

Scholarly essay on memory in *Fun Home*  

*Term project proposals due Friday*

**Week 10:** *Memory in things, places, time*

Bell ME and Bell SE, “What to do with all this 'stuff'? Memory, family, and material objects.” *Storytelling, Self, Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies* 8 (2012): 63-84.


Corkin, *Permanent Present Tense*, pp. 210-236 (chapter 10)

**Week 11:** *Memory in culture, nostalgia, monuments, memorials, museums/algorithms*


Maurice Halbwachs, from *The Collective Memory*, pp. 53-83 and 139-43.


*Carousel scene from Mad Men* [5 minutes]

**Week 12:** Field trip having to do with a monument  

*Permanent Present Tense*, pp. 237-86 (chapters 11-12)  

*Memory Lab 6: Reflection on field trip, due Friday*
**Week 13:** Memory in a digital world, digital memory, AI, posthuman memory


Black Mirror S01 episode 3, “The Entire History of You” [1 hour]

Corkin, *Permanent Present Tense*, pp. 287-315 (chapter 12 and Epilogue)

Read “H. M.’s Brain Yields New Evidence” and peruse The Brain Observatory -- find link in article.

**Week 14**

Project Presentations