

Modernist Fragmentation and After

International postgraduate conference

Princeton University, September 29-30, 2016

Confirmed keynote speaker: Dr. Nora Goldschmidt (Durham University)

Call for Papers: deadline July 1st 2016

We invite proposals for papers of 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of discussion, for a conference on modernist tropes of fragmentation, to be held at Princeton University, September 29-30, 2016.

Fragmentation is an inescapable aesthetic technique of 20th- and 21st-century literature and art, overdetermined as a figure for both social processes of alienation and atomization and the psychological interiorization of these processes. “Modernist Fragmentation And After” seeks to interrogate this category from the perspective of classical reception and history, examining modernist experiments with fragmentation as a formalization of modernist problems of artistic representation while also investigating the deployment of this technique as a dominant aesthetic mode of receiving and adapting the cultural products of Greek and Roman antiquity.

Fragmentation as a mode of composition rather than an accident of the historical process of preserving literary and material artifacts has, of course, a significant history before its assumption in modernism, which the theorist and historian of Romantic literature John Beer has adumbrated. Beer suggests that the Romantic compositional treatment of the fragment tracked the developing 18th-century European investment in the past as a “locus of feeling” as exemplified in interests in architectural ruination and broken statuary. Thus the post-Romantic voice of Rilke’s famous sonnet on a headless ancient Greek statue of Apollo exemplifies the paradox whereby the fragment takes on an independent aesthetic interest beyond its ruination that depends on a lost and imagined whole. Rilke’s poem also points up the origins of the aesthetic interest in fragmentation as reflecting on the loss of a classical past. These meditations prefigure the programmatic and widespread modernist interest in fragmentation: when Eliot in the final lines of the *Waste Land* writes, “These fragments have I shored against my ruins,” he both offers a program of interpreting his poem through the technique of synthesized fragmentation and gestures towards the dominance of fragmentation as a poetic technique and aesthetic mode in his contemporaries, as seen in the poems of H.D. and Pound and the disjunctive prose compositions of Joyce, Faulkner, Woolf, and others. While these moments of fragmentation frequently reflect on and adapt the cultural products of classical antiquity—conceived of in such terms—they do so in complex and contradictory ways.

This conference seeks to address the historical circumstances that rendered fragmentation a dominant aesthetic and analytic mode of modernist engagements with Greek and

Roman antiquity. We aim to foster cross-disciplinary investigations into this complex history, and invite abstracts from graduate researchers in Classics, English, Comparative Literature, Modern Languages, History, Architecture, Art History, and related disciplines. We also seek abstracts from practising artists.

Possible approaches might include (but are not limited to):

- Case studies of concrete instances of this engagement in literature, the performing arts, and visual and material media
- Theoretical approaches exploring modernist fragmentation as an aesthetic trope
- The historical development of modernist fragmentation from its prehistory in Romanticism, other aesthetic movements of the 19th century, and/or Early Modern interest in classical civilisations
- Meditations on the transformations of this trope in postmodernist poetics and aesthetics
- Papers from practising artists in various disciplines exploring their own engagement with modernist fragmentation, and illuminating dynamics of fragmentation in the history and practice of a given artistic medium.

Abstracts for papers of 20 minutes should be sent to fragmentation2016@gmail.com by **no later than July 1st**. They should be no longer than 300 words, and attached in .pdf or .doc format. Please ensure that they contain no identifying information.

Questions should be addressed to the conference organisers, Kay Gabriel (kgabriel@princeton.edu) and Talitha Kearey (tezk2@cam.ac.uk).