

LT324 Modernism and the Interarts

Seminar Leader: Ross Shields
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Office Hours: Thursday, 14:00—15:30

Description

Aesthetic modernism is often theorized in terms of medial specificity: painting is said to be about the flatness of the canvas; music investigates the acoustic affinities among sounds; literature reflects on how texts produce meaning. Although there may be some truth to this thesis, which was formulated independently by Clement Greenberg and Theodor Adorno, it fails to do justice to the interartistic tendency that characterizes much of aesthetic modernism in the early twentieth century. This course will reconsider the question of the interarts from the point of view of its modernist practitioners. On the one hand, we will examine the reflections of artists (in the broad sense) on mediums not their own—for example, Wassily Kandinsky on music, Gertrude Stein on painting, or Arnold Schönberg on literature—asking what the artistic 'other' allow them to articulate about their primary medium. On the other hand, we will consider interartistic journals and intermedial collaborations like *Blast* (i.e., vorticism) and *Der Blaue Reiter*. We will ask: To what extent does interartistic reflection impact artistic production? How does the modernist stage production differ from the romantic *Gesamtkunstwerk*? To what extent does it anticipate the development of sound film? Finally, is it possible to reconcile interartistic collaboration with medial specificity?

Requirements

- Thoughtful preparation of reading assignments and engaged participation in class discussions.
- In-class presentation (see below)
- Midterm essay (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 your 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 under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III 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.

Assignments

- One short (5 to 10 minute) in-class presentation introducing one of the readings. Topics will be distributed in the second week of class. Your job will be to play the role of an “expert” by contextualizing the reading and raising questions that will facilitate the group discussion.
- One midterm essay (4 pages), due on October 20th. Topics will be announced in class.
- One research paper (12-15 pages), due on December 20th. You may choose the topic on your own, but you must discuss it with me during my office hours prior to November 21st.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

The Student Handbook stipulates the following concerning late essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will 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 and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Grade Breakdown

- 30% Preparation of readings and participation in discussion
- 10% In-class presentation
- 20% Midterm essay
- 40% Final research paper

Schedule

Week 1 (9/5): **Introduction to the Interarts**

Week 2 (9/12): **Paragone**

- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (excerpts)
- Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (excerpts)

Week 3 (9/19): **Medial specificity**

- Theodor W. Adorno: “Art and the Arts”
- Clement Greenberg: “Towards a Newer Laocoon”

Week 4 (9/26): **Painters on music**

- Wassily Kandinsky: *On the Spiritual in Art* (excerpts)
- Paul Klee: *Contributions to the Theory of Pictorial Form* (excerpts)

Week 5 (10/3): **No class (federal holiday)**

Week 6 (10/10): **Composers on painting**

- Ferruccio Busoni: *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music*
- Nikolai Kulbin: “Free Music”

Week 7 (10/17): **Writers on painting**

- Paul Valéry: “Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci”
- Gertrude Stein: *Picasso* (excerpts)
- Rainer Maria Rilke: “The Cézanne Inscape” and “Self-Portrait from the Year 1906”

-----Midterm essay due October 20th-----

Week 8 (10/24): Painters on literature

- Wassily Kandinsky: *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (excerpts)
- Honoré de Balzac: *The Unknown Masterpiece*
- Pablo Picasso: *Desire Caught by the Tail*

Week 9 (10/31): No class (fall break)

Week 10 (11/7): Composers on Literature

- Arnold Schönberg: “The Relationship to the Text”
- Richard Wagner: Program notes for Beethoven’s 5th Symphony

Week 11 (11/14): Writers on Music

- Honoré de Balzac: *Séraphîta* (excerpts)
- Thomas Mann: *Doctor Faustus* (excerpts)

Week 12 (11/21): Modernist Collaborations

- Ezra Pound: “Vorticism”
- *Der Blaue Reiter* (excerpts)
- Clive Bell: *Art* (excerpts)

Week 13 (11/28): The Total Work of Art

- Richard Wagner: *Opera and Drama* (excerpts)
- Kandinsky: “On Stage Composition”

Week 14 (11/5): Modernist Stage Production

- Arnold Schönberg: *The Happy Hand*
- Wassily Kandinsky: *The Yellow Sound*
- Satie/Cocteau/Picasso/Massine: *Parade*

Week 15 (12/12): Sound Film

- Sergei Eisenstein: “The Fourth Dimension in Cinema” and “Vertical Montage”

-----Final research paper due December 20th-----

Library and Book Purchase Policies

All readings will be made available online for download on Google Drive. No purchases are necessary.