Fran Lebowitz is an author, journalist, humorist, and social commentator who has been active since the 1970s. She is the author of the best sellers *Metropolitan Life* (1978) and *Social Studies* (1981), and in recent decades is known more as a speaker than as a writer. Lebowitz is the star of *Pretend It’s a City*, a new Netflix documentary series directed by Martin Scorsese. The discussion will be moderated by USC Annenberg professor Josh Kun.

Fran Lebowitz was born in New Jersey in 1950, to parents who owned a furniture store and upholstery workshop. After earning a GED (she was expelled from high school), she moved to New York City in 1969 and has been associated with New York ever since. (“I feel that I am like the designated New Yorker,” she told *The New Yorker* last year.)

As a young adult in New York, Lebowitz worked a variety of jobs—among them cleaning apartments and driving a cab—before landing journalism gigs with Andy Warhol’s *Interview* magazine, where she was a columnist, and *Mademoiselle*. Her writings in these publications formed the basis for her first book, *Metropolitan Life*, published in 1978. The book made her famous, and she became a regular on TV and at legendary hot spots like Studio 54. Another book of essays, *Social Studies*, followed in 1981.

In 1987, Lebowitz wrote a powerful piece in the *New York Times* on “The Impact of AIDS on the Artistic Community,” documenting in real time the devastation she would later reflect back on with the words, “AIDS completely changed American culture.”

Lebowitz’s writer’s block is legendary. She was known as a writer for the books she published in 1978 and 1981. In the decades since, she has made an impact primarily as a speaker—she is “one of our preeminent extemporaneous talkers,” wrote Robert Marston in *Inside Hook*. Indeed, Martin Scorsese’s 2010 documentary about Lebowitz was called *Public Speaking*.

Lebowitz has been called a modern-day Dorothy Parker, and is known for both her wit and her trademark fashion: suit jackets, jeans, cowboy boots, and tortoiseshell glasses. She is also known for her aversion to new technology: she doesn’t have a computer or a cell phone. What she does have is books: her book collection famously numbers more than 10,000.
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What do you think are the differences between speaking and writing?
- In a recent interview in *The New Yorker*, Lebowitz said, “Not only are you not always right—when you are wrong, you are the worst wrong you can possibly be.” How does this resonate with you? What do you think it says about opinions? About self-knowledge?
- Lebowitz reflects a lot on how New York has changed over the past half century. Have you seen a city change like that? What do you think drives such changes?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- *Pretend It’s A City* and *Public Speaking* | *On Netflix*
- Street views of 1980s New York | *Bos.nyc*
- *Interview* magazine | *interviewmagazine.com*
- ACT UP Oral History Project | *actuporalhistory.org*

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**CHRISTY KANE** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening’s event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at *libraries.usc.edu* but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

**BOOKS**


**ARTICLES**


**JOURNALS**

- *Interview*
- *New York Times*
- *Vanity Fair*

**DATABASES**

- *Gateway to North America: The People, Places, and Organizations of 19th-Century New York*
- *Jewish Life in America, ca. 1654–1954*