Course Overview
Silence, blank space, gaps and fractures: attending to these formal elements in works of literature and art can pique understanding about some of the most difficult matters in human experience, or what is often unsayable. Poet Rainer Maria Rilke claimed, in 1903, that “most experiences are unsayable,” and in this course we will study the ways writers and artists, through expressions of silence itself, attempt to communicate those very experiences. How might we better understand the human through attention to those most hard-to-express experiences? With a special emphasis on works that blend the creative and the critical, this course will examine how scholars and creative thinkers over the past century have addressed problems of power, gender, oppression, and trauma, exploring means of expressing those urgent concerns that often feel unsayable. Through active exploration, students in this seminar will practice creative and critical approaches to investigate and convey difficult subjects that are often invisible or silenced.

In our study of works emphasizing close reading of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and interdisciplinary works, we will assess how we, as writers and scholars, can develop and communicate our understanding, contributing to critical conversations about difficult issues in profound and original ways. Exploring interdisciplinary work in the fields of literary studies, feminist theory, art history, film, performance, trauma studies, and aesthetics, students will be able to work in and across these disciplines to investigate a number of concerns. What are we finding difficult to say? What means are we seeing or hearing or reading that help us make sense of the difficulties in our world? And when and how might we powerfully, after all, break our silences?

Course Expectations

In this seminar, we will actively study the ways creative and critical work is inter-related, examining a range of works and working to expand our understanding, experience, and means of expression as we do. Students will be expected to come to each seminar prepared to do this active work of exploration by reading independently the theoretical and creative works assigned, and joining each week with questions, ideas, and problems that we will work on together. Through this work, we will gain knowledge about how others have approached the challenge of communicating difficult “unsayable” material as we grapple with that challenge ourselves. Serious commitment to both the study of existent works and the exploratory labor of discovery is expected.

That discovery will be made manifest in several ways.
1) Attentive reading and study of all required texts, written and visual.
2) Thoughtful written responses to works independently and in class.
3) Research and sharing of findings through written and verbal presentation.
4) Lively and respectful participation in class discussions.
Course Requirements

Readings
All students must acquire required texts. Some shorter essays will be available for download on NYU Classes. Some texts will be on reserve at Bobst. Others can be purchased at NYU Bookstore, the Strand, or online:

Required Texts – to be announced

Attendance and Participation
A seminar is a space in which we develop knowledge collaboratively. You must attend class to participate, and in order to participate fully and appropriately, you must complete assigned readings prior to class. Participation includes the quality of the feedback you give others and your preparedness for discussion. Strive to be intellectually present in class, and demonstrate your presence by respectfully adding your voice to our discussions and sensitively attending to the ideas of others.

Failure to meet in-class participation requirements adversely impacts your grade.

You are expected to learn through what you read, through what you hear, and even through what you find yourself able to contribute during class discussions. Such discussions can lead to surprising insights, unexpected discoveries, and sometimes productive tensions. Respectful and open discussions are essential to the work of a serious seminar, and every student is expected to engage in discussions with respect, openness, curiosity, and maturity demanded of this endeavor. I will be happy to discuss – both in class and outside class -- the course content, the questions it raises, the assumptions we might confront, including any tensions it raises and intellectual delights it inspires.

If you anticipate missing classes for religious observances, please let me know so we can make appropriate accommodations.

It is expected that you will respectfully come to class on time.

In-Class Writing
Although there may be times during the semester when you may be invited to use laptops or mobile devices to do work in class, at all other times these devices must be put away. Please have a notebook that is devoted to this class for in-class writing.

Recording of class sessions is only permitted with prior authorization.

Written Assignments Overview
Basic Expectations:
- Intellectually engaged and timely execution of all written assignments
- Demonstrated effort to improve the communication of your ideas – in all their complexity – through written language
- Careful and ethical representation of all sources (and research where appropriate)

Over the course of the semester, you will be required to write responses to works that especially resonate with your thinking about questions raised in the seminar. These requirements include:

- 4 reading responses, demonstrating textual analysis and reflection (1 page each)
- 1 culminating reflection assessing the reading responses and reflections over the course of the semester (2-3 pages)
- 1 “object research” essay on a work of art, including visual and performance (5 pages). Objects are studied in city museums and galleries.
- 1 final project in the form of an essay engaging with at least one creative and one critical source. Project includes proposal (2 pages) and final essay (8 pages).

Grading Distribution
30% - Reading Responses & Final Reflection
20% - Object Research Essay
30% - Final Essay
10% - Presentation
10% - Participation

Please note: Any student attending NYU who needs an accommodation due to a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility and/or learning disability, or is Deaf or Hard of Hearing should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212 998-4980, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, http://www.nyu.edu/csd. Accommodations will be made to enable all students to participate in this seminar.

** PLAGIARISM **
It is important to make yourself familiar with the CAS statement on Academic Integrity. As you work, you are responsible for keeping track of ideas and language that you have developed, and communicating that which come from other sources (including sources, classmates, professors, the internet, friends). The passing off of another’s words or ideas as your own is a serious offense and will be handled in accordance with the official university policy on academic dishonesty.

See NYU Classes “Resources” for additional links for Writing, tutoring, and wellness support.
Tentative Schedule – *(details subject to change)*

All required reading for a given class day must be completed prior to that class. Additionally, film screenings and art viewings will be announced throughout the semester. Assignments must be completed and submitted prior to class.

Week 1: In Class: Handouts, various

Week 2: **Response 1 due**
Reading: Martin Heidegger
poetry handout: Dickinson; Rilke

Week 3: **Response 2 due**
Reading: Adorno (extracts); Susan Sontag, “Aesthetics of Silence” pdf
poetry handout: Celan; Tsvetaeva (pdf)

Week 4: Reading: *Endgame*, Samuel Beckett, play
Handout: Oppen; Carson (pdf)

Week 5: **Ready to share: Object Research selections**
Reading: Simone Weil pdf; Jean Rhys (novel): Part 1

Week 6: Reading: Julia Kristeva; Jean Rhys, continued

Week 7: **Response 3 due**
Reading: Merleau-Ponty; Helene Cixous

Week 8: **Object Research Assignment Due**
**Final Project 1-page Proposal Due**
Reading: Marguerite Duras; Carruth

Week 9: Reading: Anne Carson
Selections: Blanchot; Grosz

Week 10: Reading: M. N. Phillip; Ranciere
Selections: Nancy; Herman

Week 11: **Response 4 due**
New critical theory handouts; Contemporary poetry selections

Week 12: **Presentations (in groups) & contemporary selections**

Week 13: **Presentations & contemporary selections**

Week 14: **Final Project Due**
**Response Reflection Paper Due**
Readings: Selections, poetry, prose