

LT328 The Modernist Fringe: Writing at the Edge of Experience

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Description

In 1892, William James defines the *psychic fringe* as a “halo of relations” surrounding any definite mental image or thought and associating it with others. Although we are not generally aware of this fringe, it directs the stream of our consciousness, connects us to a larger world, and supposedly plays an essential role in both religious and aesthetic experience. This advanced seminar will pursue James’s insight by examining seminal texts of literary modernism against the background of contemporaneous psychological, physiological, and philosophical concepts of the fringe. On the one hand, we will interrogate theories of perception and association, focusing on the limits of discursive thought and its pre/un-conscious other. On the other hand, we will consider literary explorations of the fringe, reflecting on the strategies used by the modernists to articulate the ineffable. We will ask: *How does literary experience inform theoretical concepts of the psychic fringe? To what extent do these ‘fringe theories’ condition or regulate literary production in turn? Does literature succeed in showing what science cannot say? What is it that emerges in the particular encounters between theorist and authors at the turn of the century?*

Requirements

- Thoughtful preparation of reading assignments and engaged participation in class discussions.
- Weekly postings (see below)
- Midterm exam (see below)
- Final research paper (see below)

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. All work must be one’s own, and all sources must be properly cited. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with according to the Code of Student Conduct, section 14.3 (academic misconduct).

Attendance

Attendance of all sessions is mandatory. More than one absence will significantly affect your participation grade for the course. You must e-mail me in advance of class if you are unable to attend due to illness or any other unavoidable circumstance. Consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing extended periods of illness or leaves of absence (see section 2.8). Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. **Note: special arrangements for students who are unable to attend individual classes for reasons related to the corona pandemic will be made on a case-by-case basis and at the discretion of the instructor.** Depending on the

situation, it may become necessary to adopt a hybrid format for some sessions (*i.e.*, dividing the class into in-person and online sessions).

Assignments

- Weekly postings in forum (completion grade).
- Midterm exam (to take place on October 28th).
- One research paper (12-15 pages), due on December 15th. You may choose your own topic, but you must discuss it with me prior to November 25th.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

The Student Handbook stipulates the following concerning late essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Grade Breakdown

- 30% Preparation of readings and participation in discussion
- 15% Weekly postings in forum
- 15% Midterm exam
- 40% Final research paper

Schedule

“Whereof one cannot speak...”

Week 1 (9/2)

- Hugo von Hofmannsthal: “The Lord Chandos Letter”

Week 2 (9/9)

- William James: “The Stream of Consciousness” from *Psychology: Briefer Course*
- John Dewey: “Having an Experience” from *Art as Experience*

Window Gazing

Week 3 (9/16)

- Edgar Allen Poe: “The Man of the Crowd”
- Franz Kafka: *Contemplation*

Learning to See

Week 4 (9/23)

- Hermann von Helmholtz: “The Facts in Perception”
- John Stuart Mill: *The Logic of the Moral Sciences* (excerpt)

Week 5 (9/30)

- Reiner Maria Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malta Laurids Brigge*

Week 6 (10/07)

- Reiner Maria Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malta Laurids Brigge* (cont.)

Necessities of Thought

Week 7 (10/14)

- Ernst Mach: *The Analysis of Sensations* (excerpt)
- Robert Musil: *The Confusions of Young Törless*

Week 8 (10/21)

- Fall Break (no class)

Week 9 (10/28)

- Robert Musil: *The Confusions of Young Törless* (cont.)
- **Midterm Exam**

Pure Experience

Week 10 (11/4)

- William James: “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” and “A World of Pure Experience” in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*

Week 11 (11/11)

- Gertrude Stein: *Tender Buttons*

Involuntary Memory

Week 12 (11/18):

- Henri Bergson: *Matter and Memory* (excerpt)
- Henri Bergson: *On Laughter* (excerpt)

Week 13 (11/25)

- Marcel Proust: *In Search of Lost Time* (excerpt, obviously)

Aesthetic Composition

Week 14 (12/2):

- John Dewey: “Affective Thought”
- Virginia Woolf: *To the Lighthouse* (subject to change)

Week 15 (12/09)

- Alfred North Whitehead: “Understanding” in *Modes of Thought*
- Virginia Woolf: *To the Lighthouse* (cont.)

-----Final research paper due December 15th-----

Library and Book Purchase Policies

You are required to purchase the following books:

- Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (Penguin Classics, 2009)
 - o ISBN-13: 978-0141182216
- Musil, *The Confusions of Young Törless* (Oxford World’s Classics, 2014)
 - o ISBN-13: 978-0141182216
- Stein, *Tender Buttons* (City Lights Books, 2014)
 - o ISBN-13: 978-0872866355

- Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Alma Classics/Evergreens, 2017)
 - o ISBN-13: 978-1847496577