Course Description
Texts of the surreal, the monstrous, and the mystical are portrayals of experiences that, while they may be outside traditional logic, are clearly central to the human imagination. Students of these texts are presented with the fascinating but difficult project of researching, interpreting, and describing irrational mental states often said to be “beyond language.” This course will focus on reading, thinking, writing about, and working with these texts. The act of writing itself traverses the area between reality and imagination, fact and fiction, and art and life, and we will explore through writing how language describes and creates experiences in these ambiguous in-between areas. Through discussion, informal writing, and a series of essays we will take various approaches to understanding depictions of these experiences as well as the surrounding discourse. The class will include outside visits to museums, concerts, and installations.

Learning Goals
• To improve your critical thinking and writing
• To apply different methodologies and disciplines to issues and questions
• To think and write critically about difficult, experimental, non-linear, and non-verbal texts
• To think historically about modern texts and questions

Evaluation and Course Requirements
The course will be graded on the following basis:
  Essay #1  30%
  Essay #2  30%
  Participation/postings  15%
  Final Presentation  10%
  Final project  15%

Formal Assignments
  #1: descriptive/comparative essay
  #2: Theoretical/analytical essay
  #3: Final presentation and project

Informal writing will be short writings done both in and outside of class and on the course Blackboard site. These are intended to allow you to work out some of your thoughts to class
readings and discussion on paper, and to allow your classmates and I to see what you are thinking about. Blackboard postings are due by 8:00 PM the night before class.

**The final project** will be on a topic of your choice, approved by me, that explores some of the themes and issues of the course. It can be a traditional research paper or another more experimental, experiential, or artistic format. You will give a presentation on this project a week or so before it is due.

**Readings:**
Most of the readings for the course will be available on line or through the NYU Classes site. You will also need to get an edition of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* and some version of the Bible.

**Academic Integrity:**
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 (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html).

**Course Schedule**

**Week one:** 9/2, 9/4
Introduction: Beyond Language and Writing

**Part I: The Surreal, the Mystical, and the Monstrous: Definitions**

**Week two:** 9/9, 9/11
Surrealism
Reading: Breton, Shattuck

**Week three:** 9/16, 9/18
Biblical Monsters
Reading: Bible: Book of Daniel 7-9; Book of Revelation 12-14

**Week four:** 9/23, 9/25
Two models for the modern monster
Reading: Bram Stoker: *Dracula* (from beginning through Jonathan’s escape)
Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein* (from beginning through the creature’s story)

**Week five:** 9/30, 10/2
20th century Monsters
Reading: finish *Frankenstein*, Strieber: from *Communion*
Week six: 10/7, 10/9  
Mysticism: the Christian model  
Reading: Hildegard of Bingham, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila  
[discuss/brainstorm on paper topics]

Week seven: 10/16  
Mysticism: the Jewish and Sufi models  
Reading: Zohar, Rumi  
[10/16 essay #1 due]

Week eight: 10/21, 10/23  
Poetry and art  
Reading: Duchamp, Tzara,

Part II: Theorizing the Inexpressible  
Week nine: 10/28, 10/30  
Psychology and the Human:  
Reading: Freud, Barbeito

Week ten: 11/4, [11/6 no class]  
MOMA visit

Week eleven: 11/11, 11/13  
Monster theory  
Reading: Kearney, Beale, Cohen

Week Twelve: 11/18, 11/20  
Theorizing mysticism and Nothingness:  
Reading: Scholem, Holt  
essay #2 proposal due (11/20)

[11/25 no class]

Week thirteen: 12/2, 12/4  
12/2 essay #2 due  
Science: Complexity and Chaos  
Taylor, Hayles

Week fourteen: 12/9, 12/11  
Presentations  
Final project due 12/12
**Bibliography**

Barbeito, Patricia Felisa. “‘The Body as Battleground in Accounts of Alien Abduction.”


Bible. Daniel 7-9; Book of Revelation 12-14

Breton, Andre. selected writings

Cohen, Jerome Jeffrey. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)”

Freud, Sigmund. “The Uncanny”

Greene, Brian. *The Elegant Universe*

Hawking, Stephen. *A Briefer History of Time*

Hawkings, Harrierr. *Strange Attractors: Literature, culture, and Chaos Theory*

Hildegard of Bingen. Selected writings

Holt, Jim. *Why Does the World Exist: An Existential Detective Story*

John of the Cross. *Dark Night of the Soul*


Lovecraft, H.P. “The Call of Cthulhu”

MacFarquhar, Larissa. “How to be Good” *New Yorker* Profile of Derek Parfit

Rumi. Selected poems


Shattuck, Roger. Introduction to *The History of Surrealism*, 11-34.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*


Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*
Taylor, Mark C. *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*

Teresa of Avila. Selections

Tzara, Tristan. “Approximate Man”

*Zohar or Book of Splendor*