Course Description

At the center of any university is an interest in education. But what does this term really involve? If we trace the verb “to educate” back to its Latin root “ēdūcerē,” we find that it originally means “to lead out.” Notice that there is no explicit mention of knowledge or its acquisition. Instead, the term refers, on the one hand, to some kind of movement outward, and on the other, to something that guides it. Thinking of ourselves as the ones being educated, then, we may understand this movement to be that of living our lives, and we may comprehend the thing that gives it direction to be a kind of path.

What would it mean to live our lives as if we were journeying on a path? What would that feel like and why might we treasure and cultivate that experience? Conversely, what reasons might there be to be concerned about a life of stasis or wandering? What could we be missing if we are off a path? This course aims to explore these and related philosophical questions by engaging with works of artistic imagination. Hopefully, the value of such works will become clearer when we see how they enrich the language we use to pursue our educations in the specific sense above.

We will study and discuss a selection of art and literary pieces in a variety of genres and mediums. These compositions grow out of distinct times and places and concern themselves with challenges rooted in diverse historical circumstances. Each works with the formal resources and constraints of its medium and discloses features of that medium’s particular nature. In both their form and content, then, these pieces are quite different; they comprise novels, films, poems, a play, a piece of music, a choreographed dance, and a painting. What unites them, though, what places them in conversation with each other, is the drama of someone searching for a life path. They are all works of education.

Accordingly, although each piece will be introduced with attention to its historical context and to some of the properties of its medium, the focus of the course will be on how the pieces help us discern various aspects of what it could mean to find oneself on a life path. The organizing principle of the course is the progressive unfolding of some of the chief experiential characteristics of such a path; this exposition will be motivated by the way the works enter into conversation with each other, as well as with us.

Course Objectives
By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Pursue more deliberately their education by what is most important to them in life.
- Engage more lucidly with philosophical and existential questions raised by primary art and literary works in the humanist tradition.
- Analyze and interpret more skillfully works of art and literature.
- Argue about the merits of such works more convincingly.
- Articulate verbally and in writing their aesthetic experiences and their philosophical thoughts more self-assuredly.

**Required Reading, Listening, and Viewing**

- Franz Kafka, “Before the Law” (parable).*
- Todd Haynes, *Carol* (film).
- Roberto Rossellini, *Stromboli, Europa 51, and Journey to Italy* (films).
- Agnès Varda, *Cléo from 5 to 7* (film).
- A. R. Ammons, “Corsons Inlet” (poem).*
- John Ashbery, “Grand Galop” (poem).*
- Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, *Fase: Violin Phase* (dance video).
- Camille Pissarro, *Two Young Peasant Women* (painting).
- Jorge Luis Borges, “The Circular Ruins,” “The Secret Miracle,” and “The South” (short stories).*
- *Instructor will provide reading.*

**Course Requirements**

Class participation: You are expected to attend all class meetings without tardiness and to complete the reading, viewing, and listening assignments for each session. This course is designed to be a small seminar rather than a lecture class and it requires your participation in our discussions. You should be prepared to consider
respectfully your classmates’ responses to the course material and to share your own willingly. In order to minimize distractions, the use of phones and laptops during class is prohibited.

Response papers: You are responsible for writing four 4-5 page response papers on this material. The prompts will ask you to compare how two works portray the experience of finding oneself on a path, that is, the experience of what I am calling education. They will also ask you to judge which of the two portraits is more successful and why. Papers will be penalized a half grade for being up to 24 hours late, and a full grade for being later than that. Thus a B paper that is submitted 2 hours late gets a B-; if it is turned in 2 days late, it gets a C.

Student presentations: Each of you will join with a few of your classmates in order to form a small group. These groups have the assignment of identifying a work of education in the above sense for the class to consider, and of leading a class discussion of this work. These discussions will be evaluated with regard to how well they engage the whole class in a conversation on how the work portrays a life-path education. Near the end of October, each group will submit a brief, 1 page progress report which identifies the work the group has selected and explains why the group chose this work. Shortly after I have received these reports, I will schedule meetings with each group to discuss their selections and approaches to them. Immediately before each group-led discussion, the group will also submit to me a 1-2 page outline of the questions and themes that it hopes to use to give direction to our discussion.

Grading

Your course grade will be based on an evaluation that will be weighed roughly as follows: 20% on class participation, 20% on the small group presentations, and 15% on each of the response papers. You must participate regularly in class discussion in order to receive a high course grade.

Evaluation Rubric

A=Excellent. This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions and readings. Writing is clear, organized, analytical, and engaging. Arguments are focused on establishing specific points, are well-reasoned, offer specific examples, and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade contribute insightfully to class discussion on a regular basis.

B=Good. This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at a general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses evidence and examples properly, and argues for persuasive points. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Fair. This work is correct but largely descriptive, lacking analysis or critical response. Writing can be vague or tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without sufficient evidence or analysis. Classroom participation lacks clarity.

D=Unsatisfactory. This work is incomplete and demonstrates little understanding of the readings or discussions. Writing and arguments disclose a serious
misunderstanding of the course material, an inattention to detail, and an overlooking of significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared, and off topic.

F=Failure. This grade indicates a failure to participate in class or complete assignments.

Academic Integrity

All submitted work must adhere to the standards of academic ethics. According to the Steinhardt School’s Statement on Academic Integrity, you violate the principle of this integrity when you cheat on an exam; submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home assignment without prior permission from your professors, particularly one that asks you to express your own independent thinking; and plagiarize printed or electronic material. Please consult the Steinhardt School Statement for more information: http://education.nyu.edu/education/students/pdfs/soai.pdf.

Student Resources

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with disabilities.
Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233. Schedule an appointment online at http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html or just walk in.

Calendar of Assignments

September 4: Introduction.


September 18: Choosing responsibility. Haynes, *Carol*.

September 20: After choice, openendedness. Rossellini, *Stromboli*. RESPONSE PAPER 1 DUE.

September 25: Education as destiny.

September 27: Calls to care.
   Rossellini, *Europa 51*.

October 2: Destiny (continued).

October 4: The human context.
   Rossellini, *Journey to Italy*.

October 9: LEGISLATIVE DAY—NO CLASS.

October 11: Destiny (continued).

October 16: Mortal conversion.
   Varda, *Cleo from 5 to 7*.

October 18: The sense of birth.
   Ammons, “Corsons Inlet.”
   RESPONSE PAPER 2 DUE.

October 23: Birth (continued).
   Ashbery, “Grand Galop.”

October 25: Being moved.
   GROUP PROGRESS REPORTS DUE.

October 30: The stillness of a pivotal moment.
   Pissarro, *Two Young Peasant Women*. (Students are expected to study this painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

November 1: Dream fiction.

November 6: Destiny and environment.
   Yang, *Yi Yi*.

November 8: Environment (continued).
   Ade, *Toni Erdmann*.

November 13: The touch of comedy.
November 15: Small group meetings to plan presentations.  
RESPONSE PAPER 3 DUE.

November 20: Comedy (continued).  

November 22: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

November 27: Comedy (continued).  

November 29: Group I presentation: “Monet Refuses the Operation” (poem).

December 4: Group II presentation: Moonlight (film).


December 11: Group IV presentation: Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (film).

RESPONSE PAPER 4 DUE.