SELF-REPRESENTATION in CONTEMPORARY ART and LITERATURE (IDSEM-UG 1890)
Monday/Wednesday, 2pm – 3:15pm
401 1 Washington Place

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Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 9:30am – 12pm and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION
In Reality Hunger, David Shields provocatively proposes that “only the suspect artist starts from art; the true artist draws his material elsewhere: from himself.” In this interdisciplinary seminar, we will explore and tackle the production of what has been termed autotheory, the intersection of autobiography and theory, the generic blurring of lyrical essay, rigorous, often scholarly-inflected, argument, and memoir/novel. Our focus will be the sometimes direct, sometimes complicated, typically ambiguous relationship between art and life, as we investigate how art reveals (and conceals) the effects of race, gender, sexuality, and politics in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.

Some of the questions we will explore and try to address: How do the ways in which we aspire to live actually relate to the ways in which we do? How is personal experience (inflected by social, political, historical circumstances, as it must necessarily be) self-consciously and deliberately transformed into (timeless) art? How does self-representation engage with notions of truth and authenticity? How might our lived experiences help us approach and make sense of theory and philosophy, of art itself? And, if every artist, as Zola had it, is more or less a realist according to his own eyes, how can art help us approach reality?

COURSE OBJECTIVES
Our goal this semester is to consider how contemporary artists and writers theorize and practice self-representation. We will examine and complicate notions of truth and authenticity in autobiography, and the ways in which these necessarily involve questions of politics and aesthetics. Indeed, one of our primary interests will be in tracking how the aesthetics of self-representation are politicized, and how politics are given aesthetic contours through self-representational choices. Another will be the perhaps inevitable, perhaps necessary distance between theory and practice, especially the practice of everyday life.

REQUIRED TEXTS
The following texts have been ordered at the NYU Bookstore (726 Broadway).

Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes (Hill and Wang, 2010)
Alison Bechdel, Are You My Mother? (Mariner Books, 2013)
Wayne Koestenbaum, Humiliation (Picador, 2011)
Ben Lerner, 10:04 (Farrar, Sraus and Giroux, 2014)
Maggie Nelson, Bluets (Wave Books, 2009) and The Argonauts (Graywolf Press, 2016)
Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric (Graywolf Press, 2014)
Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (Harvest, 1977)

All other readings will be made available via NYU Classes (indicated as CLASSES on the schedule) or as handouts.

**OPTIONAL TEXTS**
We will be working with excerpts of some of these texts, and you may find that you wish to consult the whole of the work. Other texts might simply prove illuminating of some of the issues we will touch on. Should you wish to purchase these works, copies have been ordered at the NYU Bookstore.

Hilton Als, *White Girls* (McSweeney’s, 2014)
Joan Didion, *The White Album* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009)
Maria Lassnig, *Works, Diaries, and Writings* (Koenig Books, 2015)
Carrie Mae Weems, *Kitchen Table Series* (Damiani/Matsumoto Editions, 2016)

**COURSE POLICIES**
It is essential that you attend class regularly, arrive promptly and prepared, and submit all work on time. If you suspect you might need an extension, please let me know well ahead of time so that we can make arrangements. If you need to miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out about any work you may have missed; exchanging contact information with a classmate is advised and advisable. Please keep in mind that more than three absences will have an adverse effect on your grade; so will persistent lateness. This course is a seminar, and it will work best if all of us are here and ready to engage with each other’s thinking and the material.

Keep in mind that some of that material involves sensitive topics: please be a mature, respectful, and nonjudgmental contributor to all of our conversations, in class and otherwise.

Please make sure to turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices before class begins. And, for the sake of furthering a collegial atmosphere in this class, which is, after all, a seminar grounded in discussion, please limit laptop and tablet use in the classroom to referencing assigned texts. Wherever and whenever possible, please work with a hard copy of the text.

REMEMBER: Any and all work you hand in this semester must be your own. Whenever you use someone else’s words or ideas, you must cite them properly. Per official school policy: “As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website for a full description of the academic integrity policy: [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)”
Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I am glad to meet with you to discuss any and all aspects of the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation is an important part of your course grade. Please come to class prepared to ask questions, to comment, to fully engage. You must, without exceptions, bring the assigned readings to each class meeting.

For our Monday meetings, you need to prepare a one-page response to the week’s assignment(s). The response should engage with some theoretical implication of one of the works we are discussing in a given week, though it might—should—do so in an idiosyncratically personal way. (Bonus points for cross-referencing works previously discussed when possible.) We will often—even typically—begin our meetings by referencing these posts, so please make sure to have yours on hand. The responses must be submitted, by email as PDF attachments, no later than 12pm on the date due; the file name must be “LastName FirstName ResponseDate.”

As an ongoing, semester-long project, you will be keeping a “self-representation journal.” I will be maddeningly vague about this assignment, in the hopes that it take the most personally effective/productive form. But I will offer a few suggestions: (1) documentation of instances of self-representation you come across in the culture, including pop culture. We are focusing, by and large, on art and on literature, and you might want to expand on this foundation by tracking self-representation in other media; (2) self-reflections inflected, where possible, by theoretical models that help you make sense of your own experiences. This might mean using theory explicitly, but it might also involve a loose interpretation of theory to mean any text/phenomenon you expect may be useful for self-understanding, or, instead, that you might make better sense of through the lens of your experience; (3) reflections on course assignments, initial thoughts and reactions that are not yet fully formed but that may well become important. Please feel free to sketch in the journal or otherwise include non-written materials. We will often begin our Wednesday meetings with a review of the journals, so please have them with you. I am in addition asking you, as part of the journal, to keep a running reflection on the notion of self-representation: its definition(s), significance(s), evolution(s). The goal is, in part, to trace whether and how your own preconceptions change, as well as to see if we might not, in the course of the semester, produce something more complicated and dynamic and involved than standard definitions.

You are strongly encouraged to post references and/or links to any relevant materials you come across in the course of the semester in the General Discussion section of Forums on our course’s NYU Classes site. You can and should include references in your journals, and bring them to the class’s attention during our Wednesday meetings.

Each of you will be presenting on a topic related to our course’s theme in the course of the semester. In conjunction with your presentations, you will turn in an annotated bibliography and a seven-page exploration of the key issues pertinent to your presentation. You will shortly have a chance to sign up for a presentation date. The paper and bibliography must be submitted, by email as PDF attachments, no later than 2pm on the date due; the file name must be “LastName FirstName EssayTitle.” A hard copy should be turned in as well at the start of class. Please be advised that late papers will be marked down half a grade for each day after the due date.

You will also be responsible for a midterm essay, of eight to ten pages, engaging with and responding to an issue you encounter in one of the course texts, as well as a final project,
which can take the form of a research essay and/or a creative project, and which you will briefly present during our last class meeting. All papers must be submitted, by email as PDF attachments, no later than 2pm on the date due; the file name must be “LastName FirstName EssayTitle.” A hard copy should be turned in as well at the start of class. Please be advised that late papers will be marked down half a grade for each day after the due date.

Your final course grade will be based on:

- Participation: 10%
- Responses, including Journal: 15%
- Presentation: 15%
- Essay: 25%
- Final Project + Presentation: 35%
COURSE SCHEDULE
Depending on the pace we establish, this schedule is subject to change with notice.

September 7
Introduction

September 12
*Reality Hunger: a - k*

September 14
from *Autoportrait [CLASSES]*
Frank O'Hara, Selected Poetry [CLASSES]
Tracey Emin, *My Bed and Other Selected Works* [CLASSES]

September 19
*Reality Hunger: l - z*

September 21
*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes: up to “Etymologies” (85)*
John Coplans, Selected Works [CLASSES]

September 26
*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes: “Etymologies” on*

September 28
*MAUS: My Father Bleeds History: Chapter One - Five*

October 3
*MAUS: My Father Bleeds History: Chapter Six – And Here My Troubles Began: Chapter One*

October 5
*MAUS: And Here My Troubles Began: Chapter Two – Chapter Five*

October 10
Fall Recess

October 12
Class Canceled

October 17

October 19
Martha Wilson, *Staging the Self* [CLASSES]

October 24
*Bluets*
Hannah Wilke, Selected Works [CLASSES]
October 26
*The Argonauts*: 3 - 55
**MIDTERM PAPER DUE**

October 31
*The Argonauts*: 55 – 143
Catherine Opie, Selected Works [CLASSES]
Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst, from *Relationship* [CLASSES]

November 2
*Are You My Mother?:* Chapter 1 - 3

November 7
*Are You My Mother?:* Chapter 4 - 7

November 9
*Humiliation*: Fugue # 1 – Fugue # 4
Boris Mikhailov, *I Am Not I* [CLASSES]

November 14
*Humiliation*: Fugue # 5 – Fugue # 11

November 16
Class Trip: Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* at MoMA

November 21
*The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*
Joan Didion, “The White Album” [CLASSES]

November 23
Thanksgiving

November 28
*Citizen*: 5 - 103

November 30
*Citizen*: 104 - 161
Carrie Mae Weems, *Kitchen Table Series* [CLASSES]

December 5
10:04: ONE - THREE
Gillian Wearing, Selected Works [CLASSES]

December 7
10:04: FOUR - FIVE
Kelli Connell, Selected Works [CLASSES]
Nikki S. Lee, Selected Works [CLASSES]
December 12
In-Class Film Screening

December 13 (NOTE: This is a legislative day: classes meet on a Monday schedule)
In-Class Film Screening

December 14
Final Project Presentations