

AR315 THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS: ART AND THE ONEIRIC

Art and Aesthetics
Module: Aesthetics and Art Theory
Fall 2026

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman
Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:45-12:15

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 16:00-18:00, or by appointment

Course Description

"He was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too!" (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*). Alice's reflection upon her dream evokes something of the oneiric experience that can be part of one's encounter with a work of art: the dialogue between the specific universe the artwork invites us to enter—with its own logic, kinds of seeing, and means of expression—and the viewer as subject, bringing her or his own desires and experiences to its interpretation. One important aspect of this encounter could be described, in psychoanalytic terms, as a relationship between the unconscious wishes, drives, and memories of the viewing subject, on the one hand, and the unconscious qualities of the work itself, both in its production and—especially—in its visual character (its "optical unconscious"), on the other. Major topics for the course include: psychoanalytic interpretations of art; the relationship between the oneiric, the imaginative, and the theatrical; contemplation, daydreaming, schizophrenia, nightmares, and other altered states of consciousness in relation to the experience of artworks; the oneiric and visual narrativity; the place of (self-)reflexivity or its absence in immersive art. Artists whose works we study include Wang Ximeng, Mirza Ali, Goya, De Chirico, Dalí, Miller, Varo, Kahlo, Fellini, Tarkovsky, Kentridge, and Kusama. Readings will be from Lewis Carroll, De Quincey, Woolf, Freud, Jung, Carrington, Borges, Bachelard, and others.

Course Books

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* (Norton Critical Edition), ISBN: 978-0393932348
Course Reader

Library and book purchase policies

The college book policy for 2026-2027 is that reserve stocks of books will be lent to students on the basis of need, or (thereafter) on a first come first served basis. Books not yet owned by the college will be purchased only to create a small library reserve collection, and for students receiving more than 70% financial aid. Otherwise, students must purchase all course books.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Use of Electronics

To facilitate a focused and engaging seminar discussion the use of electronic devices during class time is not allowed, unless for disability accommodation. If you have a disability accommodation, please inform your instructor at the beginning of the semester.

Museum Visits and Film Screenings

Three of our scheduled classes will be museum visits. Since it is not possible to go to a museum during our scheduled class time, museum classes will be on the weekends and each museum class will replace a regular Monday or Wednesday class, usually from the preceding or following week. We will also have five film screenings over the course of the semester, these will be scheduled in the evening and will take place in the lecture hall.

Assessment

Participation

Students should arrive to each class on time and prepared. Being prepared means (1) having completed the assigned reading (in the specific editions indicated above), (2) bringing to class a non-electronic copy of the assigned reading, and (3) being ready to initiate and to contribute to discussion. Engagement in class discussion should be regular as well as productive; quantity alone will not favorably affect the participation grade.

Writing Assignments

There will be two principal assignments over the course of the term: a midterm essay, 2000-2500 words in length, and a final presentation accompanied by an essay, 3000-3500 words in length, due at the end of the term.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Extensions may be granted by the individual seminar leaders, but the request must be made at least 24 hours before the essay deadline. Late essays will be marked down one-third of a letter grade (e.g., from A- to B+) for every 24 hours they are late, down to a maximum grade of a C.

Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation: 30%
Midterm essay: 30%
Final presentation: 10%
Final essay: 30%

Schedule

I. TIME

The White Queen (oneiric narrativity)

Tuesday, September 1 Max Klinger, *Paraphrase on the Finding of a Glove*

Reading:

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: opening poems, Chapters 1-6

Thursday, September 3 Illustrating Alice I (*Alice in Wonderland*)

Reading:

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: Chapters 7-12

The Garden of Live Flowers (text and image)

Tuesday, September 8 Illustrating Alice II (*Through the Looking-Glass*)

Reading:

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*: opening poem, Preface to the 1897 Edition, Chapters 1-6

Thursday, September 10 Lewis Carroll, *The Alice Books*

Reading:

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*: Chapters 7-12, closing poem

Suggested reading:

Hypnerotomachia Poliphili (The Strife of Love in a Dream), translated by Jocelyn Godwin (Thames & Hudson, 1999), pp. 9-26 and 58-67

The Mock Turtle (*chronos* and *kairos*)

Tuesday, September 15 Giorgio de Chirico

Reading:

Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, "The Manifest Content of Dreams and the Latent Dream-Thoughts" and "The Dream-Work"

Suggested reading:

Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Chapter VI: "The Dream-Work"

Thursday, September 17 No class

Thursday, September 17, 19:15 Short films (Deren, Marker, Kentridge, Katō, Al Moji)

No reading assignment

II. SPACE

Drink Me (miniature worlds)

Tuesday, September 22 Wang Ximeng, *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*

Group presentation

Reading:

Bhagavata Purana, selections (looking into Krishna's mouth)

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Aleph"

Suggested reading:

Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/*, Chapter 5, "The Hieroglyph of Breath"

Thursday, September 24 No class

Thursday, September 24, 19:15 Film: *Céline and Julie Go Boating* (Rivette/Berto/Labourier)

No reading assignment

Suggested reading:

Henry James, "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes"

The Cheshire Cat ("the call of space": imagination, nightmare, schizophrenia)

Saturday, September 26, 14:00 Visit to the Scharf-Gerstenberg Collection

Reading:

Francisco Goya y Lucientes, "Advertisement for *Los Caprichos*"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan"

Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, "The Pleasures of Opium" and "The Pains of Opium," pp. 74-80

Tuesday, September 29 No class

Thursday, October 1 Francesca Woodman and Counter-Portraiture

Group presentation

Reading:

Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia"

Suggested reading:

Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Chapter 8 ("The Line and Light") and Chapter 9 ("What is a Picture?")

Down the Rabbit-Hole (immersive art)

Tuesday, October 6 Bill Viola

Reading:

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, Part Two: "Time Passes"

Thursday, October 8 Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirror Rooms

Reading:

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, "Intimate Immensity"

III. SUBJECTS

“Who Are You?” (states of [un]consciousness: daydreaming, contemplation, ecstasy)

Saturday, October 10, 14:00 **Visit to the Hamburger Bahnhof**

Reading:

Clarice Lispector, “In Search of a Dignity” and *Aqua Viva*, pp. 64-72

Tuesday, October 13

Mirza Ali and Oneiric Illumination

Group presentation

Reading:

Hafez, selected poems

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, “The Dialectics of Outside and Inside”

Thursday, October 15

No class

Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Sunday, October 18

FALL BREAK (October 19-25)

Humpty Dumpty (personal iconography and free association)

Tuesday, October 27

No class

Tuesday, October 27, 19:15

Film screening: 8 ½ (Fellini)

No reading assignment

Suggested reading (browsing):

Federico Fellini, *The Book of Dreams*

Thursday, October 29

Pablo Picasso, *Vollard Suite*

Reading:

Carl Jung, “The Concept of the Collective Unconscious”

Leo Steinberg, “Picasso’s Sleepwatchers”

The Looking-Glass (oneiric self-reflection)

Tuesday, November 3

Frida Kahlo, Self-Portraits

Reading:

Carl Jung, “The Psychological Aspects of the Kore”

Thursday, November 5

No class

Thursday, November 5, 19:15

Film: *Mirror* (Tarkovsky)

No reading assignment

Suggested reading:

Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, Chapter V: “The film image”

IV. OBJECTS

Mad Tea Party (surrealism and automatism)

Tuesday, November 10

Max Ernst, René Magritte

Reading:

André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)," selections

Thursday, November 12

Dorothea Tanning, Salvador Dalí

Reading:

André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)," selections

The Old Sheep Shop (place as object / object as place)

Tuesday, November 17

Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington

Group presentation

Reading:

Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, pp. 127-141

Carl Jung, *The Red Book*, Liber Primus, pp. 118-126 ("The Way of What is to Come") and

Liber Secundus, pp. 361-374 ("Nox Quarta")

Suggested reading:

Carl Jung, "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy" (in Carl Jung, *Dreams* [Routledge Classics, 2002])

Thursday, November 19

No class

Saturday, November 21, 14:00

Visit to the Neue Nationalgalerie

Reading:

TBA

A Game of Chess (the uncanny and the optical unconscious)

Tuesday, November 24

Surrealist Photography: Man Ray, Tabard, Miller

Reading:

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

Thursday, November 26

No class

Thursday, November 26, 19:15

Film: *Alice* (Švankmajer)

No reading assignment

Suggested reading:

Anna M. Richards, *A New Alice in the Old Wonderland*, Chapters 1, 2, 11, and 12;

John Rae, *New Adventures of "Alice"*

Saki, "The Westminster Alice"

Edward Hope, "Alice in the Delighted States"

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Tuesday, December 1

Thursday, December 3

Tuesday, December 8

Thursday, December 10

Final essay due: 23:59 on Friday, December 18