Fall 2015
Gallatin School of Individualized Study
Beyond Language: The Surreal, the Monstrous, and the Mystical
Monday, Wednesday: 2:00-3:15
Room: 601
Office: 1 Washington Place, #417; (212) 992-7767
Office hours: Monday, Wednesday: 10-11; 3:30-4:30; (Thursday by apt.)
Instructor: Gregory Erickson
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Syllabus

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: 4-5 pages
- #2: Theoretical/analytical essay: 4-5 pages
- #3: Final presentation and project/paper

Informal writing will be short writings done both in and outside of class and on the course web site: https://wp.nyu.edu/beyondlanguage2015/. 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. Website postings are due by 9:00 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 class web site: https://wp.nyu.edu/beyondlanguage2015/. 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
Introduction: Beyond Language

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

Week two: 9/9
Surrealism
Reading: Shattuck, Surrealistic Games

Week three: 9/14, 9/16
Surrealism continued
Reading: Breton,

Week four: 9/21, 9/23
Biblical Monsters
Reading: Bible: Book of Daniel 7-9; Book of Revelation 12-14

Week five: 9/28, 9/30
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 six:** 10/5, 107  
20th century Monsters  
Reading: finish *Frankenstein*, Strieber: from *Communion*

**Week seven:** 10/13 [Monday schedule], 10/14  
Mysticism: the Christian model  
Reading: Hildegard of Bingham, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila  
[discuss/brainstorm on paper topics]

**Week eight:** 10/19, 10/21  
Mysticism: the Jewish and Sufi models  
Reading: Zohar, Rumi  
[10/21 essay #1 due]

**Part II: Theorizing the Inexpressible**  
**Week nine:** 10/26, 10/28  
Poetry and art  
Reading: Duchamp  
Museum visit

**Week ten:** 11/2, 11/4  
Psychology and the Human:  
Reading: Freud, Barbeito

**Week eleven:** 11/9, 11/11  
Monster theory  
Reading: Kearney, Beale, Cohen  
Essay #2 proposal due (11/11)

**Week Twelve:** 11/16, 11/18  
Theorizing mysticism and Nothingness:  
Reading: Scholem, Holt  
11/18 essay #2 due

[11/23 no class]

**Week thirteen:** 11/30, 12/2  
Science: Complexity and Chaos  
Taylor, Hayles, Hawking

**Week fourteen:** 12/7, 12/9  
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

Sagan, Carl.  The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark.  61-77

Scholem,Gershem.  Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.  1-39

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*