

First-Year Research Seminar: Normalcy & Media

NYU | Gallatin School for Individualized Study

FIRST-UG 785 | Spring 2018

TR 6:20-7:35pm | Silver 403

Instructor: Kevin Gotkin

Office: 1 Washington Place, Office 415

Office Hours: T 4-6pm, or by appointment



Laura Swanson's "anti-selfie," from *Hope, NY* (2014)

The photograph shows an immaculately clean sink and mirror of a bright hotel bathroom. There are pied ruddy tiles on around the sink that stop about halfway up the photograph where an off-white painted wall continues up. To the left of the sink is the corner of metal wire shelves. On the white sink surface is a cup wrapped in plastic and an outlet nearby. The central feature of the image is an oval beveled-edge mirror that shows a mostly blank off-white wall with a high metal towel hook and part of a shower. At the very bottom of the reflection – a small but striking part of the whole image – there is the top of someone's head: dark hair and a few inches of a forehead.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What does it mean to act or be normal? In what ways do media determine what we imagine to be normal? In this course, we will conceive of media as a broad category, including a range of technologies, objects, texts, and collective feelings. We will discover normalcy as a fragile and curiously inconspicuous concept, exploring its development in the U.S. since the mid-19th century. We will consider the cooperation of normalcy and media in an array of cases, while simultaneously developing 3 writing-intensive assignments that will focus the skills required to render complicated thinking.

This course is designed as an introduction to the fundamental skills of critical inquiry. We'll explore several things that seem a lot easier than they really are: how to ask questions, how to evaluate sources, how to select appropriate methods, and how to present findings for an audience. We'll use the relationships between normalcy and media as the topical platform for our trials, and we'll find that these terms furnish a wide weave of possible avenues for investigation. We'll discover that writing about media compels us to *make* media and we'll fix our progress toward an idea in a variety of ways that we can think of, expansively, as "writing."

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Rehearse the development of an idea, from freewriting to posing questions to gathering and evaluating sources to rendering complicated thinking

Gain a working knowledge of some major methodological spheres in the study of media

Cultivate introductory literacies in media criticism, including how to choose appropriate methods for various kinds of inquiry

Understand normalcy as a fragile, designed, and powerful social category

Develop a basic familiarity with the analytic-creative tools for making media as a form of research

REQUIRED MATERIALS

All the readings for our course will be posted as PDFs to NYU Classes with the exception of one book we will read in full. Purchase this as soon as possible:

Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983)

Texts assigned under a class meeting are to be read for that meeting. *Bring assigned readings to class.*

Towards the end of the course we will use some applications in the Adobe Creative Suite. You are not required to purchase it (but explore discounts through the NYU Computer Store if you want to license it). All software we will use is available through the LaGuardia Co-Op or the Digital Studio on the 5th floor of Bobst. We will talk about ways to rent equipment (recorders, cameras) that may come into play for your final media essay.

READING & WRITING

You will be writing every week, responding to prompts that allow you to practice a particular skill or habit. These exercises form a progression toward an assignment that will require you to use these skills together to render a coherent, complicated idea.

Writing is a response to reading and thus it is crucial that we think of reading and writing as inextricably linked processes. This course will give you the tools to practice reading as a way to practice writing, and vice versa. *Procrastinate on either at your peril.*

PARTICIPATION

Active participation in this course is essential for success. This is a seminar, which means most of our class time will be spent actively discussing our readings or workshopping for assignments. You'll notice I will experiment with how I facilitate discussion as we get to know each other, but I will likely call on students whether your hand is raised or not.

This can be stressful and I understand that. Active participation is too narrowly defined when we understand it only in terms of speaking up in class. So if there are other ways you would prefer to engage, make time to talk with me about how we can enhance your perceptual modes. We could experiment with a new modality of interaction, or we could focus your participation in questions you pose before or after class.

We will negotiate a policy for laptop use in class at the beginning of the semester.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is taken very seriously in our course because you cannot do well without being present. Students are expected to be at every class meeting. After your second unexcused absence, your participation grade will be deducted two points for each absence. Illnesses that require a doctor's visit or hospitalization, family emergencies, or religious observances are excused with proper documentation.

Lateness or early departure of more than 15 minutes will be counted as half an absence.

I encourage you to anticipate the way your participation grade affects your overall course grade. When students are in class and participate, this grade category tends to buoy the

course grade. When students miss many classes, the course grade can quickly take a hit. Commitment can be a defining feature in your overall grade, as it is for your learning.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

There are three major assignments in this course. The final media essay will be broken into two parts, which means you have a total of four key deadlines, in addition to your attendance, participation, and weekly reading questions that are graded throughout the term. Full prompts and evaluation rubrics for each assignment will be distributed and discussed in class.

Late assignments will be docked one point for each day the assignment is not handed in.

The Normal History of a Surface	20
The Ritual/The Interview	20
Literature Review	5
Final Media Essay	25
Reading Questions	10
Participation	20

100 points

The point-to-letter grade conversion operates on the following scale: A \geq 92.5; A- = 89.4 - 92.4; B+ = 86.5 - 89.4; B = 82.5 - 86.4; B- = 79.5 - 82.4; C+ = 76.5 - 79.4; C = 72.5 - 76.4; C- = 69.5 - 72.4; D+ = 66.5 - 69.4; D = 62.5 - 66.4; D- = 59.5 - 62.4; F \leq 59.4

E-PORTFOLIOS

Twice during the term, you will be asked to add content to your ePortfolio, an online platform for showcasing your work and reflecting on your curriculum. There are many uses for this digital space. For example, you might want to show your adviser your ePortfolio during advisement sessions to demonstrate your progress. You should have already received instructions via email on how to access and use your ePortfolio. Please note that students are expected to adhere to NYU's Code of Conduct

(<https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/compliance/code-of-ethical-conduct.html>) and must comply with NYU Web Publishing's Terms of Use

(<https://wp.nyu.edu/termsfuse/>). Any questions about the ePortfolio program can be directed to gallatin.edtech@nyu.edu

OFFICE HOURS

I will hold office hours every week from 4-6pm on Tuesdays in office 415 at 1 Washington Place. Please let me know ahead of time that you are coming so that I can accommodate as many students as possible. If you need to meet outside of this time, email me.

I do not recreate missed classes in office hours for students who are absent. Reach out to your classmates if you miss class and let me know if you'd like me to facilitate a connection.

ACCESS

You should feel comfortable accessing the classroom, the material, and the assignments. It is important that you allow yourself room to explore the kind of learner you are in order to develop individualized habits that will enhance your perceptual modes. There are many accommodations we can make together to increase your access to this course and I invite you to talk with me about them. Be aware that class may be recorded to accommodate students with disabilities. If you would like to request accommodations through the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, call 212-998- 4980 or email mosescsd@nyu.edu.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to be familiar with Gallatin's statement on 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/about/bulletin/undergrad/policies/integrity.html>"

SCHEDULE

N.B.: This schedule is likely to change. Be sure to check NYU Classes for the most updated version.

Week 1

January 23: Hi, What's This?

I. *NORMAL <--> MEDIA*

January 25: Touchstones

Read:

Allan Horwitz, "**Normality**," *Contexts* 7, no. 1 (2008): 70-71

&

Leslie Fiedler, "**Tyranny of the Normal**," *The Hastings Center Report* 14, no. 2 (1984): 40-42

&
Lennard Davis, "**Constructing Normalcy**," *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995), 23-49
&
"**Normalcy**," & "**Normal**," *Urban Dictionary*
&
"**Normalcy**," & "**Normal**," *Oxford English Dictionary*

Week 2

January 30: What are Media?

Exercise #1 Due:

A Constellation

Read:

Raymond Williams, "**Culture**," "**Media**," & "**Mediation**," in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 87-93, 203-207
&
Lisa Nakamura, "**Media**," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, eds. Bruce Burgett & Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 165-168
&
Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton, "**Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Social Action**," *Media Studies: A Reader*, eds. Paul Marris & Sue Thornham (New York: NYU Press, [1948] 2002), 18-30

January 30 @ 9pm:

Watch: **State of the Union Address**

Read: **The smartest analysis you can find** about it

February 1: The Tricky Thing

Read:

Alan Sekula, "**The Body and the Archive**," *October* 39 (1986): 3-64

Week 3

II. MEDIA THINGS

February 6: What is an Object?

Exercise #2 Due:

Is That Your Thing?

Read:

Langdon Winner, "**Do Artifacts Have Politics?**" *Daedalus* 109, no. 1 (1980): 121-136
&

Rebecca Mead, "**The Semiotics of 'Rose Gold,'**" *The New Yorker*, Sept. 14, 2015

February 8: Discipline & Control

Read:

Michel Foucault, "**Docile Bodies**" *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1975), 135-169

&

Gilles Deleuze, "**Postscript on the Societies of Control,**" *October* 59 (Winter 1992), 3-7

February 9 @ 6am:

Watch: **Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony**

Read: **The smartest analysis you can find** about it

February 9 @ 4:30pm: Field Trip – The Whitney Museum of American Art

Read:

Curatorial Statement, *An Incomplete History of Protest: Selections from the Whitney's Collection, 1940-2017*

&

"**Melvin Edwards,**" Alexander Gray Associates

Week 4

February 13: A Condensed Situation

Exercise #3 Due:

Spelunking

Read:

Mara Mills, "**Evocative Object: Auditory Inkblot,**" *Continent* 5, no. 1 (January 2016)

February 15: Workshop

In-class:

Tessellating

Week 5

February 20: Draft Workshop

February 22: Suspiration

The Normal History of a Surface Due

III. *NORMAL HOW*

Week 6

February 27: Propagandish

ePortfolio Reflection Due:

What's Good?

Read:

Harold D. Lasswell, "**The Study and Practice of Propaganda**," in *Propaganda and Promotional Activities: An Annotated Bibliography*, eds. H.D. Lasswell, R.D. Casey & B.L. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969 [1935]), 1-27
&

Adrian Chen, "**The Fake-News Fallacy**," *The New Yorker*, Sept. 4, 2017

Watch:

Jonah Kessel & Paul Mozur, "**How Facebook is Changing Your Internet**," *The New York Times*, Sept. 18, 2017

March 1: Observing Culture

Exercise #1 Due:

Noticing

Read:

Clifford Geertz, "**Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight**," *Daedalus* 101, no. 1 (1972): 1-37

March 4 @ 6:30pm:

Watch: **Academy Awards**

Read: **The smartest analysis you can find** about it

Week 7

March 6: Performance

Exercise #2 Due:

Making a Scene

Read:

Erving Goffman, "**Introduction**" *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956), 1-9
&

Erving Goffman, "**The Self and Its Other**," *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Penguin, 1963), 126-139

March 8: Performativity

Read:

Judith Butler, "**Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory**," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (Dec. 1988): 519-533
&

Season 10, **RuPaul's Drag Race**

Week 8: SPRING BREAK

Watch:

Hypernormalisation, dir. Adam Curtis (2016)

Week 9

March 20: Workshop

March 22: Suspiration

The Interview/The Ritual Due

Week 10

IV. *DECENTERING NORMAL*

March 27: Marriage

Artist Visit:

Jenn D'Role

Read:

Michael Warner, "**What's Wrong with Normal?**" *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, & the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 41-80

March 29: The Club

Visit:

NYU's Fales Library & Special Collections | **The Downtown Collection**

Read:

Isaac Oliver, "**Is This the Golden Age of Drag? Yes. And No.**" *The New York Times*, Jan. 17, 2018

&

Fiona Buckland, "**Introduction: Impossible Dance,**" *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 1-15

Week 11

April 3: Brooklyn Nightlife

Exercise #1 Due:

From Evidence to Idea

Artist Visit:

Charlene

Watch:

Charlene's 2015 Bushwig performance

Read:
TBA

April 5: Disability Culture

Read:
Eli Clare, "**The Mountain**," *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Durham: Duke University Press, [1999] 2015), 1-13
&
Riva Lehrer, "**Where All Bodies Are Exquisite**," *The New York Times*, August 9th, 2017
&
Victoria Ann Lewis, "**Crip**," from *Keywords for Disability Studies*, eds. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 46-48
&
Mia Mingus, "**Medical Industrial Complex Visual**," *Leaving Evidence*, Feb. 6, 2015
&
Leroy F. Moore, Jr. "**Krip-Hop Nation is Moore Than Music**," *Wordgathering: A Journal of Disability Poetry* 6, no. 2 (June 2012)

Week 12

April 10: The Telethon

Exercise #2 Due:

Bibliography

Watch:

Choose 1 Hour from the **1976 MDA Labor Day Telethon**

Read:

Paul Longmore, "**Introduction**" & "**The Hidden Politics of Telethons**," *Telethons: Spectacle, Disability, and the Business of Charity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xiii-xix & 32-42

April 12: Whiteness

Read:

Julian Carter, "**Introduction: The Search for Norma**," *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality & Race in America, 1880-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1-41

&

Simone Browne, "**B@anding Blackness: Biometric Technology & the Surveillance of Blackness**," *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 89-130

Week 13

V. GEEK LOVE

April 17: Geek Love, Part I

Literature Review Due

Read:

Katherine Dunn, **Geek Love** (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), through 104

April 19: Geek Love, Part II

Read:

Katherine Dunn, **Geek Love** (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), through 166

Watch:

“**Getting to Know Adobe Premiere Pro,**” & “**Basic Editing,**” from *Premiere Pro CC 2017 Essential Training: The Basics*, Lynda.com

Week 14

April 24: Geek Love, Part III

Exercise #3 Due:

Finding Intertexts

Read:

Katherine Dunn, **Geek Love** (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), through 265

April 26: Geek Love, Part IV

Read:

Katherine Dunn, **Geek Love** (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), finish

Watch:

“**Basic Audio Editing,**” “**Working with Effects,**” & “**Exporting Your Project,**” from *Premiere Pro CC 2017 Essential Training: The Basics*, Lynda.com

Week 15

May 1 & 3: Peer Conferences

No class (Kevin out of town)

Week 16

May 8: Media Fest

Media Essay Due

May 11

ePortfolio Reflection Due:

Final Thoughts