Introduction

A flea market where one always finds what one has lost; a vanishing passage through a capital city where capitalism dreams of its own demise; a landscape riven by colonial violence whose scars speak the language of resistance. The Surrealists did not want to escape from the world but to return to it — to reclaim reality for those whom reality drove into exile. The sites of Surrealism are as contradictory and ambivalent as the artworks that represent them: at once external and internal, strange and familiar, contemporary and archaic. In these sites, psychic and social life endlessly mirror each other, and private interiors are open to the elements of history. In this class, we will examine these contested sites in texts by André Breton, Louis Aragon, Claude Cahun, Aimé Césaire, and J. G. Ballard. We will draw on the theories of Freud and Marx, both of whom influenced Surrealist thought, and on the work of Walter Benjamin, who found in Surrealism a method of reading the relics of a recent past. Sites are also places seen — sights — and Surrealist thought is always a way of seeing. Guided by the work of Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster, Mary Ann Caws, James Clifford, and Michael Taussig, we will examine Surrealist vision in painting, sculpture, and especially film and photography.

Assignments and Grading:

Over the course of the semester, you will write 2 formal essays in which you explore a specific question about Surrealism through an analysis of one or more texts on the syllabus. Be sure to choose topics and texts that truly interest you. Essays will be graded for the form as well as the content of their analysis.

In addition, you will write 6 response papers of 250-500 words, which you will post to Blackboard’s Discussion Forum. You can choose any six classes and write the responses on any of the texts due for those days; do try to spread out your posts over the course of
the semester. Please post your response at least 24 hours before the class, to give all of us time to read it before we meet. Part of the assignment for each class will be to read the responses posted for that day (there should be about two per class). Rather than grading each response individually, I will assign one grade for all six at the end of the semester.

These responses are designed to prepare you for class discussion as well as generate ideas for your essays. While you are welcome to include personal reflections in your responses, you must organize your comments around an analysis of the assigned text, which should include quotes from and references to specific passages in the text. As the author of a response to a particular text, you will be responsible for helping to direct the discussion about the text by raising questions, introducing passages, suggesting interpretations.

This course is a seminar, so your regular, active participation in our discussions is crucial. I will expect you to come to class prepared with questions and comments on the day’s reading.

Response Papers (1-2 pages): 25%
Essay 1 (4-6 pages): 25%
Essay 2 (8-10 pages): 35%
Participation: 15%

Attendance

If, due to illness, emergency, or religious holiday, you cannot attend class, please be in touch with me directly as soon as possible so that you can be prepared for the next class. You will also need to get the notes for the day you missed from one of your classmates; once you’ve gotten the notes, I would be happy to meet with you and go over what you missed. Please be aware that more than two unexcused absences will jeopardize your course grade.

A Note on Plagiarism

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 www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

Required Texts
You can buy all our books at the NYU Bookstore. All other readings will be in the Course Documents section of Blackboard. Please print these out and bring a hard copy to class.


**Schedule**

**Wed, Sep 5**
- Introduction
- “The Burning Man” (television; *The Twilight Zone*; writ. Ray Bradbury and J. D. Feigelson; dir. J. D. Feigelson; November 15, 1985)

**I. Surrealism: Reflections on the Revolution (The Revolution in Retrospect)**

**Wed, Sep 12**
- Maurice Blanchot, “Reflections on Surrealism” (1945)
- André Breton, “The Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924)

**Wed, Sep 19**
- Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia (1929)
- Theodor Adorno, “Looking Back on Surrealism” (1956) (from *Notes to Literature I*; 1958)
- Optional reading: Hal Foster, “Outmoded Spaces” (from *Compulsive Beauty*; 1993)

**II. Theoretical Model I: Romanticism**

**Wed, Sep 26**
- Percy Bysshe Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry” (1821)
- *The Blood of a Poet (Le Sang d’un Poète)* (film; dir. Jean Cocteau; 1930)

**III. Theoretical Model II: Psychoanalysis**

**Wed, Oct 3**
- Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919); “Dream-Interpretation as an Illustration” (from *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, 1938)
- Anna Balakian, “Breton and the Surrealist Mind—The Influences of Freud and Hegel” (from *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute*, third edition; 1986)
- Optional reading: Hal Foster, “Exquisite Corpses” (from *Compulsive Beauty*; 1993)
- *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (La Coquille et le Clergyman) (film; dir. Germaine Dulac; 1928)

**IV. Theoretical Model III: Marxism**

Wed, Oct 10
- Karl Marx, “Commodity Fetishism” (from *Capital*; 1867)
- Fredric Jameson, “Marcuse and Schiller” (from *Marxism and Form*; 1971)
- Optional reading: André Breton, Diego Rivera, and Leon Trotsky, “Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art” (1938)
- **Essay 1 Due**

**V. Site I: Flea Market (Paris)**

Wed, Oct 17
- André Breton, from *Mad Love* (1937)
- Simone de Beauvoir, “Breton or Poetry” (from *The Second Sex*; 1949)
- Optional readings: Hal Foster, “Compulsive Beauty” (from *Compulsive Beauty*; 1993); Rosalind Krauss, “The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism” (1981)

**VI. Site II: Arcade (Berlin; Paris)**

Wed, Oct 24
- Siegfried Kracauer, “Farewell to the Linden Arcade” (1930)
- Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant* (“The Passage de l’Opéra”) (1926)
- Optional reading: Mary Ann Caws, “For a Cinema of the Central Eye” (1978)

**VII. Site III: Island (Jersey, France)**

Wed, Oct 31
- Claude Cahun, *Disavowals* (1930)
- Mary Ann Caws, “Doubling: Claude Cahun’s Split Self” (from *The Surrealist Look*; 1997)

Wed, Nov 7
- *Disavowals*
- Rosalind Krauss, “Claude Cahun and Dora Maar: By Way of Introduction” (from *Bachelors*; 1999)

**VIII. Site IV: Island (Martinique)**

Wed, Nov 14
- Reading: Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (1939)
- James Clifford, "A Poetics of Neologism: Aimé Césaire" (from The Predicament of Culture; 1988)

Wed, Nov 21
- Notebook of a Return to the Native Land

IX. Site V: Resort ("Vermilion Sands")

Wed, Nov 28
- J. G. Ballard, from Vermilion Sands (1971) (stories to be announced)
- J. G. Ballard, “Coming of the Unconscious” (1966)
- Michael Taussig, “The Beach (a Fantasy)” (from Walter Benjamin’s Grave; 2006)

Wed, Dec 5
- Vermilion Sands
- Hal Foster, “Beyond the Surrealism Principle” (from Compulsive Beauty; 1993)
- Essay 2 Due