

Syllabus for Honor 2103 Intellectual Traditions III: The Rise of Modernity

Dear Incomprehension: Words, World & the Limits of Meaning

Spring 2022

Sec 003: MW 1:25-2:45 KV 1115

Sec 004: MW 3:00-4:20 KV 1115

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

What does it mean to be modern? Is it a question of *style* — the way something looks, is written or painted or scored or sung? Is it an *historical* question having to do with the rise of industrialization and urbanization, with modern *things*: skyscrapers and cars and airplanes and weapons and new ways and technologies to represent this new life? Is it a question of *ideas*, of things not thinkable at an earlier time or newly thinkable given everything mentioned above? People — writers and artists especially — have always wanted to be “modern” regardless of when they were born. So how can we distinguish our modern modernity from earlier versions? What does it mean, *now*, to be modern?

One of the many ways to understand what we call our modernity resides precisely in the question of meaning, in the ways certain writers interrogate how language does and does not “represent” or “express” or “signify” ideas or what we take as our reality. Think of it this way: we often take for granted that we say what we mean. That is, we *have* something to say and only need to find the words that best convey that meaning. But, to paraphrase Alice’s response to the March Hare in Wonderland, saying what we mean, do we also mean what we say? That is, to speak like Humpty-Dumpty now, are we the master of meaning or are the words we use master already? Does meaning come after words? Where and when does meaning reside?

We will explore these questions by thinking about how language does and does not offer a *medium* as physical and as sensual and as “senseless” as any other raw material: paint, for instance, or sound, or stone. Heavy stuff, perhaps, but, as with any material, such a way of thinking offers endless possibilities for *play*.

That’s what we will be doing this semester: playing with these ideas by investigating the ways various writers have played in and with their language. To do this, we will examine some of the different techniques they’ve invented that foreground language as a material to either bring it (and us) closer to the world or to exacerbate the gulf between language and reality, between saying what we mean and meaning what we say.

So roll up your sleeves and don’t worry if you get a few word-splinters under your fingernails!

This course fulfills the Humanities Exploration Requirement.

Course Objectives

- To strengthen your ability to engage with and appreciate ideas that may initially seem difficult and unfamiliar.
- To give you practice in identifying and responding to intellectual problems that are not defined for you in advance.
- To improve your skills as close readers, critical discussants, and writers.
- To broaden your historical awareness.

Required Texts

- Plato, *Cratylus*. Hackett (978-0-87220-416-4).
- Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York Review Books (978-1-68137-464-2).
- Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels*. Grove (978-0-8021-4447-8).
- The Incomprehension Reading Packet (Canvas).

If you have opted into the Inclusive Access Program, Plato, Beckett and Carrington will be available on the “Bookshelf” in Canvas. If you prefer (like me) hard copies, please purchase THESE editions. They have been ordered in the campus bookstore and should also be available on Amazon.

You **MUST** bring the assigned reading to class on the day it is due.

You do not have to print up the course reader but you DO need to be able to access it in class. If you’d like to print it up, it’ll be cheaper to do it all at once. A spiral bound, double-sided packet with a cover will cost about \$32 from the local FedEx print center. Ask me for a printable PDF if you want to print a hard copy.

Instructor’s Responsibilities

- To create an environment in which you feel free to comment and ask questions
- To respond to your writing regularly through discussion and written commentary
- To be more or less clear
- To engage in dialogue rather than lecture
- To discuss your writing or any other concern during office hours or by appointment

Students’ Responsibilities

- *Attendance*. You are responsible to the group and must be at all the class meetings on time and stay for the whole class period. I keep track of lateness — and of the times you leave early — and this will be added to your absences. **After 4 unexcused absences your grade will drop one step for every additional absence. After 8 absences you will fail the class.** This class is work intensive and it is difficult to catch up when you fall behind. I understand that sometimes you cannot make it to class, but it is your responsibility to inform me (if possible) if you will be absent and to find out from a classmate what you have missed.
- *Preparation*. **THIS IS NOT A LECTURE CLASS.** Therefore, you need to come to class prepared to participate. Thus you must do the assigned reading. **If you come to class unprepared — not having done the reading, without your book and/or the course reader — you will be marked absent.** Make sure you have a notebook to write in and something to write with.

- *Participation.* Participate in small group work and full class discussions and take notes in class no matter who is speaking. We will all be thinking together in class. Thinking often leads to disagreement; I disagree with myself at least 42 times a day. Disagreeing with each other helps us think more clearly — be grateful that you disagree or are disagreed with! That means: be respectful, kind and generous when you don't agree with what a peer or with what I assert and be prepared to explain why you disagree. Be prepared as well to have your interlocutor respond to your disagreement by reformulating their position, bringing in other evidence, and/or pointing out where your own thinking wasn't rigorous enough. Be prepared as well to have peers take your ideas and push them towards places that hadn't occurred to you. *All this is writing and material for writing*, even if it is said out loud.
- TURN OFF all cell phones. DO NOT text while in class.
- Make sure I'm clear. Ask questions when I'm not. Disagree with me when warranted and explain why you do.
- Make fun of my handwriting.
- Occasionally be funny.

Assignments

ALL WRITING FOR THIS CLASS IS PUBLIC WRITING, AND YOU MAY BE CALLED UPON TO SHARE IT WITH THE CLASS OR IN A SMALL GROUP.

Connection Responses. This is the place where you'll be keeping a record of your thinking about the class texts, especially the questions that intrigue and/or confound you. This is also the place where you will CONNECT texts both to each other and to some of the larger course ideas. The poems and novels and essays we will be reading all speak to each other as well as to any number of the larger course ideas; they are at the same time wholly *individual* poems or stories or essays dealing with specific issues or ideas AND part of a greater dialogue about language and meaning and world. Your job is to address the uniqueness of the texts you connect while at the same time using them to help you think about one of the larger course ideas. SO, EVERY FEW WEEKS, YOU WILL WRITE 2 DOUBLE SPACED PAGES where you

1. choose AT LEAST TWO of the class texts we've read over the past two weeks
2. introduce the larger idea or question you'll be thinking about;
3. talk briefly about HOW your chosen texts address this idea;
4. show in some detail what your texts help you say about the larger idea by quoting and/or paraphrasing, analyzing and connecting passages from them
5. as well as thinking about HOW they address that idea individually and as, if applicable, *material* writing.

These questions and ideas will provide material for class discussion and for your writing. **They must be turned in via Canvas BY 12 PM the FRIDAY of the week they are due.** See the class schedule for dates.

These response will be graded on a 3 point scale, 3 being excellent, 2 being appropriate, and 1 being insufficient.

Essays

You will be writing two essays for the class, a midterm essay and a final paper. I will hand out more detailed assignments during the semester. You can find the due dates on the class schedule.

- **Midterm Essay.** Think of this essay as a more formal and extended Connection Response. In 5-6 double spaced pages, you will thoughtfully explore one of the larger theoretical issues raised by the class texts by closely reading and connecting AT LEAST TWO of the texts with the help of ONE of the course fundamental texts. The point isn't to (only) closely read the texts but to use them to think more deeply about the theoretical and material issues they raise.
- **Final Essay.** Here you will have a choice:
 - In 6-8 double spaced pages you will analyze some of the strategies used by our authors to interrogate or diminish or exacerbate the gap between word and world, language and meaning. You might consider how a few writers investigate the relationship between language and the visual arts, for instance, or perhaps how they focus on the material properties of words. Or you might contrast a few of the different approaches as a way to think more deeply about some of the larger theoretical issues raised by the class. Whatever you decide, you will need to write about AT LEAST THREE of the class texts and AT LEAST ONE of the fundamental texts.
 - OR you can try your hand at creating some sort of text where your language-play at least in part asks your reader to think about some of the larger class issues. You might experiment with some of the forms and techniques we studied over the semester or you might invent one of your own. Whatever you create, it still must be recognizable as a *text*. Then you will write 4-5 double spaced pages thinking about what you've created by explaining your techniques and what responses they bring to some of the larger class questions. To do this, you'll talk about what you "stole" from some of writers, how you understand what those writers are doing and why they were successful on their own and how you've tried to build on them, respond to them, and/or critique them by creating your own text.

Letter to the Reader. The letter provides a place for you to specifically raise writing questions: things you wish you had time to look at, questions/issues that you didn't have the time or the space or the information to deal with. I consider these letters an important part of the writing process. The should be at least 3/4 of a page in length and accompany your two essays.

Grading

- *Participation & Attendance:* 15%
- *Connection Responses:* 20%
- *Midterm Essay:* 30%
- *Final Essay:* 35%

Honors grading rubric

A Outstanding achievement. Student performance demonstrates full command of the course material and evinces exceptional levels of originality and sophistication that far surpass course expectations.

A- Excellent achievement. Student performance demonstrates thorough knowledge of the course material and exceeds course expectations by completing all requirements in a superior manner.

B+ Very good work. Student performance demonstrates above-average comprehension of the course material and exceeds course expectations on all tasks as defined in the course syllabus.

B Good work. Student performance meets designated course expectations and demonstrates understanding of the course materials at an acceptable level.

B- Adequate work. Student performance demonstrates inconsistent understanding of course materials.

C+ Marginal work. Student performance demonstrates incomplete understanding of course materials.

C Poor work. Student performance demonstrates limited understanding of course materials.

C- Unsatisfactory work. Student performance demonstrates inadequate understanding of course materials.

D Unacceptable work. Coursework performed at this level will not count toward the honors bachelor's degree. For the course to count toward the degree, the student must repeat the course with a passing grade.

E Failing.

Grades on Canvas

I will be posting grades on Canvas as you turn in your assignments. I will also be updating attendance on Canvas. That means that at any time during the semester you should have a *rough idea* of your overall grade for the course. You should always feel free, however, to contact me if you want more precise information about how you are doing in the class.

Canvas

I will post material on **Canvas pages** throughout the semester. There will be a page for the syllabus and writing assignments, a page for readings (where you will find the Course Reader and any supplementary readings I may post during the semester), and pages with other material relevant to our authors. Each time I create a new page I will let you know.

Class Schedule:

While we will make every effort to keep to the schedule below, we might have to make changes to the order of readings or to assignment due dates. I will promptly notify you of any changes.

Our readings will be loosely grouped by writing technique and by conceptual affiliation with each other and with one or more of our **“foundational texts”** — foundational not in the sense of “first” but because they clearly state an idea or theory or a problem that will help us read and connect the other texts.

Reading is due ON the dates they appear below. Writing is due on Canvas by 12 pm the FRIDAY of the week it is due. Bolded readings are “foundational texts”.

HT = *The Hearing Trumpet*

UN = *The Unnameable in Samuel Beckett: Three Novels*

All other reading is from the Incomprehension Readings Packet

CR = Connection Response

Date	In Class	Reading Due	Writing Due
M 1/10	Course introduction; seeing and reading	“r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” & “A Sort of A Song”	
W 1/12	Stevens & Baudelaire; Words and World	“Idea of Order at Key West”, “Correspondences”	
M 1/17	NO CLASS	THERE ISN’T CLASS	CLASS
W 1/19	Plato; names and things	<i>Cratylus</i> 1-74 (383a-427d)	
M 1/24	Plato; names and things	<i>Cratylus</i> 74-95 (427e-440e)	
W 1/26	Book and cosmos	“The Library of Babel”	CR due Friday
M 1/31	Poetry’s remuneration	“Crisis of Verse”	
W 2/2	Thinking space	“Preface” & “A Roll of the Dice”	
M 2/7	Blanchot on Mallarmé	“The Book to Come”	
W 2/9	Pritchard; conceptual and concrete	<i>The Matrix & EECCHHOOEESS</i> (excerpts)	CR due Friday
M 2/14	Language and painting as different media	<i>Laocoön</i> (excerpts) & “Shield of Achilles”	
W 2/16	Ekphrasis and Descriptive poetry	“Ode on a Grecian Urn” & “To Autumn”	
M 2/21	NO CLASS	THERE ISN’T CLASS	CLASS
W 2/23	The “purity” of expressive media	“Towards a New Laocoön”	Midterm Essay due Friday 12 pm
M 2/28	Word things	<i>Tender Buttons</i> (excerpts)	
W 3/2	Shaped poetry	<i>Calligrams</i> (excerpts)	
M 3/7	SPRING BREAK	TAKE A BREAK	FROM CLASS
W 3/9	SPRING BREAK	TAKE A BREAK	FROM CLASS

M 3/14	Surrealism and the image	“Free Union” & “The Earth is Blue Like an Orange”	
W 3/16	Collage	<i>A Week of Kindness</i> (excerpts)	
M 3/21	Surrealism	“First Manifesto of Surrealism”	
W 3/23	Carrington	<i>HT</i> 3-55 top	CR due Friday
M 3/28	Carrington	<i>HT</i> 55-126 top	
W 3/30	Carrington	<i>HT</i> 126-165 bottom	
M 4/4	Carrington, eccentricity	<i>HT</i> 165-196 & Afterword	
W 4/6	Language ≠ world	“The Letter of Lord Chandos”	
M 4/11	Beckett	<i>UN</i> 285-315 middle	CR due Friday
W 4/13	Beckett	<i>UN</i> 315-340 bottom	
M 4/18	Beckett	<i>UN</i> 340-377 middle	
W 4/20	Beckett	<i>UN</i> 377-407	
M 4/25	Davis; reading and writing	“Almost No Memory”	Final Essay due by WED 12 pm

Important University of Utah Policies that apply to this course

Honors Covid Policy. Current CDC guidelines recommend the usage of masks in indoor public spaces (regardless of vaccination status) because breakthrough infections are possible and do occur. The Honors College strongly recommends that every student get vaccinated. This is the single most powerful way that you can protect yourself, your friends/families and to keep the virus from mutating. In addition, the **Honors College also requests that all faculty and students use masks while indoor in classrooms** until further change in COVID infection rates.

University Wide Covid Policy.

University leadership has urged all faculty, students and staff to **model the vaccination and masking behaviors** we want to see in our campus community.

These include:

- Vaccination
- Masking indoors
- If unvaccinated, getting weekly asymptomatic coronavirus testing
- Quarantining after exposure

Vaccination

- **Get a COVID-19 vaccination and the booster shot recommended for pairing with your vaccine** if you have not already done so. Vaccination is proving highly effective in preventing severe COVID-19 symptoms, hospitalization and death from coronavirus. Vaccination is the single best way to stop this COVID resurgence in its tracks.
- University of Utah students are required (as of August 27, 2021) to complete a cycle of COVID-19 vaccination and booster shot with an approved vaccine, or complete an exemption form. The university provides three convenient vaccination options:
 - Attend one of the regularly scheduled [vaccine events](#) at the Student Union on campus.
 - Schedule an appointment with Student Health [here](#).
 - Visit <http://mychart.med.utah.edu>, <https://alert.utah.edu/covid/vaccine/>, or <http://vaccines.gov/> to schedule your vaccination.

Masking

- While masks are not required outside of Health Science facilities, on UTA buses or campus shuttles, **CDC guidelines now call for everyone to wear face masks indoors.**
- Check the CDC website periodically for masking updates: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>
 - With high transmission rates in Salt Lake County, the CDC recommends: “Everyone should wear a mask in public indoor settings.”
- Treat masks like seasonal clothing (i.e. during community surges in COVID transmission, they should be worn indoors and in close groups outside.)
- In cases of classroom exposure, masks should be worn for the quarantine period (see details below).

Testing

- **If you are not vaccinated, get weekly asymptomatic coronavirus tests.** This is a helpful way to protect yourself and those around you because asymptomatic individuals can unknowingly spread the coronavirus to others.
 - Asymptomatic testing centers are open and convenient:
 - Online scheduling
 - Saliva test (no nasal swabs)
 - Free to all students returning to campus (required for students in University housing)
 - Results often within 24 hours
 - Visit alert.utah.edu/covid/testing
- **Remember: Students, faculty and staff must self-report if they test positive for COVID-19** via this website: <https://coronavirus.utah.edu/>

Exposure & Quarantine

- If your class is exposed, the U of U Health contact tracing team will contact your instructor, the department chair, the dean, and the students. Here is the university's contract tracing protocol.
- The following masking policy will be implemented for all members of the class:
 - For those who are unvaccinated, The Utah Department of Health and the University of Utah ask that you please comply with self-quarantine measures by staying home from class and work and avoiding close physical contact with other people. You will need to get tested 3-5 days after exposure and quarantine based on the latest CDC guidelines. Please wear a mask whenever you are outside of your home and consider vaccination. Follow the U Health contact tracing team's advice about your return to class.
 - Those who are *fully vaccinated* (2 weeks after a second or final vaccination shot), are free to remain on campus while following the CDC masking, testing and quarantining guidelines.

Class meets in person.

This course will be held in person. Except in cases of ADA accommodations or quarantining due to COVID-19 exposure or infection, you will be expected to attend class in person and complete assignments and exams in person. Changes to this policy are up to the discretion of the instructor.

Student Mental Health Resources

- Rates of burnout, anxiety, depression, isolation, and loneliness have noticeably increased during the pandemic. If you need help, campus mental health resources are available, including counseling, trainings and other support.
- Consider participating in a Mental Health First Aid or other wellness-themed training provided by our Center for Student Wellness to help contribute to creating a healthier and safer campus community. These are designed to equip you to better recognize and respond to signs and symptoms of mental health and substance abuse challenges.

ADA Accommodations. Given the nature of this course, attendance is required, and adjustments cannot be granted to allow non-attendance, except in cases of quarantining due to COVID-19 exposure, or for those who have an ADA accommodation. If you need to seek an ADA

accommodation to request an exception to this attendance policy due to a disability, please contact the *Center for Disability and Access* (CDA). CDA will work with us to determine what, if any, ADA accommodations are reasonable and appropriate.

Plagiarism. The Council of Writing Program Administrators defines plagiarism thus: “In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source” (www.wpacouncil.org). This is a pretty good definition, and you should keep it in mind whenever you write. *If the idea and/or the writing is not your own, you need to document it; if you are not sure and cannot ask me, document to be safe.* In accordance with University of Utah policy, any instances of cheating or plagiarism will result in failure of the course, along with other possible sanctions. For more information and a number of important definitions, including that of plagiarism, see the University of Utah’s Student Code of Conduct.

Content accommodation policy. “Students are expected to take courses that will challenge them intellectually and personally. Students must understand and be able to articulate the ideas and theories that are important to the discourse within and among academic disciplines. Personal disagreement with these ideas and theories or their implications is not sufficient grounds for requesting an accommodation. Accommodations requested on such grounds will not be granted. The University recognizes that students’ sincerely-held core beliefs may make it difficult for students to fulfill some requirements of some courses or majors. The University assumes no obligation to ensure that all students are able to complete any major.” No content accommodations will be made for this course.

Disability accommodations. “The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, 801-581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.”

If you have emergency medical information you wish to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform me as soon as possible by seeing me after class or making an appointment to visit during office hours.

Addressing sexual misconduct. “Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran’s status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677.”

Safety. “The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu.”