Make up a story... For our sake and yours forget your name in the street; tell us what the world has been to you in the dark places and in the light. Don’t tell us what to believe, what to fear. Show us belief’s wide skirt and the stitch that unravels fear’s caul. — Toni Morrison

Artwork: Romare Bearden

The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power. — Toni Morrison
Place and Displacement

Welcome. Everything you read in this syllabus is an invitation to walk through the doorway that stands in front of you. This class will serve as an introduction to writing poetry and fiction. We will collect, navigate and explore writing in a range of genres, centered around the theme of place. We will begin with more literal notions of place (geography, the city, neighborhoods) and move into metaphorical engagements of the theme, including the idea of one’s place in the world, displacement & diaspora, the page itself, and a myriad of formal approaches that seek to engage place and displacement in writing. This class aims to posit that the act of writing is a means of establishing a locale for creativity, self, exploration, and more. Through a thematic structure, we will see just how multitudinous and porous literature makes something that is typically mitigated by limits, borders, and territories. Language is a passport to travel the depths of your imagination! The cross-genre nature of this class encourages students to read, challenge, represent, and re-write turf, region, and terrain in a way that is multiple. All aboard!

Course Overview

The main goals of the course are to engage the creative process, recognize, experience, respond to, and interpret works of art in their social, historical & cultural contexts. Using appropriate terminology and critical vocabularies, we will evaluate published works and work created by students in this very class. The course begins with the assumption that, regardless of one’s literary background, students are interested, invested, and open to learning about the value of creative writing in our lives and how that work can function in greater society.

In class, we’ll work extensively on student writing, but we’ll also spend considerable time reading published works & learning about writing from the authors we study. Workshops are most productive when they offer constructive criticism to their members. As such, you’ll need to be willing to receive and offer such advice. Also, you’ll need to be willing to embrace new ideas about writing—in both your own writing and the texts we’ll read for this class. The function of a workshop isn’t to confirm our previously held ideas about writing, rather it’s meant to challenge them, and to prompt us to examine new possibilities—to see what’s working, what isn’t working yet, and why.

This class looks to the written word as a place for intellectual inquiry and experiment. Students in this course will investigate multiple modes of learning from reading, writing, and analyzing. Throughout the course, you will read and respond to the work of authors who write in various ways. We will read Non-fiction, Fiction, and Poetry in order to consider and play with a breadth of strategies and approaches that foster creativity. Ultimately, you will bring these analytical skills to your own work and to the work of your peers.

Each student will be responsible for stimulating meaningful class discussions, completing writing assignments, keeping a travel-book, contributing work for workshop, and critiquing the work of your peers with great consideration and care. Additionally, students will respond to workshop submissions with annotations and written responses to the packets of their peers. Finally, all students will be revising their work in order to submit a final portfolio.
Required Materials

Travel-book:

Please come to each class with your travel-book in hand. This is a notebook specifically dedicated to writing, class notes, and writing assignments. It should be small & light enough that you can easily carry it with you around town, but not so small that it would impractical for taking down notes in class or writing longer entries. A composition notebook or moleskin (I’d suggest at least 5x8 – hard or soft cover) would be excellent options for this.

Books:

Course Readings:

All other course readings will be available through NYU Classes or your course reader. You’re required to print, read, and annotate all assignments before class meetings.

Three ring notebook (recommended):

Over the course of the semester you will accumulate readings. Because you are required to print, annotate, and bring these readings to class, it will be most useful to keep them together (organized by week) so that you have access to all of the material we have been working with. Come the close of the semester, you will have your own cross genre anthology (this is pretty cool).

Requirements

Participation & Attendance:

In a workshop situation, it is important that every reader takes an active role in discussion. There are no wrong thoughts, questions, or points of discussion in a workshop. However, the more specific you can be in your comments, the more helpful your comments will be to other writers. Imagine the kind of responses that you would like to receive on your work and try to do the same for others. Your classmates are counting on you to give helpful feedback.

Regular attendance is crucial; the workshop is a discussion-based atmosphere that depends on a community of voices and (energetically) participating members. Lateness is not acceptable because a late arrival will inevitably interrupt an activity or discussion of a student story. Your presence is necessary for discussion of your work and that of your fellow students.

You are permitted one absence without an excuse. If you miss more than one class, you cannot pass the course. No exceptions. Arriving to class more than ten minutes late two times counts as a missed class. If you miss a class, you are still responsible for catching up with the work from that day.
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You can eat in class, but please keep it respectful and quiet.

You must bring to each class meeting all texts that are scheduled for discussion that day. If you are present but one or more of your texts is not, you may be marked absent.

If you have to leave class early, please e-mail me in advance and explain the situation. Do not come up to me at the beginning of class and tell me that you have to leave early. I will mark you as absent.

No phones. This means exactly what it means: no use of phones in class, period. If you are expecting or receive a phone call or text in class that you absolutely need to take, please leave in order to respond to it. Otherwise, your phone should not be in use.

Travel-book:

Please come to each class with your travel-book in hand. This is a notebook specifically dedicated to writing, class notes, and writing assignments. We will begin each (non- workshop) craft class by writing; travel-books will provide a routine mediational space for writing each time that we meet. In addition to the thirteen in-class entries, you will complete thirteen on your own, for a total of twenty-six (26) entries at the close of the course. You are welcome to exceed this number!

Writing Responses & Workshop Submissions:

In addition to the weekly readings, you will complete a Writing Response related to we have been focused on during that week. Thus, the Writing Responses are both an extended mediation on course content and a writing play-space. I will collect your WR and they will be workshopped in small groups in the first half of our class. WR submissions should be a minimum of 200 words.

There are absolutely no limitations on genre or content, but if your work contains material that might be received by your readership as intense, explicit, or difficult, I encourage you to provide a trigger warning with the submission. Because the workshop experience is based on collective trust, I recommend that you not include references to any instructors or students in your writing. If you do, you should discuss this with me before you submit the piece.

Completion of written commentary on colleagues’ poems:

Thoughtful written commentary is evidence of this respect and commitment to each other’s work—it’s also direct evidence of our individual development and practice of a critical discourse. Written commentary should consist of marginalia written on the poems themselves and a one-page typed response to the packet as a whole which will be printed out and posted to NYU Classes.

Mandatory In-Class Conferences:
There are two days of the semester allotted for mandatory in-class conferences. These will be short 5 minute check-ins, during which we will briefly discuss your progress in the class. This is an appropriate time to discuss any concerns. This is not the appropriate time for an in-depth dive into your work. You are encouraged to schedule an appointment or two with me during the semester for a more profound consultation.

**Final Portfolio & Project:**

Due at our last class meeting, the final project will be a portfolio collection of your work, in the form of a hand-made chapbook, comprised of both prose & poetry, and a short reflection essay. The chapbook/portfolio will consist of revisions of earlier work from the semester as well as new work to be completed specifically for the chapbook/portfolio, and a short essay addressing your stance regarding writing and what you have learned this semester. The essay will appear in the beginning section of your chapbook.

**Grades**

- 20% Attendance and class participation
- 20% Travel-book
- 20% Workshop submissions & writing responses
- 20% Workshop participation & responses
- 20% Final portfolio (including the final essay)

**How I grade:**

I grade based upon effort and deliverables. I don’t grade you on the quality of your creative assignments—no such rubric exists. But I do grade based on how you function as an active participant in the class. I also grade on completeness and thoughtfulness of written work and responses; consistently handing your work in on time; and how well prepared you are for class.

**Disability Disclosure Statement**

NYU policy supports students with disabilities. Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should also please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980.

NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
726 Broadway, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10003-6675
Telephone: 212-998-4980 Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114
Web site: http://www.nyu.edu/csd

**Student Wellness Policy**

Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves,
First Draft

we assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, such as seems to be a possible cry for help, will likely prompt the instructor’s attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting work, especially for workshop, that may be interpreted as such. If you do feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person’s labor: another person’s ideas, words, or assistance. Generally speaking, it’s extremely easy to detect plagiarism in creative assignments, so I assume nobody’s going to try it. However, I very much encourage referencing—if you want to engage a specific story, poem, whatever, and are obviously aping its structures and themes—not only is that perfectly acceptable, but might be an interesting direction to take your work. If you do this, however, I do ask that (for the sake of workshop) you make a note that states the reference or references with which you’re working. More than anything: don’t hand in someone else’s work of literature and call it your own. If you do, you might risk failure in this course. For an overview of academic integrity at NYU, please consult: http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity

Course Schedule

*subject to change with notice*

Week One // Finding Our Footing

(M) Jan 28
First day welcome: introduction and review of syllabus

(W) Jan 30
In-class writing meditation
Letters to a Young Poet (selections), Rainer Rilke
The Art of Daring: Risks, Restlessness and Imagination (selections), Carl Philips

Week Two // The Flâneur

(M) Feb 4
Craft and the City: Writer as Flâneur, Kristen Iskandrian
In Praise of the Flâneur, Bijan Stephen
On Keeping a Notebook, Joan Didion
Shattered Aperture, Bradford Bucknum
Ecodeviance: Somatics for a Future Wilderness (selections), CA Conrad

(W) Feb 6
In-class writing meditation
Mock workshop with favorite poem or excerpted fiction
Week Three // Landscape & Place-scape

(M) Feb 11
In-class writing meditation
Introduction from *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood
*Cascadia* (selections), Brenda Hillman
*Running the Dusk* (selections), Christian Campbell
*Transcendental Grammar Crown* from *Companion Grasses*, Brian Teare

(W) Feb 13

Group A: 1st workshop

Week Four // Page as Place / Staking a Claim through Form

(W) Feb 20
In-class writing meditation
*Into the Maze: OULIPO*, Monica de la Torre
*Nets*, Jen Bervin
*How I Quit Spin*, Joshua Clover
*Bluets* (selection), Maggie Nelson

(M) Feb 25
Group B: 1st workshop

Week Five // The Body as Place

(W) Feb 27
In-class writing meditation
*Sentences* from *After We All Died*, Allison Cobb Power,
*Power*, Adrienne Rich
*The Consequences of My Body* (selection), Maged Zaher
*I Put My Lover’s Pussy*, Eileen Myles
*Something & The Language*, Robert Creeley

(M) Mar 4
Group A: 2nd workshop

Week Six // Other Places

(W) Mar 7
In-class writing meditation
From *Place to Non-Place* from *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Marc Augé
*Bloodchild*, Octavia Butler
*Reeling for the Empire*, Karen Russell
Descent of Alette (selection), Alice Notely Small group workshop for WR 4

(M) Mar 11
Group B: 2nd workshop

MANDATORY CONFERENCE #1
(W) Mar 14
In-class writing meditation
TBD staggered individual conferences

Week Seven // Where We Are Placed / Considering the Neighborhood

(M) Mar 18
In-class writing meditation
How to Date a..., Junot Diaz (ambivalent)
sousveillance pageant (selection), Emily Abendroth
Frankenstein (selection), Sue Landers
1000 Words (a Documentary) / New Plantation Blues: A Photo Essay, Jaime Torres and Gina Myers

(W) Mar 21
Group A: 3rd workshop

Week Eight // Place as Displacement

(M) Mar 25
In-class writing meditation
Schizophrene, Bhanu Kapil
Vertical Interrogation of Strangers (selection), Bhanu Kapil
Review of The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers by Jane Sprague
(Jacket2) Little Boat (selection), Jean Valentine
Bhanu Kapil’s commencement speech at Goddard College

(W) Mar 27
Group B: 3rd workshop

Week Nine // Prose’s Place

(M) Apr 1
In-class writing meditation
The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis (selections), Lydia Davis Girl Jamaica Kincaid
Curves to the Apple (selection), Rosemarie Waldrop
What Resembles a Grave but Isn’t, Anne Boyer

(W) Apr 3
Group A: 4th workshop
Week Ten // Identity as Place
(M) Apr 8
In- class writing meditation
_I_ & _II_ from _Citizen_, Claudia Rankine
_Last Mojave Indian Barbie_, Natalie Diaz
_I’m an Assassin and I’m in Love_, Cara Fraizer

(W) Apr 10
Group B: 4th workshop

Week Eleven // Revision
(M) Apr 15
MANDATORY CONFERENCE #2
TBD staggered individual conferences

(W) Apr 17
Group A: 5th workshop

Week Twelve // Experiment: Re-imagining Borders & Testing Limits
(M) Apr 22
In- class writing meditation
_I Hate Telling You How I Really Feel_, Nikki Wallschlaeger
_Mother Tongue_, M. Nourbese Phillip
_A Sequence_, Leslie Scalapino
_Selected Amazon Reviews_, Kevin Killian

(W) Apr 24
Group B: 5th workshop

Week Thirteen // Revision
(M) Apr 29
In- class writing meditation
Podcast listen: _Necessary Cuts_, Rickey Laurentiis
Readings TBD

(W) May 1
In- class radical revisions
Entire Class Revision Workshop

Week Fourteen // Reflecting Upon & Celebrating our Class as a Locale for Creativity
(M) May 6
First Draft

Travel-book ➔ Chapbook Making workshop

(W) May 8
Last day of class!
Travel-books & chapbook / final portfolios due!
Celebratory class readings!
Potluck!